

Your Quality of Life

Reflections & Recommendations

January 2023



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Introduction

This document brings together the recommendations from the Your Quality of Life Project. They draw from the findings of the Your Quality of Life Survey, open source mapping data and Quality of Life Foundation's analysis of the Garden Town. The recommendations are broken down into four sections.

The first three sets of recommendations relate directly to the Your Quality of Life Survey findings and are split into: A) Engagement and Communication Practices with Communities and Organisations, B) Empowering Existing Community Groups and Creating Community Led Processes and C) Considering Local Priorities in Planning Regeneration and Growth. The final set of spatial recommendations take a more nuanced view that draws together the survey findings, mapping data and Quality of Life Foundation's area analysis to make three high level spatial recommendations.



Crosscutting Key Recommendation

To continue to monitor quality of life in the Garden Town by updating the metrics assessed by the survey and baseline data at appropriate intervals.

A suggested methodology for how to approach this is set out in the Quality Monitoring Framework.



Engagement and communication practices with communities and organisations

The recommendations below relate to the Quality of Life Framework theme of Control.

“

A sense of wellbeing comes from believing that there is something that we and our neighbours can do to improve our area and address local problems.

”

— Quality of Life Framework

Through the Your Quality of Life Consultation, we saw that on average a sense of control closely matched those collected in national surveys on the same topic, but a strong sense of control is not necessarily being achieved nationally. In the 16 to 24 age bracket 90% responded that they don't feel able to have any influence on their local area. This is significantly worse than the national average of 73% of those in this same age bracket (Community Life Survey, 2020/21).

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
<p>A1</p> <p>Establish a physical presence</p>	<p>A physical place is allocated and run through HGGT for community engagement. This could be either a series of semi-permanent 'pop-ups' or permanent space in the Civic Centre or Harvey Centre that could be staffed occasionally.</p>	<p>This space would give the public the chance to provide ongoing feedback, receive information about proposed developments to their local area and feel connected to the process of change in a way that is visible and tangible.</p>
<p>A2</p> <p>Increase community conversations around planning and policy development</p>	<p>Involving the community more directly in matters relating to planning, management and policy development, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Regular follow-ups that keep residents informed about the project, results of consultations and outcomes. ii) Policies and plans be made more accessible in general (see Recommendation A9/B3). iii) Getting a wider range of groups engaged in local planning projects such as local plans, masterplans. There is scope to have outreach and engagement that is youth focused around quality of life e.g. tapping into existing toolkits to better enable this process, Make Space for Girls, Public Practice etc. 	<p>People felt concerned about their ability to shape planning and development, often asking if their comments and ideas would actually make a difference. Providing more information on outcomes and actions helps to demonstrate that their inputs are having an impact.</p> <p>It is important to cater for needs in printed and digital access, reading ages, and non-English languages that are read and spoken, so that a larger proportion of residents can be involved.</p> <p>In order for everyone living in the area to feel that they have a voice in these processes it may be necessary to target engagement around the needs of specific groups.</p>

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
A3 Provide community links officers	LAs/HGGT partnership to provide resourcing for a Community Engagement Team. This could be in the form of community links officers who: work to engage early with stakeholders about local issues; work with partner organisations, local people, and amenity groups; liaise with in-house teams.	To provide dedicated resources and capacity that can support consultation processes and enable engagement.
A4 Increase digital inclusion and support	LAs/HGGT partnership to support resources for in-person engagement and support alongside digital engagement. This could be in the form of working with partner organisations that provide digital support or access.	To support people who do not have digital access to devices, to get online and to be involved in conversations.
A5 Embed local events into engagement	Embedding pop-ups deeper into future engagement efforts. This could be in the form of a pop-up tour and using e-bikes, tying into existing local events calendars to maximise uptake and boost awareness. These should be well distributed and take into account the spaces that under-represented groups use most.	Local events provide an excellent opportunity to “meet people where they are”, demonstrate that engagement is part of the fabric of local life and reach a wider audience.
A6 Project engagement plans on all projects	Undertake a project outreach and engagement strategy and mid-point review on all projects. Methods to agree and understand the impact of any future outreach and engagement are considered as part of this process.	It’s important to understand the context by mapping out the stakeholders, tapping into local people and resources, and finding out where people go for information as part of an ongoing programme. It is essential that local organisations and groups are tapped into and built on as part of this process.
A7 Sense checking of material by the community	That community stakeholders are involved in sense checking and scrutinising the outreach and engagement materials. We recommend that this also includes underrepresented groups and to provide a wider scope of viewpoints.	This approach ensures that materials are relevant and relatable, avoiding jargon and increasing the likelihood of meaningful interactions.

