**EIA Quality Mark Case Study**

**Gilston Park Estate | North Harlow, Hertfordshire**

### Key Issues

- **Extensive consultation process** – the Gilston Area represents one of the most significant releases of Green Belt land in recent years.
- **Environmental sensitivities** - historic landscape, numerous heritage assets (ancient woodland, hedgerows and species rich grassland), valuable agricultural land, underlying mineral resource, three onsite watercourses (include a WFD Main River) and flooding concerns in the Stort Valley.
- **Complexity** – the EIA needed to assess and report the potential environmental effects for all three applications.
- **Survey access** - access was not possible across the whole site.
- **Flexibility in delivery** – the ES approach and assumptions needed to allow for flexibility in delivery of the three applications (and specifically various elements of the Village Development) across the construction programme.

### Purpose of the project

To provide strategic environmental planning advice to support the allocation of the site and EIA coordination for three interlinked planning applications to deliver a residential-led masterplan for up to 8,500 homes and associated highway infrastructure on a large greenfield site.

### Description of the project

**Client | Places for People**  
**Site size | 975 ha**  
**Location | North Harlow, Hertfordshire**

The Gilston Area site (Policy GA1) is allocated for the delivery of 10,000 new homes within East Hertfordshire District Plan to provide a strategic and sustainable residential-led masterplan development to the north of Harlow.

The Gilston Park Estate project entails three inter-linked planning applications (one outline and two detailed) known as the Village Development, Central Stort Crossing and Eastern Stort Crossing with an indicative 20-year construction period from 2020 to 2040.

The Village Development forms the main component of the project and is an outline planning application for 8,500 new homes across six distinct villages, supported by education, health and other community facilities, as well as substantial open space and public realm.

The Central and Eastern Stort Crossing applications are detailed applications providing new or enhanced crossings over the River Stort, including a new pedestrian and cycle crossing over the A414.
Future proofing - The EIA needed to be robust but sufficiently flexible to allow for changes in technology and occupiers behavior over time given the long construction period.

EIA Learning Outcomes

Lessons learnt

The site allocation followed a considerable period of pre-application engagement with the client, East Hertfordshire District Council and numerous other stakeholders. With the large number of stakeholders involved, it was important to maintain ongoing dialogue between all parties throughout the process and ensure the emerging design reflected priorities from key parties and all stakeholders were engaged and comfortable with the scheme proposals, planning strategy and assessment methodologies. This was especially pertinent when there was a change in Council staff during the EIA process. This effective communication throughout enabled issues to be identified and dealt with at the earliest stage appropriate and ensured that the environment and social constraints influenced the design of the scheme and adverse effects were avoided as far as practicable.

Lessons learnt continued

Given the long construction programme of the project (20 years) and necessity to provide reliance on the delivery but flexibility on the timings of the build-out of three applications, the EIA was not linked to a phasing plan but assessed a set of trigger assumptions. Sensitivity tests were also incorporated out to test the potential implications of the early delivery of the detailed applications (e.g. the Eastern Stort Crossing).

The parameter plans were designed to provide sufficient flexibility to allow the development to respond over time to changing technology and behaviours within clearly defined parameters. In addition, it was crucial to ensure that all sensitive receptors (e.g. heritage assets) were clearly identified and incorporated into the parameter plans as part of an iterative process, so that appropriate mitigation could be developed accordingly and enhance these assets where possible.

The EIA had to reflect the likely significant effects of the parameters, rather than the illustrative proposals of the scheme. If the EIA assessed illustrative proposals of the scheme, rather than defined parameters, it could be argued that the EIA had not assessed a 'worst case' scenario.

To ensure a robust planning application that gave due consideration to other relevant environmental legislation, it was critical to ensure that the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) assessment were coordinated with the EIA process.

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