



## AGENDA ITEM:

### SUMMARY

Report for:	<b>Strategic Planning and Environment Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of meeting:	<b>24 November 2021</b>
PART:	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Hemel Hempstead Place and Town Centre Strategy update</b>
Contact:	Cllr Alan Anderson - Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure  Author/Responsible Officers;  James Doe – AD Planning & Regeneration  Sara Whelan – Group Manager, Place and Enterprise
Purpose of report:	To update members about the work to date on Hemel Place Strategy and Town Centre, including an update from newly formed Hemel Place Board.
Recommendations	That the report is noted.
Corporate objectives:	The programme supports all six of the Councils priorities in the Corporate Plan.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u>  None arising for this report – work is carried out from established budgets. Cabinet approved a budget of £500,000 for this work at its meeting in April 2021.  <u>Value for Money</u>  The Hemel Place budget currently employs one architect and is supported by a corporate graduate overseen by the Group

	Manager of Place and Enterprise. Many others across the Council are supporting this work along with private and third sector partners.
Community Impact Assessment	Completed in March 2021 and attached. Members should note that a separate CIA will be prepared for the forthcoming Town Centre Strategy and this will be included in future reports.
Health And Safety Implications	None in this report
Consultees:	
Background papers:	Appendix 1 – Relationship to other Strategies Appendix 2 – The draft Hemel Hempstead Story Appendix 3 – Summary from Hemel Place Board 4 Nov 2021 Appendix 4 – Paradise Design Code work
Historical background <i>(please give a brief background to this report to enable it to be considered in the right context).</i>	Report to Cabinet, 20 April 2021
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing LEP – Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

## 1. Background

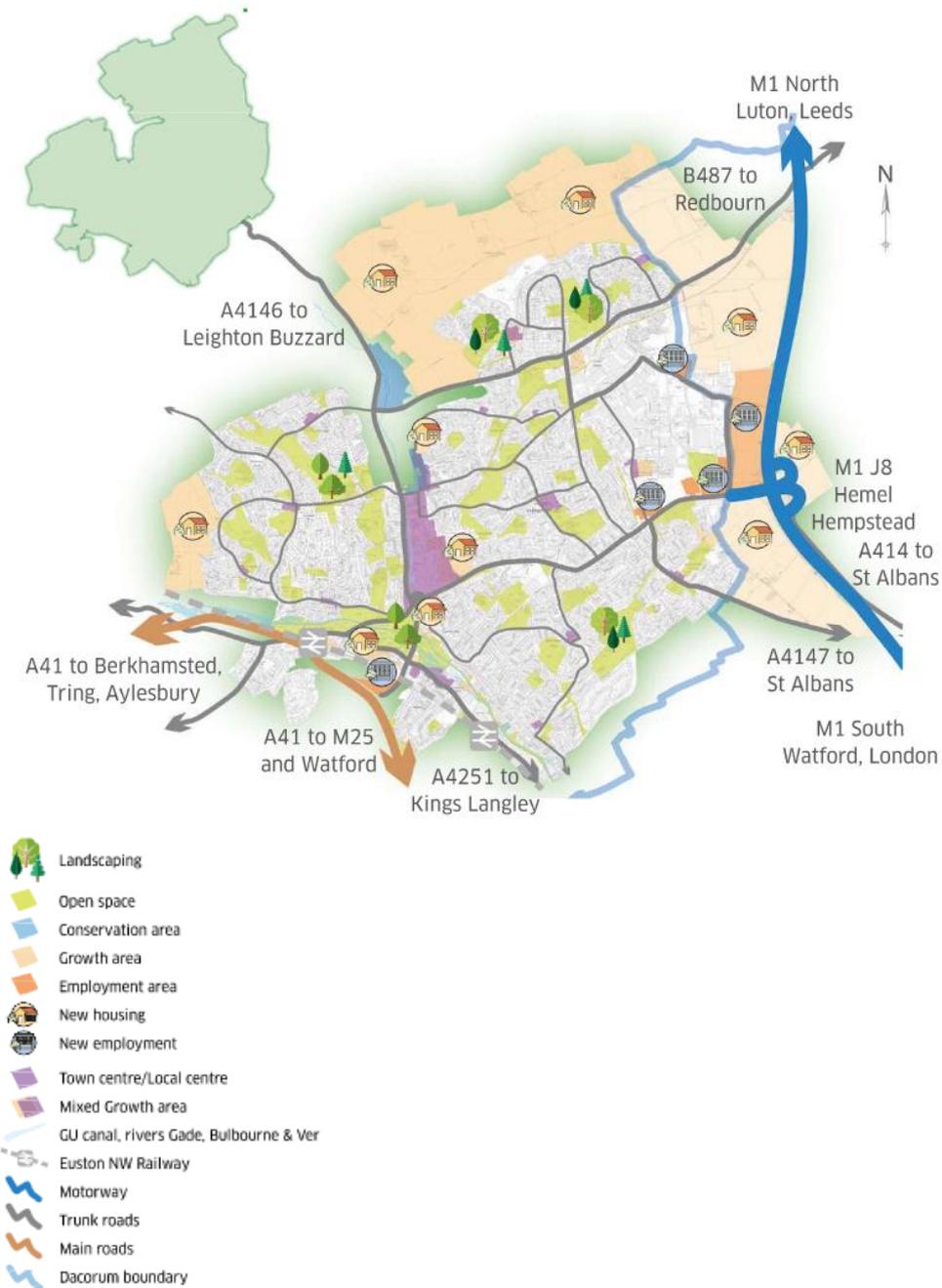
- 1.1 Cabinet agreed in April 2021 to create a new Place Strategy for Hemel Hempstead and to establish a Hemel Place Board. As part of this work a new strategy for the future of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre was also agreed.
- 1.2 In September 2021, Sara Whelan was appointed to the Hemel Place Strategy Programme Manager post. Recently her post has changed again to cover the retirement of Chris Taylor, Group Manager Strategic Planning and Regeneration in December 2021. Sara Whelan is now the Group Manager for Place and Enterprise and will continue to lead the Hemel Place work as well as leading the Economic Development Service.

