



# HARLOW & GILSTON QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

A guide for applicants

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide describes the role of the Quality Review Panel (QRP) in helping deliver growth and regeneration across the new Harlow and Gilston Garden Town communities, as well as within Harlow town centre.

The document is designed to assist specific users of the QRP process; including developers, landowners, designers and architects, as well as the Garden Town and local authority officers.

Case studies of successful projects, as well as testimonials from council officers, panel members and applicant teams have been included. These illustrate the benefits of the quality review process, and show how it provides independent expert advice on design and placemaking.

Although this document is presented in a stand-alone format, it should be read in conjunction with the QRP Terms of Reference and Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Vision. Links to these documents, as well as other useful references are provided opposite.

Image right: The Water Gardens in Harlow, by Frederick Gibberd © Steve Cadman / Wikimedia Commons

## Useful links and documents

[Harlow and Gilston website](#)

[HGGT Vision](#)

[HGGT Design Guide](#)

[HGGT Sustainability checklist](#)

[QRP Terms of Reference](#)

[QRP Annual report](#)

[Harlow Local Plan](#)

[Epping Forest District Local Plan](#)

[East Herts Local Plan](#)

[Harlow Town Centre Area Action Plan](#)





# GARDEN TOWN ASPIRATIONS



Harlow and Gilston Garden Town is one of the biggest and most active growth areas in Southern England. It is a remarkable partnership between five local authorities and has the interests of the community right at its heart.

The Quality Review Panel has been set up to support our ambitions for the Garden Town vision and plays a vital role in delivering quality places for people to live, work and enjoy. Harlow is a forward-thinking place, with an amazing history. With four new neighbourhoods and the regeneration of Harlow Town itself, my aim is to ensure that the Garden Town will build on this pioneering legacy.

We encourage applicants and developers to bring schemes forward to the quality review process, and hope you will benefit from the excellent knowledge and expertise provided by the panel.

Naisha Polaine  
Director - Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Image: The Gibberd Garden © Steve Cadman / Wikimedia Commons





# THE GARDEN TOWN VISION

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town is a pioneering project, which provides one of the most exciting growth opportunities in the UK, setting an exemplary agenda for sustainable living.

The Garden Town's vision builds on the area's key strengths, and has established a set of core principles that will ensure that the new communities created will be adaptable, healthy, sustainable and innovative places to live, work and enjoy.

Four themes have been identified to help guide development and growth across the Garden Town, and these are centred around:

