



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>20 April 2021</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>I (Note Cost Plan in Appendix at Part II)</b>
If Part II, reason:	<p>The Part II appendix contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of the Council.</p> <p><b>(Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3).</b></p>

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Hemel Place Strategy</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	<p>Cllr Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Claire Hamilton – Chief Executive James Doe, Assistant Director – Planning, Development and Regeneration</p>
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To propose arrangements for the creation of a new Place Strategy for Hemel Hempstead and the establishment of a Hemel Place Board</li> <li>2. To set out proposals for, as part of the Place Strategy work, a new Strategy for the future of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre</li> </ol>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approves the preparation of a Hemel Place Strategy, subject to final approval by Cabinet and Council once further work has been carried out.</li> <li>2. Approves the establishment of a Hemel Place Board as outlined in the report to oversee the development and implementation of the Place Strategy, and delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to approve the final membership of the Place Board and its Terms of Reference.</li> <li>3. Approves proposals as outlined in the report to carry out engagement with key partners, stakeholders and local residents to help shape the Hemel Place Strategy</li> </ol>

	<p>vision and objectives.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Endorses the creation of a comprehensive strategy for the future physical, economic, social and environmental development of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre as an early priority for the Hemel Place Strategy work.</li> <li>5. Approves the provision of resources to develop the Hemel Hempstead Place Strategy and the related Town Centre Strategy.</li> <li>6. Recommends Council approves a budget of £500K to be drawn down from the Dacorum Development Reserve as required to fund the work to develop the Place Strategy.</li> <li>7. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Corporate Director (Finance &amp; Operations) to draw down the allocated funds to produce the work set out in this report.</li> <li>8. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to prepare and submit a bid to MHCLG for funding under the Levelling Up Fund programme.</li> </ol>
Period for post policy/project review	Governance arrangements will be set out as part of the programme plan for the Hemel Place Strategy. The project will report into the newly established internal Corporate Growth and Regeneration Board. It is envisaged that a post-project review would be undertaken in mid-late 2023 following the completion of the Strategy in late 2022.
Corporate objectives:	The proposed Hemel Place Strategy, and specific work for Hemel Hempstead Town Centre, will address all Corporate Objectives.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The financial implications are set out in the report below and Cabinet is invited to approve a budget of £500,000 for this work.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> Value for money and financial management will be addressed through the proposals for programme governance as set out in the report. The work required will necessitate the engagement of a number of consultants, who will be procured in accordance with the Council's procurement regulations to ensure the best value for money is being achieved. Use is to be made of in-house Officer resources and aspects of the programme will be carried out, where possible, using these.
	A high level risk mitigation plan was carried out on 23 February 2021 as part of the initial Project Concept, which is included at

Risk implications	Appendix 1 to this report.
Community Impact Assessment	A Community Impact Assessment was carried out on 29 March 2021, attached at Appendix 2 to this report.
Health and safety Implications	None arising from this report.
Monitoring Officer comments	The Place Strategy will not be a statutory local plan document but it will help to guide future development principles and place-making for the town. The Strategy may help to inform and develop future local plan documents which will need to follow the required statutory procedures at the appropriate time.
S.151 Officer comments	A breakdown of the indicative costs comprising the requested budget of £500k is attached as a Part 2 appendix to this report. There is sufficient balance within the Dacorum Development Reserve to meet these costs and, subject to Council approval of Recommendations 6 and 7, the funding can be drawn down as required once the procurement exercises are complete and the actual figures are known.
Consultees:	<p>Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration Senior Leadership Team</p> <p>Chris Taylor, Group Manager – Strategic Planning and Regeneration</p> <p>Sara Whelan, Group Manager – Development Management and Planning</p> <p>Richard Rice, Group Manager – Commercial Assets and Property Development</p> <p>Nathalie Bateman, Hemel Garden Communities Lead Officer</p> <p>Alex Robinson, Strategic Planning Manager</p> <p>Gunilla Edwards, Interim Economic Development Officer</p> <p>Kelvin Soley, Communications Team Leader</p>
Background papers:	<p>Shaping the Future of Dacorum – Our Growth and Infrastructure Strategy to 2050 (DBC, 2019)</p> <p>Hemel Garden Communities Charter (HGC, 2018)</p> <p>Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision (HGC, 2020)</p> <p>Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Masterplan (DBC, 2012)</p> <p>Two Waters Masterplanning Guidance (DBC, 2016)</p>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>HGC – Hemel Garden Communities</p> <p>Hemel Hempstead BID – the Business Improvement District for Hemel town centre</p>

