

Ebbsfleet Garden City: Draft specification for a full masterplan

Response of the Landscape Institute, 20 April 2015

1. Background

The Landscape Institute is the Royal Chartered body for the landscape profession – one that encompasses landscape planning, design and management at all scales. As a professional body and educational charity, we work to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the public benefit. We champion landscape and the landscape profession, through advocacy and support to our members, in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. We work with government to improve the planning, design and management of urban and rural landscape. We accredit university courses and promote professional development to ensure that landscape professionals deliver the highest standards of practice.

The landscape profession itself is rooted in an understanding of how the environment works and what makes each place unique. It is a blend of science and art, vision and thought. It is a creative profession skilled in strategic planning, delivery and management. Landscape professionals bring knowledge of natural sciences, environmental law and planning policy. They lead teams, engage stakeholders and manage conflicting demands. And they create delight with beautiful designs, protecting and enhancing our most cherished landscapes and townscape.

2. Response of the Landscape Institute

At the very outset of the consultation email (from Kirstin Blagden date 26 March 2015), it is pointed out that the draft specification should be seen within the context of delivering a garden city within the 21st century. We feel it would be worthwhile highlighting that the challenges of the 21st century need to be addressed through the specification for the masterplan. These challenges have been articulated in various publications/pieces of research. Perhaps most relevant, and comprehensive, is the Government Office for Science's Foresight report on Land Use Futures (2010).

Taking each of the specific questions in the consultation email in turn, our responses are as follows:

a. Whether what we are asking for is clear?

We believe that there is currently insufficient clarity that a garden city must, by definition, be a landscape-led project. Landscape needs to be the integrating framework within which development takes place and this framework needs to be used as a source of inspiration to guide the nature of new development.

Every place has its own distinctive local character, a result of the action and interaction of natural and human systems. The work of Natural England in its National Character Areas (NCA) would be of great value in informing the masterplan of the new garden city. It is our understanding that Ebbsfleet falls within NCA 81, the Greater Thames Estuary. Further information can be found [here](#).

Sitting beneath this landscape framework should be an overarching green infrastructure (GI) strategy for the development of the garden city. This needs to be established at the very outset of

development, and delivered early on so that the GI features can mature whilst development is taking place.

GI is the principle way in which delivery of ecosystem services can be ensured. The multifunctional nature of GI, the network of natural and semi-natural features within and between settlements, can deliver a wide range of benefits for the future Ebbsfleet community, the local economy and the environment. These benefits include:

- Distinctive local character, informed by a landscape character assessment;
- Creation of a stress-resilient landscape that is adaptable and can respond to future social, environmental and economic pressures and opportunities – the best places evolve over time and the failure of many settlements is the lack of flexibility to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. Green infrastructure can play a key role in avoiding this;
- Improving the links between the new garden city and its wider rural setting, which can promote the important relationship between town and country through, for example, food production, recreation, water management and fuel provision;
- Provision of a range of active and passive recreational and sporting opportunities, including formal and informal play facilities throughout the garden city;
- Ensuring that the garden city landscape helps support the health and wellbeing of the new Ebbsfleet Community. More information on the ways that this can be achieved can be found in the Landscape Institute's position statement on public health, which can be accessed [here](#);
- Enabling water sensitive urban design, that includes managing flood risk, quality of water supply, sustainable drainage systems and waste water management;
- Provision of sustainable and highly permeable transportation routes to encourage safe walking, cycling and use of public transport and to build green networks;
- Creating capacity for renewable energy installations, for example, ground source heating and cooling under hard and soft spaces, combined heat and power stations and integration of solar or wind sources into site and building design;
- Resilience, mitigation and adaptation relating to climate change and extreme weather events;
- Energy efficiency through layout, landscape treatment and microclimate design;
- Increased biodiversity value;
- Opportunities for local food production via allotments and small community spaces; and
- Substantial use of urban tree cover, woodland and forestry to provide for high density passive recreation, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, air filtration, reduction of intervisibility between developments and source of fuel and fibre.

Enabling all of these benefits requires consideration of GI and its integration into the masterplan at the earliest stage, so that opportunities presented by the site are not lost and can be enhanced. The LI has produced a position statement on GI which can be accessed [here](#). It provides more information and highlights good practice, including the need for a strategic approach. Page 14 of the position statement provides more information on this.

