

Housing and Development Group (HDG)

(Working Group to SELEP)

Tuesday 22nd September 2020

Video Conference – MS Teams

1. Introductions and Apologies – Nick Fenton (Chair)

Chair welcomed attendees to the video conference call and thanked them for attending.

2. Review & Agree Notes/Action Points of Previous Meeting – Nick Fenton

The notes of the previous meeting were approved.

On the Action Points:

Brian Horton will speak with partners regarding the Viability Protocols.

The Kent Rural Housing Protocol is due to be launched imminently and will be shared, Keith Harrison from Active Communities Rural Kent will be invited at a future meeting to present this to the group.

Ian Piper is still waiting for MHCLG to approve Estate Management Plan for bringing it to the group.

3. SELEP Update – Alex Riley

Alex Riley noted ongoing work at SELEP over the previous few months, with particular regard to the economic intelligence and evidence gathering work that has been undertaken. Some of which can be found on the SELEP website: <https://www.southeastlep.com/our-strategy/economic-data-and-intelligence/>

It was also noted that SELEP recently produced a COVID-19 Economic Response Statement – which is included in the link above. That details short term measures that SELEP has undertaken in response to the pandemic. With the delay of the Devolution White Paper, there is a sense that we need to be proactive in terms of developing our strategies and plans and so SELEP will likely proceed regardless with work on recovery planning – of which the working groups will be engaged on in due course.

Brian Horton noted that partners are working on a response to Robert Jenrick's letter which will be shorter than the original correspondence. This will be shorter than the original letter and will detail the top five issues we want to take forward.

There is continued engagement on market intelligence meetings with MHCLG and Homes England, which are now monthly as opposed to weekly, and the top five issues will be fed through that forum.

A letter has also been received from portfolio holders from ECC and KCC, copying in colleagues from ESCC, and have requested that Developer Group Chairs meet with them in advance of the meeting with the Housing Minister.

Dialogue is also continuing with Localis following the essays from the Developer Group Chairs, with a virtual event planned on the horizon.

Chair has also been in contact with the APPG for SME Housebuilders and they have been impressed with our correspondence to date. The Housing Minister will be attending their next meeting and issues will be fed through that forum as well.

Chair encouraged members of the group to provide feedback on these discussions, with suggestions for items that should be emphasised or if anything is missing, noting that members have the contact details of Brian and the Developer Group Chairs.

4. I-Construct Update – Jemma Little

Jemma Little updated the group that I-Construct had its first breaking ground event for the Innovation Hub in Braintree - for the start of the build which has started and is due to last nine months. James Cleverly attended this. There is hope that there will be positive press out of that, with Braintree leading on local press side and planning on putting out a press release to trade and professional press, which aims to give profile to the overall project.

On the communications & PR side, a communications agency has been appointed in terms of branding and website build. A communications manager has also been appointed in the team to get the message out to SMEs and individuals across the industry.

A panel of industry experts has been successfully recruited with the idea of providing SMEs access to nine hours of mentoring support.

Work is ongoing on supply chain development, engaging with a potential client base for SMEs. Including attending a Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) 'Meet the Buyer' event to engage with a potential client base for SMEs. The LTC project is also being supported by the Sustainability Supply Chain School and some of their advisors is joining the expert panel. Other major projects and client groups are also being engaged.

Once there is a client group established a series of webinars will be set up. Jemma or a member of her team may be in contact to link working group members to the I-Construct project.

Ian Piper is interested in receiving details about the programme and how it might link to the Ebbsfleet Garden City.

Liz Gibney would also be keen to catch-up with Jemma after the meeting on this subject.

Lucy Spencer-Lawrence asked to ensure this project is linked in with the SELEP Major Projects Group – Jemma has had some discussions with this group and agreed it would be good to be involved with this.

5. Planning for the Future – Planning White Paper 2020 – Feedback to MHCLG – Jonathan Buckwell/All

Brian Horton provided context on this agenda item, noting the discussion on this agenda item will feed into the dialogue with MHCLG/Homes England on this subject.

