

Attendees:

<b>AB</b>	Adam Berger	Locate East Sussex	<b>JH</b>	Josh Hemmings	Homes England
<b>AP</b>	Andrew Palmer	Hastings BC / ES Housing/Planning Officers Groups	<b>JM</b>	Joshua Mellor	Barton Willmore
<b>BC</b>	Barry Chamberlain	Wealden Homes	<b>KBo</b>	Kevin Bown	Highways England
<b>BHk</b>	Ben Hook	Rother DC	<b>KBx</b>	Kim Bloxham	East Sussex CC
<b>BHr</b>	Brian Horton	SELEP	<b>LP</b>	Leigh Palmer	Eastbourne BC / Lewes DC
<b>CBr</b>	Chris Broome	Sea Change Sussex	<b>MB</b>	Mark Bewsey	DHA Planning
<b>CMr</b>	Chris Moore	Bellway Homes	<b>NBe</b>	Cllr Nick Bennett	East Sussex CC
<b>DE</b>	Dave Evans	East Sussex CC	<b>NBr</b>	Nigel Brown	East Sussex CC
<b>DS</b>	Dave Shepherd	Clarion Housing Group	<b>NF</b>	Nick Fenton	Nick Fenton Associates
<b>EE</b>	Eleanor Evans	Hastings BC	<b>PP</b>	Peter Phillips	Highways England
<b>EP</b>	Erica Peck	Rydon Homes	<b>PS</b>	Peter Smith	East Sussex CC
<b>ES</b>	Edward Sheath	East Sussex CC	<b>PT</b>	Paul Thomas	Development Land Services Ltd / SELEP
<b>GP</b>	Graham Peters	Team East Sussex (TES)	<b>SR</b>	Stacey Robins	Wealden DC
<b>IS</b>	Ian Scott	Town & Country Housing Group	<b>TH</b>	Tim Hickling	Rother DC / ES Planning Officers Group
<b>JB</b>	Jonathan Buckwell	( <i>DES CHAIR</i> ) DHA Planning	<b>VG</b>	Vera Gajic	East Sussex CC

Apologies:

<b>CBe</b>	Chris Bending	Wealden DC	<b>JO</b>	Jane Owen	MHCLG
<b>CMo</b>	Chris Moore	Homes England	<b>MO</b>	Matthew Oliver	Vistry Homes (formerly Bovis Homes)
<b>DM</b>	David Martin	Stiles Harold Williams Partnership	<b>PC</b>	Peter Coldbreath	Stiles Harold Williams Partnership

***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/des210126](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/des/des210126)

**1. Welcome and introductions**

1.1. **JB** welcomed the group and delivered the apologies. Round table introductions were made.

**2. Review of previous minutes, 9 Dec 2020**

2.1. **JB** ran through the actions of the previous DES meeting, noting that all had been completed. The minutes were approved by the group as an accurate record of the meeting.

**3. ESCC Asset & Investment Strategy**

3.1. **NBr** and **PS** delivered a presentation on the County Council's *Asset and Investment Strategy*, including clarification of the current property estate (land and buildings) in figures, and a description of the Asset Management Policy for 2020-25. ESCC has actually published eight distinct policies for managing its assets, covering acquisitions, leasing, compliance, maintenance, sustainable buildings, disposals, community asset transfer and carbon. All of the objectives are governed by three clear principles – to manage and maintain property effectively, efficiently and sustainably; to use land and buildings to stimulate development and growth; and to promote partnership joint working.

3.2. DES members discussed the above, and the following key points were made:

- Small parcels of land may not be valuable in themselves to ESCC in terms of development, but the DES group could be particularly useful here, as members may know/own adjacent sites so could help identify wider development opportunities.
- Developer colleagues welcome the opportunity to get involved very early on, even speculatively, and are happy to be engaged in that way.
- Please don't forget about the need for *commercial* space, particularly light industrial.
- Affordable housing needs to be considered/included on any larger sites.
- In terms of procurement, clearly there are guidelines that ESCC must follow, but developers are still encouraged to come forward with ideas as it could help shape/influence the actual approach to market in the first place.

3.3. **JB** welcomed the opportunity for DES to engage in this area, and thanked County Council colleagues for being proactive. The group agreed that continued dialogue will be positive and mutually beneficial.

#### 4. EU Exit Transition

- 4.1. **BHr** led a short discussion on whether colleagues have seen any additional impacts on the sector since the last DES meeting, and since the UK officially left the EU on 1 Jan 2021. The group agreed that the overall situation seems fairly stable, with no specific acute concerns arising, only anecdotal information on areas to keep an eye on. The following points were made:
- There continues to be a degree of materials stockpiling (timber, lintels, blocks).
  - The cost of reinforced steel appears to have risen sharply.
  - There could potentially be a shortage in bricklayers.
  - The labour market may have been affected by foreign labour not returning from their respective countries, but the situation is slightly blurred by the Christmas break and Covid-19 checks, so for the moment it's difficult to know whether there are truly any Brexit-related issues with labour.
- 4.2. **BHr** asked the group to continue reporting back on any potential issues, even anecdotally, so that they can be fed to MHCLG.

