

# **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C-012-2023/24**

**Date of meeting: 18 Sept 2023**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Place (Cllr Nigel Bedford)**

**Subject: Latton Priory Strategic Design Code**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**(1) To agree that the Draft Latton Priory Strategic Design Code (Appendix A) be approved for public consultation for a six-week period, and;**

**(2) To agree that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Place Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the Draft Latton Priory Strategic Design Code prior to publication for consultation.**

## **Executive Summary:**

EFDC were awarded £120,000 by the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) to produce a design code for the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan area; one of the three Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) communities within, or part of, the District. The Council's adopted Local Plan (Policies SP2 Placeshaping and SP3 Development and Delivery of Garden Communities in the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town) requires '*Design Codes to be produced which accord with the principles established by the endorsed Strategic masterplans*' for Strategic Masterplan sites. The strategic masterplan framework (SMF) for Latton Priory was produced by site promoters' consultants and endorsed at Cabinet on 10.07.2023.

Building on the mandatory spatial principles established in the SMF and the site-specific requirements set out in the Local Plan (Policy SP4 Garden Communities), the strategic design code establishes site-wide strategies and requirements under key themes, including nature, movement, public spaces, built form, identity and resources. The design code focuses particularly on strategies to encourage sustainable movement and create a high-quality public realm with the aim of realising a vibrant and resilient new neighbourhood in line with the Garden Town Vision. As well as supporting Policies SP2 and SP3, The Latton Priory Strategic Design Code supports other policies within the adopted Local Plan, including those relating to green and blue infrastructure (Policies SP6 and DM5), sustainable transport choices (Policy T1) and high-quality design (Policies DM9 and DM10).

This report provides members with an update on the aims, objectives and scope of the Latton Priory Strategic Design Code and confirms the proposed consultation timescales on the Draft design code document. The intention is that following the consultation and any updates arising that the Final Design Code will be brought back to Cabinet for endorsement as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for the Latton Priory strategic masterplan area.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

- To ensure that members are kept fully up to date on the progress of the Latton Priory Strategic Design code.
- To comply with the Council's general obligations as a local planning authority and the requirements set out in national planning guidance.
- To ensure that future development proposals for Latton Priory meet the District and Garden Town ambitions for high-quality, sustainable development.

### **Other Options for Action:**

- Not to agree the Latton Priory Strategic Design Code can be published for consultation, which would mean that there would be no authority-led design code to guide the delivery of development on the Latton Priory Masterplan Area and help to achieve the Garden Town ambitions and Local Plan objectives of high-quality and sustainable growth.

### **Report:**

1. Following a successful bid, EFDC were one of 25 authorities that were awarded funding to produce local design codes by the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) under the Pathfinder Pilot Programme. This followed the publication of the National Model Design Code (NMDC) and an update to the National planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2021 that requires that *'all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences'*.

2. The funding is being used to produce a design code to set design standards for the Latton Priory Strategic masterplan area, allocated in the Local Plan as one of three new Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) communities within, or part of, EFDC. The intention is for the final strategic design code to be endorsed to have material weight as a planning consideration for future developments proposals within the Latton Priory masterplan area.

4. The draft strategic design code establishes site-wide strategies and requirements in line with the Garden Town Vision and Local Plan Policies including those relating to Strategic Masterplans and Garden Communities (Policies SP2, SP3 and SP4), green and blue infrastructure (Policies SP6 and DM5), sustainable transport choices (Policy T1) and high-quality design (Policies DM9 and DM10).

### Context

5. The Latton Priory Masterplan Area is located to the south of Harlow immediately outside the urban area, within the administrative area of EFDC. It is located in Hastingwood, Matching and Sheering Village Ward and North Weald Bassett Parish.

6. The Local Plan Policy SP4 (Garden Town Communities) envisages that the Latton Priory site will deliver a minimum of 1,050 homes, 1ha of employment land, up to 5 traveller pitches and a range of infrastructure and facilities including, amongst others, a primary school, a secondary school (or an all-through school), sustainable drainage systems, suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGs), a local centre, and a sustainable transport corridor connecting the site to Harlow centre and beyond.

