

HARLOW AND
GILSTON / EPPING
FOREST DISTRICT
QUALITY
REVIEW PANEL

ANNUAL
REPORT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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HGGT
HARLOW & GILSTON
GARDEN TOWN



INTRODUCTION

The Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel was set up in 2017 by Frame Projects on behalf of the collaborative HGGT partnership between East Hertfordshire, Epping Forest and Harlow District Councils, and Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils. It is chaired by Peter Maxwell and includes 24 professional experts, selected through an open recruitment process in collaboration with officers from the Councils. The panel also reviews proposals in the EFDC area, outside of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, as the Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel.

Terms of reference, available on the planning authority's web site, set out the role and remit of the panel, and the way in which it supports the planning process. Schemes requiring design advice are identified by planning officers and referred to the panel for a review. Officers provide a briefing on planning context and key issues, both in writing for the meeting agendas, and in person at the panel meeting. Advice given by the panel is recorded in a report, to assist with continuing pre-application negotiations, or to advise the planning committee on submitted schemes.

The Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel has advised on 23 schemes in the year from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. 5 of these schemes have been reviewed on more than one occasion. First reviews usually take place at a stage when a client and design team have decided their preferred option for development of a site, and have sufficient drawings, models, etc. for a comprehensive discussion. There will often be a second pre-application review, to provide advice on more detailed design matters, before planning submission.

Frame Projects has developed a process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of quality review panels. This process allows us to obtain insight into the effectiveness and performance of each of our panels, as well as valuable information on the significant emerging issues from panel reviews. It also provides public transparency and allows for continual improvement of our services. This process includes collecting quantitative information based on the reviews carried out from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. It also includes feedback from panel members, applicants and local planning authority representatives gathered through anonymous surveys.

This framework builds on the initial work done by Public Practice to develop a monitoring tool for design review.

Quantitative data was gathered from reviews that took place from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021.

Due to government restrictions relating to Covid-19, all review meetings managed by Frame Projects were conducted online via video conference from 16 March 2020.

PANEL

Authority	Harlow Council, East Hertfordshire District Council, and Epping Forest District Council
Review Panel name	Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel / Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel
Panel management	Externally managed, Frame Projects
Contact name for panel	Marina Stuart, Frame Projects
Contact email address	marina@frame-projects.co.uk
Report produced by	Marina Stuart, Frame Projects

Image: Newhall Be, Harlow, Alison Brooks Architects © Paul Riddle
RIBA National Award 2013 - Housing Design Awards 2013



REVIEW TOTALS

Total number of reviews

23

Number of follow up /
second reviews

5

Number of formal reviews
(4-5 panel members)

14

Number of virtual site visits

18

Chair's reviews
(1-2 panel members)

3

Workshop reviews
(3 panel members)

5

PANEL COMPOSITION

PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel
members used

21

Male panel members

57%

Female panel members

43%

BAME panel members

24%

PANEL EXPERTISE USED

Architecture

17

Sustainability

5

Social infrastructure

4

Transport

8

Inclusive design

1

Urban design / town
planning

4

Landscape

10

Heritage / conservation

1

Development delivery

2

PROPOSALS REVIEWED

APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

10

Local authority

13

Public Private Partnership

0

STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre application

22

Planning application
submitted

1

Amendment to
approved application

0

TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Masterplan

6

Mixed use

2

Policy or strategic document

2

Commercial

3

Residential (1-50 units)

6

Residential (50+ units)


4

Healthcare

0

Other

0



Frame Projects has worked with the local planning authorities to identify schemes to assess as part of the monitoring and evaluation process. These consist of schemes that have been reviewed by the Quality Review Panel, and where a planning decision has been determined between 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021.

The schemes used for feedback in this evaluation are:

- Nazeing Glasswork (ref: EPF/2712/19)
- Gilston Area Charter
- HGGT Sustainability Guidance
- Green Infrastructure Strategy

Anonymous survey responses were collected from the applicants (planning agent and lead architects, where applicable), panel members who attended the reviews, and local authority representatives (planning officers) who were leading on the schemes. Surveys took the format of yes/no questions with options to provide further specific feedback. Participants were sent an e-mail inviting them to take part in the survey and given two weeks to provide feedback, with one follow-up reminder.