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
A8 Specific engagement with young people	LAs to take a more active approach in involving young people, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Pop-ups and dedicated events specifically included for young people. ii) Using newsletters, digital platforms and social media to provide informal feedback on the current project progress. 	In Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas, 90% of 16-24yr olds felt they were not able to have any influence on their local area, and this is compared to the national average of 73% for that age range.
A9 Reduce reliance on professional language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) That terms that are commonly used by the Local Authorities are defined and accessible. ii) The adoption of the Crystal Mark for future external communications. 	The Crystal Mark is a standard for clear communication established by the Plain English Campaign. This mark has been adopted by a number of UK Government departments as well as corporations and is seen as a good standard for communication across sectors.



Empowering existing community groups and creating community-led processes



The recommendations below relate to the Quality of Life Framework theme of Control but also of Community.

“

Belonging to a community is a powerful need in humans and is central to our wellbeing...It is about being part of a group and sharing an identity; about trust, cooperation and reciprocity.

”

— Quality of Life Framework

When it comes to feeling a sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood, a large majority of respondents felt a strong connection. When compared to national sentiment, respondents of the Harlow and Gilston area ranked their sense of belonging higher than the 65% taken from the Community Life Survey (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020/21) findings. This creates an incredible opportunity to empower local people to be more involved in shaping the Garden Town.

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
<p>B1</p> <p>Build training into future engagement</p>	<p>The specifics of this will depend on the engagement being undertaken. Based on their positive involvement in this project, Rainbow Services (Harlow) could be involved, as well as students from Harlow College and volunteers at the Princess Alexandra hospital.</p>	<p>Involving residents in this project has helped to upskill both local partners and the wider community. Taking such an approach to future engagement and including training to support community involvement in such processes will further build local capacity.</p>
<p>B2</p> <p>Transfer of management to communities</p>	<p>i) Management transfer strategy should be developed along with local stakeholders to identify areas, assets and opportunities.</p> <p>ii) Local Authorities help to set up local community bodies, resident councils, or strengthen existing groups. These can in turn assist with helping to raise awareness around local issues and explain the constraints under which LAs work.</p>	<p>Increased sense of control and belonging through building local capacity and in some cases transferring decisions/ownership over to the community.</p> <p>Local community groups can mobilise interested residents and businesses to generate community funding. This is a step towards giving communities a great sense of agency in the face of ongoing challenges around changes to Harlow, Gilston and the wider area.</p>

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
<p>B3 Mapping routes to influence</p>	<p>Set up a simple route map into the local authority making clear how things like maintenance of space, streets, transport and perceived decline can be addressed.</p>	<p>Most communities we work with understand that money and funds are tight for this sort of work/help, they often just want to understand what can be done and where they can help with local issues. Better understanding of local authority structures and contact points will give new communities some contact and possibly input into decisions.</p>
<p>B4 Facilitating and empowering existing community groups</p>	<p>i) Active mapping and planning - inclusivity or street audits alongside community groups (see also Recommendation C1). ii) Adopt tactical urban planning practices alongside existing community groups.</p>	<p>Engaging with community groups to respond to queries relating to speeding, active travel, walking and cycling will increase local understanding of the issues and provide important insights to decision makers.</p> <p>Tactical or DIY Urbanism are short-term and flexible options to prototype and evaluate ideas around street safety, public space and community building. Taking such an approach can help local people directly engage with the issues and provide a visible demonstration that action is being taken.</p>
<p>B5 Adopting community charters</p>	<p>The development and adoption of a community charter for the Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas.</p>	<p>These typically highlight the fundamental rights and responsibilities that concern and direct the future of that community, helping to provide a sense of empowerment for the community and accountability for decision makers.</p>





Considering local priorities in planning, regeneration and growth

These recommendations link directly to the Quality of Life theme of Movement but also pick up on themes of Community from the previous section.

