

Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) Delivery Board Minutes

18 July 2024, 14:00 – 16:00

Location: MS Teams & Conference Room 1, The Forum, DBC

Attendees	Bob Lane OBE (Chair)	Hemel Garden Communities
	Councillor Adrian England	Dacorum Borough Council
	Councillor Sheron Wilkie	Dacorum Borough Council
	Councillor Stephen Boulton	Hertfordshire County Council
	Councillor Paul de Kort	St Albans City & District Council
	Claire Hamilton	Dacorum Borough Council
	James Doe	Dacorum Borough Council
	Sara Whelan	Dacorum Borough Council
	Amanda Foley	St Albans City & District Council
	Christine Traill	St Albans City & District Council
	Colin Haigh	Hertfordshire County Council
	Fionnuala Lennon	Homes England
	Phillipa Zieba	Hemel Garden Communities
	Nathalie Bateman	Hemel Garden Communities
	Jonathan Wellstead	Hertfordshire County Council/ Hemel Garden Communities
	Adam Wood	Hertfordshire Futures / Herts IQ
	Vanessa Cooper	Hemel Garden Communities
Apologies	Sarah McLaughlin	Hertfordshire County Council
	Issy Spence	St Albans City & District Council/ Hemel Garden Communities
	Mark Doran	Hertfordshire County Council

Attachments

- Item 2 – Draft HGC Delivery Board Minutes 29 February 2024
- Item 3 – HGC Programme Director’s Update Report
 - Appendix A: Programme Plan Timeline
 - Appendix B: Risk Register
 - Appendix C: Engagement & Activity Plan
 - Appendix D: Team Organogram
- Item 4 – HGC Annual Finance Paper

Item	
1.	<p>Welcome and apologies</p> <p>The Chair noted apologies had been received from Sarah McLaughlin, Issy Spence and Mark Doran and welcomed Cllr de Kort and Cllr England to their first Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) Board.</p> <p>Welcome to Vanessa Cooper who is the new Administration Officer for HGC.</p>

2.	<p>Previous minutes sign off – 29 February 2024</p> <p>The minutes of the HGC Delivery Board, 29 February 2024 were agreed.</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>
3.	<p>Additional Item: The King’s Speech</p> <p>The Chair suggested the meeting include an additional item, following yesterday’s King’s Speech. Discussions included:</p> <p>There were some details in the Labour Manifesto on how Local Plans are produced and New Towns. Government has gone very public on its housing target, which is incredibly ambitious. The pressure is going to be huge to get 1.5 million homes being built over the next 5 years.</p> <p>All County Councils have been written to asking about devolution agreements.</p> <p>The Crown Estate apparently have been given borrowing powers for infrastructure provision. Last administration had started looking into this and this should be perfect for this project – this needs to be confirmed as being correct.</p> <p>The pressure is likely to increase hugely for delivery which was also noted has huge opportunities for the programme.</p> <p>JD confirmed the authorities are looking at what might be achievable in terms of delivery acceleration and what the ask of government might be from the authorities.</p> <p>Cllr England noted the recent letter issued by Angela Rayner - main focus was devolution and growth. This will bring a workforce challenge so need to start planning for this.</p> <p>AW noted that the programme is already shifting to delivery. The programme is in a good place to help government deliver its ambitious agenda.</p> <p>C Hai noted that the skills challenge should be picked up in the future work of Hertfordshire Futures, specifically an Economic Plan will look at sectors and skills alignment.</p> <p>Cllr de Kort noted the potential role of the Herts Growth Board and their role as advocate.</p> <p>Cllr Boulton noted the changed emphasis on the devolution from unitary authorities and County Councils, plus the emphasis on supporting public transport and the importance of how this might be funded.</p>

