

**UPDATE ON REDEVELOPMENT OF CHURCHGATE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREA: INFORMATION NOTE****THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Members on the progress regarding the Churchgate redevelopment project.
- 1.2 For the ease of updating Members this Note, and future information notes on the Churchgate Project, will be divided into various sub-sections.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Following a detailed procurement process, that being one of competitive dialogue, Full Council agreed at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010 to award the contract for redevelopment of Churchgate and the surrounding area to Simons Developments Ltd as North Hertfordshire District Council's (NHDC) development partner. The contract was subsequently signed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010.
- 2.2 The proposal that emerged from the competitive dialogue process and formed the tender stage of Simons' bid is a schematic development proposal scheme (equivalent of RIBA design stage B/B+). The preparation of Simons' proposal has been guided by the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy and the Planning Brief for the Churchgate Centre Development Area and surrounding area. The proposal sets out Simons' vision for the redevelopment of the Churchgate area and forms part of the first stage of the public consultation process. As part of the Strategic Director's report to Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010 (agenda Item 10) it was agreed that this proposal would be consulted on widely and would be evolved further following public consultation, prior to the submission of a formal planning application.
- 2.3 A Churchgate Project Board has been set up to act on behalf of the Council to deliver the Churchgate Project. The Terms of Reference for the Churchgate Project Board were agreed by Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010 and the Board is authorised to make decisions on behalf of the Council referring to Cabinet and/or Full Council if necessary. The Board comprises Members and Officers from the Churchgate Project Team. The Members are the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport and the Chair of Hitchin Committee.
- 2.4 As a means of engaging with local people, the Council at its meeting of Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010 agreed to set up a Churchgate Liaison Forum (CLF). This will be a public forum which will allow for an effective means of

communication to occur between local residents, businesses and the developer. The Forum will have no decision making powers but will be a useful avenue for the developer to test ideas, helping to shape the project, and most importantly communicate effectively with the town. The constitution and Terms of Reference for the CLF were agreed by Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

### **3. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CHURCHGATE EXHIBITION**

#### **Churchgate Exhibition**

- 3.1 It was agreed by Full Council, that once the contract was signed, the tender submission outlining Simon's vision for the redevelopment of Churchgate and the surrounding area would be consulted on with the wider public. It was agreed that this would occur in late May and the dates for the exhibition were confirmed by Full Council at its meeting on 8 April 2010.
- 3.2 The Exhibition was well advertised prior to the event in the Local papers, in Outlook and on the Council's website. Key stakeholders representing local organisations, businesses, the market traders, the Church, residents and adjacent landowners were invited to a launch/pre-view of the scheme on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May. This followed a Member invitation to pre-view the exhibition on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May. The exhibition was then opened to the public from Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> May through to Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The exhibition was held in St. Mary's Church and was manned throughout this period by officers of the Project Team and representatives from Simons, who were available to answer questions.
- 3.3 Over 1500 people visited the exhibition during the week in St. Mary's Church and either completed feedback forms at the exhibition or took them away to be filled in once they had gathered their thoughts. People have also been completing the feedback forms on-line. The exhibition then moved to Hitchin Library for a further two weeks until 7<sup>th</sup> June. During this period, officers had to re-stock leaflets at the library on two occasions again demonstrating the high amount of interest by the general public in the proposed scheme. Letters were also sent out to the three secondary schools in Hitchin inviting them to come along to view the scheme. Only the Hitchin Girls School took up the invitation and sent along approximately 15 students. In general, the mix of people visiting the exhibition appeared to fall into three categories, under 30s and teenagers, which were few compared to the 30 to 50 and over 50 year age groups. The latter group making up the majority of visitors.
- 3.4 The level of discussion and debate at the exhibition was extremely well informed. People were asked to tick a box on the feedback form along with their comments as to whether they are in favour of the scheme, not in favour of it or just not sure but like some aspects or have concerns about aspects of the scheme. It is important to note that this is the start of the consultation process and the numbers should not become the focus. The purpose of the consultation is to learn what people think and feel about Simon's vision as presented and to identify issues. It is essentially a qualitative exercise not a quantitative one. All these comments will be considered and key issues will be discussed at the Churchgate Liaison Forum, and will be taken forward by

Simons along with a raft of other commercial, technical and planning issues in developing a scheme that will be offered as the planning application.

3.5 Given that this first round of consultation is not finished at the time of writing this report and Simons are in the process of collating all the comments, below is a summary of some of the key points that were raised by members of the public with NHDC officers and Simons at the exhibition. Generally speaking there were a mix of views expressed about various elements of the scheme.

- (i) The following aspects of the scheme generated a positive response:
  - Redevelopment of the Churchgate shopping centre
  - Opening up of the River Hiz and improved use of riverside walk areas
  - New Piazza area for specialist markets and events
  - The idea of a new shopping street open to the air linking Market Place to Biggin Lane
  
- (ii) The following elements elicited a mixed response with some respondents for the proposals and some against:
  - Bringing a new department store to the town
  - Bringing a new range of high street retailers to the town and the impact on other town centre businesses
  - Providing a market that uses demountable stalls and relocating it back to the historic market place
  - Providing a mixed-use development with retail and residential
  - The size and scale of the proposed buildings on St. Mary's and Portmill Lane East car parks
  - The framed view of St. Mary's Church from Hollow Lane
  - The design elements and how these could be in keeping with the character of the town.
  
