



Newsletter 1: Summary Report - SOHL Meeting 24 January 2020 **Heathlands Garden Community Proposal**

In response to the issues raised during and after the SOHL Meeting held on 24 January, Maidstone Borough Council Director of Regeneration and Place, William Cornall has provided a Newsletter – as per below, outlining the details and information surrounding the Heathlands Garden Community Proposal:

February 2020:

I am writing to set out and expand on some of the points discussed at the community briefing meeting held at Lenham Community Centre on 24 January 2020, both for those of you who attended the meeting and those of you who were unable to do so.

1. As explained at the meeting, in order to comply with Government policy, the Council is required to plan for some 1,236 new homes to be provided in its area each year from 2022, an increase of 40% on the current number. That is clearly an ambitious and challenging target and means that the Council must explore all possible options for achieving those housing numbers.
2. National planning policy suggests that the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through the planning for larger scale development, provided it is well located and designed and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities. Consequently, one of the options under consideration by the Council in its capacity as a local planning authority (**LPA**), and as part of the current Local Plan Review, is the creation of one or more new "garden communities". With that in mind, in February 2019 the LPA published a "New Garden Communities Prospectus", inviting interested parties to submit proposals to create new garden communities of between 1,500 and 10,000 or more new homes in the borough.
3. The LPA has received a high number of garden community proposals and it is important to make clear that the proposal for Heathlands is only one of those currently under consideration as it is still at an early stage. No decisions have yet been reached on which, if any, of the proposals are to be taken forward as draft allocations in the Local Plan Review. Such decisions are likely to be provisionally taken by the LPA around October 2020 and there will be a further opportunity for you and other interested parties to comment at that stage through a formal public consultation exercise on the LPA's preferred spatial strategy plus alternatives (Regulation 18b).
4. The Heathlands proposal was submitted to the LPA by the Council's Property arm, having opened lines of communication with the principal landowners. In the event that it is to be pursued, any development would be achieved through agreements

with those landowners. The aim would be to ensure that there would be no need for any existing homes to be acquired to make way for the new development and the Council will of course wish to see that any proposals bring overall benefit to the area. Further work will be required to inform the exact locations and scale of any development proposed for Heathlands.

5. At this point, the only decision that has been made is for the Council to continue to explore a council-led garden community at Heathlands. The exploration of a project of this nature is a lengthy and iterative process and the Council is presently at the early stages of this journey, in terms of understanding the position of the principal landowners as well as the overall deliverability of the project.
6. If the proposal for Heathlands progresses, the Council will later this year engage a specialist firm of high-quality design and master planning consultants to further develop the vision. An essential element of their brief will be to consider the potential impact of a new garden community on local residents and the relationship between the existing and new communities. That factor will influence both scheme design and scheme content. A cornerstone of the designer's brief would be that around 50% of the land within the new garden community would be non-residential, and this would include a variety of green space to include a country park, sports pitches, recreation grounds, village greens and enhanced biodiversity and wetland landscapes. As such, there would be an abundance of green space available that could be used as buffers between existing hamlets and homes and any new development. This further design work will also be informed by the findings of the various environmental and technical studies that the Council has recently commissioned too. Furthermore, these further design iterations will be put on the Maidstone Borough Council website: www.maidstone.gov.uk and we would be pleased to put them on display locally for feedback if the community would like this to happen.
7. Not only would the proposals be aimed at enhancing the physical environment and providing significant areas of green space, but if implemented, they would bring a range of new facilities and amenities which would be accessible by existing residents including educational, health, and community facilities and transport infrastructure such as roads, buses, cycle routes as well as affordable housing.
8. To achieve the best possible outcome through the master planning stage it is important that the Council receives input from you, along with the wider community and other stakeholders. For example, we need to hear from you about the type of facilities you consider are most needed in the area and how the content of the scheme could bring benefits to you and your family. Please address any comments you wish to make to: Heathlands@Maidstone.gov.uk
9. Whilst the provision of new housing is very important for the whole borough, the Council fully appreciates that these kinds of proposals can cause concern and uncertainty for those in the immediate area. We will therefore be keeping you up to date with the progress of the proposals for Heathlands through our website at: <https://news.maidstone.gov.uk/home/information> and through regular newsletters.

William Cornall

Director of Regeneration and Place
Maidstone Borough Council