

Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel

Report of Workshop Review Meeting: Latton Priory Design Code

Friday 19 May 2023

Room 1.2, Epping Forest District Council, Civic Offices, 323 High Street, CM16 4BZ

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)

Richard Lewis

Prachi Rampuria

Attendees

Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council lead for Harlow & Gilston Garden Town
Naisha Polaine	Harlow & Gilston Garden Town
Gavin Cooper	Essex District Council
Tai Tsui	Essex District Council
Paul Wilkinson	Essex District Council
Lucy Block	Frame Projects
Roxanne Salburg	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Rosalind Peebles	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As public organisations Harlow Council, East Hertfordshire District Council and Epping Forest District Council are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and in the case of an FOI/EIR request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

1. Project name and site address

Latton Priory Strategic Design Code - Pathfinders

2. Presenting team

Krishma Shah	EFDC Senior Urban Design Officer
Peter Van der Zwan	EFDC Planning Officer
Jon Tricker	Phil Jones Associates (PJA)

3. Planning authority briefing

Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) received funding to produce a design code for the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Area as part of the DLUHC Pathfinders programme. The aim is to embed high-quality, sustainable, and equitable design into the development framework for Latton Priory, consistent with the principles in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

As well as being a strategic masterplan site, Latton Priory is one of three new Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) communities. The Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan (SMF) area is former green belt land at the north of the district on the border of Harlow. It is allocated to provide a minimum of 1,050 homes, a new local centre including retail and community uses, primary school, secondary school, a gypsy and traveller site, as well as strategic green infrastructure including SANG, sports pitches and an extension of the Harlow green wedge. The SMF scheme suggests that 1,500 homes can be accommodated subject to environmental impact testing.

Design code work is currently being progressed with a view to having a full draft ready by the end of July 2023. The team are seeking QRP input to ensure that the format, scope, coding plans and emerging design code are in line with the vision and high-quality sought by the District and HGGT.

The panel is invited to comment on the emerging design code and whether it fulfils the aim of being transferable and exemplary, to promote design quality on other sites within the Garden Town and beyond. Comments related to the scope and content are sought, as well as how best to coordinate with the developing Strategic Masterplan Framework, Sustainability Guidance and emerging Stewardship Charter. Officers would also welcome the panel's advice on whether it feels that the emerging code is sufficiently legible and enforceable, while providing flexible to allow for future innovation and creativity.



4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is impressed with the amount of work undertaken since the previous review and it commends the detail and content developed. The focus on landscape design, public realm and developing a clear hierarchy of streets is positive. The panel feels that when combined, these considerations will enable good placemaking and support modal shift. Further reference to the identity and character of Harlow and Epping Forest would also be welcome, to make the design code more specific to the local context.

However, the panel cautions that there could be overlap between the different sections of the code, and it advises the team to sense check and simplify where possible to avoid duplication. The usability of the document should be considered for different user groups, including developers, design teams and planning officers. The sketches and axonometric diagrams are successful, and the panel suggests continuing to use graphic devices to further clarify the rules. Stress testing the document through consultation should also be considered, to ensure that the document achieves the project's ambitions.

The panel would like to see how the design code could relate more clearly to the delivery of the masterplan. Further information on phasing would be useful, as well as setting out clear steps for the user to apply as part of the design process. Mechanisms and controls for compliance should be developed alongside the design code. As the masterplan will be delivered over a significant period, it will be important to ensure that these mechanisms can be easily understood by a newcomer to the project, without deeper knowledge of the design code.

Usability and content

- The panel encourages further interrogation of the usability of the document for different users. To avoid the document being overly complex, the team should distil the priorities and purpose of the design code, to ensure the information is simple and easy to follow.
- A key element of the design code will be the executive summary, to clarify the purpose of the document for the reader. Getting someone outside the core team to write this could be helpful. This should also be tested through the wider consultation to assess how well the intent is understood.
- Adding a section at the beginning of the document to explain how to use and read the document could be beneficial. This should explain the content, as well as how to interpret the graphic layout and navigate the design code.
- The panel feels that there could be potential overlap between the *Nature*, *Public Space* and *Movement* sections of the document. This could be difficult to navigate and should be simplified wherever possible.



- The rules and explanation of applying these needs to be clear. The panel notes that there will need to be a careful balance to avoid the guidance being too prescriptive, allowing sufficient flexibility for design teams to translate the guidance into individual designs that add variety and character.
- The graphic design and illustrations developed are positive, particularly the street diagrams and axonometric views which help give a sense of place.
- The panel suggests the use of ‘must’ throughout the document needs to be carefully considered. It’s overuse will make it difficult for users to understand the true priorities. It will also increase the likelihood that there will be more conflicting codes and therefore difficult to create a compliant design.
- The panel suggests also using ‘tick’ and ‘cross’ examples, to help clarify the rules in a quick, visually accessible way. Captions will also be helpful to explain what the viewer is meant to specifically look at.