	Herts LEP – Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
	Herts IQ – Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter, the Enterprise Zone for the County
	MHCLG – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Project Concept document

Appendix 2 – Community Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Data Analysis report

Part II Appendix – Cost Plan

## Executive Summary

Hemel Hempstead will see considerable growth and regeneration activity over the next 20-30 years and the Council has a clear leadership role in shaping and managing this change effectively to ensure that all parts of the local resident and business community benefit from future opportunities.

In addition to this, it is forecast that there will be long term effects of Covid19 which will impact on the borough's largest town centre. The way people will live their lives and do business in the future is likely to negatively impact on the vitality of the Town Centre unless action is taken now.

The proposed Hemel Place Strategy will set out a long term plan for the regeneration of Hemel Hempstead and set a path for recovery beyond the pandemic. It will develop a clear, ambitious yet realistic vision for the future of the town, and it will be shaped by extensive engagement with the Council's partners, stakeholders and residents.

To be successful, Hemel as a place needs to be celebrated and championed and the new Strategy must have the development of the place at its centre. It must also complement and embrace the Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision and strategies for growth and transformation and have environmental sustainability at its heart in line with the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and commitment to the reduction of the carbon footprint of the area.

An early priority, to be delivered through the Strategy, will be the development of a comprehensive approach to leading and managing change in Hemel Hempstead Town Centre. The new Place Strategy must ensure that the town centre is fit for purpose for the future and that it addresses the fundamental changes in retail that have been exacerbated by Covid19. The town centre must provide the right mix of facilities, not just retail, for a growing residential population and the Place Strategy must champion a clear and compelling vision for its regeneration.

In order to ensure that the place Strategy is effectively shaped and delivered, it is proposed to establish a multi-agency Hemel Place Board consisting of a range of Council partners and stakeholders who will be instrumental to the future success of Hemel Hempstead.

## 1. Background

1.1 The Council has already taken significant steps to address the challenges of both major growth and change affecting Dacorum. In 2019, the *Growth and Infrastructure Strategy* was prepared and approved by Council to set out the key challenges facing the Borough to 2050. It can be found at <http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/dacorum-growth-and-infratstructure-strategy-to-2050.pdf> .

1.2 The Strategy sets out what needs to be done to address these issues, recognising both the objectives of the Corporate Plan and issues that will arise in the longer term to reflect the impact of major growth on the Borough as a whole and how Council services will need to be organised to meet these pressures.

1.3 It sets the vision for Dacorum to 2050 as:

*“We want Dacorum to be known as a place where...*

- *Everyone has the best start in life*
- *Both residents and businesses have the opportunity to achieve their hopes and expectations*
- *Families and young people are welcome, where older people are valued and where the vulnerable can get the help they need”*

1.4 From this, the Strategy is based on developing six themes of:

- Building Dacorum’s future with homes for everyone;
- Generating a vibrant economy with opportunities for all; A happier, healthier and safer Dacorum;
- Creating a clean, green and attractive Dacorum;
- On-track for a better transport network; and
- Harnessing the opportunity of technology and digital connectivity.

Officers have since developed action planning across Council services in the short term and are developing long term objectives for future work.

1.5 In January of this year, Cabinet considered and endorsed the *Spatial Vision for Hemel Garden Communities*. This is online at: [https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/210310\\_hemel-spatial-vision\\_with-appendix.pdf?sfvrsn=37e4039e\\_2](https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/210310_hemel-spatial-vision_with-appendix.pdf?sfvrsn=37e4039e_2) .

