



Communications and Engagement Strategy

Creating a greener, more connected New Town

November 2024

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Hemel
Garden
Communities

- 04 ABOUT HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES
- 09 ROLE OF HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES
COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
- 10 KEY PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT
- 11 OUR AUDIENCE
- 12 A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS AND
ENGAGEMENT
- 13 LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- 15 LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Any questions regarding this strategy should be sent to the Hemel Garden Communities
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Hemel Garden Communities is an ambitious development programme that will transform Hemel Hempstead, creating attractive and sustainable new neighbourhoods and communities to the north and east of the town, through the delivery of up to 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs, by 2050. Located in the heart of the Golden Triangle between Oxford, Cambridge and London, Hemel Garden Communities will draw on the best of local heritage and culture, to become a greener and more connected version of Geoffrey Jellicoe's original New Town design.

The Government awarded Garden Town status to Hemel Hempstead in March 2019, to deliver the Hemel Garden Communities Programme. With the support of Homes England, it is being overseen by the key partners, Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Futures and Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter, who are working with The Crown Estate and other landowners. There will be a wide variety of benefits, including:

New high-quality homes, of which 40 per cent will be affordable

New neighbourhoods set around vibrant local centres, green spaces and play areas, all easily accessed on foot

Sustainable travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport, which will be prioritised as we target a greener, healthier environment, which includes open spaces as well as new country and district parks

Many of the new employment opportunities will be delivered through the Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter, a new business park with a range of facilities including flexible office and industrial spaces and a variety of amenities to serve the local community. This, along with the creation of sustainable transport choices and links between Maylands, the town centre and Hemel Hempstead train station, plus wider connections to both St Albans City and St Albans Abbey train stations, will ensure that communities are better connected and more resilient.

The foundations for this programme were set out in the Hemel Garden Communities Charter, which led to the Spatial Vision, a high-level document that provides a series of aspirations for the future of Hemel Garden Communities, to inform masterplanning and guide landowners and developers.

