

Churchgate Consultation Feedback Summary Report

February 2025

- The programme of engagement ran from September to November 2024, and included:
 - Workshops with Hitchin Community Forum and Market Board
 - Inviting current tenants of Churchgate to their own drop-in session at the Consultation Hub
 - An in-person Consultation Hub which was open on various dates for members of the public to drop-in and meet members of the project team. At the Hub there were exhibition boards on display that set out the history behind the proposed regeneration and options for the future, as well as interactive activities for attendees to take part in and give their thoughts.
 - A feedback survey available both at the Consultation Hub and online
 - A series of social media posts throughout the consultation period encouraging participation
 - A leaflet drop to the whole District to ensure maximum reach, which was sent out during the consultation period to boost response rate
 - A programme of engagement with local schools to ensure maximum youth engagement
- We received a high level of participation, with over 1000 people attending the Consultation Hub and 1505 responses to the feedback survey.
- Key findings show that people really value Hitchin's historical character, the range of local restaurants and cafes, and the market, but feel that parking issues, traffic, and public transport are some of the town's main weaknesses.
- The consultation helped to identify five key recommendations that are priorities for the local community and should be at the forefront of considerations when planning for the regeneration of the Churchgate Centre.

Survey feedback

Who responded

The survey ran on North Herts Council's website from Monday 16th September to Sunday 3rd November 2024. There were also hard copy surveys available at the Churchgate Consultation Hub. The survey received a total of **1505 responses**. Most responses came from the 35 – 44 age group. Around 15% of respondents were 18 – 34, which is a harder to reach demographic.

99.5% of respondents use Hitchin Town Centre, with the majority of respondents visiting a couple of times a week. The survey asked people the main reasons they visit the Town Centre. Shopping was the most selected option, with leisure and entertainment following. Work and education were the

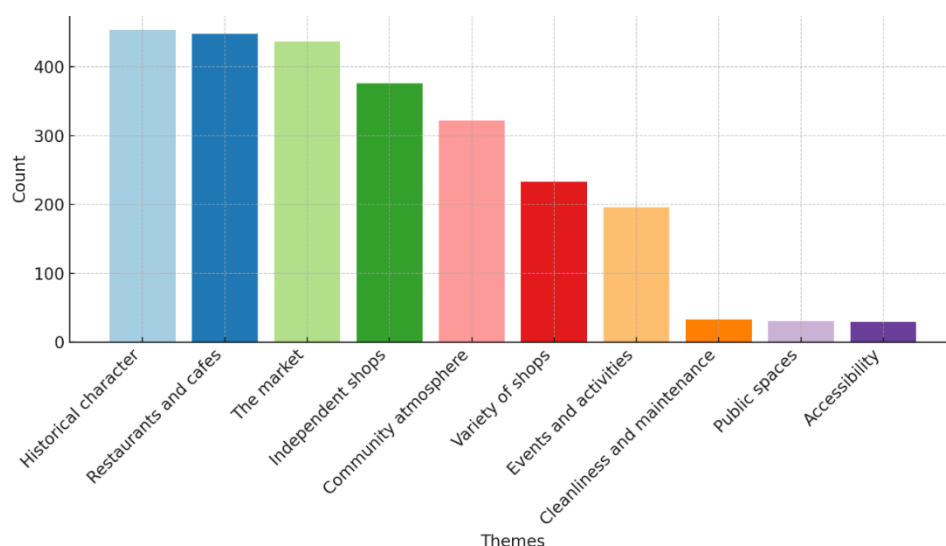
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least common reasons for people to visit the town. Most people either walk or drive into the town centre (55% and 40% respectively), but the vast majority of people get around the town centre by walking.

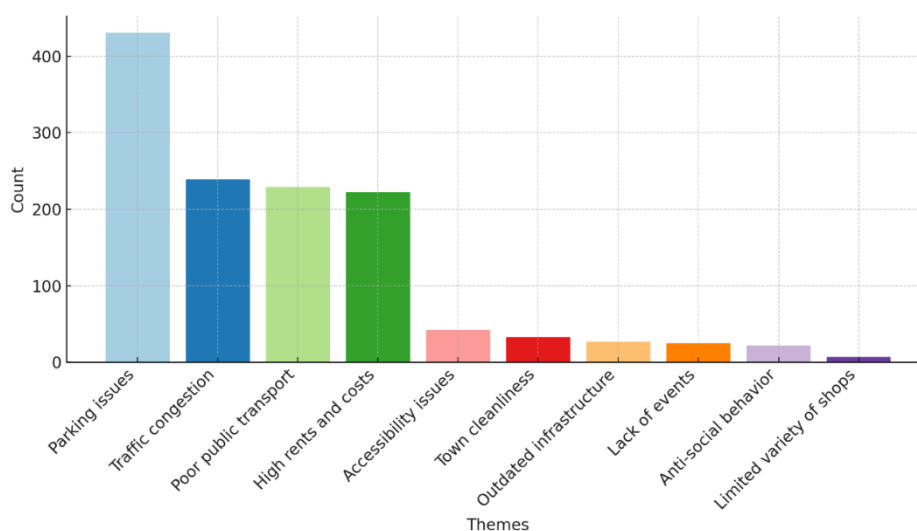
As expected, most people who responded either live or work in Hitchin Town Centre. However, there was a number of responses from neighbouring areas, such as Letchworth Garden City, Royston, and Luton.