## 2. Hemel Place Strategy

- 2.1 The Hemel Place Strategy will set out a new vision for Hemel Hempstead and will set out proposals for the regeneration and management of the town over the short, medium and longer term. It will strongly link to the visions already in place for Hemel Hempstead, including the Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision, the Dacorum Economic Recovery Plan and the

Dacorum Growth and Infrastructure Strategy. Please see Appendix 1 which shows a diagram on how this new work on the Place Strategy relates to these and other strategies.

- 2.2 The aim of the Hemel Place approach is to knit together all the exciting work already happening and to be sure that Hemel works together as one place, now and in the future. Without this place shaping approach there is a risk that Hemel Garden Communities, Maylands Business Park, the Enterprise Zone, Town Centre and Old Town all operate separately and do not support each other. We want people who work, live or visit any part of Hemel Hempstead to visit and support the whole of the town.
- 2.2 Below is an extract from the Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision which sets out how Hemel Hempstead will grow. The population of Hemel is expected to grow from approximately 95,000 currently to 150,000 by the early to mid-2050s.



2.3 The Hemel Place Strategy will look to capitalise on the town’s amazing assets, such as being a New Town set in ample green open space as well as our transport links to London and strong sense of community. It will also address the town’s weaknesses with a clear action plan.

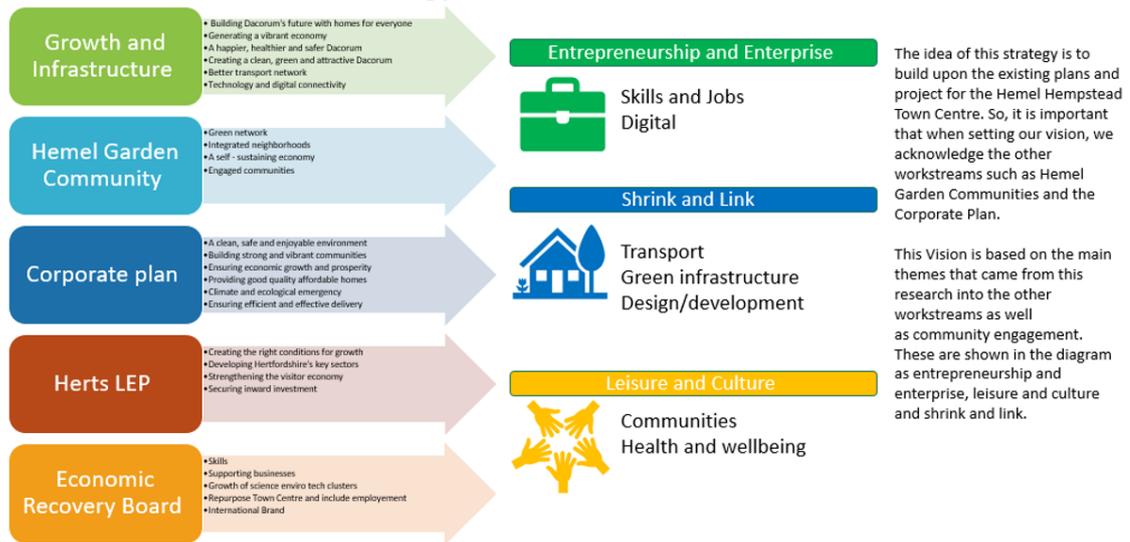
2.4 The Place Strategy will be authentic to the history of Hemel Hempstead and be ambitious for its future. The Hemel Place Board will work in partnership to deliver the vision of the Place Strategy. The success of the town centre will be a key part of the future of Hemel Hempstead and therefore will have its own strategy with more focused interventions.