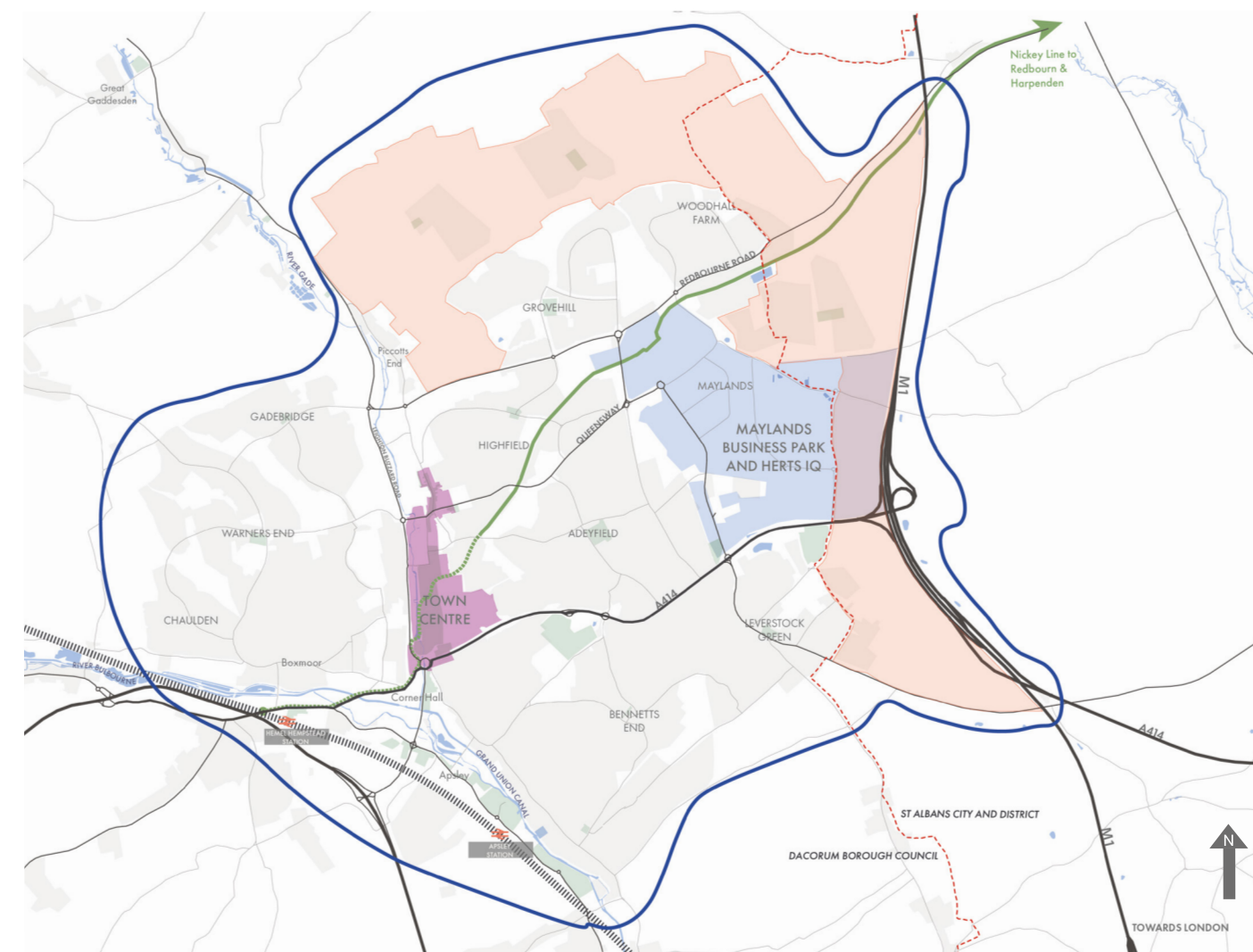


Figure 1: Hemel Garden Communities Programme Area and Context Map

- Dacorum Borough and St Albans District Boundary
- Area of HGC Influence
- ||||| Railway Line
- The Nickey Line (Disused Railway)
- Existing Settlement
- North and East Hemel Growth Areas (HGC)
- Maylands Business Park and Herts IQ
- Existing Hemel Town Centre

The Charter provides an insight into the key vision principles of the development that will be delivered through the Hemel Garden Communities Programme, our aspirations for high-quality, innovative design, and the key studies and plans, infrastructure improvements and the wider benefits planned for the town.

The key themes are:

- 1. Place and Design:** Hemel Garden Communities will respond to the pressing issues of social inclusion and climate change, provide economic opportunities, and take advantage of new and emerging technologies.
- 2. Engagement:** Hemel Garden Communities will be developed through a partnership of existing and new communities, public agencies and the private sector.
- 3. Delivery:** The timely delivery of homes and supporting infrastructure will build communities and support a high-quality, sustainable and inclusive place.



Figure 2: The Charter sets out aspirations for high quality placemaking. Example image from Marmalade Lane development

The Spatial Vision builds on Hemel Hempstead's strengths and sets out how the Hemel Garden Communities will look, once the development and transformation is complete.

The Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision pillars, shaped by the Hemel Garden Communities Charter Principles, which draw on the legacy of the original Garden Cities and New Towns bringing them into the 21st Century, are designed to articulate the Hemel Garden Communities Programme's ambition for the specific context of Hemel Hempstead and the wider area. The vision is organised into four thematic pillars, all of which reinforce the aspirations to 'Promote Healthy Lifestyles' and 'Respond to the Climate Crisis'.

Hemel Garden Communities will be home to inclusive, Integrated Neighbourhoods, connected by A Green Network. They will be thoughtfully designed places with Engaged Communities, all underpinned by digital connectivity, A Self-Sustaining Economy and pioneering green technology driven by Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter.