7. The Council's Local Plan (Policies SP2 Placeshaping and SP3 Development and Delivery of Garden Communities in the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town) requires '*Design Codes to be produced which accord with the principles established by the endorsed Strategic masterplans*' for Strategic Masterplan sites.

8. The strategic masterplan framework (SMF) for Latton Priory was produced by site promoters' consultants with input and scrutiny from EFDC officers and HGGT partners. The Latton Priory SMF was endorsed at Cabinet on 10.07.2023. The strategic design code is being produced by the EFDC Planning Implementation Team and builds on the mandatory spatial principles established in the SMF and the site-specific requirements set out in the Local Plan.

9. Whilst it is intended that the strategic design code informs all future proposals, there may be limited scope to shape the outline application if one is submitted prior to final endorsement of the design code but the strategic design code will help to inform design discussions and will be used to guide future Reserved Matters Applications.

### Aims and Objectives

10. Through the funding received and the opportunity to produce an authority-led design code, the primary aim is to embed high-quality, sustainable and coordinated design into the strategic development framework, consistent with the principles set out in the National Model Design Code (NMDC), National Design Guide (NDG), local and national policy and HGGT principles.

11. Within this is an objective to embed community and stakeholder aspirations into the development framework and provide clarity about design expectations for communities and stakeholders, which should help to smooth the planning process at later stages and accelerate housing delivery.

12. The design code is intended to be a clear and straightforward tool for those preparing future planning applications and for those assessing future planning applications. It is intended to put in place key strategic principles that are essential to meet the keys aims for the new Garden Community whilst also providing flexibility and inspiring creativity and innovation in future proposals.

13. By producing the design code predominantly in-house and through utilising best-practice in the design code process, it is envisaged that in-house design and engagement skills will be enhanced and that the learnings and outcomes will be used to improve the quality of processes and output on other Strategic Masterplan sites and Garden Communities.

### Design Code Process

14. The design code process has largely followed the guidance set out in the 'National Model Design Code Part 1 – The Coding Process', which describes the stages of Analysis, Vision and then Code. In the context of the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework development by the site promoters' consultants, some of the stages were adapted to reflect the existing baseline information available and the opportunity to coordinate with the emerging masterplan framework.

15. Baseline analysis included a review of relevant policy and guidance documents for the District and the Garden Town as well as key national policy and guidance. The following documents helped to inform the vision, scope and content of the strategic design code:

- EFDC Local Plan
- HGGT Vision including 'principles for healthy growth'
- HGGT Design Guide

- EFDC Green Infrastructure Strategy
- EFDC Latton Priory landscape character assessment
- EFDC/ HGGT Sustainability Guidance
- HGGT Transport Strategy
- HGGT Healthy Garden Town Framework
- HGGT Latton Priory Access Study
- HGGT Measures to achieve mode share
- HGGT Transport Strategy
- HGGT Sustainable Transport Corridor placeshaping principles
- HGGT draft stewardship charter
- HGGT quality of life survey recommendations

16. Existing information on the site held by EFDC and gathered as part of the allocation and SMF process informed the understanding of the existing place. This was supplemented by officer site visits and helped to inform a site-specific vision and design code.

17. To avoid duplication of previous consultations, community views were incorporated at analysis stage through a review of the previous consultations undertaken as part of the Latton Priory SMF process. This included feedback from themed workshops held in 2019 on 'Sustainable movement and transport', 'nature, green and open spaces, landscape and water', 'community hub and stewardship' and 'homes and living'. Emerging Neighbourhood Plan' policy ideas for the 'North Weald Basset Neighbourhood Plan' were also reviewed to understand local priorities and aspirations.

18. Officers were engaged at the analysis through online workshops to help inform the project scope and priorities. These were attended by a variety of EFDC teams, such as Community and Wellbeing and Homes and Communities as well as officers from the Garden Town and partner authorities including Harlow, Essex and East Herts.

19. The baseline information analysis informed a set of design ambitions to be achieved at Latton Priory through the strategic design code work. The design ambitions are intended to be site-specific, concise and shaped to fit in with NMDC themes. For each design ambition, a set of objectives and strategies were established to describe how those ambitions can be achieved, and these inform the strategies and rules that follow in the code. Baseline analysis and resulting strategies and objectives are collated in a Stage 1 report.