54% of respondents to the Your Quality of Life Survey felt 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with their local options when it comes to walking and cycling. Those with mobility issues felt less satisfied, with only 33% of respondents from that group reporting that they were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied'. Only a minority of people responding to this survey felt satisfied with public transport connections in their area.

Many of these recommendations overlap with the spatial recommendations that follow, these are signposted in the "reason/description" text.

“

We should probably accept that having a car contributes to your quality of life...The problem is that when everyone enjoys these freedoms our collective quality of life suffers... We must therefore encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Initially, this may mean that the car is used less, but before long people will ask why we need two cars, or even a car at all. This will contribute to everyone's quality of life.

”

— Quality of Life Framework

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
<p>C1</p> <p>Prioritise transport network investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The deployment of small-scale infrastructure investments. ii) Use of street and space audits with community groups, (see Recommendation B4), alongside Local Authority highways and transport teams exercises. iii) Community transport - the establishment of a local chapter that provides these services to access travel for those who can drive but don't own a car. 	<p>Existing road and transport infrastructure in the area can be enhanced through strategic and small-scale public infrastructure projects such as junctions, surfacing and signage projects.</p> <p>See also S2 Active Travel Routes.</p> <p>These can also be beautification and greening projects, which can improve perceptions around the state and maintenance of town areas as well as improve access to green spaces.</p> <p>A community-led shared public transport option that could take many forms, from minibuses to car club services. Charities or Local Authorities could help establish these services, or subsidise them to provide an affordable rate.</p> <p>See also S3 - Public Transport.</p>

Recommendation	Method	Reason/description
<p>C2 Create more places to sit</p>	<p>i) Trialling of public seating arrangements deployed in and around green and hard public areas.</p>	<p>Bench provision is always positive and is generally a cost-effective way of improving walking networks and increasing the use and natural surveillance of public spaces and footpaths. Improved lighting in some areas can also assist in improving use and connectivity and reducing the likelihood of these spaces becoming sites for anti-social behaviour.</p>
<p>C3 Create spaces for enjoyment</p>	<p>i) Investing in meanwhile spaces. ii) Continuation of investment into the maintenance and upkeep of the highly valued green spaces. iii) Encouraging, supporting and facilitating local food cooperatives.</p>	<p>Create flexible, adaptive, spaces that cater to the community's needs for commercial food and entertainment needs. This can be a cost-effective way to test out different kinds of offers and could also be paired with local enterprises to help support local businesses and entrepreneurs through mentorships, start-up guidance and reduced rent agreements.</p> <p>Promoting investment into existing or potential green spaces in the area could result in projects such as community growing and vegetable box schemes.</p> <p>This can help foster a sense of community cohesion while improving health and wellbeing through a greater awareness of food.</p>





