



FRAME PROJECTS

## **Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel**

### **Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy**

Friday 18 September 2020

Zoom video conference

#### **Attendees**

Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Lydia Grainger	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Rosie Sargen	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Lana Elworthy	Frame Projects

#### **Apologies / report copied to**

Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Rhian Morgan	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Lydia Grainger	Team Manager– Joint Planning Implementation (EFDC)

## **1. Project name and site address**

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

## **2. Presenting team**

Rosie Sargen                      Landscape and Ecology Officer, EFDC  
Ione Braddick                      Senior Urban Design Officer, EFDC

## **3. Planning authority's briefing**

Epping Forest District Council's strategic residential allocations are primarily on the edges of existing settlements and are set on former green belt land. There is a desire in the council to develop a document that supports the aspirations of the local plan, in relation to Green and Blue Infrastructure, landscape led masterplanning and high-quality design.

In conjunction with Natural England the council has agreed to produce a combined Green Infrastructure and Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space document which looks to improve the Green Infrastructure network across the district. This work has a particular focus on bringing forward Green Infrastructure in and around new developments to provide a high-quality offer which will encourage new and existing residents to use local green space rather than visit Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation.

The final strategy will be a material consideration in planning decisions.

The vision for the Epping Forest District Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is:

'By 2033 a well-connected network of Green and Blue Infrastructure will be created which ensures that both existing and new communities have access to high-quality, well-maintained multi-functional spaces. These green and blue spaces will be safe, sociable and support peoples' health and well-being. The District's important ecological, natural heritage and landscape assets will be protected and enhanced. Net gains in carbon capture and biodiversity will be achieved and a design-led approach to the provision and integration of Green and Blue Infrastructure will be at the heart of creating the District's new places.'

The aim is for the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy to be reported to Epping Forest District's Cabinet in December for endorsement. Planning officers asked for the panel's views on the strategy, and the way this has evolved in response to previous Quality Review Panel comments.



## 5. Quality Review Panel's views

The Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel is very supportive of the initiative taken by the council to develop a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. At this workshop session, the panel discussed a number of questions posed by planning officers, to help refine and finalise the strategy. The panel's discussion on these topics is set out below.

**Question - Is the restructure and layout of the document proving beneficial to its readability and accessibility, and in relation to different audiences? (Please see 'Primer' and 'How to use this document' page in each part)**

- In general, the panel felt that the structure and layout of the strategy is very clear - and the use of sub-documents is helpful.
- However, there may be an issue when people refer to individual documents in isolation - for example, Document 1 is very strategic, whereas Document 3 provides much more specific detail.
- Cross referencing will be needed to ensure that the suite of documents, and their different purposes are understood. For example, Document 3 should link back to Document 1 and the Primer, which reflect the unique nature of Epping Forest District.
- The panel highlights that some aspects of the strategy would be generally applicable best practice, rather than being specific to Epping Forest District. Wherever possible, the documents should show how the special landscape character of the area can be celebrated and enhanced.
- In terms of layout, the panel feels that the text appears quite dense, making it difficult to absorb. Giving the page layouts more 'breathing space' would make it easier to read.
- At the previous review, the panel discussed how the strategy could be written with clear audiences in mind. It continues to think that greater clarity about who each document is intended to influence could give it more impact e.g. developer or community.
- If one of the suite of documents is intended primarily for the community, it should be written in plain English. A review of the text by the council's communication officers could help with this.
- Documents intended to be read by developers and their design teams could be made more concise, by omitting general best practice guidance, and being more directive about Epping Forest District's specific ambitions above and beyond this.



- Wherever possible, the panel would encourage brevity - to make the strategy as 'punchy' and effective as possible. Again, communications colleagues may be able to assist with this task.
- For example, it should be possible to cover aspects such as sustainable urban drainage or biodiversity once, and not repeat this - giving a greater focus to specific detailed guidance.
- Messages should be as clear as possible, so that they can be used by planning officers in pre-application negotiations, and by elected members to support decision making. What are the green and blue infrastructure opportunities and deficits for Epping Forest District? What are the potential benefits? How can this be achieved?
- The wider community benefits of increasing green and blue infrastructure are more obvious than ever in the current pandemic - so the strategy is timely and can be expected to attract both public and political support.
- A delivery plan is currently missing from the strategy documents - and the panel would encourage clearer commitments, responsibilities and target dates.
- It would be valuable to consider how much of the green and blue infrastructure strategy can be delivered by current Local Plan strategic allocations?
- Setting clear targets, such as 40% of the strategy to be delivered by 2024, will help hold both developers and the council to account.