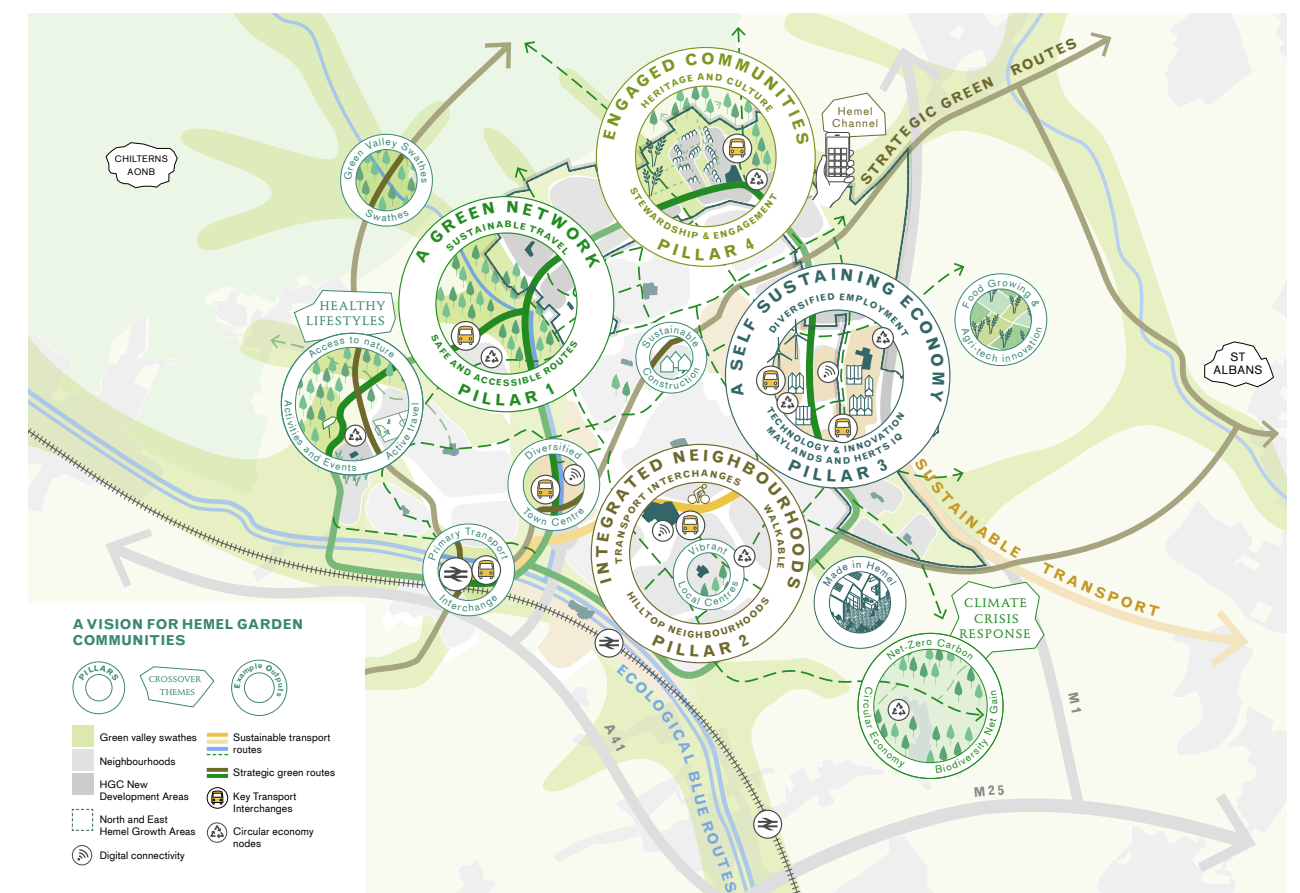


Figure 3: Hemel Garden Communities Vision Diagram (Spatial Vision Document)

Hemel Garden Communities has spent the last year engaging with the community, including local Councillors and residents, to share updates on the HGC Programme and gather feedback on strategies and work to shape proposals.

This has taken place through a Health & Wellbeing and Green Infrastructure Workshop, in September 2023. Public engagement included supporting DBC and SADC Local Plan events in September and December 2023. HGC has also run two public surveys over the last year one focused on 'Healthy Lifestyles' and the other which was focused on stewardship, called 'Taking Care of our Spaces, Places and Communities.'

The Hemel Garden Communities Review 2023/24 was published in 2024 to summarise and is available on the HGC website ([here](#)).

During 2024, we have continued this engagement and have run a Councillor Showcase session in September 2024 to share the current progress of the programme with elected members. Then to prepare for the creation of our Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) in 2025, we ran a workshop in November 2024 for partners, members and key stakeholders. It focused on how why the SPDs are needed and how we will prepare the content for the Framework & Transformation SPD and the for Stewardship SPD.



