

APPENDIX A – HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY PROJECT CONCEPT



Managing Projects Successfully

Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Strategy

Project Concept

FOR APPROVAL	Name	Contact details	Approved?
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IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Completion Date		

Document Control

Date	Issue	Changed by	Comments
3 Feb 2021	1.0	James Doe	For discussion at Project Steering Group 4 Feb 2021
19 Feb 2021	1.1	James Doe	Amendments for Steering Group

23 Feb 2021	1.2	James Doe	Further amendments for Steering Group meeting on 24 Feb 2021 following input from Linda Roberts including Risk Mitigation Plan at section 3.3
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Background

The HH Town Centre Masterplan was published in 2012 – it created a series of character zones around which a development strategy to 2021 was formed. This served as the basis for the Hemel Evolution programme of direct works improvements to the Marlowes, Bank Court, Bus Interchange and Water Gardens restoration, and the creation of the Forum. These have been completed, with the exception of the 'PAM' parking, access and movement project for Water Gardens South car park access and Bridge Street remodelling which is scheduled for 2021.

Importantly it set the basis for private sector housing led regeneration which has on the whole been successful: the Civic Zone in the north of the town centre has two major projects underway by Bellway and Hill, delivering between them around 140 new homes.

Elsewhere a high number of new apartments have been delivered or are well under way through conversion of outmoded office accommodation for which there was no demand: key examples are Lord Alexander House, Stephyn's Chambers, Swan Court, Hamilton House and Bryanston Court.

Concept

Opportunity or Problem

High Street retailing is in long term decline, and this has been exacerbated further by the Covid-19 pandemic which has both reduced footfall significantly and fuelled online spend.

Despite this, the town centre remains a popular place to visit even with a large number of stores closed due to Covid-related lockdowns or restrictions; it also provides direct amenities and facilities to the growing number of residents in newly built or converted apartments.

Hemel, and Dacorum is growing in the long term: The new local plan anticipates a further 18,000 new homes in the Borough by 2038; for Hemel this is 10,000 new homes, and by the time Hemel Garden Communities is fully developed into the 2050s, the total level of growth could be in the region of 20,000 new homes taking into account both the post-2038 phases of HGC in Dacorum, and the new housing to be built just over the boundary in the St Albans district, which functionally will be part of the town.

The long term aspiration, with this totality of growth, is to transform Hemel Hempstead from a mark one new town that has grown incrementally and evolved over its 70+ year history into a 21st century Garden Town; using Hemel Garden Communities as its catalyst, a transformation strategy will link the new developments at HGC to the transformative effects of other key sites, underpinned by a new sustainable transport strategy and the eventual introduction of a mass rapid transit system linking Hemel Hempstead across Hertfordshire to Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.

The Local Plan is in draft only and Dacorum's main towns are surrounded by Green Belt: this means DBC has to take every reasonable opportunity to drive housing growth from regeneration of its urban areas – as such the focus will be on Hemel Town Centre to achieve a substantial proportion of this.

The 2012 Town Centre masterplan has in all been a great success; however there are key sites which remain undeveloped although feasibility work has been carried out on all three:

1. The Civic Centre Site – owned by DBC, notional capacity c 200 homes
2. Market Square – owned by DBC albeit with small areas of title enjoyed by Homes England – about another further 200 homes capacity

3. The Hospital Zone – comprising of the operational Hemel Hempstead Hospital in the ownership of West Herts Hospitals Trust, though with significant areas of land owned by both DBC and Homes England which adjoin it; the redevelopment must comprise a new hospital facility for which the NHS is bringing forward a business case, a new 2FE primary school, and capacity for c 500 new homes

There are other sites under consideration through ongoing work on Urban Capacity in the town centre.

Prior to the pandemic, the owners of the Riverside shopping centre placed it on the market; Riverside is anchored by Debenhams which can be expected to close at some point in 2021; the future of other retailers at Riverside is also in some doubt.

The development strategy for all town centre sites needs to be re-appraised, not least to explore the potential for greater density and quantity, avoid piecemeal and uncoordinated development, and to deliver the highest quality of new design possible to create an exciting new identity and image for the town centre.

Related to this is the need to meet the social needs of this growing community in the town centre; the Water Gardens restoration and improvements to both Gadebridge Park and Heath Park, together with the community aspects of The Forum, provide a good base.

However the town centre lacks primary school provision; opportunities for delivering new open spaces are limited; and connectivity with the rest of the town, particularly on foot or by cycle remains limited; apart from The Forum, there is no community meeting facility such as is enjoyed by Hemel's other residential neighbourhoods.