Hitchin's strengths and weaknesses

We asked people what they think Hitchin's greatest assets or strengths are. The graph below shows the top ten themes that people included in their answers.



Similarly, we asked people what they think Hitchin's three greatest challenges or weaknesses are. The graph below shows the top ten themes that people included in their answers.



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Shops, services, dining, and Market

Reducing the number of vacant shops would encourage people to spend more time in Hitchin Town Centre. Respondents were also keen to see the market revamped and opening up the River Hiz as part of the regeneration. Respondents wanted to see the introduction of specialist food stores and a cinema.

The current choice of restaurants, bars, cafes, and pubs in Hitchin Town Centre was rated poorly in the survey, with respondents wanting more healthy options and international cuisine.

Both outdoor dining and a food hall were rated by most respondents as important consideration for any future redevelopment.

Most people either had no view or were unsatisfied / very unsatisfied with the current market. The most popular improvements selected were a greater variety of stalls and more local produce.

Housing and communal spaces

Most of those who responded would like to see apartments and affordable housing being delivered in the town centre.

Green spaces, or play areas being provided as part of the regeneration were very important , with respondents wanting to see communal spaces used for live music, community events, and seasonal celebrations.

Parking

We asked respondents where they park in the town. Sainsbury's, St Mary's, and Waitrose car parks are all used by more than 25% of people.

When asked which are important factors when thinking about parking, the most popular answers were location, cost, and availability. The 'other' options given included:

- Proximity to shops
- Parent and child spaces
- Ease of payment method
- Sizes of spaces

We asked people to what extent they agree that there is currently enough disabled parking available. The majority of people felt neutral on this issue. We know that only 9.4% of respondents consider themselves to be disabled so this could mean the majority of people answering do not have experience of the disabled parking locally and therefore have no opinion on this matter.

Sustainability and heritage

We asked people to rate the importance of various sustainable and environmentally friendly aspects to potentially be incorporated into the regeneration. Energy efficient lighting, followed by recycling stations, sustainable building materials, and solar panels were deemed the most important elements to be incorporated.

The main takeaway though, is that all of the measures we asked about are deemed important by people, so sustainability is generally a highly priority for people in Hitchin.

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We also asked people to what extent they agree that initiatives such as zero-waste shops or bike-sharing programmes should be incorporated into the plans. People generally agreed or felt neutral about this.

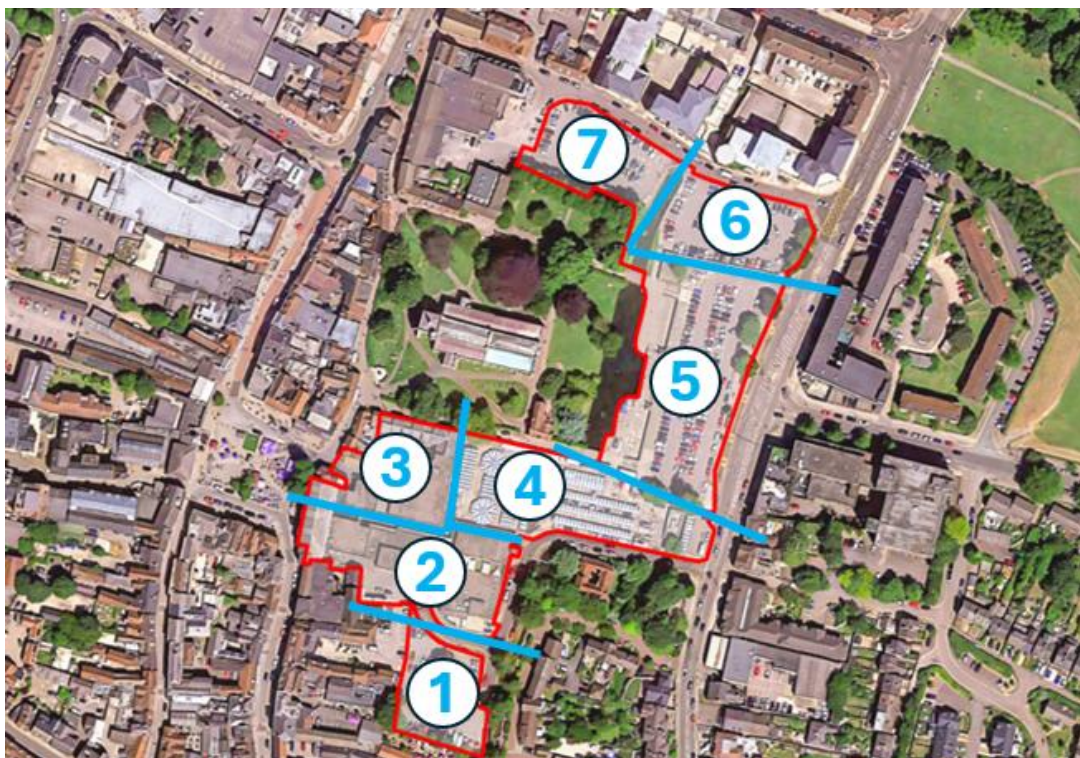
It was also deemed as very important that Hitchin's character and history be protected and enhanced.

