

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

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Officers have nothing further to report on the Churchgate Project since the Churchgate Project Board Bulletin note circulated to all Members of the Council on 22nd June 2012.

A copy of the Churchgate Bulletin is attached for information.

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



Churchgate Project Board Bulletin

Bulletin 6 – June 2012 – Update Churchgate Development Project

Project Progress

Members will be aware that the planned timeframe for the delivery of the Churchgate project is set out in the Development Agreement (DA) and is impacted by the recovery of the economy. As part of the DA, Simons are required to provide regular updates on the financial viability of their proposals, and will only submit a detailed scheme for planning permission if the planning viability test is met.

Simons are presently concentrating their efforts on reviewing options for a proposed scheme and have presented a number of draft development options to the last two meetings of the Churchgate Project Board. These options appear to be moving forward in the right direction in terms of seeking to address both Member and public concerns. Simons is now working with the Project Board to present further details at its next meeting on 30 July.

During this period Simons are continuing their commercial negotiations with landowners, prospective retailers and other third parties. Such negotiations together with land assembly costs are important factors in bringing a scheme to viability. They will also be meeting with the LPA.

As Members are aware, Simons are required to submit a planning application by the 'first cut off date' as stated in the DA. This date can only be extended by agreement of both parties and would require a decision by Full Council having received a report from the Churchgate Project Board. At this point Simons have not submitted a formal request to extend the first cut off date.

Meeting with Schools

Given the difficulty in trying to arrange convenient times with the Schools, Simons and officers, the Churchgate Project Team agreed that officers should progress with the school visits and that a summary of comments are fed back to Simons for their consideration in developing options for a proposed scheme.

Officers met with the Student Council of the Hitchin Boys School and Hitchin Girls School and the Student Voice at The Priory School earlier this year. A summary of their comments are attached to this bulletin for information.

Information on the Project

Officers and Members of the Churchgate Project Board are continuing to respond to queries regarding the project and have also responded to a number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Following an FOI request from a member of the public which was considered by the Information Commissioner the Council has released the Churchgate Project Risk Register. The Project Board has also agreed to release redacted versions of the notes from their meetings. The Project Board notes and the risk register can be viewed under the 'Churchgate Project Board' sub-page on the Council's website. Copies are also available to view in the Hitchin Library.

The Project Board will continue to proactively publish information about the project in order to assist and inform the public debate. It is to be noted, however that some of these documents contain redactions for commercial sensitivity reasons.

The Project Board will continue to work with Simons to ensure that the project continues to progress and that information is released where possible to keep the public informed.

If members would like to speak to any of the officer project team with their Churchgate queries please contact Norma Atlay, Andy Cavanagh, Louise Symes, Simon Ellis, Anthony Roche or Thomas Burn.

**CHURCHGATE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
CONSULTATION SUMMARY WITH HITCHIN SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCILS –
FEB/MARCH 2012**

OVERVIEW

Background:

Officers for the Churchgate Project Team, namely Louise Symes, Anthony Roche and Simon Ellis met with the Student councils at Hitchin Boys School, Hitchin Girls School and The Priory School in February and March.

The purpose of the workshops were to:

- Seek young peoples' views on the retail, leisure and social activities in Hitchin town centre and for the groups to reach a consensus on what they feel is important when looking at improving the retail and leisure offer in Hitchin town centre.
- Seek young peoples' views on the physical environment of Hitchin town centre and for the groups to reach a consensus on what they think are the most important improvements that should be made to Hitchin town centre.
- Feedback the views to Simons to be taken into consideration as part of evolving their scheme for the Churchgate development project.

Key Points:

Retail, Leisure and social offer

- Maintain uniqueness, like the independent shops, but too many coffee shops and some of these should be changed to more young peoples clothes shops
- Would like to see a better range of branded shops e.g. Primark, Hollister, men's clothing, Top Shop, Miss Selfridge, Top Man
- Need Better shops in Churchgate
- Like Rhythms of the World
- Improve leisure/entertainment facilities such as:
 - having more exciting events in the Market Square aimed specifically at young people E.g. Party in the Square
 - small cinema (but question if would be viable)
 - bowling, sports centre
- Would like cheaper and youth friendly restaurants – E.g. Aroma, Nandos, Frank & Benny's
- Need cheap fast food outlets of good quality that will appeal to young people
- Tend to go to Stevenage mostly and to other towns such as Cambridge, Luton and Bedford for range of shops that appeal to young people and leisure facilities. Go to Letchworth for the cinema as it is cheaper than Stevenage.
- Would like more public places in Hitchin for young people to meet with friends
- Also safer environments for youth to 'hang out'
- Do not want to see Hitchin turn into Stevenage.
- If there were more shops for young people and leisure activities in Hitchin they would use the facilities and it would be cheaper on travel.

The Physical environment

- Like the old attractive Buildings mostly along Hermitage Road, Sun Street and Bucklersbury
- Like the open spaces including the green areas, i.e. Windmill Hill, Bancroft Rec and the bank along the River Hiz fronting St. May's Church.
- Like the Market Place but could be improved with more benches, more bins
- The market and the arcade though Churchgate are run down and need improving
- Regenerate Churchgate, Wilkinsons buildings
- Improve the market in terms of layout, types of stalls which could be better organised and have stall that appeal to young people
- Improve appearance of Woodcote House
- Tidy up the river and improve the walkway to Hermitage Road.
- New development should blend with the environment and character of Hitchin
- Keep old buildings and character
- Bancroft Gardens needs to be improved in terms of being a safer area to meet with friends.
- Crossing points needed along section of Bancroft between Hermitage Road and Nightingale/Fishponds Road intersection
- Improvement needed to the traffic lights at the top of Hermitage Road and Queen Street for pedestrians