A Business Improvement District has been in place since 2018, and is in place until 2023 when a further five years will depend on a further ballot of businesses within the BID area.

Its success has been limited and there has to be real concerns over its future given the weak state of retailing in the town centre with struggling businesses likely to be reluctant to commit to a further period of levy paying.

A new BID Manager was appointed in late 2020 and things are starting to move again, such as with the development of a shopping app, but progress is bound to be limited for the first and possibly second quarter of 2021 given current Covid-19 restrictions; we need a return to the ability to run events and attract footfall back.

Recent research by KPMG (2021) points to Hemel Town Centre being the most affected by the Covid19 pandemic out of the 109 UK towns researched due to the highest proportion of home working (estimated at 27%) and a lack of cultural and leisure facilities. Other Hertfordshire towns also scored poorly. This however may present a big opportunity for increasing footfall as fewer residents will be commuting out of Hemel Hempstead for work.

Furthermore, and despite previous policy intentions, the night time economy has never developed well, with the town centre becoming lifeless after the shops close in the evening. There is a real opportunity to be exploited here based on an imaginative and supportive approach to fostering such businesses within a revitalised urban realm.

Businesses need support, and a new purpose for street level activity and business opportunities needs to be developed; resources from the Re-opening High Streets Safely fund are being deployed but these will run under Government spending rules to the end of March 2021 and cannot extend to wider town centre improvement and development initiatives beyond helping the area to deal with Covid-related implications on the safe re-opening of businesses

There is no public wi-fi in the town centre.

The Marlowes Shopping Centre has been subject to major and beneficial improvements by its new owners, Capital and Regional plc, but plans for a new multi-screen cinema in the centre are currently on hold.

Underpinning any new strategy of this magnitude and importance is the climate change agenda, recognising both the UK Government’s commitment to zero carbon by 2050 and DBC’s Climate Change strategy for zero carbon from its own operations by 2030.

Alignment to Corporate Plan

(Mark 'X' for all that apply)

Alignment to Corporate Plan (indicate all that apply)		Benefits (to Corporate Plan)
A clean, safe and enjoyable environment	X	
Building strong and vibrant communities	X	
Ensuring economic growth and prosperity	X	
Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular, for those most in need	X	
Delivering an efficient and modern council		

Interdependencies

Within DBC, the main services to be involved in the development and delivery of the new strategy are:

- Planning, Development and Regeneration
- Commercial Assets and Property Development
- Neighbourhood Delivery
- Housing

Services that will need to support the project are:

- Finance and Resources
- ICT
- Legal
- Procurement

External to DBC the key organisations and interests to be engaged will be:

- Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID)
- Town Centre Businesses
- Local Residents
- Capital and Regional plc (owners of the Marlowes centre and other TC property)
- Aberdeen Asset Management (long leaseholders of the Riverside Centre)
- Landowners
- Commercial Agents
- Hertfordshire County Council (Transport, Education, Property, Planning in particular)
- West Herts Hospitals Trust

- Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- West Herts College
- Herts LEP
- University of Herts
- MHCLG Cities and Local Growth unit
- Connected Places Catapult
- Hertfordshire Growth Board
- Hemel Garden Communities programme

Success Criteria

Outputs – what will be delivered through this project?

- A clear, challenging yet achievable Vision for the future of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre for the next 20 years or so
- Members are able to Champion this Vision within Dacorum and with Government and other key agencies
- Full Corporate buy-in to the project and strategy, with meaningful engagement from stakeholders and partners
- A fully developed and future-proofed Strategy to transform Hemel Hempstead Town Centre through the redevelopment of key sites in line with the Vision, business development to meet the challenges of the next c20 years and with clear benefits to the local community
- A robust and realistic Delivery Plan in place with resources identified to support the enabling work required

Outcomes – what will the project lead to?

- Hemel Hempstead's town centre as vibrant, busy, prosperous and a place people will want to visit, shop, spend time and do business in, live and work
- A significant uplift in the number of quality new homes delivered, in high quality attractive buildings befitting of a 21st century Garden Town, and linked to the Hemel Garden Communities Charter and Spatial Vision
- Hemel Hempstead as a town centre that all residents will see as the heart of the town, a hub for the community that people will want to use and visit frequently and spend time in
- A vibrant arts and culture offer
- Delivery of a green and attractive public realm
- Rationalisation of retail leading to high occupancy of retail, service and business premises providing a vibrant and diverse offer of experiences
- Opportunities for innovation and the ability for independent businesses to set up and thrive