Spatial recommendations

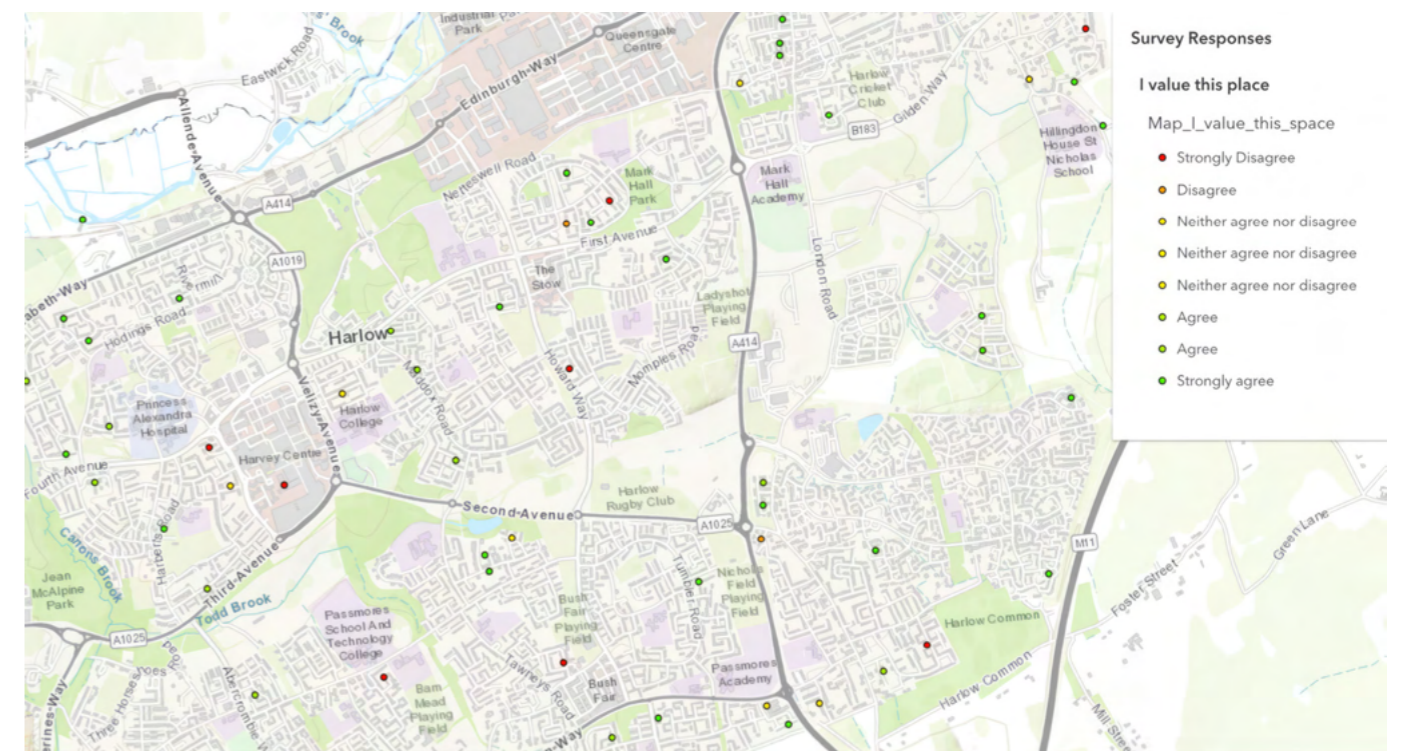
The “Your Quality of Life” consultation identified a number of recommendations that would improve Harlow and Gilston Garden Town for residents. Recommendations can be addressed through communication, processes, maintenance and stewardship, but the physical environment also has a role to play.

The following spatial recommendations establish at a high level the key urban design interventions that should be considered for the existing environment and any future phases of development. They relate to the “C” recommendations above, but take a broader look at how the design of the Garden Town might support the implementation of the recommendations. Where the preceding recommendations relate directly to specific findings from the survey, the spatial recommendations attempt to set out broader approaches that cut across many of the findings to address wider themes.

Using Quality of Life Foundation’s analysis of the area, the “Your Quality of Life” survey responses, Stantec’s mapped data and discussions with stakeholders at an “Outcomes Workshop” on 15th December 2022, we identified two key spatial issues: safety and connectivity. We have set out three approaches that could be pursued to help to address these broad issues.

Use of Mapped Data: As part of the Your Quality of Life project, design consultancy Stantec mapped open source technical data (e.g. active travel routes, local amenities etc) for the Garden Town relating to the Quality of Life Framework themes (Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement and Community). We also used the Commonplace survey platform to map the responses to the Your Quality of Life Survey. This mapped data has helped to inform the spatial recommendations.