1.6 The Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision applies to the whole town: whilst fundamentally underpinning the shape and content of new development proposed for north and east of Hemel Hempstead, it also applies to the future development and transformation of the whole town and wider movement routes.

1.7 The agreed vision is to create a greener, more connected New Town and is organised into four thematic pillars:

- Inclusive **Integrated Neighbourhoods**,
- connected by **A Green Network**, and
- thoughtfully designed places with **Engaged Communities**, all underpinned by digital connectivity, and
- **A Self-sustaining Economy** and pioneering green technology driven by Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter.

Each of the four pillars reinforces aspirations to promote healthy lifestyles and respond to the climate crisis, which are the two crossover themes of the Spatial Vision. It provides an overarching spatial vision for the town with individual visions for each pillar. Each pillar includes spatial principles and

supported contextual information, further guidance and precedents, where spatial principles will inform detailed masterplanning and guide landowners and developers for all new development and transformational projects. The delivery section provides a strategy to support the delivery of each pillar with a range of studies and strategies required as next steps.

- 1.8 The underlying planning framework for dealing with change and development within the Borough is being addressed in the ongoing statutory Local Plan for Dacorum. Consultation on the Emerging Strategy for Growth closed on 28 February 2021 and Officers are currently collating and analysing the substantial number of responses received. Members will note that the forward plan for Cabinet foresees a report on the Local Plan to the meeting on 22 June, with a report to the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee a week beforehand on 15 June.
- 1.9 Both the Growth and Infrastructure Strategy and the HGC Spatial Vision, together with the new Local Plan as it progresses, set a clear and firm basis for how the Council, in its leadership role for the local community in its widest sense, will manage the challenges of change and new development over the next 20-plus years. There is now a need to pull together a distinct, ambitious and challenging strategy for Hemel Hempstead as a place and to start the work to facilitate its transformation in the long term.
- 1.10 Crucially, there is a pressing need to consider the effects of the Covid19 pandemic, particularly over the longer term in relation to how this, and other trends, will affect how people are likely to live their lives, how business will operate and locate in the future and to understand the implications for transport needs and to gear up the Borough for better digital connectivity. As with the HGC Spatial Vision, there is a need for action undertaken to develop Hemel as a place to be underpinned by the need for promoting healthy lifestyles and tackling climate change
- 1.11 To address all of these factors, this report proposes that arrangements are brought forward to create a unifying Place Strategy to deal with the variety and complexity of these issues and challenges for engagement with the Council's partners, stakeholders and local residents. The Strategy will aim to champion the promotion of Hemel Hempstead as a place, of which people are proud of and where they want to live, work and visit, and importantly to promote Hemel as a location of choice for investment.
- 1.12 As an early priority, however, it is recommended that work progresses on a new strategy for the future of Hemel Hempstead town centre, where many, if not all, of the above issues come together. This work will provide a firm platform for its ongoing success and that of the local economy.

## **2. Purpose of the Hemel Place Strategy**

- 2.1 Drawing on work already undertaken, as referred to above, a new Strategy for Hemel Hempstead should commence with stakeholder and community engagement with a view to developing a new vision for the whole town. This Vision will then be translated into specific workstreams and projects for subsequent action. Para 3.4 of this report provides some early suggestions for what the workstreams could comprise.
- 2.2 These activities would then be overseen by a new multi-agency Place Board as set out in section 3 below.
- 2.3 The new Place Strategy will provide an exciting and compelling narrative to give Hemel Hempstead a clear identity and provide a strong vision and sense

of direction. The Place Strategy will provide the foundations for promoting the town as a destination for business activity, a place where people will want to live, work and visit and as a basis to attract inward investment and secure funding for infrastructure. It will also provide the opportunity for local residents and businesses to benefit through new employment and business opportunities.

2.4 It is proposed that the Hemel Place Strategy and proposed workstream plan will be brought back to the Council's Cabinet for endorsement.

### **3. Creation of a Hemel Place Board**

3.1 It is strongly recommended that a multi-agency Place Board is created to oversee the development and implementation of the Place Strategy.

