

UPDATE ON REDEVELOPMENT OF CHURCHGATE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREA: INFORMATION NOTE

REPORT OF 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 will be divided into various sub-sections.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following a detailed procurement process, Full Council agreed at its meeting on 25th 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 19th 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 25th 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 This first stage of the public consultation process started on 18th May with a stakeholder launch and public exhibition in St. Mary's Church, Hitchin. The exhibition ran for five days in St. Mary's Church from 18th to 22nd May, and then moved to the Hitchin Library for a further two weeks from 24th May to 5th June 2010.

3. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CHURCHGATE EXHIBITIONChurchgate Exhibition – Feedback

- 3.1.1 Over 1500 people visited the exhibition. Representatives from Simons and NHDC were available at the exhibition in St. Mary's Church to answer questions and take comments.

- 3.2 Key points that were raised by the public with officers and representatives from Simons at the exhibition were summarised in the Information Note presented to Hitchin Committee on 13th July 2010. A Summary Report of feedback from the public exhibition on Simons' Vision was published towards the end of July and was the subject of discussion at the Churchgate Project Board and the Churchgate Liaison Forum Meetings in July.
- 3.3 Nearly 900 written comments were received by Local Dialogue, working on behalf of Simons as their public relations and communications consultants. In their Summary report (attached as Appendix 1) Local Dialogue note that the relocation of the market and changes to views of St Mary's were the two issues that attracted the most comments. Other issues raised by a large number of respondents included: traffic; parking; current empty retail units in Hitchin (e.g. Woolworths); architectural design and materials; opening up the River Hiz and the new piazza area; the possibility of including the Royal Mail site within the development; the type of retail that will be provided; the multi-storey car park; and whether the development will come forward due to the current state of the economy.
- 3.4 The demolition of the Churchgate centre and replacement with a more sympathetic development was welcomed by the majority of all respondents, as was opening up the River Hiz and the inclusion of more public open space as part of the scheme.
- 3.5 It is worth noting that while 57% of the respondents ticked the 'No' box on the feedback form, in many cases the answers were fairly similar regardless of which box was ticked. For example, some of those who ticked 'Yes' appeared to disagree with certain aspects of the proposal and some who ticked 'No' agreed with most aspects of the proposals. 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 was to learn what people thought and felt about Simon's vision as presented and to identify issues.
- 3.6 As a result of the number of the points raised during the feedback process, the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the Council's website has been amended as a means of addressing some of the issues raised. In addition, an anonymised full list of all the comments submitted will be displayed on the Council's website towards the end of the month, and will also be made available in the Hitchin Library.
- 3.7 Simons are now in the process of considering the comments and have identified a number of key issues and topics that will need to be discussed with key stakeholders and at the Churchgate Liaison Forum meetings as means of moving the project forward. The list of suggested topics for future CLF meetings is attached at Appendix 2. Please note that this list is subject to change.
- 3.8 Simons have already met with the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative, Hitchin Markets Ltd and the Hitchin Chamber of Commerce. They will be meeting with the Hitchin Forum and arranging sessions to meet with St. Mary's Church, representatives from Jill Grey Place and the Churchgate retailers. Meetings will also be taking place with the Local Planning Authority as well as with landowners and potential retailers. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of all the meetings which Simons will be undertaking, some of which are commercially sensitive. This will be an on-going process while Simons develops a scheme that will be offered as the planning application.

The Churchgate Liaison Forum (CLF)

- 3.9 The second meeting of the CLF took place on 28 July 2010 at Church House, Hitchin. Approximately 80 people attended the pre-discussion session. A number of topics were raised and discussed such as:
- The response to the exhibition;
 - Simons' developing on St. Mary's car park;
 - The location and size of the market in relation to the Planning Brief;
 - Hammersmatch's existing lease;
 - The lease arrangements with Simons as part of the development agreement; Representation on the CLF.
- 3.10 The formal part of the CLF meeting discussed the Summary Feedback Report prepared by Local Dialogue, agreed the suggested topics for future discussion and agreed that the Hitchin Society's views on the Simons proposal would be the subject of a separate discussion. The CLF also revisited the issue of the Chairmanship of the meetings and agreed that they wished to have an independent Chairman. After a vote Martin Stears-Handscorn was elected as Chairman, a position he has accepted.
- 3.11 The notes from the CLF meeting (including the pre-discussion) are available on the Council's website and in the Hitchin Library. If Members wish to receive their own copy then please contact Louise Symes, Projects Manager.
- 3.12 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 29th September 2010
 - Wed 24th November 2010
 - Wed 26th January 2011
 - Wed 23rd March 2011

4. REPORTS TO CABINET

- 4.1 None to Report

5. AVAILABLE INFORMATION

- 5.1 Over the last couple of months the Council has been pro-actively publishing information about the project in order to assist and inform the public debate. The table below updates the information previously provided in the Information Note to the July 2010 Hitchin Committee. New items that have been released for publication since 13th July are shown in bold italics. These documents are available to view on the Council's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk and in the Hitchin Library. Other documents may be added in due course as the Council continues to review material related to the project.

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

Document/ Class of document	Estimated publication timescale
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
Summary Feedback Report on Exhibition July 2010	Published in full
List of all comments submitted to Exhibition	Will be published towards end of September
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
Development Agreement and associated legal documents	Published with redactions
DTZ Pre-Qualification Questionnaire scoring report	Published in Full
PQQ scoring criteria	Published in Full
Summary of decisions made by all Committees re Churchgate project	Published in Full (ongoing)

6. CONCLUSION

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

7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 – Local Dialogue Hitchin: Churchgate Feedback: Report – 26 July 2010

7.2 Appendix 2 – Suggested programme for discussion topics at CLF meetings

8. CONTACT OFFICERS

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