

**POLICY AND RESOURCES 15 SEPTEMBER 2021
COMMITTEE**

PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

Final Decision-Maker	Policy & Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Report Author	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Wards affected	All, but in particular Harrietsham & Lenham and Headcorn Wards.
Classification	Public

Executive Summary

The proposal was last considered by this Committee on 23rd June 2021. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Heathlands Garden Community proposition. As in the case of previous reports to this Committee, the contents of this report relate to the Council's position as a potential property owner/developer and not as Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Purpose of Report

To provide this Committee with an update on progress with respect to the Heathlands Garden Community proposition.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That this Committee notes the report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	15 th September 2021

PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Continuing with the development of the Heathlands Garden Community proposition will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve all the corporate priorities.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The Heathlands Garden Community proposition supports the achievement of all the cross-cutting objectives.</p> <p>Through delivering much needed homes to include 40% affordable housing. The emerging masterplan is landscape led with up to 50% of the total proposed as green space. Led by the ambitions set out in the Strategic Plan the Council can ensure that the design principles of development where it is the master planner reflect the commitment to reduce health inequalities amongst other things.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place

Risk Management	See section 4.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Financial	Investment in the Garden Community forms part of the Council's five-year capital programme and budgetary provision exists for the expenditure described in the report and the plans outlined here.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	There are no legal implications arising from this report as it is for noting only.	Principal Solicitor – Commercial
Privacy and Data Protection	No impact identified	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed if the proposal forms part of the draft spatial strategy of the Local Plan Review at Regulation 19 stage.	Equalities and Corporate Policy
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals more broadly. However, the period of uncertainty whilst the opportunity is being explored could negatively affect local residents.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Head of Service or Manager
Procurement	N/A.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity	The revised masterplan brief seeks a biodiversity net gain within the area defined by the proposed redline.	Head of Policy Communications & Governance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is pursuing this project as it is consistent with its Strategic Plan priority of “embracing growth and enabling infrastructure” and the desired outcomes within it:

- The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed.
 - Key employment sites are delivered.
 - Housing need is met including affordable housing.
 - Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth.
- 2.2 This report updates this Committee concerning progress since June 2021 in respect of the following areas:
- Homes England (HE) partnership
 - Promotion of Heathlands through the Local Plan Review (LPR)
- 2.3 **Homes England (HE) Partnership.** The Collaboration Agreement was signed on 31st March 2021. The main focus since then has been to develop the latest submission of the masterplan documents to the LPA (see below) and to advance the discussions with the 8 principal landowners. In terms of the latter, matters are now very close to reaching a positive conclusion, with the documents in their near final form.
- 2.4 Furthermore, the preliminary work with the appointed communications firm is underway, and programme of engagement activities is due to commence in October 2021.
- 2.5 **Promotion of Heathlands through the Local Plan Review.** The LPA requested additional information (to that submitted in March 2021) to assist in its assessment of the Heathlands proposition. Homes England and the Council made this final submission during the week commencing 30th August 2021.
- 2.6 This is part of the normal iterative process in providing the LPA with a comprehensive suite of the technical information to inform their decision making with respect to the emerging Local Plan.
- 2.7 In terms of the latest submission and the overall Heathlands proposal, there is now a greater emphasis on employment provision than previously, with closer to one job per one home built. It also now includes flexibility in terms of on-site secondary school provision if this proves necessary. Furthermore, additional technical evidence has now been commissioned in respect of the ability of the proposal to achieve Nutrient Neutrality, and this has now been provided to the LPA, as this was a topic upon which they were seeking more assurance.
- 2.8 In terms of the railway station proposal, and the strategic outline business case for it, further work for the next level of detail will be instructed if the scheme remains in the local plan review at the next stage. Fee proposals for this next stage of work have already been invited by Homes England.
- 2.9 The submission now also includes proposals around the long-term stewardship and management of the new community, as well as a more detailed delivery plan.
- 2.10 The overall long-term business plan / development appraisal, taking into account all scheme costs and revenues remains sound, this area has been kept under ongoing review by the Homes England consultant team.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 This report is for noting.

4. RISK

4.1 When this proposal was presented to this Committee in September 2019, the likely risks were set out as follows:

- At risk consultancy expenditure.
- A period of uncertainty for the community affected.
- Possible negative perceptions of a broader role for the Council in the context of acting as master developer.
- Maintaining cohesion amongst the landowner group.

4.2 These risks have to some degree crystallised and largely remain. However, the level of cohesion amongst what is a now a smaller core landowner group, remains strong.

4.3 Further risks that have since been added and remain are:

- Terms cannot be agreed with the principal landowners.
- Challenge from individuals or organisations that oppose the principle and/or the specific details of the Council's public sector-led garden community.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 Nothing further to report.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 The next steps will be to:

- Conclude the commercial negotiations with the principal landowners and for Homes England to enter into the land option deals with them.
 - If the proposal remains in the Local Plan Review process, continue to develop the proposal to respond to any public engagement feedback received and to prepare to defend the proposal at the Examination in Public.
 - Appoint an external consultant team to further develop the outline strategic business case for the delivery of the new railway station / halt.
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7. REPORT APPENDICES

7.1 None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None.