

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Councillors Ian Albert (Chair) (IA), Clare Billing (Vice-Chair) (CB), Val Bryant (VB), Jon Clayden (JC), Elizabeth Dennis (ED), Keith Hoskins MBE (KH), Nigel Mason (NM), Dave Winstanley (DWi) and Daniel Wright-Mason (DWM)

In attendance: Aimee Flack (Community and Partnerships Officer) (AF), Laura Hartley (Community and Partnerships Officer) (LH), Executive Member for Environment (AA) and Louise Overington, Service Development and Support Manager – waste (LO)

Also present: At the commencement of the meeting there were around 20 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:30**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

We have received apologies from Cllr Donna Wright.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance.

Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.

Councillors are reminded to make declarations of interest before an item they may wish to abstain from voting if they have an interest, but they are merely making recommendations and not decisions.

Also congratulated Councillor Keith Hoskins on becoming Chair of the Council.

The order of the agenda was amended slightly since publication, and the Forum received a presentation on the Highover Farm Development first.

3. HIGHOVER FARM DEVELOPMENT UPDATE AND Q&A

Verbal presentation from Jonathan Walton, Planning and Development Director from Opus Works

A PDF copy of the presentation slides have been published alongside these notes.

Also, more detailed information can be found on their website [Documents | Land at Highover Farm, Hitchin from Barratt Redrow and David Wilson Homes](#)

For the Q&A Jonathan was joined by Mark Osborn, Senior Planning Manager from Barratt David Wilson North Thames and Sarah Smith, Planning Consultant from Rapleys

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Traffic movement – concerns were raised about recent movement of large vehicles on site and it was explained that the vehicles are needed to carry out more archaeological works. Going forwards all construction vehicles will access through Stotfold Road.
- Flooding – the developers are aware of the recent flooding report released by Hertfordshire County Council. A member of the public raised concern about how the surface water will move in particular areas such as High Dane and Grovelands Avenue. It was explained that the drainage strategy has been carefully designed and has been submitted for the Council's consideration, which will also require assessment by the County Council as Local Lead Flood Authority. One of the slides shows how the surface water would move.
- Sewage issues – concerns were raised about how the sewers are already not coping and that the development will make it worse, particularly around areas like Woolgrove Road. It was explained that Anglian Water are a consultee of this development and are the strategy providers around this. It's Anglia's role to make sure the system can accommodate. Cllr Albert agreed these are legitimate concerns around sewage and explained how the process works with getting permissions via the North Herts Council planning team. When anymore applications come in they will be added on the Council's website and members of the public can express their views.
- Phasing timings – the start date depends on the planning permission. The programme estimate of development is 6-7 years. The rate of how quickly the houses are built depends on how active the housing market is, as developers can complete more quickly if houses sell quickly. This is because they don't want to build and then have empty houses. More detail around the phasing is on the website - [Strategic Infrastructure | April 2025 Update | Land at Highover Farm, Hitchin from Barratt Redrow and David Wilson Homes](#)
- School – explained how it's the County Council's responsibility on how quickly the school is built.
- Affordable housing – it was asked how the speed of building these works. It was explained that affordable housing works differently to the general market as they bulk sell it to housing associations at each phase. There will be delivery targets that need to be met. They are also policy compliant with the amount of affordable housing needed to be built.

- Affordable housing grant funding – it was asked how the announcement of more funding from the government into affordable housing could affect the timeline of the development. It was explained that the funding goes direct to housing associations and developers can't influence how much of the grant goes into this affordable housing.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

Aimee Flack, the Community and Partnership Officer, updated Members of community grant budgets. The current Community Grant budget available is **£19,952**. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£651**.

If the application outlined in Appendix 2 is recommended and approved, there would be **£19,301** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2025-2026 financial year.

Received a presentation in support of a grant application by the following:

Ben Peachey and Gareth White presented the **Bubble Works Run Community** application for **£651**.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Fundraising – will do this by asking for donations from members of the club. Co-chairs may contribute if needed. They expect to meet the £400 mark. To ease pressure, there's no formal system and contributions are voluntary. Those who can afford to contribute often do, and funds come together quickly.
- The welfare officer role covers injury support and general wellbeing, including access to mental health first aiders.
- They explained that new members often feel inspired to do a race and so want to support this through providing a coach to do a half marathon.