Access and movement

- The panel questions whether the streets will be adopted or privately managed.
- Privately managed roads could give more creative license, for instance in terms of materiality, road markings and carriage widths. However, there is also a need to take account of commercial viability and impact on service charge for the new residents and businesses. Stewardship options should be reviewed against the emerging Stewardship Charter.
- The range of street types is positive. However, the panel would like to see more detail about the defensible and threshold spaces, and when they are needed. For example, some of the tighter streets have the buildings directly abutting the pavement, recalling more historic parts of the district. This flexibility will be critical to developing characterful streets.
- The redesign of the main vehicular route is positive, and the panel feels that making this indirect is the right approach, to make driving less convenient, and encourage walking and cycling via more direct and usable routes.
- The panel is pleased to see the development of the active travel routes assessed against the natural topography of the site. These should also relate to key desire lines and destinations in Harlow to the north, including nearby local centres, schools and allotments.
- The proposed options for layering of pedestrian, cycle and vehicles works well. The panel feels that considering this alongside materiality, play features, planting and SUDS is successful and will result in high-quality placemaking.
- The panel would like to see further detail on the proposed connections to Harlow town centre, including detail of locations of bus stops along the Sustainable Transport Corridor. Although this may be outside the remit of the



design code, coordination with desire lines and routes within the SMF area will be essential.

- The design code could include guidance on the design of the Sustainable Transport Corridor and mobility hub, given that these sit outside the strategic masterplan framework.
- The panel is encouraged by the low parking ratio adopted. It agrees that on-street parking will be the most desirable option, but notes that alternatives may be needed to meet the required spaces.
- Parking enforcement options will need to be considered, to avoid illegal parking on verges and streets. This will be particularly important for vulnerable residents and those that live in accessible dwellings, who need designated parking close to their homes.
- The use of car barns could work well, and the panel welcomes the potential for conversion of these to other uses, should parking demand fall in the future. These structures could also be combined with photovoltaic panels, to generate energy for the development.

Landscape design

- The panel feels that the landscape design coding has been well developed since the previous review, responding more clearly to the site topography. Exploiting the green wedges is also successful and will capitalise on the existing ecology and natural features on the site.
- The panel feels that it would be helpful to list key landscape typologies, to clarify what areas of the design are non-negotiable for the success of the masterplan.

Character and placemaking

- Further detail of the coding for the architectural design would be welcome, but the panel appreciates that this may sit outside the remit of the strategic design code.
- The panel feels that the guide should be more reflective of the local identity of Harlow and Epping Forest. It suggests referencing local typologies and project examples.
- Building upon the 15-minute city concept is positive, but the panel feels that the scale of local centres proposed may not be able support this vision. Provision for additional convenience or corner store type uses would help support the walkable neighbourhoods proposed.
- Active frontages will be crucial to good placemaking. The panel suggests that clear rules for uses and building entrances should be included, alongside exemplar projects and case studies to reference.



- The character of the new neighbourhoods will centre around the narrative of people living there, and not just the buildings, spaces and streets created. 'Day in the life' scenarios for different users, age groups and abilities would help ensure that Latton Priory becomes a 'lifetime development' that can adapt and respond to people's needs over time.

Phasing and delivery

- Further consideration of phasing should be included in the design code. For instance, when looking at the guide from the developer perspective, it will be important to know what to prioritise and what should be done first.
- It will be important to ensure that the enabling infrastructure, including the sustainable transport links and hub, are delivered first to ensure that modal shift can be achieved when new residents and businesses move in.
- It would also be helpful to clarify expectations for design team knowledge and expertise, as well as which consultants should be commissioned at each stage of design. This will be particularly important when considering the individual plots to maintain high standards of design quality.
- Compliance tracking will be important to ensure that the ambitions of the design code are delivered. Given the duration of the project, this will likely be undertaken by others, not linked to the development of the design code. It will therefore be important to make this simple and easy to use.

Consultation

- The panel feels that the planned consultation period will be positive and will help the team distil the document further.
- Stress testing with different groups should be considered, to help inform the usability and accessibility of the information presented and ensure that the design code meets the ambitions of the project.

Next steps

- The panel notes that it will be critical to maintain momentum for the design code to be in place in time to meaningfully influence the strategic applications for Latton Priory. It would welcome the opportunity to review the Design Code again, if helpful.