Councillor Showcase, September 2024



Supplementary Planning Document Workshop, November 2024



This Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed to provide clear guidance for all communications and engagement carried out through the Hemel Garden Communities Programme. It sets out minimum requirements to meet legal compliance, but goes beyond that to deliver best practice as well as more ambitious aims, so that the community can help to shape the programme and the development on the ground.

The strategy will underpin our engagement and consultation throughout the delivery of the Hemel Garden Communities Programme. Sharing information and engaging with all our stakeholders and community representatives, from the earliest stages and throughout the process, is key to a successful and sustainable project and fundamental to the Government's Garden Communities Programme as a whole.

This Communications and Engagement Strategy is designed to be used by anyone supporting the Hemel Garden Communities team to deliver the programme. It provides context, objectives and principles for engaging with the community.

The strategy has a number of Aims across three key areas, as follows:

People:

- Builds a trust that future growth and development will be informed by their views and needs
- Builds confidence and skills to pro-actively participate in Hemel Garden Communities
- Builds a sense of ownership and pride in Hemel Garden Communities

Programme:

- Facilitates a Communications and Engagement Plan to support the key workstreams
- Provides a framework for consistent and robust engagement activities within the Hemel Garden Communities Programme
- Encourages effective, collaborative working with key delivery

Place:

- Delivers new development and transformation, responding to local needs and the aspirations of the Hemel Garden Communities Charter and Spatial Vision
- Ensures Hemel's heritage, Jellicoe's original New Town plan and the culture of the local area is reflected in the transformation delivered through the new development
- Supports the integration of communities, through the development and delivery of the programme

The following Key Principles will inform our approach to communications, engagement and consultation:

1. OPPORTUNITY

- Raise awareness and provide up-to-date information on engagement processes
- Facilitate constructive contributions and influence over outcomes
- Add value by building the skills all of those involved within and outside of the HGC Programme
- Build long-term, sustainable relationships

2. CLARITY

- Use plain English and explain any planning or technical terms used
- Explain the purpose of engagement, scope and level of influence over outcomes

3. INCLUSIVITY

- Broaden reach using inclusive communications and activity formats
- Actively encourage engagement of groups previously under-represented in the planning process (identified in the Authorities' Statements of Community Involvement).

4. TRANSPARENCY

- Make all documents readily publicly available, whilst protecting the personal details of participants in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations/Data Protection Act 2018
- Report on how contributions have been taken into account (usually through a dedicated section in the relevant study/plan/document on which engagement took place, or through a standalone public report/bulletin)

5. FLEXIBILITY

- Learn from what is and isn't successful
- Enable those engaged to shape the Strategy and how they are engaged

We will be communicating and engaging with an extensive range of people (our stakeholders) as part of the Hemel Garden Communities Programme - all of those who are fundamental to helping us shape its delivery. These include, but are not limited to:

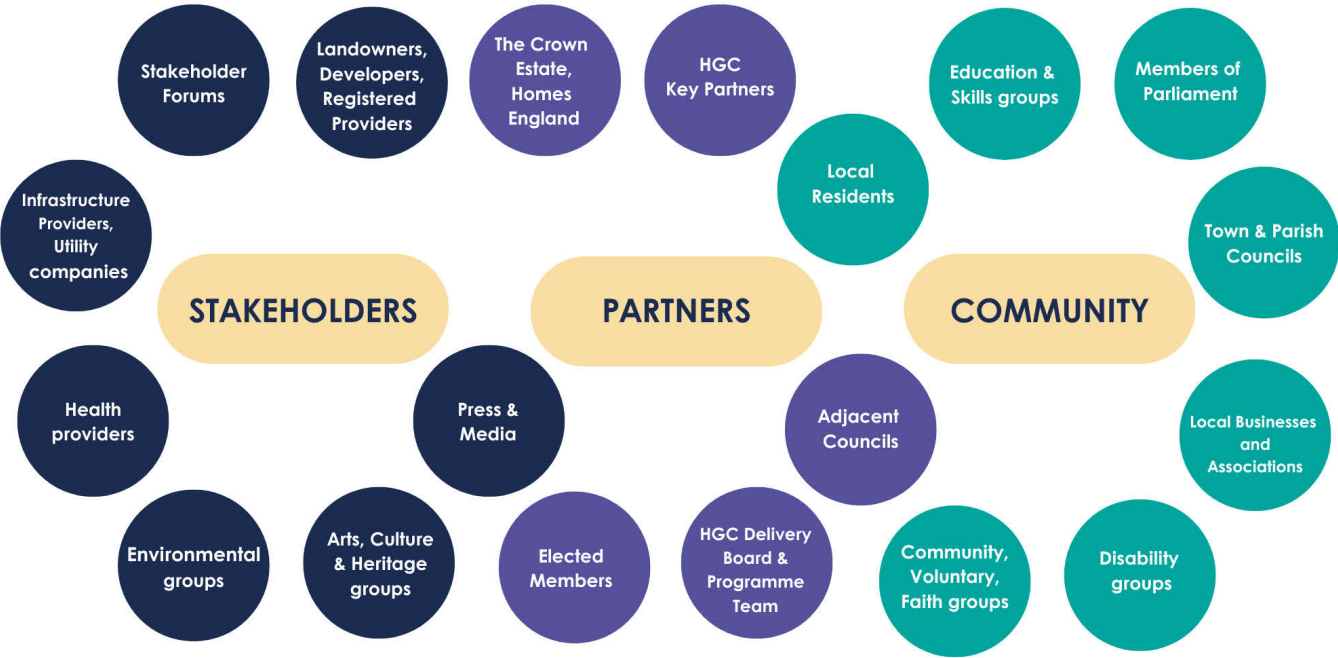
Key partners (Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County

Council, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

- Elected Members (Councillors)
- Homes England
- The Crown Estate and other landowners
- Adjacent councils (Three Rivers District Council, local Parish and Town Councils representing the areas adjacent to the programme area)
- Members of Parliament
- Stakeholder Forums eg Quality Review Panel, Community Review Panel, Youth Panel
- Developers, registered providers, housing associations
- Infrastructure providers, utility companies
- Health providers
- Environmental groups
- Local residents
- Community, voluntary, faith groups
- Disability groups
- Education, skills groups
- Local businesses and associations
- Arts, culture and heritage groups
- Leisure and tourism groups
- Press/media
- Wider stakeholders identified within the specific needs of the programme

Our approach will be inclusive and will endeavour to include hard-to-reach groups and all ages. Whilst our main communications and engagement platform will be digital, we will, where appropriate, undertake alternative formats, eg face-to-face. We will always provide feedback from our engagement and explain how people’s views have informed the programme. The results of each consultation event will be published on our website www.hemelgardencommunities.co.uk.

Examples of our stakeholders are illustrated in the diagram following. There is no hierarchy, all are equally important and we will add additional groups as they are identified. A specialist communications forum, established through our governance structure and representing our key partners, is supporting the programme and the delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy and they will maintain and update the full Stakeholder List.



We have devised a structured approach to communications and engagement to facilitate best practice, as follows:

i) **Prioritising our Key Workstreams**

There are four Key Workstreams, set out below, that are currently being progressed through the Hemel Garden Communities Programme. For each of these, a detailed Communications and Engagement Plan will be developed, to ensure they will be informed by local knowledge and that they align with the relevant Local Plans and support the Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision and Charter Principles.

Framework Plan

The purpose of the Framework Plan is to provide a spatial and infrastructure framework for the Hemel Garden Communities Programme Area, with a detailed focus on the North and East of Hemel Hempstead Growth Areas and a strategic outline of infrastructure requirements for the wider town of Hemel Hempstead. It will also include a supporting viability assessment.

Transport Plan

Developing a programme of transport infrastructure projects and supporting initiatives will enable the existing and new communities of Hemel to travel sustainably in the future. We will focus on infrastructure and accessibility improvements, to achieve positive modal shift change and increase the amount of journeys made through active travel and sustainable transport.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Hemel Garden Communities is preparing an overarching Infrastructure study, to ensure we have an informed understanding of the major and deliverable infrastructure that is required to deliver the level of growth proposed and to deliver on the Garden Communities’ vision and aspirations – including schools, community facilities, green space, transport, utilities and health.