S1 Density and Active Frontage Analysis



Stantec Mapped Survey Questions: “I Value This Place”
 We used this map to look at the areas that respondents didn’t value (the red dots) and used our own analysis of the area and a review of the detailed survey responses to build up an idea of the possible reasons for the negative experiences of these places.

Observations

- While management and maintenance has a role to play in creating a sense of safety in the environment, the physical configuration also has a role to play.
- Development in Harlow and Gilston Garden Town is generally low density. The **National Model Design Code** suggests Town Centres have a density of around 200 dwellings per hectare, Urban Neighbourhoods around 60-120, and Suburbs 30-50. The density analysis in the **Garden Town Design Guide** shows densities of between 18 and 34 dwellings per hectare.
- Lower densities can contribute to a lack of enclosure (the sense of safety you get when buildings frame the street) and struggle to create the critical mass of people to support shops and services.
- The way buildings are laid out is also important. Many buildings in the Garden Town “step back” significantly from the street (meaning there is a large gap between the street and the fronts of buildings or “turn their backs” on key routes and open spaces (meaning the front of the building isn’t facing onto the street or public space). For example there are a lot of back garden fences along key routes.
- Addressing the issues above would increase the sense of enclosure, create active frontages (when you can see people coming in and out of entrances onto the street) and increase passive surveillance (when you are aware that people can/could see the street from their windows). This could help to reduce the instances and perception of crime and antisocial behaviour.

