

Attendees:

<b>AB</b>	Adam Berger	Locate East Sussex	<b>DMr</b>	David Martin	Stiles Harold Williams Partnership
<b>AF</b>	Ashton Freeman	Optivo	<b>EP</b>	Erica Peck	Rydon Homes
<b>AP</b>	Andrew Palmer	Hastings BC / ES Housing/Planning Officers Groups	<b>ES</b>	Edward Sheath	East Sussex CC
<b>AS</b>	Andrew Simpson	Andrew Simpson Planning Consultants	<b>JBk</b>	Jonathan Buckwell	DHA Planning
<b>BC</b>	Barry Chamberlain	Wealden Homes	<b>JBI</b>	Jody Bulman	Rentplus
<b>BG</b>	Billy Greening	Terrapin Group	<b>JH</b>	Josh Hemmings	Homes England
<b>BHk</b>	Ben Hook	Rother DC	<b>KB</b>	Kim Bloxham	East Sussex CC
<b>BHr</b>	Brian Horton	SELEP	<b>MC</b>	Mike Cogswell	Locate East Sussex
<b>CBe</b>	Chris Bending	Wealden DC	<b>NF</b>	Nick Fenton	Nick Fenton Associates
<b>CBr</b>	Chris Broome	Sea Change Sussex	<b>NT</b>	Nathan Thompson	Eastbourne BC / Lewes DC
<b>CMr</b>	Chris Moore	Bellway Homes	<b>PT</b>	Paul Thomas	Development Land Services Ltd / SELEP
<b>DE</b>	Dave Evans	East Sussex CC	<b>SR</b>	Stacey Robins	Wealden DC
<b>DMh</b>	David Maher	Barton Willmore	<b>TH</b>	Tim Hickling	Rother DC / ES Planning Officers Group

Apologies:

<b>CMo</b>	Chris Moore	Homes England	<b>RW</b>	Richard White	Optivo
<b>EE</b>	Eleanor Evans	Hastings BC	<b>SJ</b>	Shona Johnstone	Homes England
<b>RC</b>	Rupert Clubb	East Sussex CC			

***Any papers or presentations used at this meeting can be viewed on the following page of the ESCC website:***  
[www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/des/des200721](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/des/des200721)

**1. Welcome and introductions**

- 1.1. **JBk** welcomed the group and delivered the apologies.

**2. Economy Recovery**

- 2.1. **ES** provided a progress update on the *East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan (ERP)*, which was initiated in Apr 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.2. The County Council appointed EBS Consulting to lead the work, which was divided into three stages. The first phase involved setting the overall context for the Plan – the impact on the East Sussex economy, effects on key business sectors, Government progress against targets, plus any potential opportunities created by the situation. After the Context Report was completed, phase two consisted of engagement sessions with key partners across multiple sectors; more than 70 interviews were held, plus group meetings with a variety of local stakeholders. Finally phase three saw the coordination and development of an Action Plan, where all of the ambitions and opportunities highlighted through the extensive partner engagement were refined into a coherent Plan to cover the next 12-18 months.
- 2.3. The Action Plan is divided into six headline ‘ambition themes’ setting out the initial ambitions along with a number of actions to be achieved. The most relevant ambition for DES is ‘Adapt and Improve Places’, containing seven specific actions, some of which will certainly be actions for DES such as looking at the policy framework for town centres, ensuring we have coordinated asks of Government, and coordinating an approach to working with Homes England.
- 2.4. The final version Action Plan will go to the next Team East Sussex (TES) meeting on 30 Jul 2020 for endorsement, after which a public-facing ‘business friendly’ version will be produced for publication next month.
- 2.5. **JBk** asked Borough and District colleagues to comment on their own authority’s circumstances in terms of recovery:
- **SR** advised that Wealden DC is holding its eleventh virtual Planning Committee meeting this week, and has made huge inroads into the backlog of applications/validations caused by lockdown. A fast-track and free advice service has also been added to the Wealden DC website.
  - **AP** reported a similar return to normality at Hastings BC, with site visits now taking place. There is still an issue with validations (caused by staff shortages) and activity is obviously down, but overall performance is good. The enforcement policy has just been amended to make it clearer, and online petitions are now being introduced, which were not previously allowed.

