# Policy and Implementation

➡ 01279 655261

➡ www.eastherts.gov.uk

➡ East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ

🅵 EastHertsDC

🆃 EastHerts

🅾 easthertscouncil

East Herts Council

**Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston NP: Policy AG6**

The Council's previous comments on this policy noted that the main issue was the implementation of the term 'Hertfordshire Village Character'. Our comments were echoed by the QRP's, who suggested that any such term would need to be defined within the context of the 21$^{st}$ Century and also in the context of delivering Policy GA1.

The expectation was that the updated policy would seek to bring in elements and examples of village character that would be suitable for Policy GA1 to draw inspiration from and critically, would also work in the context of delivering modern sustainability objectives.

With that in mind, elements of this policy are still in conflict with the points referred to in the first paragraph and do not achieve the expectations of the second. Particularly in reference to the term 'Hertfordshire Village Character' where the definition hasn't been suitably amended or explained to provide comfort that GA1 could still be delivered.

The appendices, although helpful in defining characteristics of what is meant when referring to Hertfordshire Village Character, generally only highlight the key characteristics of existing villages and how these characteristics are good examples of a typical Hertfordshire village.

The key point here is remembering that whilst the Gilston development is expected to deliver a series of *distinct* villages, they are garden villages and *not* traditional villages. If they were to take the form, layout and character of the Hertfordshire villages referred to in the supporting appendices, the strategic objective of Policy GA1 would not be met.

I appreciate that the above points be disappointing to hear but it is better that these are voiced now whilst the NPG is still in full control of drafting the policies. Therefore, whilst I have highlighted the general issues above, below I have drawn out some of the specific issues with the supporting text, and both the policy and the appendices.

Specific officer comments on Policy AG6 and supporting text:

Supporting Text:
- 184 – the principle was established for accommodating 'distinct' villages not 'individual' new villages. There is an important difference between distinct (recognisably different) and individual (single or separate) and perhaps this is creating some issues within this area. This is later recognised in the following two paragraphs but should be clarified in the first.

- 189 – whilst I appreciate that density and building heights are clearly a key issue for the Neighbourhood Plan Group, the neighbourhood plan should recognise the benefits to increased density and building heights where appropriate across the GA1 development.
- 190 – Only part of the HGGT Vision definition of a 'village' is included in this paragraph, the whole quote should be included to ensure this is not taken out of its context.
- 191 – The first sentence should be reworded as it doesn't accurately reflect a summary of the policy and guidance documents. It would be more appropriate to refer to new designs taking cues from existing assets both man-made and natural. New designs can't be appropriate to an existing villages morphology as the context is entirely different.

Policy AG6:
- The title refers to Hertfordshire Village Character – and not as an updated definition or in the context of delivering a strategic site allocation as suggested through previous comments. Consider deleting and instead having the title; 'Securing Distinct Character in the Garden Villages'
- Part 1 – talks about masterplan preparation – Policy DES1 of the District Plan and in the Gilston Area Charter already set out the masterplan process which involves extensive community engagement and collaboration. Delete reference to masterplanning.
- Part 1, Criterion iii. links density to general village form and layout – considering village form has been defined via the appendices and the appendices only refers to existing Hertfordshire villages  this would not allow the delivery of Policy GA1. Delete reference to 'village form and layout' and instead use '…the objectives of each distinct village'.
- Part 2; Again, direct link to a 'typical Hertfordshire village layout and character' which in order for the strategic priorities of Policy GA1 to be met, this policy simply wouldn't allow it. Delete '…typical Hertfordshire village layout and character…'
- Criterion i. potentially conflicts with other NP policies (albeit I haven't seen the subsequent drafts) which refers in places to wooded spaces. Consider deleting reference to 'open' land.
- Criterion 4 – this policy should be reworded to focus only on the Gilston Area being distinguishable from Harlow but not refer to its 'predominantly urban character' as the Gilston Area development will have urban functions given its scale.
- One area that is notably absent in any particular detail is reference to prominent materials or architectural styles – this is a key component of creating distinct

character and an area where the NP could be influential without directly impacting upon the delivery of a strategic site.

<u>Officer comments on the Appendices:</u>

Whilst I appreciate that your introduction notes that the appendix does 'not prevent larger future villages' some of the information within it does appear to be significantly contrary to this statement.

A4.1: Whilst it is useful to point to guidance offered elsewhere it is important to note them within the context they sit. For example;
- Policy HOU2 does state a lower net density in villages, but Policy GA1 is a strategic site and not a village so that statement has taken on the wrong context.
- The HGGT Vision does indicate that housing densities will be broadly between 20 and 55 dph; however it does not indicate a preference for Gilston. Likewise, Gilston is not going to be a village, it is a series of Garden Villages and so this extract should only be presented factually not with an assumption on density.