### 3. Hemel Town Centre Strategy

- 3.1 The scope of the Town Centre Strategy will include;
- Health and wellbeing
  - Supporting vulnerable people in the community
  - Sustainability and tackling climate change
  - Urban design strategy
  - Economic and business development actions
  - Social value actions, including skills and apprenticeships
  - Digital connectivity strategy
  - Arts, culture, leisure and heritage Strategy
  - Social and community facilities and infrastructure
  - Framework plan and assessment of development sites
  - Transport assessment and recommendations for intervention

3.2 Importantly the Town Centre Strategy will have a clear action plan and different routes for delivery. The Hemel Place Board will have an important role to play in the delivery of the Town Centre Strategy as well as wider partnership working. The Strategy is being prepared in draft, and will be brought to both this Committee and Cabinet when it is more fully advanced. The diagram below provides an initial indication of how current plans and strategies will contribute and how they relate to some of the emerging key themes.

### Vision for Hemel Town strategy



## 4. Hemel Hempstead Old Town

4.1 Paul Langford, Housing Service review Consultant, who recently completed a six month contract at Dacorum Borough Council, led a 'Hemel Old Town' Place Project Team made up of Officers from a range of services across the Council. The vision for the Old Town is to create a place where residents, business, community facilities and all stakeholders can thrive and feel pride in their local area. Establishing a place where people want to live, work and prosper. James Doe is the new Project Sponsor and Sara Whelan is Project Lead.



4.2 This is a multi-disciplinary team with officers from across the council including Economic Development, Estates, Finance, Planning, Waste and Clean Safe and Green, Housing Services, Communications, Licensing, Communities and colleagues from the Old Town Hall/theatre.

4.3 The team have spoken to key stakeholders including businesses to understand how the Old Town is working and how they thought it could improve. The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive hosted a public meeting on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November in the theatre of the Old Town Hall. It was well attended by the businesses and the residential community and overall was a positive session.

## Old Town Stakeholders (not an exhaustive list)



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**Working Together to effect positive change**

- 4.4 This work, now with the benefit of the business and residential community input, will be continued with the aim that the relationship between them and the Council will get stronger to the benefit of the Old Town. All ideas and issues raised are being worked on as part of an action plan.
- 4.5 Separate to the work above but closely linked is an independent review of the Old Town Theatre and Borough wide Cultural Strategy which will be closely interlinked to this work.

## 5. Hemel Place Board

- 5.1 The Hemel Place Board is a partnership of key stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors which have a strong presence in Hemel Hempstead and are key to the future success of the town.
- 5.2 The Board will provide strategic direction for the town's growth and prosperity activities through the development of a new Place Strategy for Hemel Hempstead and importantly advocate for Hemel Hempstead at all opportunities.
- 5.3 The Council held its first Hemel Place Board on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November. It was a hybrid meeting which comprised a range of key attendees from partner organisations such as Herts County Council, the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUHC), Herts Local Enterprise Partnership, West Herts College, Community Action Dacorum and the Dacorum Environmental Forum as well as senior representation from major businesses. The session was well attended and chaired by the Chief Executive, who set the vision for strong place leadership in Hemel Hempstead.
- 5.4 This was followed by a presentation by Thinking Place, a consultancy which was commissioned by the Council to carry out a wide range of stakeholder engagement over the summer and concluded that Hemel's future could focus on one big idea and three themes;