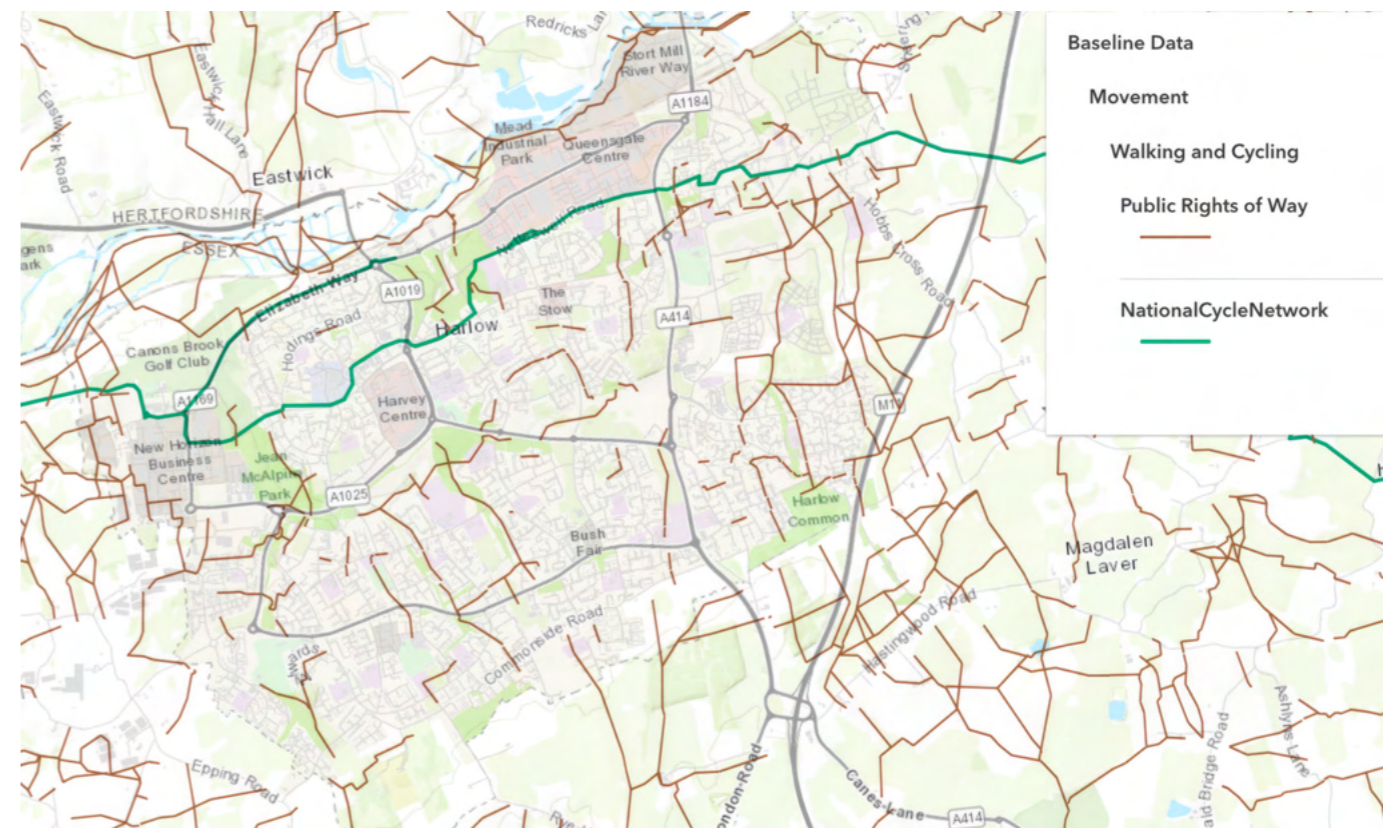
Community Perspectives

- Your Quality of Life responses highlighted concerns around antisocial behaviour, nuisance, drug use and littering.
- Some respondents mentioned spaces that feel unsafe including underpasses and secluded areas where it is easy to hide.
- Comments around parks were generally positive, but some raised concerns around maintenance, which can be linked to perceptions of safety.
- Comments were raised about a lack of local amenities and poor coverage and frequency transport routes, which could be partially driven by lack of “critical mass” (enough people to create sufficient demand to support shops and services).

Recommendation: Density and Active Frontage Analysis

- Review the existing density of the urban area. Identify plots where development could be intensified around key routes and green spaces.
- Review existing green space: analyse which are well used, high quality, functional spaces and which are “left behind” fragments. Consider alternative uses for these including possible development.
- Future phases of the Garden Town are seeking to maintain the traditional layout, but masterplanners should carefully explore how this can be done in a way that creates good density, enclosure, active frontages and spaces with passive surveillance.

S2 Progress Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan



Stantec Baseline Analysis: Walking and Cycling

Observations

- The area is linked to the National Cycle Network. The Stantec mapping indicates that there are stronger cycle connections to the north, though the Outcomes Workshop suggested links are strong throughout.
- Walking routes appear to make some good connections through the Garden Town, but permeability and legibility could be improved: some routes are circuitous and indirect.
- As highlighted in “Density and Active Frontages” above, many routes have limited passive surveillance and enclosure, and the quality of both walking and cycling routes could be improved.