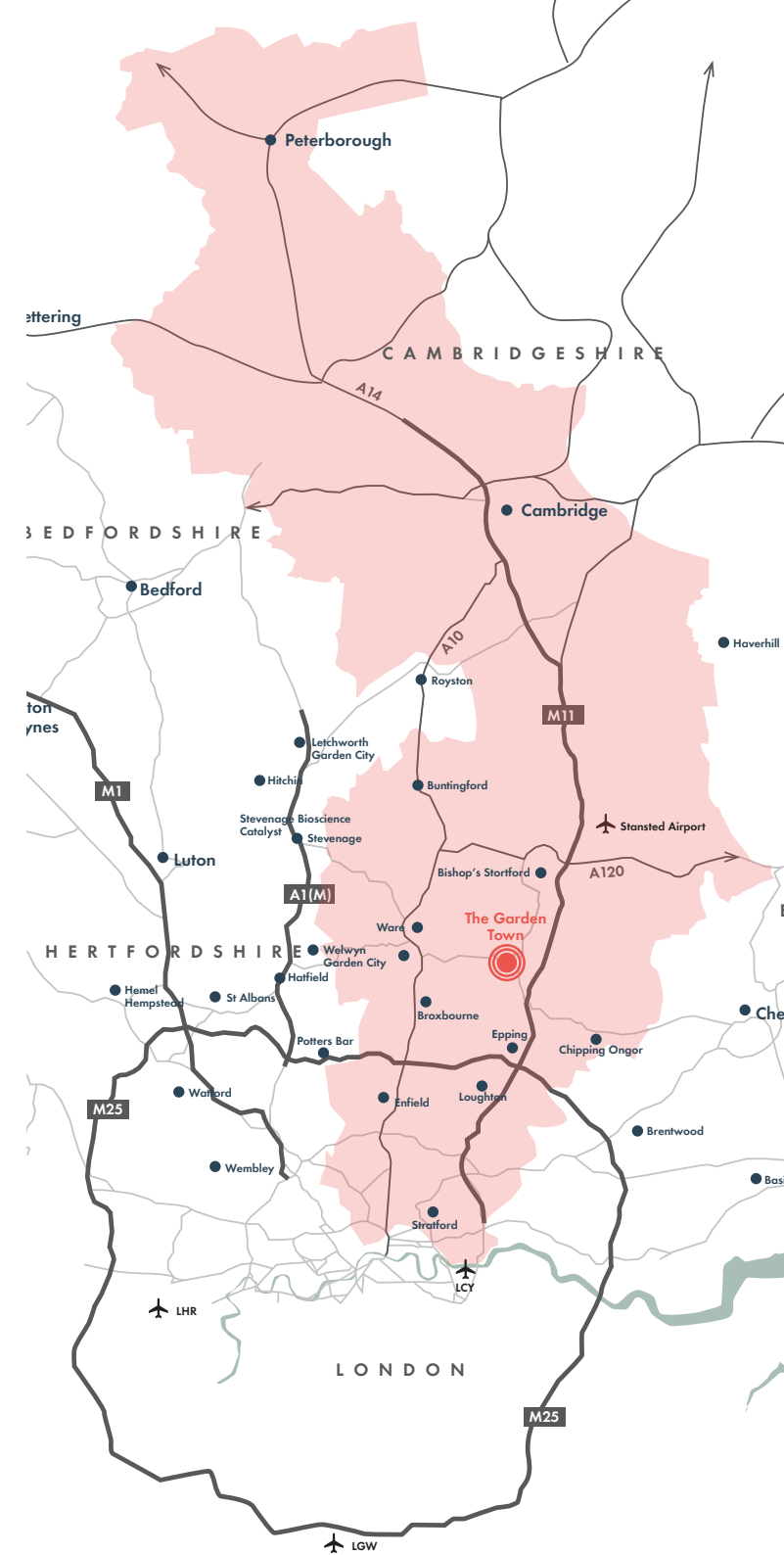
- placemaking and homes
- landscape and green infrastructure
- sustainable movement
- economy and regeneration

We are committed to ensuring excellent quality development. To support our ambitions we have set up the Quality Review Panel to provide independent advice and design guidance that will support development proposals, plans and strategies across a range of disciplines and scales.

The Quality Review Panel includes a broad range of built environment expertise, including architecture, urban design, landscape design, planning, transport, infrastructure, environment, inclusivity and deliverability.

The panel's main purpose is to provide independent, expert advice across the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town area. It should be considered as a 'critical friend' to support the planning process.

*'The garden town  
will deliver a positive  
legacy for the area,  
putting people first.'*





## A WORD FROM THE QRP CHAIR



I have chaired the Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel since its inception back in 2018. During my time as chair, I have had the opportunity to review a significant number of proposals for the Garden Town and have seen the positive influence that the panel has had on forthcoming developments, policies and strategic documents.

My role as chair is to ensure that the panel provides helpful advice to applicants, in its role as a critical friend. I believe that the panel has a huge part to play in supporting the Council in delivering the Garden Town vision and delivery of 16,000 homes by 2033.

I hope you will take the opportunity to engage with the panel, and look forward to working with you to deliver one of the most exciting growth opportunities in the UK today.

Peter Maxwell  
Panel Chair for HGGT QRP

Image: Quality Review Panel site visit © Ione Braddick





# BENEFITS OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

The Quality Review Panel has been working with the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project team since 2018. It has advised on policy and design guidance documents, such as transport strategies, sustainability guidance and a spatial vision. This has helped to give clarity about ambitions for the Garden Town.

