

Churchgate Regeneration Zone Hitchin Town Centre Summary Report





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Introduction

Churchgate Regeneration Zone

North Herts Council (NHC) acquired the long leasehold interest of the Churchgate Centre in August 2022, and effectively merged the leasehold interest with the freehold interest already in the Council's ownership. Their outright ownership of the centre and adjacent land provides the opportunity, for the first time, for the potential comprehensive redevelopment of the 5.6 acre site. The wider opportunity site is referred to as the 'Churchgate Regeneration Zone' (CRZ).

Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) was initially commissioned by North Herts Council (NHC) in 2023 via the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework to review and advise on the market potential for the regeneration of the Churchgate Centre and adjacent (surface car park) sites under its ownership.

The Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ) comprises the Churchgate Centre, Hitchin Market and the Portmill Lane, Biggin Lane and St Mary's Square Car Parks (see plan).

The first phase of work comprised:

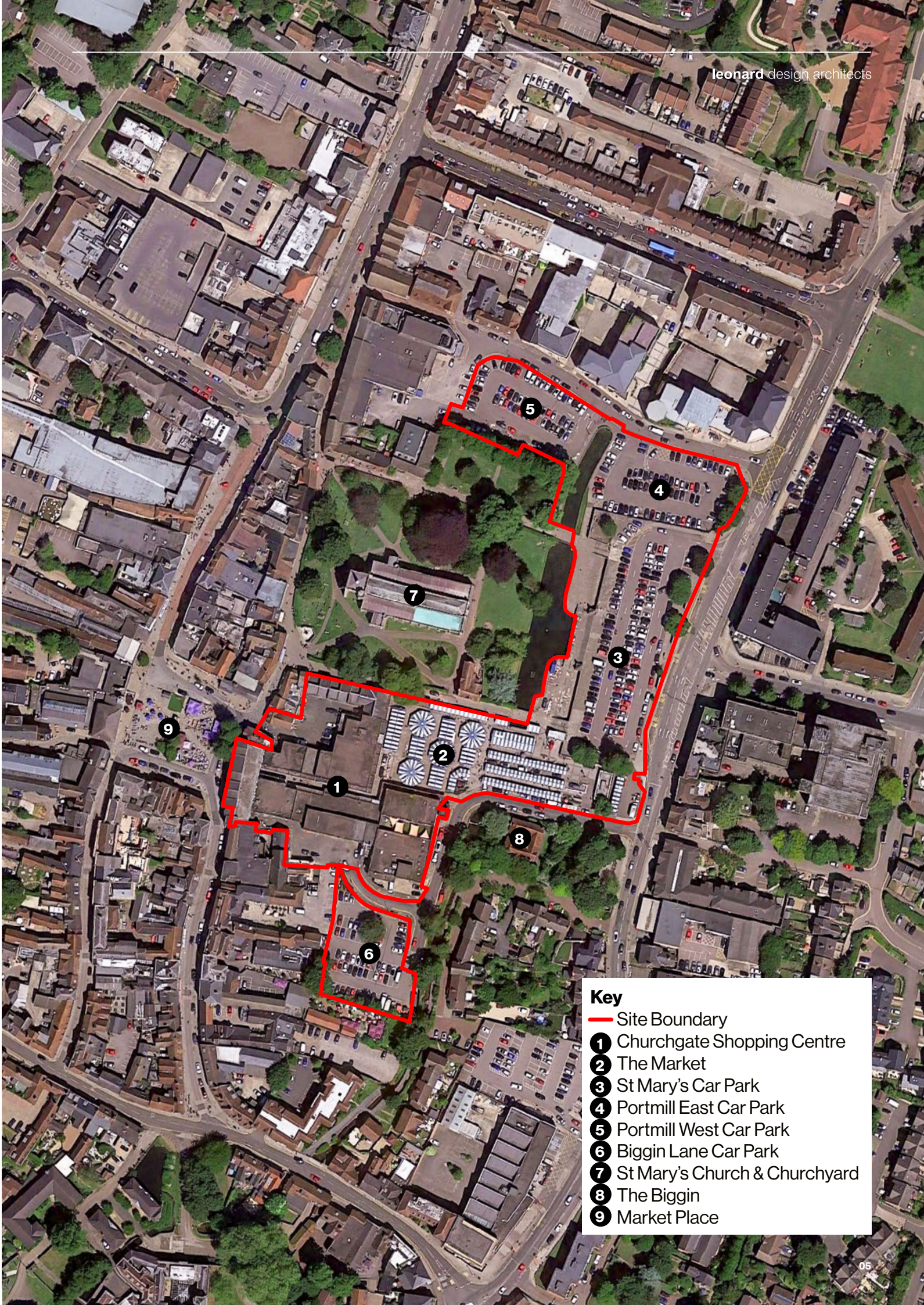
- A review of ownerships and identification of any potential issues that might impact on future development (e.g. restrictive covenants, rights of way, long leases, further land assembly, etc).
- A planning policy overview and assessment of any factors/considerations that might impact (positively and negatively) on the development (e.g. conservation area, proximity of listed buildings, sight lines to St Mary's Church etc).
- A market overview of different uses (retail, leisure, employment, civic, community, market, residential types, etc.) and broad 'value parameters' to help understand the most viable and optimum mix of uses; as well as an early understanding of any potential barriers to development and delivery, and what mitigation steps may be needed to reduce risks.