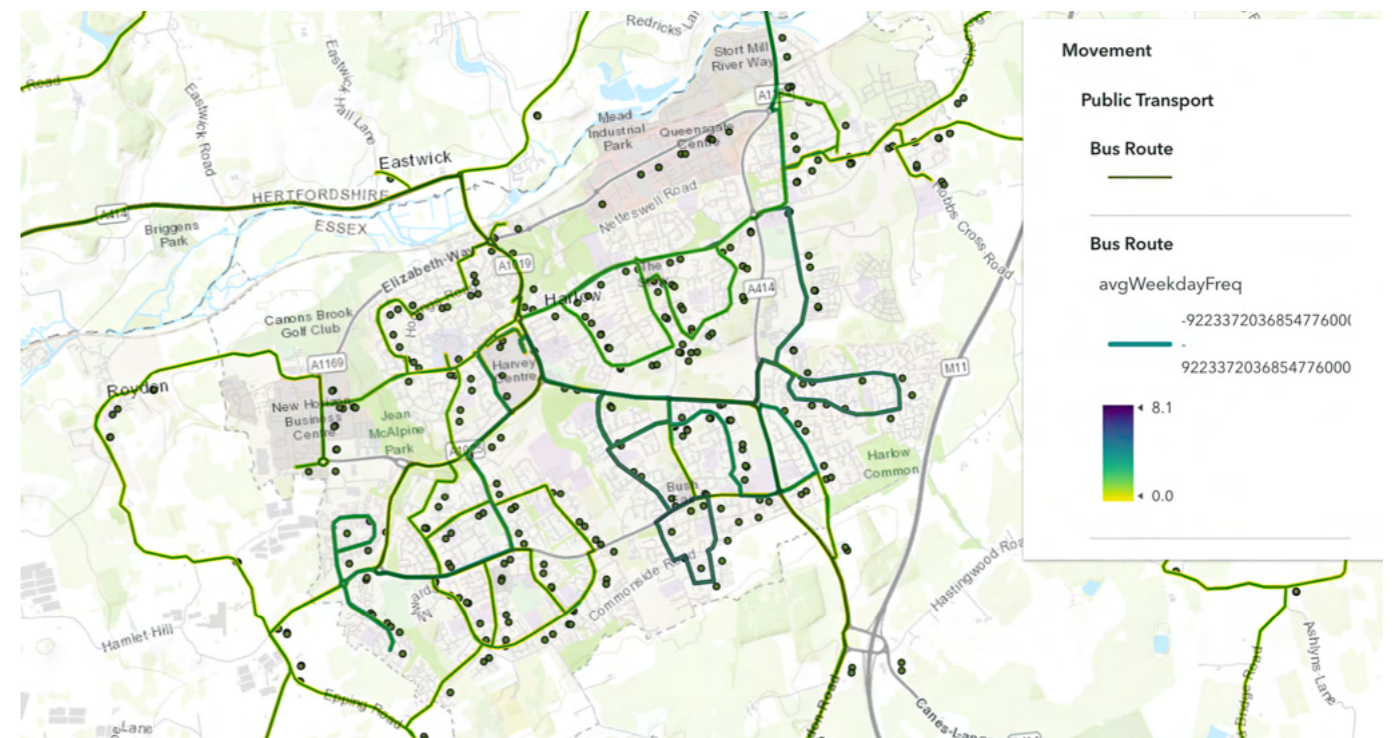
Community Perspectives

- Comments reflected the positivity around the cycle network and over half of respondents felt satisfied or very satisfied with the walking and cycling provision in the area.
- Those with mobility issues felt even less satisfied, with only 33% of respondents from that group reporting that they were either ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very Satisfied’.
- A significant proportion of people responding felt neutral about their walking and cycling connections. Looking at responses to other questions, this higher proportion of neutral feedback is likely to be based on the positive feelings about the cycle and walking paths around Harlow but is tempered by the condition of these paths.

Recommendation: Progress the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

- The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Transport Strategy identifies the high level opportunities to improve and fill gaps in the walking and cycling network.
- The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) identifies priorities for investment in new infrastructure to support a greater number of people to make journeys on foot or on cycle.
- We support the intention for key routes to accommodate and integrate all modes (walking, cycling and wheeling), improve accessibility through the width and quality of paving treatments, green the route and improve lighting.
- We support a focus on the intersections between modes and between key uses; the links from the train station to the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, and the routes from bus stops to neighbourhoods and key uses.
- We support the sustainable transport corridors identified in the LCWIP, but would also support exploration of how existing links along the Southern Way could be improved to create a more joined up approach, in order to ensure all areas of the town have more equal access to sustainable routes.