Image: Panel site visit © Ione Braddick

APPLICANT QUESTIONNAIRE

6 applicants were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire.

0 out of 6 applicants responded to the following questions:

1. Did you find the review sessions were conducted in a constructive manner?
2. Were you clear about the information you needed to provide prior to the review?
3. Did you consider that the advice from the panel helped to improve the proposal?
4. Did you feel that the panel reports accurately captured review discussions?
5. Did you think that the panel's advice assisted with officer and council discussions?
6. Would you recommend using the Quality Review Panel?
7. Any other comments?

Image: Harlow Water Gardens, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town



LOCAL AUTHORITY QUESTIONNAIRE

4 local planning authority representatives were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. 2 out of 4 local authority representatives responded to the following questions:

1. Were you clear about the information you needed to provide and your role in the review process?
2. Did you find the panel's comments during the review clear and constructive?
3. Did you find the review session and report clear and useful?
4. Did you find the panel's advice helped support negotiations on design quality?
5. Did you incorporate the panel's comments into a delegated planning report or reported to committee?
6. Did you feel that the planning committee gave weight to the design review advice during decision making?
7. Any other comments?

LOCAL AUTHORITY FEEDBACK

All local authority officers who responded to the questionnaire felt that they were clear about their role in the review process. All officers found the panel's comments during the review and the review session to be clear, constructive and useful. They found the report helpful in supporting negotiations on design quality and agreed that the planning committee gave weight to the design review advice in the decision-making process. They also advised that they incorporated the panel's comments into either a delegated planning report or a report to the committee.

PANEL QUESTIONNAIRE

7 panel members were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. 6 out of 7 panel members responded.

1. Did you feel that the level of information provided prior to the review session was appropriate?
2. Did you consider the site visits a benefit to the review session?
3. Did you consider the information presented at the review to be sufficient to enable a thorough review?
4. Did you consider planning officer written and verbal briefings provided clarity on design and policy issues?
5. Did you feel that panel reports accurately captured review discussions?
6. Did you feel that you could contribute your advice fully?
7. Any other comments?

PANEL FEEDBACK

The majority of the panel considered that site visits – both virtual and physical – were beneficial to the review session. All those who responded felt that they were able to contribute their advice fully however, the panel had mixed feelings in regards to whether the information presented by the applicants during the meeting was sufficient to enable a thorough review. They felt that some applicants were more prepared than others and information on sustainability was often lacking.

Most respondents considered the level of information provided prior to the review to be sufficient, although one panel member noted that sometimes information on sustainability was not well presented. The panel members mostly felt that the planning officers written and verbal briefings provided clarity on design and policy issues and they all felt that the panel reports accurately captured the review discussions.

EMERGING ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

This annual report covers the period from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021, during which time the Quality Review Panel held its meetings by video conference. As returning to in person meetings becomes possible, the aim will be to hold all meetings requiring a site visit in person. For returning schemes, video conference meetings may continue to be appropriate, and can include a virtual site visit to refresh the panel's understanding of the context.

Although a good level of feedback was received from panel members and local authority representatives, the response rate from applicant teams was poor. Frame Projects will review the evaluation process with council officers at the next progress meeting, with the aim of improving applicant response rates for the 2021 - 2022 annual report.

Some panel members commented that insufficient information was provided by applicants at review meetings on their approach to environmental sustainability. In recognition of this, the use of chair's review meetings including the chair plus a sustainability expert are being trialled to allow for more detailed presentation and discussion.

Image: The Clock House © Harlow District Council

EMERGING ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

Sustainability

Frame Projects also ran a climate emergency training session for panel members and planning officers in April 2021. This was developed in collaboration with Architects Declare and the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI). As an output of this session, the guidance notes sent to presenting teams in advance of a review are being updated, to give more clarity about the information required.

Image: A view East from Gibberd Garden, Essex © Acabashi, Wikimedia Commons