IA – Proposed

DWi – Seconded

Unanimous vote in favor of recommending Bubble Works Run Community **£651** towards running activities and safeguarding costs.

5. BIN COLLECTIONS UPDATE AND Q&A

Verbal presentation from Cllr Amy Allen, Executive Member for Environment and Louise Overington, Service Development and Support Manager - waste

- New blue lidded bin - everyone should have received this. It's an upgrade to replace the current blue box for cardboard and paper. Any issues that have occurred during this are being looked into, such as damaged lids.
- From 4 August, general waste will be collected every 3 weeks.

Food caddies will still go out every week as usual.

Soft plastics will be accepted in recycling, which means less for the purple bin.

- An 8-page leaflet with full details will be sent out in July.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Residents with special circumstances (e.g. some terraced housing) will receive sacks instead of bins.
- Outstanding issues - councillors are urged to report any outstanding issues with receiving the blue lidded bins from residents.
- What to do with the old box – the choice is up to the residents, some suggestions were to use it in the garden or use for storage.
- Tracking soft plastic volume - it's hard to track but takes up significant volume. An example bag full of soft plastics was shown to demonstrate how much volume it takes up.
- A member of the public reported damage of their current small blue box from bin crew throwing it. AA apologised and noted the new bins will prevent such issues as they can't be thrown.
- Messaging - currently trying to balance the messaging around current bin service and what the new service is. Mainly using social media for this.
- Impact of three weekly collection with pests such as rats – it was confirmed the food waste bin will still be collected weekly.
- A member of the public asked why there are less litter bins in Walsworth and will it increase littering. It was advised that assessments have been carried out on litter bins. Some have been removed if not fit for purpose or based around the number of bins situated in one area. Report if not seeing the bins emptied enough.

All MOP gradually left the meeting after this item.

6. COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Community and Partnerships Officer highlighted to Councillors to encourage groups to apply for a Community Grant.

This was followed with discussions on:

- Why BIDs can no longer apply.
- Wording to be sent to Councillors to help publicise grant fund.
- Timings of future meetings if there are several grant applicants. IA asked if Councillors were available if the meeting was to start earlier. DWi and DWM might be able to do a 7pm start.

7. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

The updates below were published with the agenda:

Updates from North Herts Council's Enterprise and Estate Teams

Churchgate Regeneration Project Update

The Project Board have held three workshops to discuss potential uses for the site and the financial feasibility of various options available to the Council. The feasibility is being led by consultants Lambert Smith Hampton, as we continue to work alongside them throughout the due diligence phase of this project.

Some members of the Project team attended 'UKREiiF' in Leeds 21st – 23rd May. UKREiiF is the UK Real Estate and Investment Forum and is a great opportunity/platform for Councils to showcase their portfolios of real estate opportunities within their towns/boroughs. The event is also attended by hundreds of developers, retailers, house builders, investment companies etc. The team attended alongside 'Invest Hertfordshire' – which makes up most of the Councils in the County, working together to showcase their opportunities.

The purpose of attending the event was to demonstrate the work done so far on the Regeneration Project for Churchgate, sharing the public consultation results as well as the technical findings. This enabled developers to have a better understanding of what the Council wish to deliver on the site – and continues to create momentum in the lead up to any Procurement exercise we may wish to do in the Autumn.