3.2 This approach is common to other places facing major change and will help to ensure full engagement and buy-in to shaping and delivering the strategy. Change is a complex process and cannot be delivered by the Council alone. For ambitious change proposals to be successful, it is imperative that the Council works side by side with a range of partners both in the public and private sector and works collaboratively to create the right conditions for good quality investment.

3.3 Cabinet will be aware that there is already an established Board for the Hemel Garden Communities programme on which St Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Homes England and Herts LEP are all represented in addition to Dacorum Borough Council. Although much of this Board's work is focused on delivery of development within the HGC area, its early work has included in setting the Spatial Vision for the whole town.

3.4 The purpose of the new Hemel Place Board will be to complement the work of the HGC Board, by focusing on delivery of both the Spatial Vision and the range of issues set out further ahead in this section of the report. Whereas detailed arrangements for the working arrangements of the Hemel Place Board will be a matter for further consideration and agreement by Cabinet, both its remit and membership will be expected to be wider than that of the HGC Board, and with a focus on transformative actions for the town beyond the HGC area.

3.5 Examples of other places where this approach is in place include Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, which is comprised of leading Members and Officers from its partner authorities and other key local agencies:

<http://www.harlowandgilstongardentown.co.uk/the-garden-town-board>

Aylesbury Garden Town has a similar approach, with its Board's membership extending to the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) with representation from the programme's retained consultants:

<https://www.aylesburygardentown.co.uk>

3.6 Both of these areas set clear proposals for the ongoing and long term development of these rapidly-changing towns based on a vision of how the future place will function, what it will look like, and what it will contain.

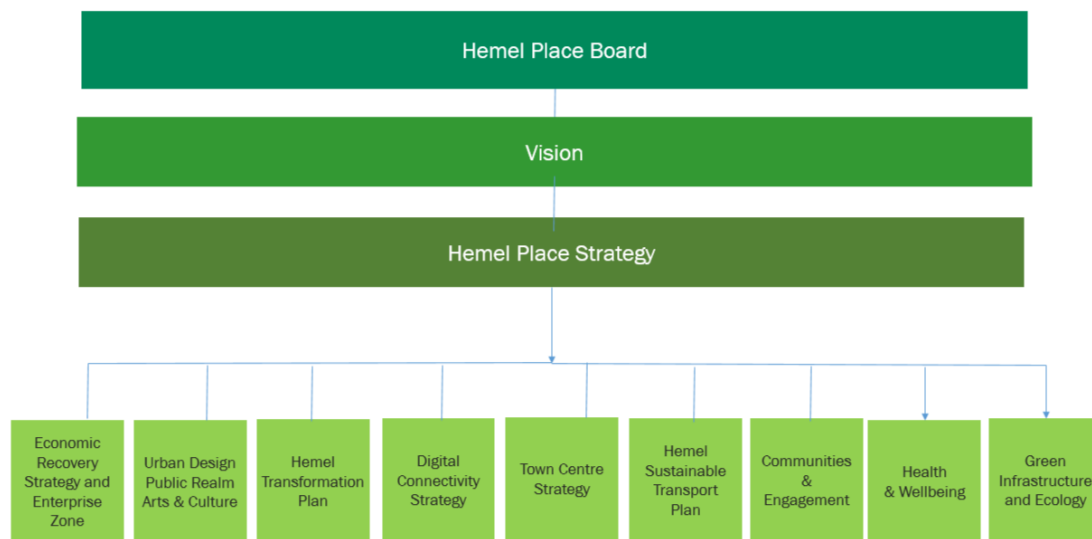
3.7 It is proposed that the Hemel Place Board will include representatives from Herts LEP, Herts IQ, West Herts College, Hemel Hempstead BID, Hemel Hempstead Business Ambassadors, The Crown Estate and other key landowners and developers along with Herts CC and St Albans City and

District Council (given its key role as the other District in the HGC programme).

3.8 The Place Board will also play an important role in championing engaging with the local community and residents' groups.

3.9 Terms of Reference will be developed by the Place Board and it is suggested that Cabinet delegates their approval to the Leader of the Council.