Transformation Plan

The transformation of Hemel Hempstead and surrounding communities is a guiding principle for the Hemel Garden Communities Programme. Securing the infrastructure required to support growth and the opportunities and transformational change for local people, will open up access to education and jobs, connect communities and promote convergence. The wider Hemel Garden Communities Transformation agenda is about achieving the long-term aims of the Spatial Vision - transitioning from New Town to Garden Town.

ii) **Collaboration and Cohesion**

Although engagement events and activities will be carried out on a project-by-project basis and led by different programme partners at different times, a coordinated approach will be taken so that it will form part of a cohesive, over-arching Hemel Garden Communities narrative for the public and stakeholders to follow.

We will explore ways to go beyond informing and consulting and exceed the partner councils' Statement of Community Involvement provisions, which set out the standards for involving the community in the planning process and identify the ways to achieve these standards.

Engagement should enable and empower people to influence outcomes. The aim is to work with our existing and future communities, partners and stakeholders and build an ongoing relationship, ensuring that the development process is as collaborative as possible. We will provide feedback to the community on the outcomes from engagement and how they have influenced these.

At project inception, engagement activities or events should be discussed with the Hemel Garden Communities Programme Team. This will allow agreement of a project-based engagement plan, prepared by site promoter(s), consultants or project leads, as appropriate.

iii) Targeted Methods of Communications and Engagement

To encompass proactive communication about the programme, through to specific project-based consultation. Our range of methods will include:

- Social media eg @Hemelgardencommunities and LinkedIn
- Hemel Garden Communities website <http://www.hemelgardencommunities.co.uk/>
- Community Forums
- Community initiatives
- Competitions to help shape ideas for delivery
- Info videos
- E-newsletters – sign up on our website
- Press releases
- Press briefings
- Promotion of current engagement on the consultation page of our website
- Statutory consultations
- Use of consultation platforms e.g.

iv) Varied Levels of Engagement

Different levels of public participation will be appropriate for different projects and at different stages in the process. When engagement is planned for projects, it should be clear what type of event is required and the purpose of each stage of engagement needs to be considered carefully.

v) Monitoring and Measuring Progress

Reporting results

The Hemel Garden Communities Team will publish the results of focused engagement activities (eg public consultations) via our established channels and directly to our governance bodies. Our partners, as well as developers, are also asked to publish the outcomes of their engagement activities via their own communications platforms, along with formal documentation eg a Statement of Community Involvement accompanying planning applications.

The Hemel Garden Communities Programme Team will provide guidance to our delivery partners and consultants to help create alignment in methodologies for collecting, analysing, feeding back and publicising engagement and communications activities. This will help to ensure consistency in detail, accuracy and transparency.

It is important that the collaboration between partners demonstrates how feedback from the consultative processes has been followed up, including providing reasons why some feedback may not have been actioned. As part of this process, we will track our activity and maintain feedback and consultation analysis, to support accurate reporting.

Evaluation

Given the length of the programme and commitment to innovation, the Hemel Garden Communities Programme Team, along with key partners, will regularly evaluate this strategy and the communications and engagement methods set out within it, to ensure that it is effectively enabling the approach of community-led delivery.

Some engagement is informal, for example early-stage engagement to learn about people's aspirations and draw on local knowledge. Consultation, however, is more formal, so legal compliance must be considered. Consultation may come about as a result of explicit requirements in legislation. Consultation case law has established the concept of 'legitimate expectation', which would apply, for example, where undertakings to carry out consultation have been made, or where people could reasonably expect to be consulted.

Where formal consultation is undertaken, it must be legally compliant, including by meeting 'Gunning Principles', which were established through case law. In summary, these are:

- A Proposals must be at a formative stage, so that there is no predetermination of decisions.
- B Sufficient information is provided and is accessible to allow for 'intelligent consideration', so that people can contribute an informed response.
- C There is adequate time for people to respond (the time period for response should be stated).
- D Decision-makers must give conscientious consideration to consultation responses and demonstrate this has been done.

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