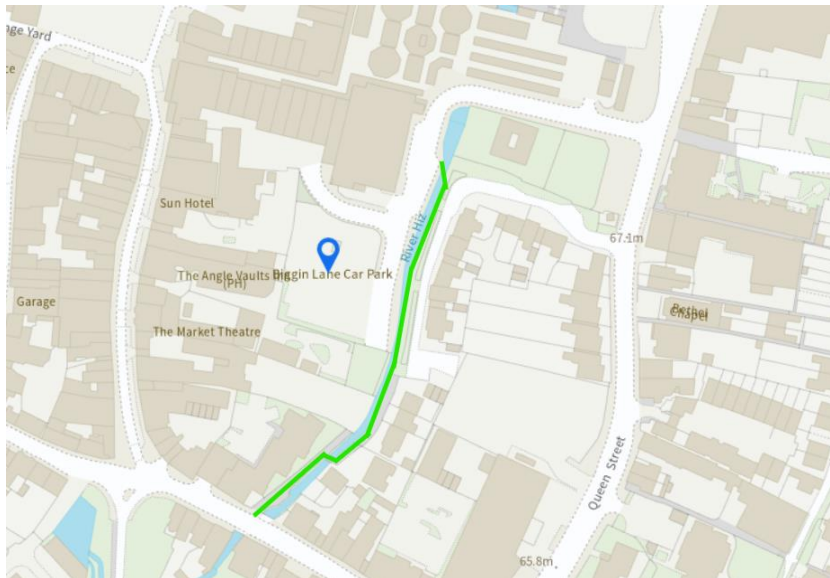
We have been using our comms channels (namely social media) to share Churchgate updates and findings. Recently we filmed and posted two videos – one of the Leader of the Council, Daniel Allen, talking about the importance of our five development principles, and the other with an interview from Steve Norris at Lambert Smith Hampton and Service Director of Enterprise Steve Crowley. This video talks about the steps we have taken so far, and why they are so crucial to our success.

We are now focusing on taking a report to Full Council that will outline a top level option and preferred route for the project.

Churchgate Shopping Centre Management

The new managing agents, Praxis Property Management, are now actively onboard with the day-to-day management of the centre. They are building good relationships with the tenants with an improved presence at the centre and ensuring compliance and day to day management aspects are actioned. There have been recent new lettings of Unit 11 and 17 which are a good addition to the centre. Deep cleaning of the walkway was completed a few weeks ago, and repair and decoration of the canopies is nearing completion and has made a significant improvement. By the time of the Forum meeting the hanging baskets and planters should be in place. We are looking at the potential to improve signage and benches in the walkway too. Praxis are working closely with Visit Hitchin regarding events this year that we can collaborate on.

Riverside Walk – This remains within the Responsible Growth priority of the Council Plan with the aim of delivering the walkway between Bridge Street and Biggin Lane to increase footfall in this part of the town centre. Following the results of a topographical survey of the proposed route, an outline proposal has now been prepared by an external firm of consultant engineers and there was a recent site visit with Executive Members and the Leader. Preliminary indications are that the optimum route of the Riverside Walk will follow the route approximately shown in green below.



The route will involve the construction of a new footbridge over the Hiz near to the Biggin Lane car park. Consultation is underway with the Environment Agency to enable the design of the proposed bridge to be finalised and with Herts County Council Highways for linking with existing footpaths. Works are planned to repair the walkway surface and clear the river to enable inspection of the retaining walls. The path will need to be for the use of pedestrians only (and not mounted cyclists) due to the width of the existing walkway adjacent to Jill Gray Place. Once more detail is available plans will be shared more widely. There are a number of stages to delivery of this project including outline and detailed design, consultation with key stakeholders, planning and conservation area consents, Highway and Environment Agency consents, tender for the works and delivery. The target is to seek completion this financial year.

Charnwood House – The Council remain committed to delivering its ambition to revitalise Charnwood House for the benefit of Hitchin and the wider district. As advised, previous work and marketing by external agents did not lead to a letting or other arrangement to bring it into suitable use for various reasons. Officers are undertaking a review of the work done to date and the reports on the building, and will be bringing forward options for Executive Members to confirm the next steps. Whilst Charnwood House is not formally on the market at present pending the outcome of this work, we are maintaining a list of organisations and groups who have expressed an interest and they will be informed of next steps.

The Council has a web page for the property remains at [Charnwood House | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://Charnwood House | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)) which is periodically updated and includes frequently asked questions.

Questions were invited on the latest published updates on Churchgate, Riverside Walk & Charnwood House:

- Information is welcomed but stressed the importance of maintaining momentum on these projects.
- Completion of Riverside Walk is expected this financial year.
- Brief discussion around what needs to be done once there is a tenant for Charnwood.

Discussion around 20mph:

- NM expressed strong support of this and requested a Highways representative on this at a future meeting. Has concerns around enough signage, Nightingale Road is one.
- IA – noted the County Council should be lobbied as the current funding for 20mph measures ends this financial year.
- KH – advised Highways Officer may be limited on what they can do due to funding.

8. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

KH – suggested town centre strategy update.

ED – access to Hitchin station.

MEETING CLOSED 21.05