

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13 JULY 2022

Public Sector Led Garden Community Update

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Corporate Services PAC	13 July 2022

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	N/A
Lead Head of Service	Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Director of Regeneration & Place.
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All but in particular Lenham & Harrietsham and Headcorn Wards

Executive Summary

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, a further three community engagement events have been undertaken, and 40% of the total land required is under Option to Homes England. As in the case of previous reports to the Policy & Resources 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

Noting

This report makes the following recommendations to the Committee:

1. That this report be noted.

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 or Regeneration & Place</p>

Risk Management	See Section 5.	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 £698,205.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	N/A	Director of Regeneration & Place
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Director of Regeneration & Place
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	N/A	Director of Regeneration & Place
Procurement	N/A	Director of Regeneration & Place
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and are; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change. 	Director of Regeneration & Place

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:

Public engagement

2.3 The second round of public engagement events took place in May 2022:

- Lenham Community Centre, 23rd May 2.30pm-7.30pm, 32 attendees.
- Harrietsham Village Hall, 24th May 2.00pm-7.00pm, 32 attendees.
- Lenham Community Centre, 26th May 10.00am-2.00pm, 56 attendees.

2.4 Around 120 attendees completed surveys and the main areas of concern about Heathlands were as follows:

- It will change the identity of the area.
- I will lose a local amenity.
- It will mean a big increase in road traffic.
- Worries about the environment.

2.5 No further public engagement events are scheduled to take place ahead of the Examination in Public.

2.6 A meeting will take place between Lenham Parish Council and senior figures from the Council and Homes England on 6th July, which is after the publication date for this report. A positive briefing for Harrietsham Parish Council was also delivered by the report author in person on 1st April 2022.

Land Assembly

2.7 Circa 40% of the required land is now under option to Homes England, and this figure is expected to reach 50% by the end of this month.

Local Plan Review (LPA)

2.8 The Local Planning Authority received a letter dated 18th May from the appointed Local Plan Inspector, David Spencer, which provided his initial observations. In effect, this letter has reinforced the previously agreed areas of focus with the LPA. So the promoters are now working on gathering further technical evidence in respect of the following:

- Railway station options

- Employment
- Minerals
- Nutrient Neutrality
- Transport
- Landscape impact

- 2.9 MBC is leading on the first three bullets, and Homes England on the second three. It is envisaged that there will be a further report issued to the LPA this summer on each of the six workstreams over the summer period.
- 2.10 In terms of the station, it is worth reiterating that both of the preferred options that will be explored in the most detail in the next station report, retain the existing Lenham station.
- 2.11 Furthermore, on 31st March 2022, the joint promoters entered into a statement of common ground with the LPA that covers the following; Introduction, Engagement, Common Ground and the Maidstone Local Plan Examination. The common ground section covers how parties will work together on the following specific topics; Shared vision, Heathlands Garden Community Supplementary Planning Document (DPD), Phasing and delivery, Housing, Landscape and design, Employment / commercial, Infrastructure, Transport connections, Environment, Governance and stewardship. I.e. it sets the topic areas across which Heathlands will be developed up to the examination and then beyond. The planning strategy that was referred to in the previous report will now be produced in tandem with the LPA, post examination, and will be a pre-cursor to the joint production of the DPD.

Homes England Partnership

- 2.12 The partnership remains very strong, with Homes England continuing to supply skilled staff as well as resources to the project. It is understood that Homes England are now close to appointing the professional team that will take the project forward, in terms of the DPD and the eventual planning application (assuming the project remains supported in the Local Plan review post Examination). An MBC colleague has participated in this selection process, that Homes England have led.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 This report is for noting.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 N/A
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5. RISK

5.1 When this proposal was presented to the Policy & Resources 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 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.

5.5 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.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 Nothing further to report.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 The next steps will be:

- Homes England to enter into the finalised option agreements with the remaining principal landowners.
- 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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8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None