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STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision
Date:	5 July 2023
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Wilkie, Portfolio Holder for Place
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Consultation feedback (attached) Appendix 2 – Urban Analysis (attached) Appendix 3 – Public realm opportunities (attached) Appendix 4 – Opportunity sites (attached) Appendix 5 – Hemel Spatial Vision (available via link) hemel-garden-communities-spatial-vision.pdf (hemelgardencommunities.co.uk) Appendix 6 – Our Hemel Story (available via link) HEM-Storybook-web-2022-09-14.pdf (thinkhemel.com) Appendix 7 - Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision Appendix 8 - Community Impact Assessment
Background papers:	Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Masterplan 2011-2021 hemel-hempstead-town-centre-masterplan---adopted-jan-13-(small).pdf (dacorum.gov.uk)
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

Report Author / Responsible Officer

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Corporate Priorities	A clean, safe and enjoyable environment Building strong and vibrant communities Ensuring economic growth and prosperity Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery Climate and ecological emergency
Wards affected	All Hemel Hempstead wards, but Hemel Hempstead Town in particular.
Purpose of the report:	1. To introduce the Town Centre Vision and appendices.
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	1. To support the Town Centre Vision and recommend approval to Cabinet in July 2023.
Period for post policy/project review:	N/A

1 Introduction:

1.1 The Hemel Place work started in summer 2021, Thinking Place, a place branding, marketing and place-making specialist carried out stakeholder engagement. The response to this formed our Hemel Place Story, which has a main big idea and three themes important to the future of Hemel Hempstead;

Big idea – Growing a fresh new future

Theme 1 – A Vibrant Destination for Enterprise

Theme 2 – Enhance your Wellbeing in Hemel

Theme 3 – Where Connections Matter

Promotional Strapline – Where Life is Greener ’

- 1.2 'Our Hemel Story' was launched on July 8th 2022, with an event including external speakers, a range of guests and a new www.thinkhemel.com website.
- 1.3 The Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision follows the themes of 'Our Hemel Story'. This report provides an overview of the Town Centre Vision. The town centre is an important area of the Hemel Place work, hence being given early priority ahead of a Hemel Place Strategy. Like many town centres, and new towns in particular, it needs intervention to support the current businesses and attract a new diverse economy, repurposing vacant units and development sites to a destination for leisure and culture as well as providing homes in a sustainable location.
- 1.4 The main audience for the Vision is developers. Officers attended UKREiiF, an investor's forum held in Leeds, on the 16th -18th May 2023 and showcased this draft version of the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision. The feedback from developers, investors and other delegates was very positive. The focus of the Vision around The Water Gardens ,repurposing Waterhouse Street to provide more space for pedestrians and to curate the space so people can enjoy the River Gade providing access to nature in the town centre was particularly well received.

2 Summary of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision:

- 2.1 The document provides an overarching Vision for the town centre and highlights the main aims and priorities in order to deliver that Vision. It provides an overview of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre for those who are not familiar and a suggested approach to land use and opportunity sites, particularly aimed at investors. Importantly the land uses should remain flexible to be able to respond to active opportunities in the market as they arise.
- 2.2 The main document is accompanied by six appendices, which will work as chapters and each will be relevant to different audiences. For example, the opportunity sites will be of interest to developers, and the public realm opportunities document will help to support any funding bid opportunities in the future.. The appendices are;
 - Appendix 1 - Consultation feedback
 - Appendix 2 – Urban Analysis
 - Appendix 3 – Public realm opportunities
 - Appendix 4 – Opportunity sites
 - Appendix 5 – Hemel Spatial Vision (available via link) hemel-garden-communities-spatial-vision.pdf (hemelgardencommunities.co.uk)
 - Appendix 6 – Our Hemel Story (available via link) HEM-Storybook-web-2022-09-14.pdf (thinkhemel.com)
- 2.3 The Vision sets out eight aims that demonstrate the ambitions for the town centre, along with interventions to deliver them. There are five priorities identified that achieve these eight aims and the drivers for change are explained, highlighting why change has to happen.
- 2.4 Importantly for investors and developers, land use zones and opportunity sites are illustrated. Some of these sites are in council ownership and some are not and this highlights that the council cannot deliver the Town Centre Vision in isolation. Partnership working and engagement with stakeholders is critical for success. All of these sites, regardless of ownership, would be subject to the expected governance and due diligence processes.

2.5 The next steps in the document affirms the council's commitment to a placemaking approach, and how we will work positively with partners, the community, landowners and developers, aligning resources to deliver our Town Centre Vision.

3 Options and alternatives considered

3.1 Do nothing – stop working on the Hemel Place Strategy and Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision. This option is discounted as it is a key priority to attract investment and businesses as well as building reputation and improving civic pride in our communities.

4 Consultation

4.1 A survey was open to residents and communities across Hemel Hempstead from November 2022 – January 2023. Many findings have also been included in the drafting of the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision. 434 people answered the survey which had 21 questions. The questions and responses can be found in Appendix 1.

5 Financial and value for money implications:

5.1 None arising from this report

6 Legal Implications

6.1 None arising from this report

7 Risk implications:

7.1 Resources/budget – there is a risk that the programme of Hemel Hempstead Place and Town Centre work is not resourced sufficiently in the future. The Place Communities and Enterprise service will support the implementation of the place work and this has mitigated this risk. Funding will be on a project basis and officers will look to secure funding from bids and other sources.

7.2 There is a risk that opportunities to attract investment could be lost if our vision for Hemel Hempstead Town Centre is not set out in a way that promotes opportunities and clearly reflects the Council's ambitions to support the aims identified.

7.3 There is a risk that the town centre will continue to decline and further retailers leave the town centre if the Council is not seen to be promoting its ambitions and setting out how it will support future investment.

8 Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

8.1 A Community Impact Assessment was carried out in April 2021 when the Hemel Place work first started. Attached is a Community Impact Assessment focussed on the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision. The aim in the Vision is for the town centre to be a place where the community can meet and be close to nature. The focus will be to develop the town centre so it is accessible to all, including people and communities from a range of diverse backgrounds, fostering community cohesion and celebrating diversity. This is positive for all in the community. There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

9 Sustainability implications

9.1 There are eight aims that set out delivery of the Town Centre Vision (pages 18-19 of the Vision document). Aim no. 4 includes focusing on sustainable transport systems. Creating an environment that better connects the Town Centre to other areas of Hemel (the station, the emerging Hemel Garden Communities, Apsley, Maylands, etc.) whilst supporting active movement and enabling healthy lifestyles and improved wellbeing.

- 9.2 Aim no. 5 focuses on climate change and biodiversity. This includes ensuring that any interventions and actions address the climate and biodiversity challenges we are facing today and in the future. This includes enhancing the biodiversity offer in the town centre to create a healthier environment as well as improve the connection between people and nature.
- 9.3 Aim no. 7 focuses on reinvigorating the town centre and creating an evening economy by providing new residential, community and employment opportunities. A key aim is to make the Town Centre feel safer using creative changes.

10 Council infrastructure

- 10.1 The placeshaping approach at the Council will enable teams to work together in delivering the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision. A multi-disciplinary approach will be taken, which focuses on geographic areas and, importantly, works with the community and stakeholders in the area who know the place best.

11 Conclusions:

- 11.1 In conclusion the committee is invited to consider the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision and support the next step to present the Vision to Cabinet in July 2023 for endorsement.