3.10 The diagram below indicates a suggested range of workstreams that the Board would oversee, following the development of the Place Strategy, these are united by a common vision for the development of Hemel as a place.



#### 4. A New Strategy for Hemel Hempstead Town Centre

4.1 The background to why a new Strategy for the Town Centre is needed is set out in the Project Concept document at Appendix 1 to the report.

4.2 The Town Centre is the focal point for community activity and is the main retail centre for Hemel Hempstead. It is also a major public transport interchange. As Hemel Hempstead grows over the next 20 years and beyond, it is critical that the Council plans for an effective and vibrant town centre to serve a considerably expanded population and be worthy of that of a transformed 21<sup>st</sup> century Garden Town.

4.3 The Borough Council, over the decades, has a good track record of planning for, and adapting to change, in the town centre. Ranging from the pedestrianisation works and the construction of the Marlowes Centre in the 1980s and 1990s, the acquisition and regeneration of land at the southern end of the Marlowes to create the Riverside Centre in the 2000s, and through to the Hemel Evolution programme of the 2010s, a significant degree of change has occurred.

4.4 New factors and forces are now in play. Traditional retailing has been in decline in recent years and this trend, at least for now, has been accelerated by the Covid19 pandemic. Whereas there will be some return to the High Street shortly, with the proposed lifting of restrictions on non-essential retailing from 12 April this year, the trend of increases in online shopping is expected to continue. Some traditional retailers have already closed and



others expected to over the short term. Retail vacancy rates were at just under 15% in 2019 and whilst latest figures are awaited, the trend is expected to worsen.

- 4.5 The growth in residential development in the town centre was a key feature of the 2012 Masterplan and significant new schemes have been completed, with others under construction such as 'The Foundry' at West Herts College, 'The Gade' on land to the north of the Forum and the ongoing conversion of older offices at Hamilton House. Significant potential for further residential development remains and given both the level of housing need the Council is expected to plan for, and the long term strength of the local housing market, this is a trend that can be expected to continue. In turn these new developments will place increasing pressure on the town centre and its facilities to provide for the social needs of new residents.
- 4.6 Furthermore the growth in development in the rest of the town and its catchment area places both a pressure on the town centre, but at the same time provides an opportunity to consider how it should be repurposed for the future.
- 4.7 The data analysis report at Appendix 3 draws attention to these factors. It points to the need to develop the business base of the town centre and highlights a lack of leisure and cultural facilities, amongst others. Importantly, as working and living patterns change as a result of Covid19, the trend of increasing levels of working from home and a decline in traditional full-week out-commuting provides the opportunity to capture potential new footfall and therefore business. Hemel Town Centre therefore needs to be positioned through the right strategy and interventions to ensure it can adapt successfully to the new socio-economic environment that is emerging.
- 4.8 A new strategy must, to be successful, be comprehensive and address a combination of development, economic and social factors with the need to tackle the climate emergency running through it. It will need to be based on the agreed 'pillars' as set out in the Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision. The issues to be addressed, as set out below, will cross refer back to this.
- 4.9 Building in Social Value principles in the Strategy will ensure there are socioeconomic outcomes of developments such as ensuring jobs for local residents, apprenticeships, career engagement with local schools and opportunities for local suppliers.
- 4.10 To commence its preparation, Officers recommend that the new Strategy must begin with the creation of a new vision for the town centre's future, informed by extensive engagement with stakeholders and the community alongside data trends and evidence, consideration of urban futures trends and those from the effects of Covid19, and best practice from elsewhere.
- 4.11 Once this new vision is in place, and without pre-empting the final scope of the strategy it is expected it will need to address the following issues.
- 4.12 **Urban Design Strategy.** A coherent and comprehensive urban design strategy will be essential to ensure that the new Vision for the town centre can be delivered. This will set out the design themes and style for new development, and will address the issues of building heights, densities, function of public realm and importantly, use.

