

APPENDIX 2

The Hemel Hempstead Story

Hemel Hempstead is location, location, location.

It is perfectly placed on the edge of London within around a 30 minute drive or train ride of the capital, benefiting from the road links of the M1, M25 and A41, four mainline rail stations along with easy access to five airports. Hemel Hempstead is a place of significant businesses set within beautiful countryside including the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The town and area offer a fantastic and great value quality of life with attractions for all the family, some great places to live, a variety of employment opportunities, all within an environment to envy; a compelling urban green experience.

Most of all, Hemel Hempstead is a place of opportunity and growth. Having been one of the first New Towns, it is reinventing itself for the 21st century with a Garden Community bringing housing and employment, transformation of the urban centre into a place for living, leisure and work, the potential repurposing of development areas near to the town accompanied by a cultural renaissance. The emphasis will be on animating and activating the place with a focus on people and the use of space not just buildings.

As Hemel Hempstead looks to the future it is doing things differently, being proactive, acting with agility, better connecting its assets, collaborating with places and people, and thinking bigger and wider as a destination; this is a place where the prospects are bright.

our Hemel Hempstead story

This story articulates the distinctiveness, character and characteristics of Hemel Hempstead, highlighting what makes it special and the opportunities for the development and promotion of both town and area. The overarching narrative consists of themes, which are pillars and chapters of the story, and a big idea which is the emotional purpose for the place. They represent what needs to be focused on for Hemel Hempstead to prosper. The theme areas combine elements that are already important in the place, alongside its potential, and lesser-known ingredients of the Hemel Hempstead experience.

the destination for enterprise and entrepreneurship

Hemel Hempstead has always been a prime business location and the focal point is Maylands Business Park, home to over 650 businesses employing over 20,000 people. Its strategic location near to London and major national and international connectivity has ensured it is a destination of choice for a variety of companies including global leaders in construction, logistics and technology. The intention is to build on this pedigree to ensure Hemel Hempstead is a beacon for business, attracting businesses looking to relocate but also encouraging entrepreneurs to establish themselves in the centre and area.

Hemel Hempstead hosts many leading businesses including Bourne Leisure, British Standards Institute, Amazon, UTC Aerospace Systems, and Britvic to name just a few. Herts Innovation Quarter is the Enterprise Zone (EZ) for the county focused on attracting a cluster of clean tech, smart construction and enviro-tech businesses to the area, harnessing the leading edge expertise of building sciences specialists BRE Group, agricultural pioneers Rothamsted Research and the University of Hertfordshire; the EZ has various sites on Maylands Business Park.

The town and area have a huge opportunity to grow their enterprise and commercial offer. Hemel Garden Communities will take the best of the existing new town and have a transformational impact on the place with over 11,000 homes and creating 10,000 jobs. The Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter will be at its heart. As the town centre is developed and repurposed, reflecting changes in shopping

habits and the pandemic legacy, there is a wonderful chance to create shared work space, studios and offices bringing business into town. Given that people want more affordable, non-city dependent work options where accessibility to countryside, as well as London is possible must place Hemel Hempstead in a great position to be the place for business and commerce.

treasure our hub for leisure and pleasure

Ever since its development as a New Town, leisure and space have been part of the design DNA of Hemel Hempstead and people are still benefitting from these initiatives today. Apart from the numerous green spaces, people really enjoy the Snow Centre, XC and Hemel Hempstead Sports Centre.

The award-winning Water Gardens are a fabulous and iconic feature of the town centre, creating an enticing environment for locals and visitors to enjoy. However, as you walk down the High Street you may not even know they are there; a great opportunity exists to bring some of this experience right into the centre. The Marlowes, Hemel's 'high street' itself is a wide European style tree-lined boulevard which in itself provides an opportunity for events and animation of the space bringing more colour and vibrancy to town. Hemel Hempstead is also incredibly green from the spaces between housing to the much used parks such as Gadebridge Park; they can provide different facilities and new event opportunities. Equally, it will change the 'feel' of the place if the green is brought more into the centre with smaller urban parks and activity space. Alongside this the Old Town of Hemel Hempstead provides a wonderful contrast to the newer High Street and has the potential for more events, food and drink, culture and experiential activity.

As Hemel Hempstead looks to capitalise on population growth, facilitated by the Garden Community bringing 11,000 homes to the area and increases in town centre living, enhancing its cultural and evening economy offer is a priority. The town has the spaces, opportunities and latent talent to deliver a cultural renaissance which will not only benefit residents but help it develop as a visitor hub for the wider area and attractions. The surrounding area has plenty to offer including the beautiful Ashridge Estate, National Trust property, Harry Potter World, part of the Natural History Museum at Tring, Whipsnade Zoo, Apsley Marina, Champneys Spa Resort as well as glorious villages to explore.

The huge changes impacting town centres including the pandemic, changes in shopping habits, migration out of cities etc., offer up a host of opportunities for Hemel Hempstead which will require a focus on the space between buildings, an event and animation strategy and the imperative of ensuring that the different experiences are curated providing a distinctly Hemel Hempstead sense of place.

shrink and link

For Hemel Hempstead, like many places the future lies in making the most of collaborations and connections both within but importantly outside the place. Hemel Hempstead is the heart and hero of the place but it can't function, grow and thrive without ensuring the place develops in a unified way, pulling together the New Town, Old Town, Maylands, the Garden Community, Berkhamsted, Tring, the ward communities and the Two Waters and Apsley area. They will each have their own story to tell but the whole has to be greater than the sum of the parts; *one Hemel Hempstead*. This has to be supported by a travel and transport offer that brings people and opportunities together, ensures the places that make up the wider Hemel Hempstead experience are linked, and that walking and cycling are prioritised.

Of equal importance is repurposing a town centre that, like most, has too much retail focussing on achieving a balance of living, working and shopping which will require changes in use, and viewing this as a community hub where people come together for multiple purposes. This creates the imperative of a strong leisure and cultural offer ensuring the town centre is somewhere people want to be.

To deliver this it will be vital to ensure Hemel Hempstead has a heart, a meeting place which is the centre of a 'sense of place' experience which places as much emphasis on activating space as it does on physical interventions; a place built around people.

At the same time Hemel Hempstead will be reaching out to strengthen within, it has the opportunity to be the centre, the destination that's part of a wider experience which means building strong relationships with and optimising the benefits from Hertfordshire, the Chilterns, nearby airports, waterways and London.

the big idea for Hemel Hempstead

The Big Idea is an emotional and behavioural statement of intent for Hemel Hempstead and sits above and alongside the themes. It projects what the place is about, what it stands for and what is important. This isn't a strap line or marketing message, rather it is a 'strategic signature' for the whole area.

By changing thinking and doing things differently, Hemel Hempstead can better utilise its assets: radiating influence, building confidence, cultivating and encouraging strong leadership, developing new relationships, bringing business and place together.

growing a fresh new future

Hemel Hempstead, when it first developed as a New Town was an exemplar, a place role model and it has the opportunity and ingredients to do that again; the next stage of its growth will be about reinvention and re-imagination. The opportunities presented by repurposing the High Street; the quirkiness of the old town; the success of Maylands; the amazing green and blue infrastructure; the potential of the Garden Community; the regeneration of Two Waters and Apsley and the relationship with London place it in an enviable position. Hemel Hempstead is on a journey of place-led renaissance predicated on people not buildings, animation not architecture, all driven by a desire of differentiation in how it develops and how it acts.

Hemel Hempstead: connection, collaboration and celebration