A4.2:
- All examples presented only note the existing character of historic villages and not their relevance or suitability to a strategic site such as Gilston or modern sustainability goals.

A4.3:
- Street character – Whilst I agree with the overarching principle of low traffic speeds and shared use. There is potential conflict between the examples here and those in the HGGT Vision and the aspired mode share targets, which prioritise pedestrians and cyclists. For example, "narrow footpaths" on High Streets are highlighted, which is not necessarily a design cue we would want to encourage. Could this section focus more about other elements of street character? Enclosure/frontage/views/landscape treatments/lighting etc.

A4.4:
- Arrival into village; I note a preference for a foreground of fields on arrival. I do not think this is a realistic aspiration for the garden villages, and instead landmark buildings on entry to a garden village may be a more desirable trait, especially in terms of legibility.
- View of the countryside from the heart of the village; much like the above this section will be tested in the different context of a garden village, and may prove to be unrealistic.

A4.7:
- Village edges, "inappropriate urban edges" – there are likely to be instances when a more rural form to the village edge will work best, and equally instances when a more urban form to a village edge will work best – I am particularly thinking in terms of ensuring passive surveillance along aspects of the village boundaries with public access (which is not typical in a Hertfordshire village).
- Furthermore, it is likely that a combination of solutions would be acceptable throughout the site. For example the interaction between new villages and existing villages would need a softer, lower and more informal approach, as would new village edges with the wider countryside. New village edges that overlook internal public open space and face other new village edges would have a need for active frontages and could be treated differently.

A4.9:
- Landmark buildings isolated from the village; we may want landmark buildings at the heart of the garden villages, as well as in various other locations to be designed through a collaborative masterplanning process. In addition, there will be the various historic landmark buildings isolated from the villages, particularly Gilston Park House, so this is not a particular reason to create new isolated landmark buildings.

A4.10:
- Building heights; it is noted that there are typical heights found within Hertfordshire villages, but this is a point in which the garden villages will differ significantly from Hertfordshire village character.


Conclusion:

Whilst the above comments, alongside some suggested tracked-changes to the policy below begin to illustrate some of our concerns, it does not necessarily solve the general points we raised initially.

In order to rectify all of the concerns, the appendices need to be revisited and so does the supporting text, to ensure that any updates to the policy are applied consistently and in the context of delivering the Gilston Area fully and sustainably.

If the objective of this policy is to draw on features of village character for use across GA1, then any updated policy should seek to highlight the elements and examples of village character that could be suitable for the new development to draw inspiration from. But critically these elements need to work in the context of the delivery of Policy GA1 and also modern sustainability objectives.

POLICY AG6 – Securing ~~Hertfordshire Village~~ Character in the Design of the New Garden Villages

~~1. Proposals for the new~~ Villages should clearly demonstrate that the best possible balance has been achieved between landscape, village separation, mass and density and ~~agreed as part of a Village Masterplan prepared in collaboration with the local community~~the overall delivery of the aims of Policy GA1 in the District Plan, which together:
i.       Respects local topography and settlement morphology.
ii.      Incorporates significant existing landscape features and an integrated Green Infrastructure Network.
iii.     Provides a range of densities and building heights which are appropriate to the objectives of each distinct village ~~village form and layout~~.
iv.     Creates garden villages of distinct character
iv.     ~~Delivers the development allocation identified in Policy GA1 of the District Plan.~~

2. Village Masterplans should demonstrate how the design ~~of the new village~~ has been informed by an analysis ~~of typical Hertfordshire village layout and character and~~ of its relationship with the landscape and existing heritage assets to create a~~n~~ distinct individual ~~village~~ character. This should as far as possible be reflected in:
i.       Clear visual integration with the countryside, with direct views over ~~open~~ land separating the villages and the retention of pockets of natural greenspace within the village boundary.
ii.      Softer outer village edges (with an informal building line and varied frontages dispersed among trees), with no prominent buildings or visually dominant built frontages.
iii.     Building heights and massing which do not visually dominate views and landscape from key viewpoints and are appropriately scaled in relation to village location and heritage and landscape elements.
iv.     The design, scale and informal layout of streets and lanes which should include street planting and connect with the Green Infrastructure. Network.
v.      Diversity of building typologies and design.
vi.     The potential to reflect in the village design other local characteristics identified in Appendix 4.
3. Contemporary and innovative design will be encouraged, provided this is appropriate to its context in terms of landscape, topography, built form, scale and materials.
4. The character, built form and morphology of the new villages should be clearly distinguishable from the ~~predominantly urban character and~~ character and built form of the wider Harlow area.