- 4.13 **Economic and Business Development actions.** Officers have already begun work on a wide-ranging economic recovery strategy for the whole of the Borough. This work will need to include a specific action plan for the town centre to address both the structural issues within retailing, but also to look at boosting the supply of general business space, to complement the approach to new development being considered.
- 4.14 The economic recovery strategy will set out the principles how to ensure inclusive economic growth and the focus will be on local wealth creation. The Hemel Place Strategy will play a key part in delivering these principles through adopting **Social Value outcomes** in developments. This could include the development of an Employment and Training Agreement for individual developments highlighting the opportunities that will be delivered and demonstrate how those will be achieved both during and after construction. The outcomes will include:
- construction apprenticeships
  - local employment during the construction phase
  - construction work experience opportunities
  - end use apprenticeships
  - local procurement opportunities
- 4.15 **Digital connectivity strategy.** As Appendix 3 refers, the provision of fibre to the premise in Dacorum is very low compared to other areas, and there is no public Wi-Fi in the town centre. A specialist focus is needed on developing the town centre's digital offer, sitting within emerging strategy work planned for other areas including Hemel Garden Communities. This work needs to be firmly linked to the approach to economic and business development.
- 4.16 **Arts, Culture, Leisure and Heritage Strategy.** This will need to address the current low offer of the town centre in this area. It will need to consider how new facilities can be planned for, and delivered, by both commercial providers and the voluntary and community sectors to deliver a diverse offer and one that brings vibrancy and footfall to the town centre. As with all constituent parts of the strategy, it will need to be developed in connection with the framework plan and the approach to new development. There is a considerable opportunity to build on the town centre's inherent strengths, not least the restored Jellicoe Water Gardens and its proximity and access to Gadebridge Park and Heath Park, both of which have been improved recently, and to Box Moor.
- 4.17 **Social and Community Facilities.** This part of the strategy will address the social needs of existing and new residents living within the town centre and its catchment hinterland, and will recognise the central role it plays in a centre for the whole community of Hemel Hempstead, both now and in the long term. A particular issue is for the provision of new primary school facilities which has been highlighted by Herts CC in the production of the emerging Local Plan.
- 4.18 **Framework Plan and assessment of development sites.** Much of the opportunity to drive and direct change in the town centre will come from the shape, extent, design and content of sites with development opportunities. Members will be aware that officers are continually reviewing the availability and opportunity for new sites through Local Plan-related Urban Capacity assessment work, and a full review will be key to this part of the strategy. Specifically, change can be expected at the former Civic Centre and Market Square sites (both owned by the Council) and at Hemel Hospital for a mix of new hospital facilities, primary school and further residential. Officers

are aware that the long lease for Riverside shopping centre is currently on the market and it can be expected that any new leaseholder will bring forward plans for change, particularly to look at the potential for further flatted residential development as part of the scheme, and the future of street-level uses.

4.19 Based on the anticipated future purposes of the town centre arising from the visioning work, the new strategy will need to set a framework for the role of key sites and how they relate to and facilitate activity, footfall, visits and business in the town centre. Specific development viability work will also need to be undertaken.

4.20 **Transport assessment and recommendations for intervention.**  
This will be a key element of the strategy to be developed alongside the development framework and assessment of key sites and development trends. It will be informed by the ongoing Sustainable Transport Plan for Hemel, which is being developed to support the new Local Plan. The emphasis will need to be on promoting sustainable forms of transport, building on the town centre's strength as the central public transport interchange for the town.

4.21 Key outputs from this work will be recommendations for specific interventions to address the pressure on the transport network arising from new development and to address modal shift and reduction of carbon emissions. It will need to take account of key movement patterns, and particularly the central role the town centre plays between the link between the mainline rail stations, Maylands Business Park and Hemel's residential neighbourhoods, both established and proposed. Particular attention will need be given to measures such as demand-responsive public transport and the role of e-bikes and e-scooters alongside walking and cycling. The ongoing work led by Herts CC on the A414 Mass Rapid Transit system project, which although still at a very early stage, is expected to originate at Hemel rail station, connect to the town centre and run on to Maylands via the A414 St Albans Road, will be important.

