

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE	9 February 2022
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PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE
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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

<p>The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee that there are no substantial updates since the January meeting. Officers from both the Council and Homes England continue to focus upon matters relating to land assembly and the production of further technical reports to be provided to the Local Planning Authority. 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).</p>

Purpose of Report

<p>To provide this Committee with an update on progress with respect to the Heathlands Garden Community proposition.</p>
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This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That this Committee notes the report. |
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Timetable

Meeting	Date
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Policy and Resources Committee	9 th February 2022
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PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<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>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<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>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>

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 £634,672.	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.	Interim Head of Legal Partnership
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 Communities Officer
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 and Climate Change	The revised masterplan brief seeks a biodiversity net gain within the area defined by the proposed redline.	Head of Policy Communications & Governance Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

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 Members of the Committee may wish to review the various technical reports that were produced and / or commissioned by the Homes England / Council promotor partnership, that were submitted to, and subsequently published by, the Local Planning Authority in the Autumn of 2021. The link is as follows:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19ACdzrDLNcEKza0R8LFFQoX6Az1IsK5?usp=sharing>

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

4.2 The first three risks (bold) have diminished because of the progress that has been made, particularly in respect of entering into the collaboration agreement with Homes England, the scheme securing “draft allocation” status in the Maidstone Local Plan Review, and the fact that there is now a smaller landowner pool, with several land parcels now under Option.

4.3 Further risks that had since been added 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.

4.4 The first of these newer risks (bold) is subsiding given the progress made with the land Options. The next emerging risk of significance is that:

- The Heathlands proposal is not supported by the (to be) appointed Local Plan Inspector.

4.5 The Council and Homes England now have plenty of time to work with Homes England's professional teams to produce further technical evidence to give the project the best chance of being supported by the examiner.

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 remaining 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 Reg 19 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.