

**POLICY AND RESOURCES 24 NOVEMBER 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 20th October 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	24 th November 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. Spend to date on the project by the Council is £631,496.00.	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 September 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.** HE has reported that all the option agreements, now in their final form for each landowner, were issued during the week commencing 4th October. The landowner’s agents have now concluded their briefing meetings with all but one of the principal landowners, this final meeting is due to take place w/c 15th November. It is envisaged that the majority of these agreements will have been entered into by the end of this month.
- 2.4 The initial community engagement work, led by “We Are Fabrick”, comprising an exhibition style briefing and some field survey work was postponed until early in the new year so as not clash with the LPA’s Regulation 19 public consultation. The Parish Council and Ward Cllrs were notified as soon as this decision was made. Regardless, the necessary preparatory work is complete, pending the finalisation of a venue and dates.
- 2.5 **Promotion of Heathlands through the Local Plan Review.** The LPA’s Regulation 19 public consultation is underway and will close on 12th December. The Council and Homes England will submit written representations on the Heathlands proposal through this process.
- 2.6 The Council and Homes England met with the LPA recently and started to explore what, if any, supporting material should be submitted to further substantiate the proposal at Examination in Public. The early indications are that the focus will be upon developing and agreeing the scope of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that was proposed in the emerging Local Plan Review Policy for Heathlands.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 This report is for noting.
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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:

- Homes England to enter into the finalised option agreements with the principal landowners.
- Homes England and the Council to undertake the public engagement work (acting as land promoters), with "We Are Fabrick".
- Homes England and the Council to prepare the (Town) Planning Strategy.
- Continue to develop the proposal to respond to public engagement feedback received either through the LPA's consultation or our own engagement work 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.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

7.1 None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None.