Local facilities

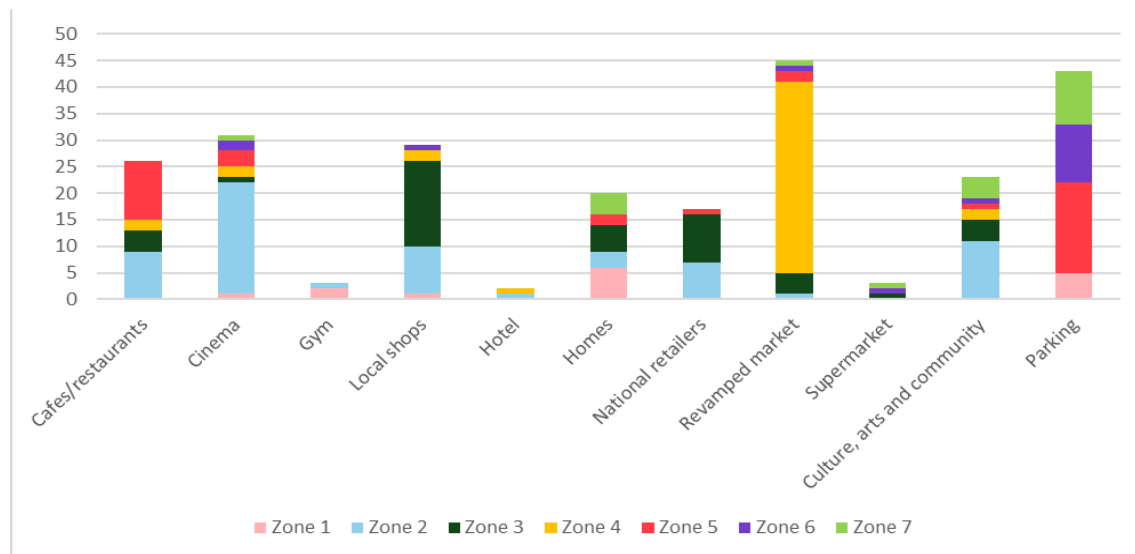
We asked people to rate how important various facilities are to them. Seating and restrooms are the most important amenities to people, followed by baby-changing stations and water fountains. Car parking and public Wi-Fi are least important to people, with 31% and 28% of people respectively rating them very unimportant or unimportant.

In person feedback

We asked people to take part in an activity at the Consultation Hub, sticking numbers to a map to indicate where best they felt certain assets would sit. To analyse this data, we have split the map into seven 'Zones'. These are shown on the map below.



The results of this activity are shown in the graph below.



As you can see, the most popular option by far was to put the revamped market in Zone 4 – where it sits currently. Other popular choices were to put a cinema in Zone 2, to put local shops in Zone 3, and to put parking in Zone 5, 6, or 7 (which are currently car parks). People would also like to see a café/restaurant in Zone 2 or 5.

We also asked people to take part in an activity which looked to find out how people had travelled into town on the day, and what their main purpose was for visiting town, using Post-its to note these down.

Shopping and leisure/entertainment were the most popular reasons given for visiting town, while most people had walked into town the day they visited the Hub.

In another in-person activity, we displayed photos of different existing markets and streetscapes and asked people to place sticky dots to indicate which styles they felt would be most appropriate for Hitchin. The existing markets people felt would fit the style of Hitchin best were Truro Farmers Market, Market Halls Victoria, Darley Street Market in Bradford, and Altricham Market.

The most popular features for inclusion in the Hitchin streetscape were opening up and celebrating the River Hiz, green places, places to sit and eat, space for performance and events, and scenic walking routes.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis in this report of the feedback received through the survey, the in-person activities at the Consultation Hub, and the stakeholder workshops, we have concluded on five key recommendations that are priorities for the local community and should be at the forefront of considerations when planning for the regeneration of the Churchgate Centre.

These five key recommendations are:

1. Revitalisation of Hitchin Market

The market is considered one of Hitchin's greatest strengths and people are keen to see it brought forward as flexible, vibrant, and community centred.

2. Sustainable regeneration

The incorporation of green space and eco-friendly initiatives are considered of high importance.

3. Improvement of accessibility

People want to see better access to the Town Centre through parking, public transport, and pedestrian routes.

4. Affordable housing

The most important aspect of any housing brought forward in the plans will be affordable homes.

5. Community and leisure space

It is important to people that community spaces are multi-functional, flexible spaces that provide for all demographics.

ENDS