



FRAME PROJECTS

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

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

Friday 6 March 2020

Frame Projects, 44-48 Wharf Road, London, N1 7UX

#### **Panel**

Peter Maxwell (chair)

Neil Davidson

#### **Attendees**

Ben Smith	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Lydia Grainger	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects

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

Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council (EFDC)
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Sarah Thwaites	Frame Projects

## **1. Project name**

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

## **2. Aims of the Quality Review Panel meeting**

The Quality Review Panel provides impartial and objective advice from a diverse range of highly experienced practitioners. This report draws together the panel's advice and is not intended to be a minute of the proceedings. It is intended that the panel's advice may assist project and development management teams in making design improvements where appropriate and in addition may support decision-making, in order to secure the highest possible quality of development.

## **3. Background**

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy aims to provide guidance to support EFDC's emerging Local Plan policies – to ensure high quality Green and Blue Infrastructure, including Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS), is delivered alongside the proposed growth in the District.

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 have agreed to produce a combined Green Infrastructure and SANGS 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 and encourage new and existing residents to use local green space rather than visit Epping Forest SAC.

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



#### 4. Quality Review Panel's views

##### *Summary*

The Quality Review Panel welcomes and supports the work being undertaken in developing the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy ('the Strategy') – it promises to be a powerful tool for demonstrating some of the public benefits enabled through the emerging Local Plan's housing ambitions. While the panel commends the broad scope, it recommends further work to balance the Strategy's top down approach, with bottom-up engagement to incentivise local communities to take stewardship over individual site-specific projects. It also recommends reviewing audiences, messages and information to be conveyed – further thinking on this will make the document and its structure clearer and more specific to the key groups that it wishes to engage. While it commends the depth of thinking shown the Strategy should be more explicit and evocative, if it is intended to be read by the general public. The panel thinks legibility, brevity and inspiration will be key to the document's efficacy. While the panel supports the overarching aims of the Strategy it recommends refinements including: further work to define and measure 'quality' cross-referencing; embedding physical and mental health more strongly into the Strategy; cultural interpretation; and monitoring and stewardship. It also provides advice on engagement and testing the Strategy. Further details on the panel's views are provided below.

##### *Approach and delivery*

- The panel supports the work being undertaken developing the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy ('the Strategy'). It commends the Council in taking the lead on this piece of work, which represents a genuine opportunity to excite and engage local communities.
- It thinks the Strategy will be a powerful tool for tangibly demonstrating some of the public benefits that will arise from EFDC's emerging Local Plan ambitions for 11,000 new homes.
- The panel highlights how the document could be used to build popular and political capital – leveraging political goodwill and funding. It will be a useful tool, illustrating outcomes people can readily engage with and embrace.
- The panel thinks there is scope to articulate the role of engagement in promoting participation by local communities, and the potential for them to take stewardship over individual site-specific projects. This will complement the Strategy's strategic vision.
- For example, it points to the London National Park City Foundation. Its approach was to set a strategic vision complemented by volunteer stewardship buy-in from the outset – enabling grass-roots delivery to support the project in the long-term.



### *Leading by example and quality*

- The panel supports the emphasis placed on high quality design, maximising qualitative value, including biodiversity value – alongside increases in overall quantum. In balancing quality and quantum, it encourages promotion of a dense network of smaller ecologically rich open spaces – which will be as valuable as big landscape attractors.
- The panel recommends further consideration of how Epping Forest District Council will define and measure ‘quality’. While defining ‘quality’ is subjectively challenging, it will be important to have clear objectives or aspirations. For example, it points to the example of the London Legacy Development Corporation ‘Design Quality Policy’ which provides a definition of good design specific to that place and organisation’s vision.
- The panel highlights the importance of the Council leading by example – delivering the ambitions of the Strategy on its own projects, including housing development on Council owned sites.
- It also recommends exploring how the Strategy’s objectives can be delivered through cross-Council collaboration.

### *Audience*

- The panel points to its previous comments on the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance, about the need to understand intended audiences. It also highlights the challenge of successfully engaging with broad audiences.
- While it understands the Strategy’s critical importance in supporting emerging Local Plan work, it highlights other potential audiences, including developers and the public.
- The panel recommends further work to tailor the document, including creating separate documents or sections within the Strategy to respond to differing audiences. For example, an introduction could be written with the general public in mind, and policy-led element focused within an Appendix.
- The panel points to the suite of documents developed as part of the East London Green Grid (ELGG) work as an exemplar document, which responds to a range of audiences:
  - the ELGG ‘Primer’ is an accessible strategic high-level document identifying existing green grid assets and strategic opportunities illustrated spatially. The Primer can be found [here](#);



- the ELGG draft Supplementary Planning Guidance is a lengthier policy guidance document which supported the spatial strategy and was subsequently carried through to the All London Green Grid SPG; and
- the six ELGG area frameworks provided detail on individual site-specific projects to be taken forward.

#### *Applicability and legibility*

- The panel has been asked to comment on the legibility and accessibility of the Strategy, and how this could be improved. If the Strategy is intended to be read by the general public it recommends being clear about why they should read it – and it needs to evocatively present benefits and opportunities.
- It highlights that local communities will want to understand how they can be involved in developing briefs for new open spaces and enhancements of existing spaces. They will want to understand what help is available for them to influence and take stewardship of these spaces.
- It suggests reconsidering chapter lengths, relative to intended audiences and distilling objectives into concise bullet points and augmenting illustrations and images.
- It supports considering how elements of the Strategy could be translated digitally, to increase the Strategy's efficacy, longevity and reach to particular audiences.
- The panel suggests caution at replicating other guidance at length, instead it should focus more on what is important for Epping and its wider environment

#### *Cross-referencing*

- The panel supports adopting a similar approach to that being used on the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guidance, identifying cross-cutting themes within the Strategy and signposting to other relevant guidance.
- For example, the panel points to exemplar sustainable urban drainage systems guidance such as Transport for London's guidance (SuDS in London – a guide) and Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) publications.

#### *Engagement and health*

- The panel understands that some soft consultation has already been undertaken, including with Councillors and statutory stakeholders. It recommends and supports testing and further refining the Strategy in consultation with local communities.



- It suggests that local engagement could be used to check the Strategy with what is really happening on the ground – noting that local communities will have an intimate knowledge of these sites and spaces.
- The panel also recommends embedding physical and mental health more strongly into the Strategy.

#### *Cultural interpretation*

- The panel recommends further analysis on cultural interpretation – this will be critical in evolving landscape character and engaging with local communities. For example, it points to the Hainault Old Forest Boundary Stones, which have been in place for 100s of years but on which there is limited local knowledge.
- It thinks emphasising the cultural value of the District’s open spaces could be a good way to approach enhancements for spaces with lower amenity and ecological value.

#### *Monitoring and stewardship*

- The panel wants to understand how implementation of the Strategy’s objectives will be monitored and measured. It suggests a combination of community and Council monitoring and measurement would be most successful.
- It will be critical that local communities are invested in stewardship. The panel recommends early consideration of spaces where volunteers may wish to steward, and those that may require more intensive maintenance – and consideration of alternative arrangements and management and maintenance funding.
- The panel recommends developing a system of community feedback. It suggests a monitoring and evaluation process that enables a circular process, where feedback influences future work.
- It recommends considering how conditioning requirements for landscape or ecology management plan details could ensure robust commitments to protect proposals in the long-term.

#### *Next steps*

The panel strongly supports the work undertaken on the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. It would like to see this work influence schemes currently travelling through pre-application, and existing schemes already submitted as planning applications.

The panel would like to hear more on how the Strategy is influencing key strategic sites, including Latton Priory.