S3 Public Transport Analysis and Action Plan



Stantec Baseline Analysis: Bus Routes and Bus Stops

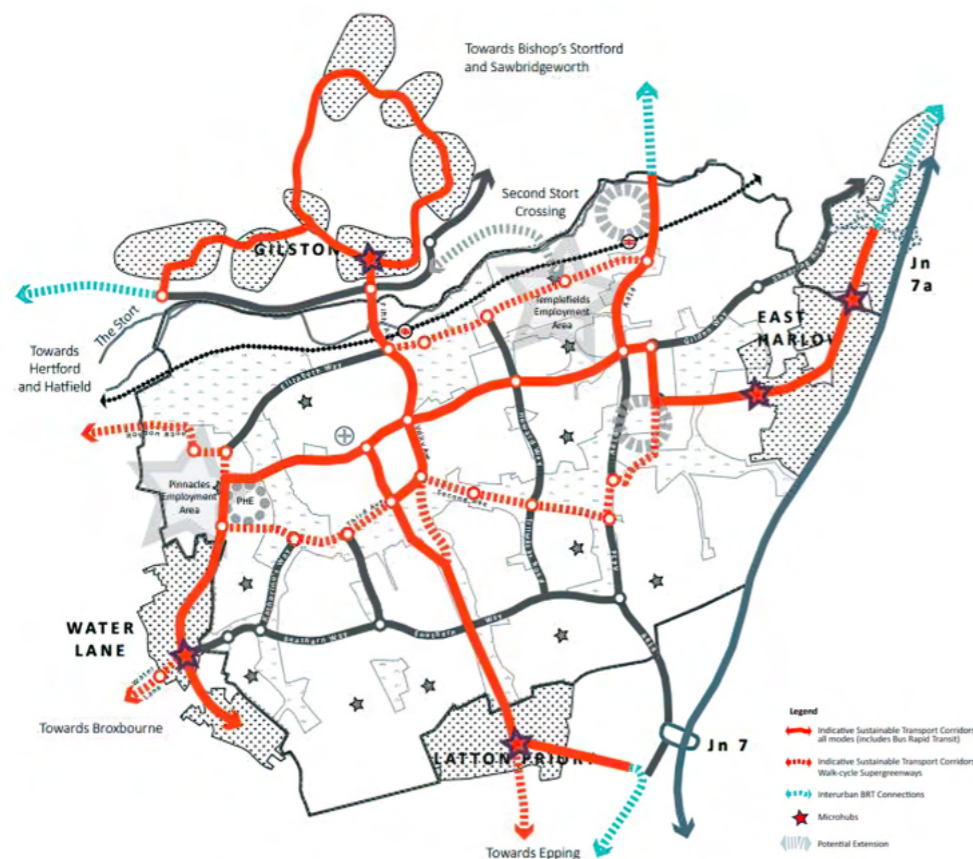


Figure 3-9: Indicative Sustainable Transport Corridors and Inter-Urban BRT connections - LCWIP extract

Observations

- The physical coverage of the public transport is good. There are two train stations to the north and bus routes connect most neighbourhoods.
- However the frequency and the reliability is poor. This is a particular issue in respect of the bus provision, and we can see from the map above that frequency varies considerably throughout the site.
- Having a poor secondary public transport system and connecting routes undermines the potential of the train stations; the quality of connecting modes is integral to the useability of a national rail connection.

Community Perspectives

- Comments overwhelmingly focused on the poor quality of bus provision. Issues included a lack of late running services, reliability, difficulty connecting into other modes, inability to easily reach certain locations (Epping and Bush Fair were mentioned in the comments) and bus stops being too far away (Berecroft was picked out in one respondent's comments).
- This has implications for health, sustainability and inequality (buses being a lower cost transport option).

Recommendation: Public Transport Analysis and Action Plan

- The HGGT Transport Strategy identified the high level aim for more direct, frequent and integrated public transport services.
- As with the active travel routes we recommend that careful analysis is undertaken to ensure that provision is targeted to the right areas and potential benefits are maximised.
- This would ideally be done alongside the key route analysis recommended above, so that a detailed strategy targeting all modes can be developed.
- This should be done with an awareness of the financial realities surrounding sustainable transport provision, focusing on and prioritising the most impactful interventions rather than detailing everything the area might need.
- While future phases of the Garden Town are committed to the lower density quality of the original Garden Town, consideration should be given to the difficulties that lower density developments have in maintaining public or sustainable transport options.
- Designs should weigh up the benefits of lower density forms and patterns of development with the challenges of connecting them effectively by public transport. We would support a move towards slightly higher densities and closer arrangements of blocks to support public transport, even if this requires a reimagining of the original Garden Town layout.
- Public transport is going to be integral to "graft" the new extensions to the Garden Town onto the root of the existing place. While the commercial realities will necessitate prioritising connections to new development, every effort should be made to squeeze benefits for the existing area out of any future provision.



