

<b>POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE</b>	<b>23 March 2022</b>
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<b>PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE</b>
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<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Report Author</b>	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Wards affected</b>	All, but in particular Harrietsham & Lenham and Headcorn Wards.
<b>Classification</b>	Public

<b>Executive Summary</b>
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<p>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. Furthermore, the first four community engagement events have been completed, and 40% of the total land required is now under Option to Homes England. 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>
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<b>Purpose of Report</b>
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<p>To provide this Committee with an update on progress with respect to the Heathlands Garden Community proposition.</p>
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<b>This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:</b>
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That this Committee notes the report.</li></ol> |
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<b>Timetable</b>
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<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
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Policy and Resources Committee	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2022
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# PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p><b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b></p>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <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 &amp; Place</p>
<p><b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b></p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <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 &amp; Place</p>

<b>Risk Management</b>	See section 4.	Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Financial</b>	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 £645,062.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Director of Regeneration & Place
<b>Legal</b>	There are no legal implications arising from this report as it is for noting only.	Interim Head of Legal Partnership
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	No impact identified	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	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
<b>Public Health</b>	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
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Head of Service or Manager
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
<b>Biodiversity and Climate Change</b>	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 The updates since the last report are as follows:

2.3 **Public engagement.** The following events have now taken place:

- Great Danes Hotel Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March (11am-5pm), 23 attendees
- Great Danes Hotel Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March (11am-6pm), 19 attendees
- Online open briefing Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March (6pm), 10 attendees
- Lenham Community Centre 9<sup>th</sup> March (1pm-8pm), plus a 1-hour pre-briefing for the Parish Council, circa 250 attendees (but maybe as high as 300).

2.4 These events were organised and promoted by “We are Fabrick”, as follows:

- Booked 6,832 leaflets to be hand distributed across Lenham, Lenham Heath, Harrietsham, Sandway, Hollingbourne, Leeds and Charing. This was managed by a professional mailing company, DLM, who are members of the DMA (Data & Marketing Association) and ISO 9001 registered. They also provide GPS tracking.
- A press release was issued to all local press.
- A Facebook page has been created and posts (including paid) have been delivered.
- Posters were placed in shops and a community venue in Lenham.
- Emailed all community groups, sports groups etc with a copy of the mailer asking them to promote the event to their members.
- The website [www.heathlandsgc.co.uk](http://www.heathlandsgc.co.uk) is live and social media activity was created to refer people to the site where information about the events was published.

On Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, “We are Fabrick” received a signed certificate of delivery from DLM, this confirmed that 6,832 leaflets had been delivered. However, it became apparent that some residents’ leaflets had not been received. They investigated and late Monday DLM confirmed that not all leaflets had been delivered. The tracking data DLM finally provided on 11<sup>th</sup> March shows only 47% of the leaflets were actually delivered.

Postcode	Household Count	Amount Delivered	
ME17 1	2,801	1,227	44%
ME17 2	1,903	864	45%
TN27 0	2,128	1,134	53%
	<b>6,832</b>	<b>3,225</b>	<b>47%</b>

This situation undoubtedly caused lower than expected attendances at the Great Danes and online events, and the Council wishes to apologise to the local communities for this situation. Consequently, further events are now being planned to take place in Lenham after the May elections.

The Council and Homes England will receive a full refund from DLM and will also explore the recovery of other associated costs from DLM too.

The events themselves went well, where attendees were able to talk with representatives of the Council and Homes England and read various information displays too.

For those that want to look at a recording of the online event, this can be done by following the link below:

[Heathlands Garden Community \(heathlandsgc.co.uk\)](http://heathlandsgc.co.uk)

For future events, the Council and Homes England will seek a single point of contact at the Parish Council with whom the future events can be confidentially planned in terms of possible dates, venue, scope, and objectives (prior to them being formally announced and publicised).

**Homes England Partnership.** This continues to go from strength to strength, as Homes England have brought both expertise and resources to the project that continue to pay dividends. Their staff have worked on many similarly sized projects across the country, and their expertise is proving invaluable. At the engagements events they provided 5 staff across the four days, who all worked incredibly hard to answer the many questions from the attendees.

**Land Assembly.** Homes England now have 40% of the 822 acres required under Option. I.e., a further 10% (of the total) has now been secured, and Homes England remain in an advanced position with the remainder.

**Local Plan Review.** The Council and Homes England (as promoters) now have a Statement of Common Ground with the Planning Authority which sets out the areas where further work is required prior to the Examination in Public. This is a live / working document and its key areas of focus are Highways; Employment; AONB setting considerations and developing an overall roadmap to planning application stage. The work referred to previously on Nutrient Neutrality and the station proposals is well underway and will be submitted to the LPA in the coming weeks.

**Station proposals.** The January 2022 report to this committee discussed the optioneering work that is underway. For the avoidance of any doubt, the preferred option is for a new station at Heathlands in addition to retaining all the existing local stations too. This is the option best supported by the evidence produced to date and is the one favoured by the promoters too.

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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.**
- **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. Should the proposal ultimately become an "allocation" in the Local Plan Review, a fresh project risk register will be established, that will look to the longer-term risks.

#### 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.

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7. **REPORT APPENDICES**

7.1 None

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8. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 None.