

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 June 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: North Herts Place Narrative

REPORT OF: Service Director, Place

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council, Elizabeth Dennis

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST and A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To outline the Council's proposed Place Narrative for North Herts.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approves the North Herts Place Narrative.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. Despite being a district since 1974, North Hertfordshire has no clear identity and needs a point of differentiation within the county. This will help North Herts stand out as the place to invest, live, visit and work in Hertfordshire.
- 3.2. Currently, the Council and its partners are all telling different stories about North Herts which leads to fragmented communications. A joined up and coherent approach in the future will have greater impact, generate greater engagement and raise the profile of North Herts the place.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. As the development of a Place Narrative for North Herts was recommended by the Local Government Association and is an initiative other Councils have benefitted from, the alternative of not developing a Place Narrative was not considered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, the Council's Political Liaison Board and the Opposition Leader have been consulted on this proposal.
- 5.2. Consultation has also been carried out with key district partners: Letchworth Heritage Foundation, Letchworth BID, Hitchin BID, North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau, North Herts CVS; North Herts residents, North Herts College students, Settle, local businesses and North Herts Council Councillors and Officers.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a Key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 26 May 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The need for a North Herts Place Narrative was first recommended in the 2020 Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge as a way of broadening the Council's future focus to include ambitions for North Herts the place.
- 7.2 The North Herts Place Narrative proposal therefore focuses on the place that is North Herts (and the places within it), rather than North Herts Council.
- 7.3 Through the LGA, and at no cost to the Council, eight in-person focus groups were run in 2022 by the Hackney Consultation Team (from Hackney Council). They successfully changed perceptions of the district of Hackney ahead of the London 2012 Olympics and have supported many Local Authorities with their Place Narratives since as a result.
- 7.4 The focus groups included key district partners: Letchworth Heritage Foundation, Letchworth BID, Hitchin BID, North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau, North Herts CVS; North Herts residents from our Citizens Panel, North Herts College students, settle residents, local businesses and North Herts Council Leaders, Councillors and Officers.
- 7.5 Additional desk research was also carried out into existing Hertfordshire Place Narratives and how other local authorities have approached their Place Narrative work.
- 7.6 There has been no cost to date for the North Herts Place Narrative work. The LGA funded the Hackney Consultation Team to carry out the initial research work for North Herts Council and the branding, straplines and copy have all been developed in-house by the North Herts Council Communications team.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Research findings from the Hackney Consultation Team (Appendix A for full report)

- 8.1.1 North Herts is a mix of towns, villages and countryside that are distinctly individual, with their own sense of community, culture and local pride, which come together to make a sum greater than its parts.
- 8.1.2 United by their:
- Liveability
 - Connectivity
 - Creativity
 - Challenges as well as opportunities

8.1.3 Four key themes arose in every session:

- Culture
- Community
- Connectivity
- Countryside

8.1.4 The challenges faced by the district were also discussed namely: Pockets of deprivation; a shortage of affordable housing and a lack of amenities for teenagers. It was made clear in the research that we must recognise those challenges within our North Herts Place Narrative.

8.2 Proposed North Herts Place Narrative branding

8.2.1 Using the research findings and partner feedback, a 'bringing together' strapline has been chosen from a choice of straplines by our district Partners, Leaders and Officers. This is due to its focus on people, the link to our council priorities 'People First' and 'Brighter Future Together'; its positivity and differentiation to the other Hertfordshire County Place Narratives (Appendix B).

8.2.2 The branding itself (Appendix C) was developed alongside our key district partners and uses strong bold colours with a heart to communicate love for a place, its people and its cultures and is informal/hand-drawn, giving a nod to the free-flow of ideas in North Herts over the years.

8.2.3 Partner feedback has led to the recommendation of launching with a Master North Herts Place Narrative brand 'Bringing Communities Together' and sub-brand - 'Bringing Businesses Together' with a view to potentially developing and rolling out other sub-brands in the future e. g., 'Bringing Culture Together'.

8.2.4 Our proposed Place Narrative story (Appendix D) has included input from The Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, the Council's Political Liaison Board and the Opposition Leader.

8.3 Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative in the future

8.3.1 Implementing and embedding the North Herts Place Narrative will be key to future usage, buy-in and success. Appendix E includes three levels of embedding the North Herts Place Narrative, based on levels of officer time and financial cost.

8.3.2 The North Herts Place Narrative branding will not be seen alongside our North Herts Council Corporate branding as each brand performs a different purpose. The North Herts Place Narrative branding will sit alongside partner brands, such as 'Brand Letchworth' that the Letchworth Heritage Foundation are developing. Both will have low brand recognition and low reach to start with but aspire to higher recognition and reach as the North Herts Place Narrative branding is used more widely by North Herts Council and our partners.

8.3.3 It will be the responsibility of North Herts Council's Communications team to lead the way with embedding the North Herts Place Narrative in both North Herts Council and Partner communications.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no known Legal impacts or requirements that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 To date, there has been no cost for the North Herts Place Narrative work. The LGA funded the Hackney Consultation Team to carry out the initial research work for us and the branding, straplines and copy have all been developed in-house by The Council's Communications team.
- 10.2 Should any of the mid options for embedding the North Herts Place Narrative be considered, branding will only be added to items that require re-printing anyway. There would therefore not be any significant costs associated with these and could be met from existing budgets.
- 10.3 Should any of the advanced options for embedding the North Herts Place Narrative be considered, they will be subject to budget/funding bids and/or partner support. The usual budget cycle would mean that (if funded by the Council) budget would not be available until April 2024. The Council's Medium-Term financial projections are that there is likely to be a need to make substantial savings, which makes it difficult to justify new additional discretionary spend.
- 10.4 If the intended results are achieved, then they would lead to economic growth within the district. Under the current funding system, the Council does get to retain some of the growth in Business Rates in the District, although it is a small proportion.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There is a risk that the communication of the North Herts Place Narrative will not have the desired impact of raising the profile of North Herts. The aim that North Herts will stand as the place to invest, live, visit and work in Hertfordshire, is deliberately aspirational and even if this campaign is successful, may not be fully achieved. As most of the actions are low/zero cost/effort, it is considered that it is worthwhile to proceed.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The North Herts Place Narrative is a shared vision of how communities across the district have and will continue to shape our future.
- 12.2 Our shared place vision is the result of discussions with residents, businesses, housing associations, charities, community groups, students, senior leaders and politicians from across North Herts.
- 12.3 Our Place Narrative is a way of helping North Herts unite as a place around a sense of shared pride and a set of common goals. To recognise not just our strengths, but our challenges too, and to bring people and partners together to celebrate our strengths and meet those challenges.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no known human resource implications that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative as the work to communicate it will form part of the North Herts Council Communications team’s everyday work.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A, Hackney Consultation Team Insight Report
- 16.2 Appendix B, Hertfordshire Council Place Narratives
- 16.3 Appendix C, North Herts Place Narrative branding and straplines
- 16.4 Appendix D, North Herts Place Narrative story
- 16.5 Appendix E, Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative

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