	<p>It was suggested the HGC Delivery Board may need to meet again before October if things develop that might directly affect the programme.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Programme Director's Update</p> <p>PZ provided a summary on the key workstreams.</p> <p><u>Framework Plan</u></p> <p>Landscape assessment workstreams have been undertaken over recent months so we can robustly defend the boundaries of Hemel Garden Communities. Have been working hard to remove development from sensitive areas, maintain capacity and ensure the plan to be viable.</p> <p>We are now on Scenario D, revision J with around 10,500 units. The financial viability is being rerun. This will be documented in due course to support the Regulation 19 consultations.</p> <p>The Transport Vision and Strategy was endorsed by Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Cabinet last week. Next step is to look at specific interventions. Comet modelling is looking at local plan growth.</p> <p>Paramics modelling is underway and will look at more detailed modelling, specifically around Junction 8. Likely will need Junction 8 improvement works in 3 parts:- 1: upgrade signalisation of a roundabout as you enter Hemel, 2: active and sustainable travel bridge spanning A414; 3: heavy duty bridge that comes in across the M1 for traffic heading South.</p> <p>Initial findings suggest that part 1 and 2 are required in the Plan period. Part 3 is not required until the end of the plan period. Approx. figure for the cost of part 1 and 2 is c.£30 million. The cost of the motorway bridge is significant.</p> <p>Early Comet modelling identifies the requirement for a strong shift to active and sustainability travel in advance of development and a 30% shift of existing travel will require early behaviour change.</p> <p><u>Local Plans Update</u></p> <p>Local Plans evidence and policies are being addressed to inform the Regulation 19 drafts and subsequent supplementary planning documents. St Albans District Council's (SADC) programme is for consultation in October and Dacorum Borough Council's (DBC) is similar.</p> <p>The recent Labour Government announcement on the need to meet housing needs presents the need to potentially consider alternative growth scenarios and some additional modelling and testing may be required.</p> <p>Cllr Wilkie confirmed Dacorum Council are currently working through options with our senior members and remain committed to maintaining timescales. DBC's local plans will require some further work to achieve a supported housing growth scenario.</p>

C Hai gave assurances that HCC will support the process.

The Crown Estate (TCE)

PZ confirmed TCE's investment decision in May 2024 to invest in preparing a planning application on the land east of Hemel Hempstead. There were a number of criteria necessary to provide confidence which included to progress from the local plans. Homes England have some final comments to make on the Memorandum of Understanding. There is a strategic liaison meeting on Monday and a Planning Performance Agreement for LEHH has been underway for some months now and is progressing.

The programme is to work to submission in October 2025 and try to align with Local Plans' examination. This will provide inspectors with confidence that there is a willing and committed developer and a viable scheme. The timescales are tight.

98% of land east of Hemel Hempstead is within St Albans and 2% is Dacorum. This will necessitate proactive engagement, communication and coordination. Members in both authorities will need to be actively engaged and informed as we go through the PPA process. Ideally there will be joint briefings for Members so that everyone hears the same information at the same time. We will potentially also look to align meeting dates.

We are pressing TCE to fully support the land north of Hemel. They have capacity for 1500 homes in the north-west and have been asked to fully support the DBC Local Plan process.

There is more proactive work going on with TCE such as looking at various access options. Gradients are being looked at and the extent of cut, but also land ownership. Marchmont Farm access needs to be re-visited as it is fundamental to delivering access to the rest of the town rather than moving traffic through the Leighton Buzzard Road.

AW noted that the significant financial commitment is an important milestone. TCE are a cautious organisation and will want to take a long-term view. We are lucky to have them as a development partner.

Comms & Engagement

Comms and engagement activities are being refreshed post election.

TCE are holding a public consultation event this evening regarding installing a community garden at the junction between Cherry Tree Lane and Redbourn Road. There is another event on Saturday.

Councillors should have received an invitation to these events. Subject to securing planning permission, the garden would be implemented over the Summer and launched later in the year.

The Councillor Review Group is to be re-instated in the Autumn, initially looking at green infrastructure, health and well-being, stewardship and socio-economic work streams. This will be held on 12 September.

We are arranging another site visit on stewardship and are looking at the Highfield Park Trust in St Albans. It was an NHS land sale and they contributed and initial £2 million to the trust which has been invested. The Trust runs various sports facilities and has some property assets.

We have the Local Plans' Regulation 19 Consultation running between October to December, so will be starting to plan our activities for the new year from Q1 in 2025.

An Annual Review Report has been prepared and circulated. It summarises the work and achievements of HGC over the past year. It will be published on our website in due course.

Claire Hamilton and Cllr Wilkie both noted it is a very good document and congratulated the team.

Other workstreams

A socio-economic and demographic study recently concluded. There are implications for securing high quality and dense employment uses, which will also affect transport movements. This has been discussed with TCE.

AW advised that there would be certain constraints with the proximity to the Buncefield depot and its safety zones. Those areas affected by the safety zones need lower density of employment and so pushes towards distribution or data centres. We should be pushing for high value employment which could be R&D. The strengths of the location lie in sectors such as life sciences.

TCE are receptive to those sorts of conversations and through Herts IQ they have reached out to them in looking at how we can develop some sort of potential joint vision on the type of employment.

There is a draft Nickey Line feasibility study which has an inter-relationship with the DBC Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) workstream.

Capital Projects

There have been two Solar Bulk Buy cohorts: 2022 and 2023. 2023 has recently completed. In 2022 the scheme was hugely popular, resulting in 13,000 registrations across the County and over 1,000 installations. We saw a halving of those levels of activity in 2023, with 122 installations in SADC and 91 in DBC. 2022 provided a significant return, but 2023 has proved more marginal.