- Increased public dwell time and footfall both during the day and in the evening
- A growing residential population in the town centre, engaged in the life and future of the town centre with the ability to lead healthy lifestyles and well supported by social and community facilities
- Clear Car Parking strategy in place, providing the right level of public parking but linked to objectives to achieve a better modal share of non-car use
- A revitalised town centre with a strong digital offer and high levels of online connectivity
- A town centre which makes a positive contribution to addressing the climate emergency and helps Dacorum achieve a net zero carbon position
- Sustainable transport links and hubs – improved connectivity to the surrounding area and the station and potential network of Multi-Modal Transport Interchanges across Hemel Hempstead

Options to Consider

For the project to be successful it requires Member leadership and corporate leadership and support, engagement and co-production with a wide range of stakeholders including residents, businesses – including HHTC BID, landowners and key public sector partners

The starting point will be to scope the remit of the project which will initially be carried out by the Steering Group; this will be considered, reviewed and validated by SLT, PHCOG and the DBC Corporate Growth and Infrastructure Board before approval by Cabinet for authority to proceed, confirm resource allocation and project timetable.

This Project Concept sets out three principal stages:

Stage 1 - to confirm initial scope and then the appointment of a consultancy team and Project Management support.

Stage 2 - to commence project visioning, co-production and development of the new Strategy through to completion and adoption by DBC

Stage 3 – Preparation and completion of the Strategy with full stakeholder engagement

Scope of Project to be agreed

- Extent of Strategy area
- An outline proposal from Cushman and Wakefield is appended, for discussion

Scope of Project expertise needed including consultancy support

To include the following:

- Council, stakeholder and resident visioning

- Lead consultant to co-ordinate all consultancy input with experience of town centre regeneration and development
- Urban design strategy development including public realm
- Site development appraisal and viability assessment
- Transport strategy with proposals for necessary interventions
- Digital and connectivity strategy
- Arts and Culture and evening economy strategy
- Business strategy to develop a robust offer from the town centre
- Project management
- Community and business engagement
- Procurement process lead and support

Plan to Develop Outline Business Case

Time Schedule

Action	Accountability	Timescale
Stage 1		
Establishment of Steering Group, Consideration of Lead Consultant for procurement		Jan 21
Draft scope of work/ detailed programme		Feb 21
Identify wider consultant team		Feb 21
SLT paper		2 March 21
PH COG (special)		11 March 21
Growth and Infrastructure Board		19 Apr 21
Member briefing		Apr 21
Cabinet report and approval		25 May 21
Stage 2		
Visioning and Masterplanning/consultant team procurement		May-June 21
Inception meetings (note consider impact of holiday period on progress)		July- Aug 21
Visioning exercise		September 21
Stage 3		
Commence strategy development in line with agreed vision		October 21
Stakeholder and community engagement		Oct 21 – April 22
Council adoption of new Strategy		May - June 22

Resource Plan

Officer Project Team

Project Champion	Claire Hamilton - Chief Executive
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Project Sponsor/Lead Officer	James Doe - Assistant Director Planning, Development and Regeneration
Steering Group Members	Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration
	Chris Taylor – GM Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Richard Rice - GM Commercial Assets and Property Development
	Alex Robinson – Strategic Planning Manager
	Nathalie Bateman – HGC Lead Officer
	Ronan Leydon – Assistant Team Leader Strategic Planning
	Gunilla Edwards – ED Support Officer
	Jane Hakes – Urban Design Officer

Draft Cost Plan

Direct project costs

£k

Lead Consultant

Project Manager

Urban Design strategy

Transport assessment

Development Viability

Visioning and Stakeholder Engagement

Digital and Connectivity Strategy

Total

Risk Mitigation Plan

Risk	Likelihood	Severity	Mitigating Actions
	H/M/L	H/M/L	
1. Resourcing for direct project costs	H	H	Fundamental issue as the new strategy will require a large pull on resources – to be costed and requires decisions over use of reserves to fund
2. Implications for longer term Council funding both revenue and capital	H	H	There will be a need to prioritise potential actions and roles for DBC in the delivery of the new strategy depending on availability of funding and appetite for change
3. Lack of or uncertainty over external funding sources	H	M	Contact with MHCLG and Homes England and other funding sources needs to run through the project to assess the scope for funding from external sources

4. Project slippage	M	M	The project involves a high degree of external stakeholder engagement from a wide base where there may be conflicting views over priorities and actions. Need for scoping and prioritisation at an early stage and expectation management. See 5 below also.
5. Project creep	M	M	As 4; the project is complex and a high degree of change control needs to be exercised to manage both project creep and slippage.

To be developed through project risk assessment. Key risks are:

Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision & Delivery Plan - methodology

