HARLOW AND GILSTON / EPPING FOREST DISTRICT QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Frame Projects
Unit 14 Waterside
44-48 Wharf Road
London N1 7UX
020 3971 6168
office@frame-projects.co.uk
frame-projects.co.uk

Epping Forest District Council

INTRODUCTION

The Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel was set up in 2017 by Frame Projects on behalf of a collaborative partnership between Harlow Council, East Hertfordshire District Council and Epping Forest District Council (EFDC). It is chaired by Peter Maxwell and includes 20 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 are available via the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town website and the Epping Forest District Council website. The terms of reference 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 offices and referred to the panel for a review. Officers provide a briefing on 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 advise the planning committee on submitted schemes.

The Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel / Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel has advised on 16 schemes in the year from 1 June 2019 until 31 May 2020. One of these schemes has 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, prior to planning submission.

Frame Projects has developed a process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of quality review panels. This process will allow 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 will also provide public transparency and allow for continual improvement of our services. This process includes collecting quantitative information based on the reviews carried out from 1 June 2019 until 31 May 2020.

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 2019 to 31 May 2020.

Due to government restrictions during 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	Sarah Thwaites, Frame Projects
Contact email address	sarah@frame-projects.co.uk
Report produced by	Sarah Thwaites, Frame Projects

REVIEW TOTALS

Total number of reviews

16

Number of follow up / second reviews

1

Number of formal reviews (4-5 panel members)

12

Number of site visits

6

Chair's reviews (1-2 panel members)

2

Workshop reviews (3 panel members)

2

PANEL COMPOSITION

PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel members used

17

Male panel members

71%

Female panel members

29%

BAME panel members

8%

PANEL EXPERTISE USED

Architecture

5

Urban design / town planning

4

Sustainability

3

Landscape

1

Social infrustructure

1

Heritage / conservation

1

Transport

1

Development delivery

1

PROPOSALS REVIEWED

APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

8

Local authority

7

Neighbourhood plan group

1

STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre-application

15

Planning application submitted

1

Amendment to approved application

0

TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Masterplan

5

Mixed use

1

Policy or strategic document

4

Commercial

2

Residential (1-50 units)

1

Residential (50+ units)

2

Infrastructure

1

Other

0

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 June 2019 and 31 May 2020.

The schemes used for feedback in this evaluation are:

- Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Healthy Town Framework
- Sustainable Transport Corridor Study

Anonymous survey responses were collected from the applicants (planning agent and lead architects), panel members who attended the reviews, and local authority representatives (planning officer and design officer) 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 asking them to take part in the survey and given two weeks to provide feedback with one follow up reminder.

APPLICANT FEEDBACK

3 applicants were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. 0 out of 3 applicants responded.

Found the review session was conducted in a constructive manner

-%

Were clear about the information they needed to provide prior to the review

-%

Considered the advice from the panel helped to improve the proposal

-%

Feel the panel reports accurately captured review discussions

-%

Thought review session assisted with officer and council discussions

-%

Would recommend using the review panel

-%

LOCAL AUTHORITY FEEDBACK

2 local authority representatives were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. 0 out of 2 local authority representatives responded.

Clear about information they needed to provide and their role in the process

-%

Found the panel's comments during the review clear and constructive

-%

Found review session and report helpful

-%

Found the panel's advice helped support negotiations on design quality

-%

Reported the panel's comments on an officer's planning report

-%

Felt the Planning Committee gave weight to the design review advice

-%

PANEL MEMBER FEEDBACK

6 panel members were contacted twice to complete the feedback questionnaire. 4 out of 6 panel members responded.

Felt level of information provided before review session was appropriate

75%

Considered officer briefings provided clarity on design and policy issues

75%

Considered site visits a benefit to a review session

100%

Felt that the panel reports accurately captured the review discussions

100%

Considered the information presented during the review sufficient

75%

Felt that they could contribute their advice fully

100%

EMERGING ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

Analysing data around panel composition shows there is room to improve gender balance and diversity. Frame Projects will continuously evaluate panel composition and work towards achieving better gender balance and diversity in line with the districts the panel represents. Three out of the four most recently appointed panel members were female. Frame Projects is also revising the panel recruitment process to ensure it is more inclusive and reaches a wider range of people.

Given the importance of sustainable transport in the Garden Town, Frame Projects has worked with Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Team representatives to recruit two new panel members with expertise in transport planning. A further two panel members have been recruited with landscape and sustainability expertise respectively to reflect the move towards landscape-led development in the Garden Town.

There has been recent success with workshop reviews and as a result, this meeting type has been added to the Terms of Reference. Workshop reviews are typically used to discuss policy documents, or to provide advice on a development strategy. Typically, the chair and two panel members will attend a workshop review, and the meeting is more discursive in tone and structure. This type of meeting works particularly well on the Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel due to the number of strategy and policy documents being reviewed.