

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE	20 OCTOBER 2021
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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 proposal was last considered by this Committee on 15th September 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).</p>
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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
Policy and Resources Committee	20 th October 2021

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 £538,000.	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 subsequently commenced the process of reviewing the final versions with each landowner in person prior to signing. 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 will have been undertaken by mid-December. The necessary preparatory work is complete, pending the finalisation of a venue and dates. As soon as these are confirmed Ward and Parish Councillors will be notified, and the event itself will be promoted more widely.
- 2.5 The Council and HE have also started the process of preparing a (Town) Planning Strategy document, for Heathlands. This is a requirement of the Collaboration Agreement and will inform how both parties will work together to secure planning permission if Heathlands is eventually “allocated” within the Maidstone Local Plan Review. It is envisaged this document will come forward for endorsement by this Committee in quarter 4 of the current financial year.
- 2.6 **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. HE and the Council made this final submission during the week commencing 30th August 2021.
- 2.7 Subsequently, the Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee, and then in turn Full Council, have agreed that the next iteration of the Local Plan Review, which still includes Heathlands, will go out to the next stage of public consultation later this Autumn. In terms of the ongoing promotion of Heathlands, this is a hugely positive milestone to have achieved.

- 2.8 The full submission to the LPA, including the framework masterplan document / brochure and the supporting reports have now been published into the public domain (by the LPA).
- 2.9 In terms of the railway station proposal, and the strategic outline business case for it, further work for the next level of detail will now be instructed given that the scheme remains in the Local Plan Review. Fee proposals for this next stage of work have already been invited by Homes England.
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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.