- (iii) The following elements received a negative response more often than positive:
  - Proposal of a multi-storey car park and its location
  - Location of the department store
  - Reducing the size of the market
  - Access to new market location for traders
  - Loss of historic market place as area for public and community use

3.6 Although no set timescale was given for receipt of feedback forms for this first stage of the Simon's scheme, it is anticipated that the amount of comments received will have reduced towards the end of June. It will then be at this stage that a more formal summary of the feedback will be prepared by Simons, and will then be reported to the Churchgate Project Board and to the Churchgate Liaison Forum, as this will formulate future topics for discussion. The intention is to publish the summary of comments on the Councils website towards the end of July.

### **The Churchgate Liaison Forum**

3.7 The current membership of CLF comprises up to three representatives from each of:

- (i) local residents associations/amenity societies – these being:
  - Hitchin Historical Society
  - Hitchin Society, and
  - Hitchin Forum
  
- (ii) Local business associations including Hitchin Market – these being:
  - Hitchin Town Centre Initiative & Hitchin Bid
  - Hitchin Chamber of Commerce, and
  - Hitchin Markets Limited
  
- (iii) North Hertfordshire District Councillors (who have been nominated by Hitchin Area Committee and reflect the range of political representation on the Committee) and a representative of the Southern Rural Committee. The nominated representatives are:
  - Cllr Paul Clark
  - Cllr Allison Ashley
  - Cllr Deepak Sangha
  - Cllr Tricia Cowley
  
- (iv) The developer, Simons Development Ltd, currently
  - The Project Director from Simons, and
  - The Director from Local Dialogue.

3.8 Council officers will also be present at these meetings and will ensure that matters discussed are referred back to the Churchgate Project Board.

3.9 The first meeting of the CLF was held on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010 where it was agreed that meetings should occur bi-monthly and that there be a 45 minute pre-discussion slot which will provide an opportunity for any local resident or business to make representations to the Forum prior to its meetings. Notes and future meeting dates are available on the Councils website and are also available in the Hitchin Library.

3.10 For information the future dates for the CLF meetings are listed below. These will all start at 6:30pm with the pre-discussion and will be held at Church House, Churchyard, Hitchin:

- Wed 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010
- Wed 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010
- Wed 24<sup>th</sup> November 2010
- Wed 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011
- Wed 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011

#### **4. REPORTS TO CABINET**

4.1 A Part 1 report was presented to Cabinet on 15 June 2010 which:

- (i) Presented a report prepared by DTZ, the Council's commercial advisors through the procurement process, on a Post Implementation Review of the procurement process, and
- (ii) Provided Members with an initial overview of the public consultation process on Simons' vision for the redevelopment of Churchgate and the surrounding area.

4.2 In terms of 4.1 (i) above, DTZ were tasked by the officer project team to produce an end of project review of the procurement process. This was attached as an appendix to Agenda Item 13 of the Cabinet Papers dated 15 June 2010. The report provided:

- a summary of the project timeline, identifying the key stages in the competitive dialogue process and the main relevant documentation as required by the OJEU process;
- A critical analysis of the main components of the project in order to understand what lessons could have been learnt from the process and covers areas such as the programme, sponsorship and leadership, resources, stakeholder engagement, budget costs and deliverables/outputs of the project; which is followed by
- Conclusions, where it is DTZ's opinion that following the critical analysis of the process the positive aspects outweigh the negative.

4.3 The report to Cabinet concluded that it was both the view of the NHDC officers included in the project team and that of the Project Board Members that the DTZ report provided an honest and balanced view of the procurement process and that the lessons learnt should be drawn upon for similar projects likely to be undertaken by the Council in the future. The Cabinet Members at their meeting on 15 June 2010 resolved to note and agree the content and conclusions in the DTZ report.

4.4 In terms of the overview of the exhibition, the Cabinet received the same information as outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.6 of this report and resolved to note the update on the first phase of Simons consultation process for the redevelopment of Churchgate and its surrounding area.

#### **5. AVAILABLE INFORMATION**

5.1 As Members are of course aware one of the constraints of the procurement process was the confidentiality requirements. The Project Board is committed to being as open as possible with the public going forward, although clearly there will always have to be some information withheld for commercial confidentiality reasons. A process is underway where we are trying to proactively publish information about the project in order to assist and inform the public debate. The following documents relating to the tender submission and procurement process are now available, or will be made available shortly, on the Council's website at [www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk) and in the Hitchin Library. Other documents may be added in due course.

It is to be noted that some of these documents contain redactions for commercial sensitivity reasons.

## 5.2 Publication Schedule of documents relating to Hitchin Churchgate Project

<b>Document/ Class of document</b>	<b>Estimated publication timescale</b>
Hitchin Committee information notes – various dates	Published in full (ongoing)
Churchgate Liaison Forum application scores	Overall marks awarded published
Churchgate Liaison Forum agenda and meeting notes	Published in full (ongoing)
Churchgate exhibition banners	Published in full
Simons Tender	Published with redactions
Simons presentation to Full Council on 25 February 2010	Published with redactions
DTZ Tender scoring report	Published with redactions
DTZ Procurement Implementation Review report	Published in full
Churchgate Planning Brief and Final Report	Published in full
NLP retail analysis studies	Published in full
Redacted Development Agreement and associated legal documents	Being published at time of report going to print
DTZ Pre -Qualification Questionnaire scoring report	To be published in July
PQQ scoring criteria	Previously published, will be re-published in July with scoring report

## 6. CONCLUSION

6.1 That the Hitchin Committee note the content of this Information Note.

## 7. CONTACT OFFICERS

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