HGGT

Harlow, Hertfordshire

By **the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Partnership, Quality of Life Foundation, Stantec, Commonplace** and **Rainbow Services**

Project overview

The Harlow & Gilston Garden Town Quality of Life (QOL) survey gathered community feedback using the Quality of Life framework to evaluate the more personal, anecdotal, reflections of residents and community members in the area as part of a holistic picture of the community's wants and needs.

About Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town spans areas in Essex and Hertfordshire. It was designated as a garden town by the Department for Homes, Communities and Local Government in January 2017. In total, 16,000 new homes will be delivered by 2033, with a further 7,000 planned for the Gilston area to be built from 2033 onwards.

Through the Your Quality of Life project, the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Partnership (HGGT) gathered extensive feedback from residents using the Quality of Life Foundation's Framework, focusing on personal experiences and insights. This initiative aimed to capture community views on existing needs and future aspirations as part of a long-term commitment to measure and enhance quality of life across the Garden Town. Insights gained are now helping guide the master planning and development process, supporting sustainable, community-driven growth.

Consultation and engagement

The HGGT team implemented a hybrid approach, combining face-to-face, printed, and digital engagement to ensure diverse and widespread participation. The digital engagement was facilitated by the Commonplace platform, which provided a central hub for updates on events, workshops, and opportunities for residents to share their input. This was complemented by local outreach through in-person events and printed materials to accommodate residents who might be digitally excluded.

Highlights of engagement efforts included:

- Over 7,000 visitors to the Commonplace platform
- 1,015 contributions to the community map and surveys
- 553 individual respondents
- 49 in-person pop-up events across the Garden Town

The project also engaged local young people as community researchers, offering them training to carry out surveys and add community comments to the digital map. This approach provided a unique perspective as local youth engaged with their peers, creating a more relatable and accessible channel for younger participants.

The partnership between the Quality of Life Foundation and local VCSO Rainbow Services enabled the project to significantly expand the geographic and demographic reach of its engagement efforts. Activities included crafting a 12-week engagement strategy, mapping local stakeholders, and fostering partnerships with community gateways. Through mid-project reviews, the team assessed which methods were most effective, allowing them to change direction where needed and strengthen outreach to underrepresented groups and specific areas.

Compared to previous Garden Town consultations, the Your Quality of Life project more than tripled the numbers of respondents and increased engagement with both younger people under 35 and those over 75, with diverse ethnic minority communities, and with people who have a disability or long-term illness.

The partnership approach also fostered knowledge-sharing, with Rainbow Services providing insights on local engagement best practices. This collaborative model built trust and allowed HGGT to align its development strategy with the community's aspirations and concerns.

Good practice

Whilst outreach, consultation and engagement approaches shouldn't be a one size fits all, we can learn from each other's practice and adapt the principles of the Quality of Life Code of Practice within different contexts.

Here are some examples of how the consultation and engagement approaches for this project meet those principles.

Principle 5: Be timely

The project team planned engagement periods thoughtfully, offering residents ample opportunity to contribute feedback. Regular reviews ensured the outreach strategy was responsive to community needs and adjusted where needed to encourage participation from all demographics.

Principle 8: Publish feedback

HGGT was committed to transparency and clear communication with communities throughout the process. Community feedback and subsequent actions were communicated through reports, meetings, follow-up consultations, and an urban room. This transparency helped residents see how their input was being used, reinforcing trust and a sense of shared ownership in the Garden Town's future.