20. Specialist transport consultants were appointed to reviewing the site-wide strategies and produce code for street and junction types to help support the Garden Town target for 60% of journeys starting in the new Community to be via active or sustainable modes.

21. In order to ensure that the emerging design code addressed the needs of residents who might be otherwise under-represented, a series of public-realm focused design workshops were held with primary and secondary school children in Epping and Harlow as well as Harlow Youth Council members. A workshop was also held with a group of older people through Voluntary Action Epping Forest. The workshops were organised by Rainbow Services and jointly facilitated by EFDC officers and Rainbow Services.

22. The draft strategic design code has been produced through partnership working in the context of its location and Garden Town status. Regular input has been provided by the HGGT Placeshaping and engagement workstream and there has been liaison with the HGGT quality of life monitoring and stewardship charter development teams. Regular workshops were held with officers from Essex County Council Highways and Harlow Council. Workshops were also held with the site promoters' consultants to facilitate coordination between the SMF and the emerging code.

23. The development of the design code has been supported and monitored throughout by DLUHC and the Office for Place. This has included two design reviews with specialist expertise at the Design Council. In line with EFDC requirements for strategic sites, the draft design code has also been reviewed twice by the EFDC/ HGGT Quality Review Panel to ensure that it is successfully addressing the key aims of the District and the Garden Town. The latest QRP report is attached as an appendix to this report.

24. A HGGT Member Briefing took place on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August, with invites to HGGT Board Members, EFDC and HDC Cabinet members and relevant local ward and parish councils in both Epping Forest and Harlow Districts. The Design Code Project team presented the draft Strategic Design Code and consultation plan. Members were then invited to ask questions or provide comments on the presentation. These included queries/ comments on:

- securing timely delivery of public assets and infrastructure,
- strategies for encouraging active travel and the use of car barns to reduce the impact of car parking on the public realm,
- accessibility of streets including shared surfaces and the design of open spaces,
- accessibility of the consultation including the use of digital and in-person engagement,
- provision of healthcare facilities,
- the use of modal filters to create quiet streets and a permeable street network for walking and cycling,
- legibility of the coding plans,
- EV charging,
- cycle parking,
- separation of cycle lanes and footpaths,
- wider road and transport infrastructure including potential closing of Rye Hill Rd south of the proposed access to cars and STC layout.

These will be addressed during the consultation and will also be used to inform the detailed consultation plan. Where applicable, these will also be addressed in the HGGT strategic transport work that is ongoing.

#### Design Code Scope and Format

24. The strategic design code addresses the public-realm and the structure of the development at Latton Priory to help deliver a place that is high-quality, coordinated and integrated in its context. By focusing on strategic infrastructure, opportunities of the site and best practice design principles for promoting health, community and social vibrancy and sustainability, the design code seeks to embed foundations of a place where people and nature can thrive, whilst leaving scope for innovation, creativity and variety in future applications and detailed design codes.

25. The scope focuses on those key aspects of the NMDC that strongly relate to the public realm and the design ambitions of the code including 'nature', 'public spaces', 'movement', 'built form', 'identity' and 'resources'. There is a particular emphasis on design that encourages sustainable movement to help meet the modal shift target of 60%. The movement section explores strategies to build in a culture of active and sustainable travel at every scale of design. This is supported by the other sections with the objective of realising a vibrant and resilient new neighbourhood in line with the Local Plan and the Garden Town vision.

26. Each section starts with a site wide strategy diagram or set of site wide strategies setting out the key components of that strategy and accompanied by principles and rules. The components are then described or illustrated. Wording includes general principles followed by a series of 'must', 'must not', and 'should', 'should not' rules and recommendations. The intention is that 'musts' are always followed and 'shoulds' followed unless deviation is justified through technical reasoning or

because an alternative approach better achieves the design ambitions. The format is intended to be legible, straightforward to understand and enforceable.

