

INFORMATION NOTE: CHURCHGATE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREA

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members on latest position regarding Churchgate and its surrounding area as requested by Members from the last Hitchin Committee meeting held on 4 March 2014.

2. OVERVIEW

- 2.1 Members will be aware of the Full Council resolution on 18 July 2013, which states:

RESOLVED: *That, having considered all the alternative options and risks to deliver the Council's aspirations for the Churchgate area, the Council resolves to:*

- (i) *await the publication of the draft Local Plan, whilst at the same time considering the approach to take;*
- (ii) *continue an open dialogue with interested developers on the Churchgate site in the interim; and*
- (iii) *not enter into any form of exclusive discussions with Hammersmatch, based on the limited information currently provided due to the early stage their proposals are at, and that officers continue dialogue with Hammersmatch in accordance with resolution (ii).*

REASON FOR DECISION: *To allow the Council to decide its aspirations for the Churchgate area of Hitchin to protect the medium to longer term vitality and viability of the town, in the light of updated planning policy considerations.*

- 2.2 While work on the Local Plan is progressing, officers have been involved in extensive dialogue with Hammersmatch over the last few months. These discussions are still ongoing. The discussions have been on a non-exclusive basis regarding their development opportunity from both a land owner and service provider perspective. As land owner, officers have provided Hammersmatch with the key elements that any proposal would need to address. This is separate to any pre-application advice provided by the Local Planning Authority given that Hammersmatch have also entered into pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority. The Local Planning Authority may have other requirements which would need to be addressed as

part of submission of a planning application and such pre-application discussions are confidential.

- 2.3 Officers have also been approached by other third parties expressing a tentative interest in the site and as such these discussions have been very broad brush in nature. To date nothing further has been submitted to the Council. In accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Churchgate project Board:

“1.1 To act on behalf of the Council in respect of all functions required under the Development Agreement and the delivery of the Churchgate project generally.”

any submission would be presented and discussed with the Members of the Churchgate Project Board, prior to any report being presented to Full Council.

- 2.4 Members are reminded that the Council has not allocated any capital or revenue funding towards the redevelopment of the Churchgate area and if a proposal were submitted that involves the Council's land, officers would require authority to incur external legal and property advice for any report to Full Council on a proposal. A Full Council decision to release additional funding would therefore be required.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 That the Hitchin Committee note the content of this Information Note

4. CONTACT OFFICERS

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