- **NT** advised that Lewes DC and Eastbourne BC have a targeted recovery team to look at local issues, and the Leader of Lewes DC recently held a summit on economic recovery, which is being viewed as an ‘opportunity’. Housing delivery targets are being scrutinised, and the authority’s office estate is also being reviewed/revisited (continued agile working of colleagues), working closely with the SPACES and Greater Brighton One Public Estate programmes.
- **TH** reported that operations at Rother DC are actually back to relative normality, with committee site visits resuming next month. The Local Plan Review is progressing slowly, and the enforcement team is back on track. **BHk** added that Rother DC is also producing its own local Economy Recovery Plan, to be aligned to the county ERP.

2.6. **JBk** asked Developers and Registered Providers to add any further views on recovery:

- **CMr** reported positivity in the sales market with an element of pent-up demand being realised, although the cancellation rate is also up slightly. They’ve been back onsite for a few weeks utilising more normal levels of site personnel, but obviously reduced for social distancing. Work is about to begin on a couple of new sites and contractors are keen to work – so overall it’s buoyant.
- **EP** reported similar positivity. They were able to continue working on a smaller Kent site, which generated lots of interest as soon as the show-home opened. Another site was delayed but work is now due to begin shortly.
- In terms of Registered Providers, DES colleagues commented on possible delays in terms of new business, where there’s clearly still interest from RPs in terms of land and new sites but the level of *commitment* is quite low. This element of unpredictability appears to cover the RP sector as a whole, so it’s not just a localised issue. **AF** commented that Optivo has a programme to complete so is definitely still interested, and there’s certainly an appetite to do more, but they do need to be a bit more selective. **BHk** suggested that any issues may have more to do with the way the grant programme is run and how RPs are forced to ‘react’. **EP** added that she’s starting to see a requirement in S106 agreements for RPs to not only be ‘approved’, which is fine, but to actually be ‘in contract’ with them prior to commencement, which is a real cause for concern. DES colleagues agreed that local authorities, planners and developers all want to encourage development, so collectively we need to address any concerns with RPs and find ways of unlocking any such barriers.

### 3. MHCLG meetings

- 3.1. **BHr** advised that he, along with **JBk**, **NF** and others, have been keeping in regular contact with officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) via weekly conference calls. To date there have been eleven weekly calls and they’ve been very effective; the most recent call concentrated on issues with SMEs (with discussions on them allowing grants on all S106 sites under 70 units and on any scheme that overperforms by 30%+ to help with deliverability and viability). They’ve also promised a formal response\* to the letter we sent jointly between Kent, Essex and East Sussex on 28 Apr 2020.
- 3.2. As things start to return to a level of normality the calls with MHCLG will now switch to monthly, but as we have a single point of contact, we’re able to liaise with them between the monthly calls if needed.

*\*the formal response from MHCLG was received and circulated to DES on 28 Jul 2020.*

### 4. Member training

- 4.1. **JBk** reminded the group that one of the actions from a previous DES meeting (Oct 2019) was to arrange a training session on the development process for Councillors at Rother DC. That training session has now taken place as a virtual workshop. It went extremely well, with developers and RPs joining the call to provide input from their perspective, all contributing to a very productive discussion. All of the Members were much better informed by the end of the session.
- 4.2. **TH** agreed that this interactive approach was much fresher and far more memorable than the usual drip-feed training the Members receive through the year. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, so this kind of training session is definitely recommended to other authorities.

## **5. Locate East Sussex**

- 5.1. **MC** advised that he's been working on a land/premises study for Locate East Sussex, a draft of which was completed in Apr this year. The study highlighted a number of areas, including a lack of supply of factory and warehouse space, a need for small business units on high-quality business parks, a need for managed workspace, pent-up demand for larger units, and a decline in office demand. A final version of the land/premises study is being produced for publication – delayed due to the pandemic but hopefully ready soon.
- 5.2. **MC** advised that he's also produced a further report assessing the impact of Covid-19 – a monthly report from a very wide range of sources, looking at lockdown to recovery. The previous land premises study provided a good benchmark, and one of the more apparent outcomes so far is that Covid-19 has accelerated the earlier trend towards agile working. The next real pressure point will be when furloughing ends, and there could be a delayed effect on businesses who've managed to survive thus far.

## **6. Open forum discussion**

- 6.1. No additional concerns raised.

## **7. AOB**

- 7.1. **JBk** suggested holding an additional shorter DES meeting sometime between now and the next scheduled quarterly meeting, say in the first/second week of Sep 2020; all agreed.

*[Action: DE to arrange an additional virtual DES meeting in the first/second week of Sep 2020]*

### Summary of actions:

- 7.1 **DE** to arrange an additional virtual DES meeting in the first/second week of Sep 2020.