

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 formed part of the first stage of the public consultation process from 18th May to 5th June 2010.
- 2.3 A summary report of the feedback from this first phase was published towards the end of July and was reported on at the September meeting of the Hitchin Committee. The summary has subsequently been updated following discussions at the Churchgate Liaison Forum meetings. The updated version of the Summary Report can be viewed on the Councils website.

3. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTNext Steps in the Process

- 3.1 Following the feedback from the first phase of the consultation, Simons' identified a number of issues to be discussed with key stakeholders and at the Churchgate Liaison Forum (CLF) as a means of moving the project forward. These included:

- Establishing economic principles
- Dynamics and location of Hitchin Market
- Public realm
- Views of St. Mary's Church
- Car Parking
- Need for more Retail Space

This will be an ongoing process while Simons develops a scheme that will be the subject of future public consultation prior to it being offered as a planning application.

- 3.2 Since last September, Simons have met and started an initial dialogue with the HTCI, Hitchin Markets Limited, the Hitchin Chamber of Commerce, the Hitchin Forum (at which representatives from the Hitchin society and Hitchin Historical Society were present), the Churchgate retailers and representatives from St. Mary's Church. Initial meetings have also taken place with the Local Planning Authority, landowners and potential retailers. Outcomes from these meetings and how these have contributed to the evolution of the design will be reported on at the CLF meetings and at Hitchin Committee where they are not commercially sensitive.
- 3.3 Simons at present are continuing to work on options for the location of the Hitchin Market and are also looking to address other key concerns raised through the consultation process such as the need for the proposed amount of retail and impacts of their proposed development on views of St. Mary's Church.

The Churchgate Liaison Forum (CLF)

- 3.4 The fourth meeting of the CLF took place on 24th November 2010 at Church House, Hitchin and was reported on at the meeting of Hitchin Committee on 11th January 2011.
- 3.5 Simons advised at the meeting in November that they were entering a quiet reporting period for the project as they needed time to find a location for the Hitchin market, discuss various options with all parties and also look at all the other issues raised through the consultation and as a result would have little to report on in terms of progress at the CLF meeting in January. It was proposed by the representatives from Hitchin Society and Hitchin Forum that the January CLF meeting be cancelled and that the CLF reconvene for the meeting on 23rd March 2011 when Simons may have more information on the market and other aspects relevant to the scheme for the CLF to discuss. This proposal was agreed by the CLF members.
- 3.6 Simons had hoped to present some initial options on the location of the Market to the CLF meeting on 23rd March. Although good progress is being made and the meetings held are moving matters on, progress is not as quick as had been hoped and Simons are not yet in a position to present the options that may be progressed. In the meantime Simons will continue to liaise with Hitchin Markets Limited, HTCI and Chamber of Commerce plus other key parties including the Local Planning Authority on the market location and will be aiming to have a set of revised drawings ready for later in the year.

- 3.7 The CLF meeting on 23rd March will receive a presentation by Simons on progress. This will be the same presentation that will be made to Cabinet on 22nd March, as it was agreed that on the anniversary of signing the Development Agreement, a presentation would be made to Cabinet by Simons reporting on progress. The presentation will not include design proposals.
- 3.8 Following a request for a longer public session at the last CLF meeting, it has been agreed with the Chair of the CLF that the meeting on 23rd March 2011 to be held in Church House Hitchin, will start with the formal part of the meeting at 6:30pm to be followed by the public discussion from 7:45 to 8:45pm and then returning to a formal session to conclude by 9:30pm.

4. REPORTS TO CABINET

- 4.1 A presentation will be made by Simons Developments Ltd to Cabinet on 22nd March 2011 on progress, given that it is a year on since their appointment as development partner. The presentation to Cabinet will not include design proposals.

5. AVAILABLE INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Council will continue to proactively publish information about the project in order to assist and inform the public debate. All documents are available to view on the Council's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk and in the Hitchin Library.
- 5.2 It is to be noted that some of these documents contain redactions for commercial sensitivity reasons.
- 5.3 As the on-going consultation with Stakeholders continues the Council will update the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section on the website.

6. CONCLUSION

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

7. CONTACT OFFICERS

Louise Symes, Planning Projects Manager. Telephone 01462 474359. E-mail address louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk

Norma Atlay, Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance. Telephone: 01462 474297. E-mail address: norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk

Anthony Roche, Senior Lawyer Telephone 01462 474588. E-mail address anthony.roche@north-herts.gov.uk