The panel's role focuses on ensuring that development proposals meet these ambitions. The process brings in fresh perspectives from professional experts, to support conversations about how developments can meet the aspirations of the Garden Town Vision.

*'The panel plays  
an advisory role to  
support the Garden  
Town project team. '*

For developers and their design teams, the quality review panel process should help to resolve design issues, giving greater confidence at planning application stage. Engaging in the review process, and responding to the panel's comments, helps to demonstrate commitment to high quality design.

For planning officers, the panel provides access to a wide range of professional expertise, supporting their pre-application negotiations. They are able ask the panel for its advice on any areas where they have concerns, and this can help identify solutions. Panel comments at submission stage can be included in committee reports.

For the planning committee, the panel's analysis of design quality can support their decision making. The review process has its basis in national planning policy, which states that 'in assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to ... recommendations made by design review panels' (NPPF, paragraph 129).

For residents, the panel's role is to champion good design that contributes to quality of life.

Image right: Pigeoncote on a cottage at Matching Tye, Essex  
© Acabashi, / Wikimedia Commons





# PEOPLE'S STORIES



Chris Snow  
Panel Member  
Chris Snow  
Architects

I am a Harlow resident and architect, with a background in teaching architecture and wide experience in the profession. Good quality design will always concern itself with the enjoyment of a building in use, its visual character and how it relates to its place. But the impact of a development is also measured in the precious resources it uses to build and operate, in the way it anticipates changes to the economy and society, and how it affects nature, amongst many other things.

The Quality Review Panel plays an important role in bringing together the wider specialisms that inform a comprehensive design, including an understanding of place that I bring as a local architect. I am hugely encouraged that planning authorities and developers are seeing the value in drawing on the QRP to help ensure good quality design in the place where I live.



Kevin Steptoe  
Garden Town Lead Officer  
East Hertfordshire  
Council

My role at East Hertfordshire Council involves supporting the planning process and enabling applicants to bring forward their development proposals. I work with a range of stakeholders to ensure that developments deliver on the aspirations of the Garden Town Vision.

Proposals for the Gilston Area are now well advanced, with early concepts having evolved through to planning applications. The panel has been involved in reviewing the designs and has always been able to provide invaluable feedback to help shape and progress the development schemes.

I would always encourage applicants to take up the opportunity as a means of adding value to the schemes and ensuring that we find a way forward when a range of conflicting objectives and outcomes need to be achieved.



Will Sendell  
Senior Development  
Manager  
Places for People

As a Senior Development Manager, I specialise in the delivery of complex residential and mixed use housing schemes, having worked for Crest Nicholson and Legal & General before joining Places for People to work on the Gilston Park Estate.

Gilston is an exceptional opportunity to work on one of the most complex and ambitious housing schemes in the country. Being involved at the earliest stage to develop the vision and delivery strategy, through to shaping the landscape and village masterplans is incredibly exciting.

The Quality Review Panel's extensive and varied expertise is an immensely valuable resource to draw upon, to inform and challenge the design process and, ultimately, to ensure that all the stakeholders can be proud of what we deliver.