27. The design code addresses the following strategic topics:

- i. Strategic framework. Includes stewardship strategy building on draft HGGT stewardship charter and sets out requirements for the process of planning, designing and maintaining community assets.
- ii. Nature. Sets out the overall green and blue infrastructure strategy and requirements such as minimum 'urban greening factor' score. Also sets out key design principles of various components of the green infrastructure such as the greenway and street trees.
- iii. Movement. Sets out site-wide strategies that help to achieve the objectives of a high-quality, safe and healthy place where active travel is encouraged. This includes strategies for an active travel network, vehicular movement and a street type hierarchy as well as approaches to parking design, but not parking numbers.
- iv. Public space. Sets out the key requirements for streets and spaces forming the public realm. This includes typical sections and key requirements for different types of streets and key open spaces, such as the community plaza.
- v. Built form. Sets out an approach to typologies and locations for density as well as rules around the building line along various streets to support street hierarchy and character.
- vi. Identity. Sets out requirements for achieving variety in frontages that support wayfinding and local distinctiveness by drawing on aspects of the built form of Harlow and Epping.
- vii. Resources. Sets out key site-specific requirements for climate resilience, mitigation and futureproofing at the masterplan stage such as the need for blocks that work with solar orientation for energy efficiency in use.

#### Proposed consultation

28. A consultation strategy is being prepared in detail and will include in-person and digital consultation. In accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), the Council is required to consult stakeholders and the general public on the draft Latton Priory strategic design code. The proposed period of consultation in line with the SCI is six weeks.

29. Consultation arrangements will be put in place and will be advertised ahead of the consultation, in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement. The consultation will include required methods for an SPD, including notifications being sent to those on relevant consultation databases, a notice being placed in the local press and hard copies of documents being made available in appropriate libraries and other public points. Other companies and consultees will be notified as appropriate. Engagement and consultation on this document will seek to follow the HGGT Communications and Engagement Strategy principles and respond to the recommendations around engagement and communications practice as noted through the Your Quality of Life project Reflections and Recommendations Report.

30. Given that consultation was recently undertaken on the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework, particular attention will be given to explaining the role and purpose of the design code within the context of the overall planning process for the Latton Priory Garden Community.

31. Following the consultation, the responses will be collated and where appropriate amendments made to the document. The Latton Priory Strategic design code will then return to

Cabinet for formal endorsement as a material planning consideration. The overall programme towards endorsement is intended to be as follows:

- Sept 2023 – Cabinet approval to commence formal public consultation
- Oct – Nov 2023 – minimum 6-week public consultation
- Dec 2023 – Post consultation revision and finalisation of strategic design code
- Jan 2024 – HGGT Member briefing
- Feb 2024 – EFDC Cabinet for endorsement of strategic design code

### **Resource Implications:**

Remaining DLUHC funding allows for completing the design code, undertaking the consultation and resulting amendments. It is not envisaged that further budget will be required. Consultation will be carried out by officers within the Planning Implementation team.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

The work on design codes has been developed in accordance with Government policy (NPPF and NPPG) and Planning Law.

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The design code builds on policies in the Local Plan and principles of the HGGT Sustainability Guidance that support sustainable development, to help deliver a place that mitigates contribution to climate change and is designed to withstand a changing climate. Key measures include well considered blue and green infrastructure, strategies to promote and encourage a shift to sustainable modes of travel, site layout principles in line with passive solar design for reduced energy use. Safety is also addressed in public realm design, with the promotion of compact walkable neighbourhoods, maximising natural surveillance and minimising potential clashes between different road users, particularly around play spaces.

### **Consultation / Scrutiny Undertaken:**

Informal engagement was undertaken with officers at EFDC, Essex Highways, HGGT and partner authorities to help establish the focus and scope of the design code. Focused community engagement was undertaken with local school children and older people to understand the public realm needs of underrepresented groups. There have been two EFDC/ HGGT QRP reviews on the emerging design code. A HGGT Member briefing was undertaken on Thurs 31<sup>st</sup> August. See para 24 of the report for a summary.

### **Background Papers:**

N/A

### **Risk Management:**

The production and use of a design code as a material planning consideration will support the Council's objectives of achieving high quality and sustainable design at Latton Priory and reduce the risk of design that fails to meet the objectives.

### **Equality:**

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out and there was no significant impact.