We also feel that there is insufficient clarity that the garden city should be 'community-led' (see Government statement 'locally-led') with mechanisms set up in the first phase to engage with existing and incoming communities to give them a genuine stake in the growth of the new city.

The LI's garden city principles provide a useful summary of the above. They can be accessed [here](#).

b. What, if anything, have we missed or overlooked?

We are very supportive of the point that landscape infrastructure/architecture will be central to the success of the garden city. However this is only stated in section D. Its importance should be reflected far earlier in the specification, and the point should be made that ensuring landscape infrastructure/architecture is a success will be reliant upon its early consideration. All too often landscape opportunities are lost as it is frequently an afterthought in the development process.

Landscape character and distinctive local identity is defined in part by the cultural history of a place, not just designated heritage assets but also what people value, the stories told about places, what images have been recorded etc. The cultural heritage and value placed on a place by a wider demographic should help shape the masterplan and will provide for greater community support.

Introduction refers to the rich and complex development history. This should be an essential part of both D landscape strategy and K cultural strategy.

There is a need for an inclusive community development strategy that welcomes and engages incoming residents and other occupiers to encourage a sense of identity and interaction and ownership for newcomers.

There is also a need to incorporate well-established urban design principles of legibility, with a well defined centre and satellite focal points, making use of landmark structures, vistas, distinctive neighbourhood level character and borrowed views to promote local identity and aid navigation within the overall city.

There is also a need to accommodate the impact of major road and rail corridors adjoining or running through the site in order to limit the impact of noise, views and lighting.

Within Section J 'Sustainability and Ecology Strategy' there needs to be the following additions:

- Green infrastructure strategy;
- Proposals for conservation of natural resources, i.e. soils, water, biodiversity, waste management on site; and
- Resilience and adaptability – a framework that can adapt and respond positively to change. This should apply to open spaces as much as the individual buildings.

Within Section K 'Public Art and Cultural Strategy', there should be a line referring to the need to demonstrate how landscape can help generate cultural activities, including community gardens, allotments, community forests, local green spaces, space for arts, play, theatre, learning, interaction and creation of genuine community sense of identity – our open spaces is where community, and local culture, flourish.

c. Is there anything here which is irrelevant, outdated or unnecessary?

No response.

d. Using your professional experience and/or local knowledge are there any future areas of interest or trends in town planning that we should make reference to?

Though of course a different context, the approach adopted in the development of the Olympic Park was a success. Consideration of how this was achieved might be useful in developing the masterplan for the new garden city. The LI has produced a number of videos to explain the process in greater detail, which can be found [here](#). The official Learning Legacy website also provides a great deal of information which can be found [here](#).

e. Are there new innovations in home building/infrastructure delivery and place making that we ought to take account of?

The following might be useful for the team to take account of:

- Self-build schemes;
- Neighbourhood planning;
- Designation of community assets;
- Local green spaces; and
- Building for Life 12 – the vast majority of BFL12 categories are about the wider context within which development takes place – its landscape. So if development is to be successful against this scheme then early consideration of landscape is a must.

f. Have we done enough to encourage community engagement?

No. A garden city is supposed to be governed / managed by its community. Clearly this is not going to be straightforward, but existing communities nearby need to feel that they have a stake in the masterplan and the garden city should be used to provide benefits for them too. It's not going to be easy but existing communities need to feel they have a stake in the masterplan, the garden city should be used to provide benefits for them too.

There also needs to be an inclusive community development strategy that welcomes and engages incoming residents and other occupiers to encourage a sense of identity and interaction and ownership for newcomers.

g. We would welcome the best examples of new town delivery, both from the UK and internationally, that might provide lessons or points of relevance to Ebbsfleet.

We would suggest that the team could benefit by looking at the Vauban district of Freiburg, Germany.

h. Is there anything that we have missed that could be added to make Ebbsfleet Garden City truly unique?

A couple of suggestions include:

- Making reference to abundance of produce from the 'Garden of England'
- The Eurostar station and associated infrastructure dominates Ebbsfleet at present. The masterplan could exploit this by pitching the new garden city as a gateway to and from Europe?

Following on from our reference to 'landscape led' (page 1, paragraph 2a), sense of identity and the point about local governance, it is worth consideration that the masterplan is built up from urban

villages each of which has its own distinct landscape character based upon existing features or place made by design. These urban villages could then provide the framework for local democracy.