# CASE STUDY

## Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework

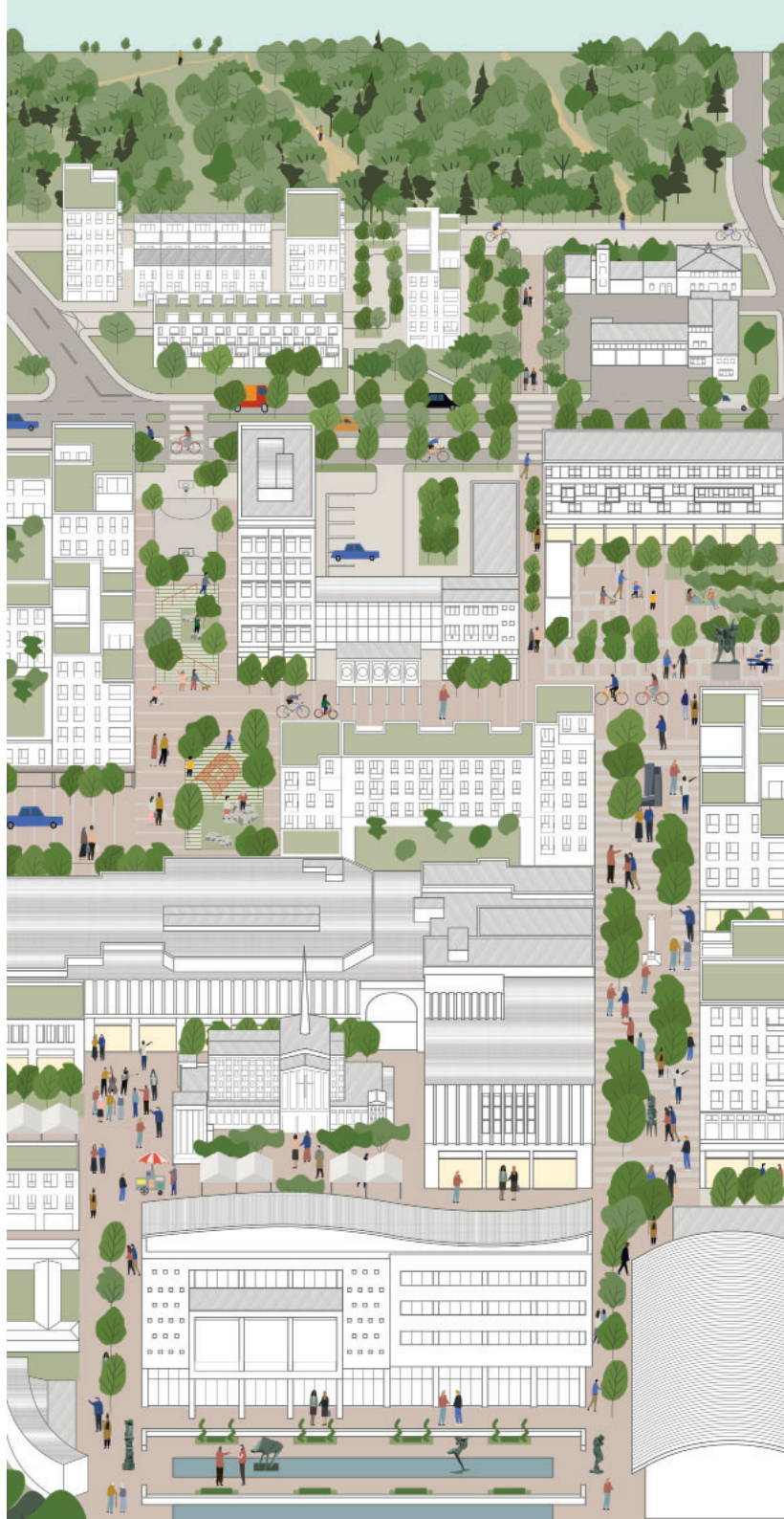
*Client: Harlow Council*

*Design lead: Allies and Morrison*

Harlow Council is bringing forward a Masterplan Framework to guide regeneration of the town centre, where significant development is anticipated. The draft masterplan has been reviewed by the Quality Review Panel on three occasions, most recently in December 2021.

The framework provides guidance on pedestrian, cycle and vehicle routes, urban design, public realm enhancements, appropriate land uses and tall buildings in the town centre.

Feedback from the panel was to encourage the design team to be more ambitious with respect to identity, character and placemaking. It recommended a stronger focus on the design team's 'urban forest' concept. The panel also asked for greater clarity about how appropriate heights have been defined for the town centre. The document is now out for public consultation, having taken on board the panel's comments.



