



HARLOW AND
GILSTON / EPPING
FOREST DISTRICT
QUALITY REVIEW
PANEL

ANNUAL
REPORT
2022-2023

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Frame Projects
Unit 15 Waterside
44-48 Wharf Road
London N1 7UX
020 8164 9980
office@frame-projects.co.uk

HGGT
HARLOW & GILSTON
GARDEN TOWN



INTRODUCTION

The Harlow and Gilston / Epping Forest District 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 23 professional experts, selected through an open recruitment process in collaboration with the Councils. The panel also reviews proposals in the EFDC area, outside of 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 review. Officers provide a briefing on the planning context and key issues, both in writing for the meeting agenda, 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 9 schemes in the year from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Five 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 the 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 reviews carried out. This report covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023, and includes feedback from panel members, applicants and local planning authority representatives gathered through anonymous surveys.

Quantitative data was gathered from reviews that took place from
1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

Lucy Block, Frame Projects

Contact email address

lucy@frame-projects.co.uk

Report produced by

Roxanne Salburg, Frame Projects

Image: Newhall Be by Alison Brooks Architects © Paul Riddle



REVIEW TOTALS

Total number of reviews

10

Number of follow up reviews

5

Formal reviews
(chair plus four panel member)

4

Chair's reviews
(chair plus one panel member)

4

Workshop reviews
(chair plus two panel member)

2

Number of site visits
(virtual)

7

Number of site visits
(in person)

3

PANEL COMPOSITION

PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel members used

13

Male panel members

54%

Female panel members

46%

BAME panel members

31%

PANEL EXPERTISE USED

Architecture

14

Urban design / town planning

5

Landscape / public realm

2

Transport planning

3

Heritage / conservation

0

Sustainability

3

Development Delivery

0

Social Infrastructure

2

PROPOSALS REVIEWED

APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

4

Local authority

5

Public private partnership

1

STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre application

6

Planning application
submitted

2

Policy Document

2

TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Masterplan

1

Mixed use

3

Residential (1-50 units)

0

Residential (50+ units)

0

Policy or strategic document

4

Commercial


0

Public realm

1

Education

1



Frame Projects has worked with the local planning authority 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 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The schemes used for feedback in this evaluation are:

- Town Centre Interchange & Hub HW/OUT/22/00286
- Green Infrastructure Strategy
- North Weald Airfield Masterplan
- HGGT Quality of Life
- Rosario Thornwood EPF/0332/22
- North of Harvey Centre HW/OUTAM/21/00

Anonymous survey responses were collected from the applicants (planning agent and lead architects), 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 email inviting them to take part in the survey and given two weeks to provide feedback, with one follow-up reminder.

Image: Dujardin Mews by Macreanor Lavington and Karakusevic Carson © Mark Hadden

APPLICANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Fifteen applicants were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire.

Two out of fifteen applicants responded to the following questions:

1. Did you find that 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 Place Shaping Panel?
7. Any other comments?

APPLICANT FEEDBACK

All applicant respondents agreed that they were clear about the information that they needed to provide prior to the review and considered that the review sessions were conducted in a constructive manner and that the panel reports accurately captured review discussions.

All applicants felt that the panel offered good, reasonable, and constructive comments which helped to improve the final scheme, one applicant added that the sessions helped shaped their plans, and another mentioned that the HGGT officers were exceptionally helpful during pre app and follow up stages.

LOCAL AUTHORITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Nine local planning authority representatives were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. Two out of nine 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 and found the panel's comments clear and constructive; half of the officers found the report helpful, while the other half found the panels advice helpful in supporting negotiations on design quality, and that the planning committee gave weight to the design review advice in the decision-making process. Some officers felt that the panel needed to better understand the Council's priorities.

Image: Site visit © Frame Projects



PANEL QUESTIONNAIRE

Fifteen panel members were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire.

Five out of fifteen 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

Most respondents agreed that the level of information provided prior to the review was sufficient. The panel member generally considered that the site visit was of benefit, as its important part of the review process. One panel member noted that they have not attended many site visits as part of the sessions. They noted that they don't think a site visit is always necessary, as the information beforehand had been helpful. All the panel members felt that the planning officer provided clarity to written and verbal briefings on design and policy issues.

The majority of the panel felt that the reports accurately captured the review discussions, while one panel member suggested that more information needs to be recorded on matters relating to sustainable transport and active travel. All panel members felt that they can contribute their advice confidently and think that Quality Review Panel's are an excellent way of helping officers come to quality decisions.

EMERGING ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

There have been fewer schemes this year and there are concerns that the panel members could become less engaged as a result. As the best way to build competency and knowledge within the panel is through regular involvement, options could be considered to foster relationships and provide feedback to panel members. The panel and chair have suggested that it would be useful to share local knowledge of successful schemes as precedent examples for benchmarking. A potential option could be for Frame Projects and the Garden Town team to arrange group site visits as part of annual meetings. Alternatively, these schemes could be presented at online lunch / breakfast briefings.

Several masterplans and design codes that have been to the panel previously, still require further input from the QRP. An emerging issue on these types of review is the lack of detail within the masterplan. A chair's review can be helpful in these situations to allow for more focused discussion of specific issues such as low carbon design, landscape or transport. Frame Projects have offered to meet applicants, alongside planning officers, to discuss how best to tailor the review process to provide the advice needed on masterplan schemes.

In December 2022, it was agreed to bolster panel expertise in transport, sustainability and landscape architecture, as well as introduce new stewardship expertise. The recruitment process was also used as an opportunity to ensure that the panel has a good balance in regard to gender and diversity. Seven new panel members have now been appointed. With these appointments, 46 per cent of the Quality Review Panel are women and 14 per cent are from a BAME background. This is broadly representative of the local demography of the area.

In analysing the panel expertise used during the annual reporting period, it is clear that panel members specialising in heritage could be used more frequently. Frame Projects will continue to work with the Council to include the widest possible range of panel members in review meetings during the course of each year, subject to availability and the requirements of each scheme.