Jonathan Buckwell updated that the consultation is ongoing on the Planning White Paper which is proposing significant changes to the current planning system. Asking the working group their thoughts on a potential joint response – recognising there will be points of disagreement but seeking the common ground.

The White Paper proposes:

- Faster and shorter Local Plan – a zoning system in effect
- Modernisation and greater use of digital data
- Design and sustainability – design codes/officers and fast-tracking good design
- Changes to development contribution system – bringing a new infrastructure level to replace community infrastructure levy and s106.

Consultation runs until the 29th October 2020.

Jonathan wanted to ask the group if there are shared areas of concern or support on the White Paper.

Alistair Pollock outlined the key points coming out of the EDG response is the challenging timeframe proposed for Local Plan production, required housing numbers have gone up across the area, affordable housing issue and we should be looking at more affordable housing in areas of high need, the impact on the greenbelt, infrastructure funding is putting a lot of onus on local authorities which raises issue around risk sharing, timing and revenue generation. The overall ambition is positive but asking questions around unintended consequences.

Jonathan noted wider concerns around how the infrastructure levy will work across different regions in the country and some areas might struggle to raise funds at all.

Jemma agreed and stated that there is also a lot of change in the pipeline in terms of local government form and potential unintended consequences of all these policies considered together. Issue around how affordable and social housing will be delivered particularly in rural areas will small-scale developments.

Dave Harris noted that there is a worry on the timescale for Local Plans with some taking nearly a decade. A lot of delay has been caused by Government changing targets, as well as Highways England, which are delays out of local authority control. Also, most district councils do not have design skills and there is a potential resource issue in terms of market supply and cost. The binding agreement is an issue if there is a recession for example, and local authorities do not directly deliver a lot of housing, what the penalties for not delivering on these targets are should be clarified.

Chair recognised that there will be differing views coming out of the private and public sector on these proposals. Understanding it is important to steer this carefully and being careful about potential conflicts. Jonathan agreed and recognised they will not be looking to answer every consultation question but just on areas where there is joint agreement.

Graham Thomas agreed and noted there will be various views. There is potential many more unintended consequences for public and private sector than currently recognised. Local authorities need clarification on how the infrastructure element will work, any forward funding of critical infrastructure in the way that is proposed does not look workable. Infrastructure should be aligned with growth and if that breaks down delivering new development will be even more difficult. There is also discussion in the local authorities sector that this is thought of as more of a Green Paper given the gaps and lack of clarity.

Brian asked if there were any positives to identify in the White Paper with particular regard to larger strategic sites – such as garden communities. Jonathan responded that bringing larger/strategic level developments into the NSIP regime and this seems a sensible way to try and deliver garden communities.

Jo Ellis stated with regard to responses it is important to note the number of organisations and individuals that the response is representing.

6. AOB

Meeting closed.

The next meeting is scheduled for 10.30 am Tuesday 3 rd November 2020 on MS Teams.

Future Meeting Dates

10.30 am Tuesday 19 January 2021 – MS Teams
10.30 am Tuesday 23 March 2021 – MS Teams
10.30 am Tuesday 11 May 2021 – MS Teams
10.30 am Tuesday 29 June 2021 – MS Teams

Action Log carried forward from 4 August 2020 Meeting:

1. Coordinate further discussions on Viability Protocols (Brian Horton)
2. The Kent Rural Housing Planning Protocol will be shared with the group when ready (Brian Horton)
3. Ebbsfleet's Estate Management Model will be shared with the group when ready (Ian Piper)
4. Provide time on future agenda for an item on Planning and Wellbeing item to be led by Jeremy Potter (Brian Horton)
5. I-Construct Ian Piper is interested in receiving details about the programme and how it might link to the Ebbsfleet Garden City (Jemma Little)
6. Contact Liz Gibney would also be keen to catch-up with Jemma on I-Construct after the meeting on this subject (Jemma Little)