## HARLOW TOWN CENTRE

Area Action Plan  
Issues and options report  
Consultation final

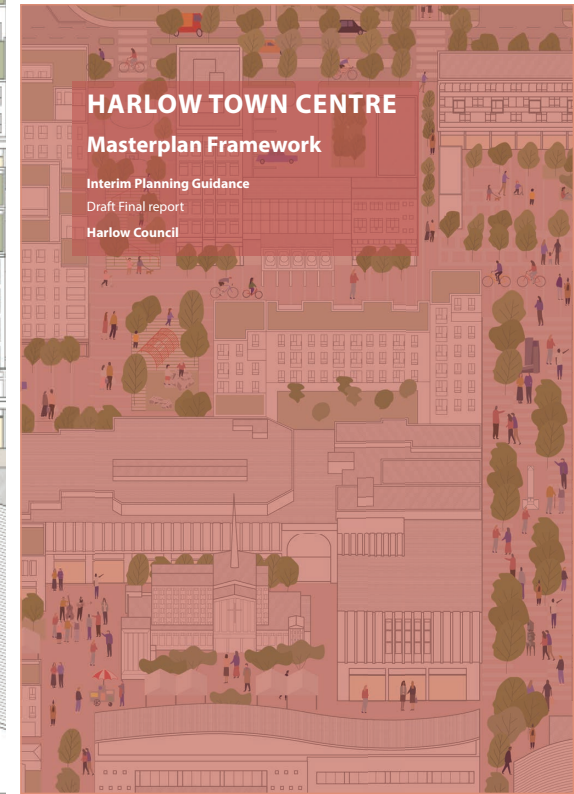
Allies and Morrison  
Urban Practitioners  
June 2018



## HARLOW TOWN CENTRE

### Masterplan Framework

Interim Planning Guidance  
Draft Final report  
Harlow Council





# CASE STUDY

## Gilston Villages

*Client: Places for People and Taylor Wimpey*

*Team lead: Quod*

The Gilston area is located north of Harlow and lies in East Hertfordshire District. A total of 10,000 new homes, along with supporting infrastructure, are planned to be built across seven new villages. Two outline planning applications were submitted in 2019 along with detailed proposals for transport infrastructure.

The design team have engaged with the Quality Review Panel since 2018. The panel has provided advice that has helped inform the principles underlying the outline applications and the detail of the full applications to ensure high-quality design is secured which reflects the Garden Town Vision.

The panel has encouraged the applicant to celebrate the distinct character of each village, and provide vibrant, sustainable and attractive places for people to live, work and enjoy. Development of the overarching strategic landscape masterplan, as well as design codes for Villages 1 and 7 are currently in development and will see further engagement of the panel.





# HOW TO ARRANGE A REVIEW

We offer a range of review formats to suit the size, complexity and design stage of your scheme. Projects are referred to the panel through the Council, at a moment when they feel this will best support you in the planning application process.

Our most common review format is a formal review. This type of review typically lasts for around 90 minutes. The panel is made up of the chair plus 4 panel members.

We also offer a workshop review for policy documents and development strategies. Typically, the chair and two panel members will attend and the review lasts for 90 minutes.

For smaller developments, or schemes that are returning to the panel, we offer a chair's review. This review is a shorter format and lasts around 60 minutes, with the chair and one panel member attending.

Very small schemes, or situations where planning officers request advice on discharge of conditions, may be more suited to a surgery review. This lasts 40 mins with the chair and one other member of the panel.

To get the most out of the review process, we suggest that schemes come forward as early as possible to inform your design development in a helpful, collaborative way. For some larger schemes, the Council may suggest a series of review sessions as the design progresses.

Following the session, a report is provided noting the panel's analysis of design issues and advice given. The recommendations in the report are intended to guide your design development. They also provide Council officers and committee members with a record of the feedback given, to help inform assessment of the final planning submission.

**Full details can be found in the Quality Review Panel Terms of Reference via the link below.**

[QRP Terms of Reference](#)

**Any questions?**

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