- Big idea – growing a fresh new future
- Theme 1 – the destination for enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Theme 2 – treasure our hub for leisure and culture
- Theme 3 – shrink and link

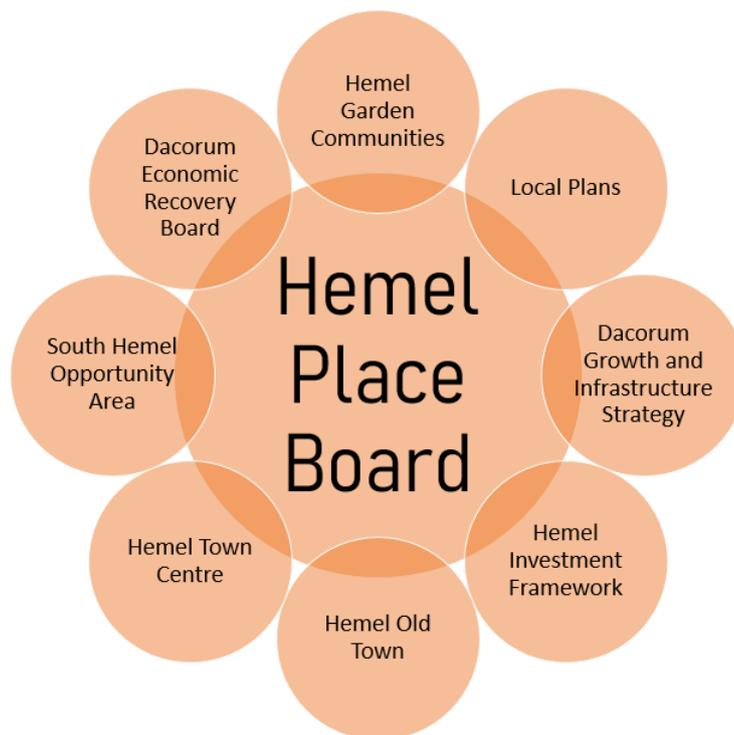
Attached to this report at Appendix 2 is a summary document entitled 'The Hemel Hempstead Story' prepared by Thinking Place as a result of the stakeholder engagement, to inform the Board's consideration of the right strategy for Hemel as a Place. This explains in more detail what lies behind the big idea and three themes as listed above.

- 5.5 James Doe followed with a presentation setting out the important New Town history of Hemel Hempstead and its current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, against the context of growth and redevelopment

anticipated at Hemel Garden Communities and the town centre. The place leadership vision and both presentations went down very well. The newly formed Board then had a discussion showing initial reactions a summary of which are included in Appendix 3 and a few key points listed below:

- The Board wanting to have a strong focus on skills
- Advice from the private sector not to take Maylands for granted as it is a great asset
- To be authentic to Hemel Hempstead's history and current day when looking at places unique selling point
- Include all in the community including importantly young people (linked to skills point above and the future generations as the Hemel Place Strategy will have short medium and long term objectives)

5.6 The next board will be held in January 2022 where the vision of the Hemel Place Strategy and scope of the key issues will be discussed. It is expected that the Board will also consider options of a clear and vibrant brand for Hemel Hempstead. This will work in tandem and very closely to the brand currently being developed for Hemel Garden Communities.



5.7 The Council is in the final stages of appointing an independent chair for the Hemel Place Board. The final interviews will be held at the end of November and the successful candidate announced in December. This is a key role, to not only chair the Board but advocate for Hemel Hempstead and foster relationships with external partners and potential investors to the area, and to positively shape the future for Hemel Hempstead businesses, communities and residents.

## 6. Funding opportunities

### Levelling up Fund

- 6.1 Dacorum Borough Council submitted a bid to the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing in June of this year. It is understood that three other Hertfordshire authorities made separate proposals for their areas. The bid focused on the redevelopment of the Market Square with the proposal to provide a cultural venue, new public realm and new homes. Unfortunately this bid was not successful, nor were any of the others in Hertfordshire as our location meant we were a category three (lowest priority) level authority and the bar was not exceeded which weighed against that designation. Despite this, the work carried out gives the Council a good platform from which to develop alternative solutions for the Market Square.
- 6.2 DLUHC is providing feedback to Officers on the bid shortly. There are future rounds of funding which the Council will consider and other central government funding opportunities which the Council will pursue, and possibly a further round of Levelling Up Funding next year. It will be excellent in future to work in partnership with the Hemel Place Board when submitting bids to show that the public, private and third sector share the same vision for Hemel Hempstead.

### Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

- 6.3 The Council is working on a bid to the Hertfordshire LEP, Transforming Town Centre Fund. The bid will seek to deliver a co-working or incubator space, providing desk spaces, shared meeting rooms and facilities for small businesses, freelancers and an alternative for individuals to working from home. The Council has recently visited a similar business space which has recently opened in Stevenage. A business case is currently being worked on.
- 6.4 The Council is also exploring the possibility of increasing the density of employment opportunities at Maylands Business Park. This is at an early stage but would seek to support Hertfordshire in becoming a hub for film studios and creative industries.

## 7. Paradise Design Code

- 7.1 Dacorum Borough Council is one of 14 councils across England given £50,000 each to develop new design codes as part of a nationwide testing programme. Design codes will set out design principles for new development and will be expected to enhance the character of the local area and ensure future design quality - meaning developments are beautiful (or popular), well designed and locally led.
- 7.2 Jane Hakes, Principal Urban Designer is the Project Lead and Sara Whelan is Project Sponsor. Tibbalds are a design consultancy who have provided external support. The project is using the [National Model Design Code](#) to

consider the design principles for the Paradise industrial area of Hemel town centre. Please see Appendix 4 for a collection of key diagrams and plans for the Paradise Design Code work so far. The work has followed the Hemel Garden Communities spatial vision for Hemel Hempstead and embedded feedback from the residential and business communities.

7.3 A series of engagement events have happened to help inform the design process and code work. This has included;

- Youth engagement workshop
- Officer and member workshops and walkovers
- Wider community engagement via commonplace website
- Landowner and stakeholder workshops
- 1:1 conversations with businesses

7.4 Some of the common opinions expressed were;

- The importance of open space to the character of Hemel Hempstead. The existing open spaces within the town are generally considered some of the most positive spaces within the town.
- Many buildings in the town centre are considered dull or boring – there is a strong desire for an attractive new environment where development is coming forward
- Access and safety issues both with regard to pedestrian and cyclist movement and generally within open spaces were raised on a number of occasions. Lack of safety for cyclists on the main roads and particular that weren't well overlooked were prominent in the feedback

7.5 The design code is being finalised and will be presented in full detail to a future Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings before going out for public consultation and eventual adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document Design Code.

## **8. Article 4 Direction in Town Centre**

8.1 Over recent years Government has widened the scope of changes that can be made from commercial uses to residential without the need for planning permission. In March 2021 Government introduced further legislation allowing the change of use from the new Use Class E to residential. Those changes which came into force on 1 August 2021 allow properties such as shops, gyms, restaurants, nurseries and health centres to be converted to residential use subject to certain conditions.

8.2 Class E covers the following uses and planning permission is not required for changes of use from one type of Class E use to another:

- (a) Shop (except for some small shops outside centres that are in Class F.2)
- (b) Food and drink (café or restaurant)
- (c) Financial, professional and other appropriate services

- (d) Indoor sport, recreation or fitness, not involving motorised vehicles or firearms
- (e) Medical or health services, principally to visiting members of the public
- (f) Crèche, day nursery or day centre
- (g) Offices, research and development and light industry

8.3 Class E does not cover various other uses often found in town centres, such as:

- Pub or drinking establishment
- Hot food takeaway
- Museum, public library
- Cinema, concert hall, bingo hall and dance hall

8.4 The legislation does provide some protection for the Old Town, Berkhamsted, Tring and the villages because the high streets are wholly or predominately within conservation areas. Although this does not mean conversions can be resisted the Council has the ability to consider the proposals through the prior approval process. Hemel Hempstead town centre does not fall within a Conservation Area and therefore does not have the same protection afforded by legislation.

8.5 The Development Management Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 resolved to confirm the Article 4 area which is highlighted in red below and will continue in effect beyond 29 January 2022 (following the 6 month expiry of the immediate Article 4 direction made on 29 July 2021).



## **9. Summary**

- 9.1 The Hemel Place Strategy work and Hemel Place Board are at the beginning of its journey. However the place shaping approach of many Council teams and partners working together and focusing on one area is already showing success and being welcomed in areas such as the Old Town. As well as in discussions with partners such as the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Hertfordshire Growth Board.
- 9.2 This approach will require support across the Council from all Members and Officers to work together on one ambitious and exciting approach to grow and benefit the future of Hemel Hempstead.