In 2023 the scheme resulted in over £4 million private sector investment. PZ asked for the Board's endorsement to funding a further mailshot in the new year.

CH suggested that this scheme may be better resourced elsewhere within DBC. It was suggested the decision be deferred so the proposal can be scrutinised further.

HGC Partnership Memorandum of Understanding

The HGC Memorandum of Understanding governs the relationship of the public sector partners. It looks at the HGC programme and provides the Terms of Reference. It was brought to the Board in December. However, the Board membership has since changed and Herts LEP changed to Herts Futures, so an updated draft will be circulated for signing post Board.

Action: PZ to circulate the updated Memorandum of Understanding.

Resourcing & Recruitment

Vanessa Cooper joined the team last Monday as Administrative Officer. There are currently 3 team vacancies – HGC Transport Lead, Senior Delivery Officer and a Design and Planning Officer.

Risk Register

PZ talked through the risks, broken down into Red and Amber categories:

Red:

- May be a delay with some of the local plan evidence, principally the transport intervention. The Chair asked if HCC could offer support in resolving any possible issues with the evidence and advancing modelling.

Amber:

- Inability to meet ambitious modal shift targets. Early modelling suggests a need for a 30% reduction on existing journeys. This will need to be an early piece of work to make sure there is adequate behaviour change.
- There were long-term finance arrangements to fund the programme for a certain period, which is coming towards the end. This requires the development of a sustainable funding strategy.

In response to queries on the risks, PZ advised that it would be difficult to say if the modal shift targets can be achieved. There are multiple aspects to the risk. One is around community support, noting what happened in St Albans post Covid with some road closures. Often residents are not favourable to restriction of movement. It may be unpopular to prioritise bus transport at junctions, for example. There is the financial aspect in funding this upfront in advance of developer contributions. Our two key partners, HCC and National Highways need confidence in our plan - HCC that it is credible and National

	<p>Highways as they would be concerned as a statutory consultee and avoiding impact on the motorways.</p> <p>There is a lot of work already in play, lots of local plan evidence and lots of previous work to build on with HCC and then delivery over 3-5 years. A plan of action is needed on the comms to support the community engagement.</p> <p>The team are looking to schedule a half-day workshop for the end of August to discuss transport.</p> <p>Claire Hamilton asked for HGGT to be invited to attend a future Board meeting to update on their progress in achieving similarly challenging mode share targets.</p> <p>Action: HGC to invite HGGT transport colleagues to attend the next Board.</p>
4.	<p>HGC Finance Paper</p> <p>Year End 2023/24: Costs came in short of £1.2million. The majority is team resources with a significant expenditure in technical studies.</p> <p>Proposed budget for 2024/25: Significant increase in comms and engagement activities which reflects the programme post Regulation 19 - getting out into the local communities to talk about specifics of the HGC programme.</p> <p>There will also be a significant increase in technical studies and a marginal 9% increase in staffing costs.</p> <p>These bring the total expenditure up by 25% to just short of £1.5 million.</p> <p><u>Staffing:</u></p> <p>An allowance has been included for recruitment and external agencies such as HYAS to support the programme delivery and comms activities, and best practice. We have a gap with our transport lead and are using WSP two or three days a week to cover that area.</p> <p>We have some challenges in filling certain roles, and this is challenging particularly in addressing transport issues.</p> <p><u>Technical studies:</u></p>

The majority of costs is on transport studies which includes behaviour change, parking strategies and other work streams.

Delivery workstreams:

This is our second biggest expenditure. Looking at planning strategy and land assembly, noting any potential compulsory purchase requirements.

IDP workstream:

This will be very important next year. Once the local plans are in place there will be a resourcing focus to identify infrastructure needs beyond the plan period.

Income and Expenditure:

(£,000s)

PZ noted brought forward funding is declining year on year.

A Sustainable funding strategy was highlighted earlier as a risk and discussions have commenced with partners over their future years' commitment.

PZ advised of the following recommendations being put forward to the Board:

- Board to note the 2023/24 programme delivery and year-end financial position as set out in the HGC Finance Paper circulated ahead of the meeting
- Board to endorse the programme and budget for 2024/25
- Board to note the indicative budget for future years set out in the HGC Finance Paper.

PZ advised that a further developer pre-app request is expected which shows a ripple effect of confidence in the programme.

A discussion took place on compulsory purchase. An understanding of our process is needed. CH requested the emerging CPO Strategy be brought back to Board.

Action: HGC CPO strategy to be brought back to the Board.

	<p>The Board endorsed the Finance recommendations.</p>
6.	<p>AOB</p> <p>There were no other items.</p> <p>The next meeting date is Tuesday, 1 October 2024 at 10.00 a.m.</p>