**Question - Are there ways EFDC can better demonstrate bottom up engagement in the document / any future action plans? (See Stewardship and Funding pages in Parts 1 and 2, and incorporation of responses from consultation into the document)**

- The panel applauds the intention to make the green and blue infrastructure strategy meaningful to the community, by supporting bottom up engagement. However, the long timeframes needed for implementation will make it a challenge to give communities a tangible sense of influence.
- One way of addressing this would be to identify a few exemplar projects, that can be delivered in the short to medium term - allowing communities to engage and see the results of their efforts fairly immediately.
- Online engagement platforms such as Commonplace can be a useful tool to enable community input. For example, Camden and Islington have recently used Commonplace to seek community views on changes to streets, as part of their post-Covid response.



- Likewise, with stewardship being an important element of the strategy, it would be great to test different stewardship models through exemplar projects - to see what works best.

**Question - Do you consider cross-referencing to the 'Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity' pages of the HGGT/ EFDC Sustainability Guidance a suitable mechanism for monitoring/ evaluating quality? (See 'Green Infrastructure' pages of HGGT Sustainability Guidance, provided.)**

- The panel agrees that it is valuable to cross reference the HGGT/EFDC Sustainability Guidance as part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.
- Similarly, the more the strategy itself is cross referenced, the more embedded it will become in the planning and development process.
- In terms of monitoring / evaluating quality the panel would encourage an approach that identifies top level priorities, with clear target setting as part of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.
- A whole raft of more detailed issues will need to be assessed on a scheme by scheme basis, and the strategy should provide a framework for target setting at this more detailed level.

**Question - Would you consider the development of a more detailed Landscape Design Guidance document helpful? At this time, EFDC think it could follow on from Part 2: Landscape-led design - aimed specifically at improving landscape design quality across developments of all scales in the district and helping planning and tree officers and smaller scale developers.**

- The panel does not think that a district wide Landscape Design Guidance Document is likely to be effective. It would be difficult to do justice to the wide range of landscape character areas in Epping Forest District.
- The panel feels that it would be a better approach to commission or produce landscape guidance for smaller areas, with more defined character.
- An assessment of strategic allocations, and where you believe no one else will produce a landscape design guide, could help identify where council led guidance would be of most value vs and where responsibility can lie with others.

Post meeting note: the chair of the Quality Review Panel followed up with several examples of landscape design guidance that may be helpful to inform the approach by Epping Forest District. These are listed below.

Whitechapel Public Realm and Open Space Strategy - by Muf Architecture Art - <https://issuu.com/mufarchitectureartllp/docs/wprosg>



LLDC Canal Park Design Guide - by J&L Gibbons  
<https://jlg-london.com/Canal-Park>

LLDC Leaway Primer and Design Manual - by 5<sup>th</sup> Studio  
<https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/862/lrp-primer-nov-2016>

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Planning-and-building-control/Strategic-Planning/Local-Plan/Evidence\\_base\\_2016\\_Local\\_Plan/DRAFT\\_LRP\\_Design\\_Manual\\_Nov\\_2016.pdf](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Planning-and-building-control/Strategic-Planning/Local-Plan/Evidence_base_2016_Local_Plan/DRAFT_LRP_Design_Manual_Nov_2016.pdf)

LLDC Odd Guides - following artist involvement / for three areas of the LLDC  
<https://issuu.com/queenelizabetholympicpark1/docs>

Park design guide for the Olympic park  
[https://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/-/media/lldc\\_park-design-guide\\_web.ashx?la=en](https://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/-/media/lldc_park-design-guide_web.ashx?la=en)

### **Other comments by the Quality Review Panel**

- In general, the panel would encourage a robust and ambitious approach to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy - which should make it clear that developers will be held to account against its targets.
- It will be essential to the success of the strategy that it becomes seen as setting binding requirements, not optional guidance.
- The panel feels climate change adaptation could be expanded on.
- The panel also feels that the value and ambition of the strategy merits additional resources and support to realise its full potential. Opportunities for the council's communication team to assist are highlighted above, and others may be able to assist.
- Establishing a delivery strategy, including a programme, will be essential. As part of this process, the monitoring regime will need consideration. Will the planning committee champion the strategy's aims in their decision making? Will there be a commitment to reporting to the community? Can Natural England assist in a formal or informal way?
- Engaging the community and involving them in the creation and stewardship of landscapes, will require a budget. Whether this is resourced via the council or S106 agreements or other sources should be thought through.

### *Next steps*

The panel looks forward to seeing the completed Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and playing a part in its delivery, through advice on development proposals.