#### 5. Housing stats – annual update

- 5.1. **KBx** ran through her paper providing an update on housing figures in East Sussex, including data on housing commitments and completions (broken down into Boroughs and Districts), house prices and transactions, plus some employment and GVA data on the construction sector overall in East Sussex.
- 5.2. Note that all of the data in this report can be found on the *East Sussex in Figures* website, where you can view tables, charts and pre-prepared publications covering social, economic and demographic profiles of the county: [ESiF website](#).
- 5.3. **KBx** said she'd be happy to report back to DES more frequently (than the current annual update) and asked the group if they'd like to see any particular areas/stats included in future reports. Suggestions included a breakdown of affordable dwellings completed; affordable housing numbers compared with the need for 'temporary' accommodation; the percentage of housing on small sites compared to large sites; and affordability by size of site.

*[Action: DES members to consider whether they'd like to see any particular figures included in future Housing Stats reports, and advise KBx]*

#### 6. Housing Delivery Test update

- 6.1. **JB** provided an update on the latest Housing Delivery Test figures from the government, published on 19 Jan 2021. Lewes DC is the only East Sussex authority rated at 100% delivery (net homes delivered against the number of homes required, as set out in the relevant strategic policies, over a rolling three-year period), with Wealden DC also scoring highly at 83%. The figures for Eastbourne BC, Hastings BC and Rother DC are given as 29%, 55% and 65% respectively, meaning those authorities now face a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.
- 6.2. Borough and District colleagues all agreed that they're disappointed by the government's calculations, noting the very obvious overlap with Brexit and Covid-19 issues already discussed – there's a clear disconnect between the Housing Delivery Test measurements and what's actually happening on the ground. **SR** observed that Wealden DC delivered over 1,000 new dwellings in the past year, as recorded in the government's figures, yet it still missed the target. **BHr** noted that MHCLG contacts have already been apprised of our concerns, and we've asked for a degree of latitude.
- 6.3. The group took some time to discuss the issue of *land banking* and its potential impact on housing delivery. Where planning authorities grant consents for developments that don't subsequently come forward, it's not necessarily a case of the developer simply sitting on the land. Larger developers do of course buy-big, but sites that have stagnated tend to be those with a promotional aspect. Smaller developers avoid land banking altogether as SMEs simply can't afford to do it. Ultimately developers *do* want to develop, and delays may be caused by any number of reasons. **NF** added that land banking may be happening away from housing development, where land allocated for *commercial* use is not being developed.

- 6.4. All agreed that land banking is tiresome, but where delays occur, developers would be happy to discuss/explain the individual issues with the relevant planning authorities. **NF** encouraged everyone, developers and authorities alike, to let him know when such delays occur so that DES colleagues can help broker conversations to get to the bottom of it.

## 7. Conversation with the Leaders

- 7.1. **JB** reported back on last week's annual 'Leaders Dinner' event, which was conducted as a virtual *Conversation with the Leaders*. The event was very well attended and was a really useful and productive experience, with plenty of positive feedback received. It was particularly valuable to have **JO** on the call representing MHCLG, as she spoke with high regard about the work of DES and our associated developer groups in Kent and Essex. **JB** thanked Council Leaders and their representatives for being willing to participate in such open and frank conversations, and looked forward to next year's event which will hopefully be back to normal.

## 8. MHCLG / Homes England engagement

- 8.1. **BHr** provided a very brief update on the continuing discussions with MHCLG. The main items to be covered next time will include Brexit, the ongoing issue of confidence, and the potential 'cliff edge' in the market (e.g. Stamp Duty and Help to Buy). We now have a date of 23 Feb 2021 to meet with Housing Minister *Chris Pincher MP*, so DES members are encouraged to continue feeding in any issues to be raised.

*[Action: DES members to continue feeding in any issues to JB, BHr and NF to be raised with MHCLG and Housing Minister Chris Pincher MP]*

## 9. DES priorities for the year

- 9.1. As usual for the first DES meeting of the year, **BHr** asked the group to consider whether there are any specific issues/topics that the group ought to cover on the agenda in the year ahead. Some of the immediate suggestions included:

- Affordable housing, following the change to the 50-unit threshold, and how we can maintain supply. **BHr** suggested an affordable housing themed meeting may be appropriate.
- Utilities, as it's been quite some time since they attended and engaged with DES.
- Commercial property update. Stiles Harold Williams (SHW) has previously presented a detailed report, so it would be really useful if they're willing to do so again. **VG** advised that the County Council has recently commissioned SHW to conduct a detailed study in this area (following on from the work Mike Cogswell completed last year, available on the [Locate East Sussex website](#)) which is due to be completed around Mar/Apr 2021.

## 10. AOB

- 10.1. The group briefly discussed attendance at DES meetings, and agreed that more can be done by existing members to encourage additional developers to engage, both housing builders and *commercial* developers. The group agreed to promote DES as appropriate.

*[Action: DES members to promote DES to peers/colleagues as appropriate in order to increase housing/commercial developer engagement, and forward any potential contacts to NF, BHr and JB]*

### Summary of actions:

- 5.3 DES members to consider whether they'd like to see any particular figures included in future Housing Stats reports, and advise **KBx**.
- 8.1 DES members to continue feeding in any issues to **JB**, **BHr** and **NF** to be raised with MHCLG and Housing Minister Chris Pincher MP.
- 10.1 DES members to promote DES to peers/colleagues as appropriate in order to increase housing/ commercial developer engagement, and forward any potential contacts to **NF**, **BHr** and **JB**.