4.22 The final Town Centre strategy will enable the Council, with engagement from partners and stakeholders, to develop a range of action plans and projects to be brought forward as priorities indicate and resources allow. It will be brought back to Cabinet for approval in due course.

## 5. Programme Plan

5.1 The work on the overarching Hemel Place Strategy, and the more focused work on both Hemel Town Centre and Economic Recovery will extend over the next year and a half.

5.2 Implementation work arising from the development of the work strands will be continue for many years to come and will be subject to more focused project plans and timescales to be confirmed in due course.

5.3 The anticipated timeline so far is as follows, with the detail of specific project activity and milestones to be established once the Project management and consultancy team is in place.

Action	Timescale
<b>Preparation and Procurement</b>	
Place engagement consultant appointment	Apr 21
Consultant team procurement	Apr-June 21
Inception meetings	May-Aug 21
<b>Hemel Place Strategy</b>	

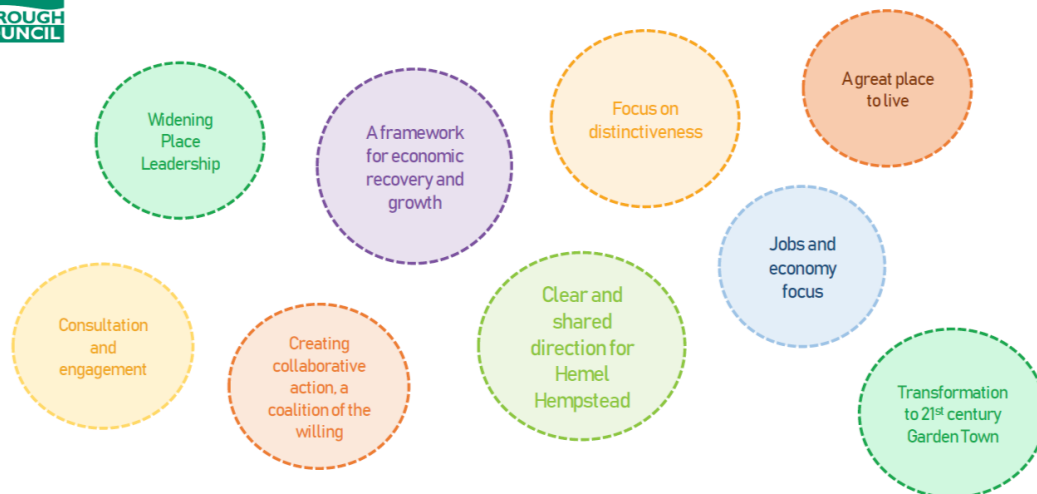
Stakeholder and community engagement	May-July 21
Vision development	July-Aug 21
Cabinet and Council approval of Hemel Place Strategy	Oct-Nov 21
<b>Town Centre Strategy Development</b>	
Commence strategy development	Aug/Sept 21
Stakeholder and community engagement	To be determined
Member briefing	To be determined
<b>Review and Completion of Town Centre Strategy</b>	
Council adoption of new Strategy	Sept 22

## 6. Engagement and Branding

- 6.1 Given the extensive work on strategy and visioning development done so far on the Growth and Infrastructure Strategy, HGC Spatial Vision and the new Local Plan, it will be important that proposed engagement work for Hemel as a place both recognises work done to date, but provides an opportunity to engage stakeholders and residents in a positive and proactive discussion over the future direction of the town.
- 6.2 As an initial step, Officers propose that a focused engagement process begins later in May of this year after the local elections. For this early work it is proposed to appoint Thinking Place <http://thinkingplace.co.uk/>, a consultancy which specialises in developing a strong narrative around the concept of local place, what it means to local people and what it could be transformed into. The Council previously engaged Thinking Place a few years ago when the Hemel Hempstead Business Ambassadors programme was being set up.
- 6.3 The initial work will comprise data and information gathering, and a series of focus groups from different stakeholders and residents' groups to gather feedback for the Council to consider.
- 6.4 Later in the programme, decisions will need to be taken by the Council over effective branding for both Hemel as a place overall, and for the town centre, for which consultancy input will be needed.
- 6.5 The following diagram provides an early indication of the scope of new branding, but this will be developed as the project progresses



