

Agenda item 5

Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) – Establishing a Hertfordshire Developers Forum

Report Author: Patsy Dell, Hertfordshire Growth Board (Tel: 07949 887794)

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The work programme for 2021 identified the desire to explore the options and potential benefits from establishing a joint Developers Forum for Hertfordshire.
- 1.2 At the present time, the Growth Board does not have a process of engagement with the development sector that is active in Hertfordshire. Previous arrangements operated by a number of Hertfordshire's District and Borough Councils have reduced over time and are now more limited to ad hoc and periodic events in the main. The LEP has sector discussions as and when needed.
- 1.3 Achievement of the work programme priorities and support for the development and construction sector activities, including the delivery of the homes that Hertfordshire needs will be assisted by introducing more regular and focussed engagement with key operators. It is also a recognised best practice approach to have on-going engagement with the sector in terms of any place-based intervention and funding support arrangements secured with HM Government.
- 1.4 This paper explores the principles and next steps in establishing a Hertfordshire Developers Forum (this is a working title for the moment).

2 Shaping a Developers Forum for Hertfordshire

- 2.1 Developers groups have been successfully established in Kent, Sussex and Essex. They have provided a forum where the private and public sectors can work together to focus on delivery, to help remove barriers to growth and deliver future economic prosperity in their respective areas.
- 2.2 The Growth Board wants to create a developer's group which will provide a forum for more focussed engagement between the Growth Board partners with house builders, developers and their consultants.
- 2.3 There are a number of different models across the UK. The links below provide details of a range of examples from the more standard planning agents type forum (from Hove BC, Cambridge City and Cornwall Councils) to the more industry focussed Essex and Kent Developers Groups.
<https://www.housingessex.org/essex-developers-group/>
<https://www.locateinkent.com/khdg>
<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-agents-area/planning-agents-forums/>
<https://planningagentsforum.co.uk/>
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/planning-agents-forum>

- 2.4 In setting up a forum for Hertfordshire, the Board needs to be clear what would be important for it to get out of the arrangement and also what the sector would want/find useful. The Growth Board would ideally be looking for relevant market intelligence and advice, the ability to take sounding on growth board work, positive engagement and influence with the sector in the delivery of good growth and placemaking (and growth board programmes), feedback from the sector on barriers to delivery and closer working with the sector on joint advocacy with Government.
- 2.5 In turn, the sector is likely to also want information about the work of the board and also better access to senior officers and Members of the Board.
- 2.6 Being clear at the outset what all participants want from any forum arrangement will be key to successful design and on-going participation. There may also be participants who just want information and nothing more. In preparing this paper officers have taken informal soundings from a number of developers as well as contacting Essex CC to discuss the operation of the Essex Developers Group.
- 2.7 There has been sector feedback that this initiative would be welcomed and offers of support to help in getting it established have also been made.

3 Principles to be considered in forming a Developers Forum/Group

- 3.1 There are a number of administrative matters that would need to be considered in establishing a Hertfordshire Developers Forum group. Whilst officers can resolve those on behalf of the board there are some principles that it would be helpful to get the board's steer on upfront.
- 3.2 **Membership** – there are options ranging from establishing a body that the Growth Board coordinates and provides the administration and secretariat for, through to encouraging the development sector to co-design and develop a membership organisation which charges a subscription to be part of – as is the case in Essex and Kent. The subscription approach ensures that secretariat and other costs are covered, the alternative would need to be funded by the Growth Board. A membership organisation led by the sector itself would effectively invite the growth board's participation onto it. There are benefits to both of these options.
- 3.3 **Frequency of meetings** – depending upon the form that is chosen for Hertfordshire, meetings could start on a six-monthly basis and move to quarterly or a different frequency over time and if that was considered desirable.
- 3.4 **Content of meetings** – these would vary but typically could cover sharing of information, discussion on specific topics and engagement with the sector and the board.
 - Sharing of information about the sector and specific issues such as Covid, Brexit etc
 - Sharing of information about the work of the Growth Board, Hertfordshire's housing pipeline and strategic sites delivery

- Regular informative events on key place-related topics such as Budget announcements, Planning White paper NPPF changes, environment, transport, viability and other issues;
- Discussion about specific initiatives in Hertfordshire, focus group type opportunities to get more sector specific feedback into the Growth Board.

3.5 **Attendance** – if the Growth Board takes a lead in helping establish whatever form of developer forum is preferred then attendance can be board members and appropriate officers depending upon the agenda. Properly managed, there is also an opportunity for the members of Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership to play a leading role in this engagement as the representative planning leads from across the councils.

4 Conclusion and next steps

4.1 The report has set out a number of considerations and general principles involved in setting up a developer’s forum. This is with the intent of facilitating discussion at the board. Officers suggest that the board gives general direction on its preferences so they can be discussed with the sector and a firm proposal can be brought back to the June Growth Board meeting. The first forum could then take place in September 2021.

5 Implications

5.1 There are no adverse legal, financial, equalities, environmental, sustainability or other implications arising from this report and its recommendations which support the ongoing work and priorities of the Growth Board.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That the Board provides feedback to officers on preferences for the development of a Hertfordshire Developers Forum. The preferences to be worked up into a firm proposal, including engagement with the sector as needed, for consideration at the June 2021 Growth Board Meeting.