# Developing a Brand for Hemel



## 7. Resources Required

- 7.1 A significant amount of work is required to deliver this ambitious programme. Much of the anticipated costs, as set out in the table below, will focus on underpinning strategies and study work for the Town Centre strategy. Cabinet is therefore requested at this stage to make a budget of £500,000 available to carry out this work over the next year to eighteen months. A cost plan containing estimates of the specific areas of expenditure is appended at Part II of the agenda.
- 7.2 This will allow for consultancy support to cover a range of issues including development viability and strategy, market assessments, urban design framework, transport assessment and solutions, retail strategy, arts, culture and heritage strategy and the approach to digital connectivity solutions.
- 7.3 In-house capacity and expertise from the current establishment of staff will be used, but the above specialist areas are where external support is needed. To successfully initiate and set a framework for the new town centre strategy, a lead consultant with expertise in urban futures and delivery of new development and both property and market issues will be critical. More focused expert appointments as indicated above are expected to flow from this.
- 7.4 The budget will also make provision for stakeholder engagement, branding and marketing. Finally the programme will need the support of a dedicated programme manager and Officers are currently considering options for how this is to be provided, including a secondment opportunity.
- 7.5 Opportunities to support this budget will be taken wherever possible from Government funding sources where they are available and Officers are currently both considering relevant funds announced by the Government, and monitoring future sources.
- 7.6 The end product will be a new Strategy to promote Hemel as a place, and specifically will also deliver a new town centre strategy, for final approval by Cabinet and Council. It will set a clear direction and vision for how the town centre should develop, and importantly communicate this to businesses, residents and investors.

- 7.7 In terms of external funding, recently the Government has announced a range of funds. Two of these are of particular relevance for this work: the Levelling-Up Fund (LUF) and the Community Renewal Fund (CRF).
- 7.8 The LUF invites proposals from across the Country and encourages every Member of Parliament to support a bid. It can support the delivery of urban regeneration, transport and cultural investment proposals up to a maximum of £20million capital with the possibility of some revenue funding support. Officers have begun considering the scope of such a bid to assist with the delivery of key sites in Hemel Hempstead Town Centre. The deadline for submission of bids to MHCLG is relatively short, by 18 June 2021. Members are therefore requested to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to prepare and submit an appropriate bid by this time.
- 7.9 The CRF can provide funds for communities and places and the prospectus issued by MHCLG points to studies delivering net-zero and local energy projects, and exploring opportunities for promoting culture-led regeneration and community development, improving green spaces and preserving important local assets and promoting rural connectivity. All issues would be relevant to emerging Hemel Place Strategy and Town Centre work.
- 7.10 Dacorum is not designated as a 'lead authority', but Hertfordshire County Council is. Lead authorities are required to submit their project shortlist up to a maximum of £3million per place to MHCLG by 18 June 2021, with the Government making decisions by late July 'onwards'. Officers will liaise with HCC about including a Hemel-focused element to a County-wide bid.
- 7.11 In addition, there will be in-kind support to the programme from Council services including, but not limited to economic development, communications and procurement.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 Hemel Hempstead is at a key turning point in its history. It faces the challenge of accommodating major growth both through the development of Hemel Garden Communities and other new developments and ongoing regeneration in the town centre and the Two Waters and Apsley area. Together with the new socio-economic environment emerging from the Covid19 pandemic, there is a need to consider the town's future through a full consideration of the future development and transformation of Hemel as a place into a vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> century garden town.
- 8.2 To do this, it is recommended that the Council develops, with its partners, a new Place Strategy drawing on the foundations of work carried out to date on the Growth and Infrastructure Strategy, HGC Spatial Vision and the Local Plan. It is considered that this should be governed by a multi-party Place Board, a practice which is being used successfully in other locations.
- 8.3 An early priority of this new strategy approach is to commence major work on the role, functions and opportunities offered by Hemel town centre on the basis set out in this report.