These inter-related work streams were set out in LSH's 'Market Assessment & Planning Overview' report, including recommendations on next steps. This report was prepared for the Council in September 2023, and the key findings were summarised and presented to the client team and to:

- Churchgate Project Board - 17 October 2023; and
- All Council Members - 9 November 2023.

At these meetings it was formally agreed a 'Regeneration & Investment Framework' (RIF) be prepared to provide the robust evidence-based spatial strategy, and planning / design / development framework needed to help inform the Council's planning of, and decision-making on the potential redevelopment of the CRZ. The RIF is being prepared in accordance with key Policy SP9 (on Design and Sustainability), to address the requirements of Policies HT11 (on Town centre uses and site-specific allocation criteria) of the adopted Local Plan (November 2022).

Working in collaboration with the Council's Churchgate Project Board team (comprising Councillors, the Managing Director (MD), Finance Director (FD) and Key Council Officers) a multi-disciplinary consultancy team was assembled in early 2024 comprising masterplanners / urban designers (Leonard Design Architects) and transport planners (KMC Transport Planning) via a competitive process.



Key

- Site Boundary
- 1 Churchgate Shopping Centre
- 2 The Market
- 3 St Mary's Car Park
- 4 Portmill East Car Park
- 5 Portmill West Car Park
- 6 Biggin Lane Car Park
- 7 St Mary's Church & Churchyard
- 8 The Biggin
- 9 Market Place

Council purchase Churchgate Centre leasehold	LSH commissioned to prepare a high level Asset, Property Market & Centre Health Check	LSH Member briefing to full council	Leonard Design and KMC Transport appointed	Reporting outputs, including: Baseline report Investment prospectus UKREiiF Market testing update & further developer testing	Stakeholder consultations, including with: Residents Community forum Market board Tenants Interest groups Youth	Consultation reporting	Viability analysis	Next steps subject to delivery strategy	
Q3 2022	Q3 2023	Q4 2023	Q1 2024	Q2 2024	Q3 2024	Q4 2024	Q1 2025	Q2 2025 onwards	

2024 Review

The combined consultant team, led by LSH, subsequently undertook the following inter-related workstreams during 2024 (also see the timeline above):

- A Baseline Review.** As part of this initial work, LSH refreshed and updated the initial commercial property and residential market assessment prepared in 2023. Further to this:
 - LDA prepared a detailed **urban design review** of the issues, constraints and opportunities for the potential redevelopment of the CRZ (including assessments and mapping of the existing street/ pedestrian network, building heights, public realm, green/blue spaces, heritage, etc.); and
 - KMC carried out a review of **transport, parking, movement and linkages** to, from and within the Churchgate Centre, and across the wider town centres. The review also covered local/strategic connections; potential opportunities to enhance linkages and active travel routes; and a high level assessment of parking occupancy/policy and any potential to rationalise/repurpose parking provision across the CRZ and town centre.
- Soft Market Testing.** Building on the initial high-level market testing carried in 2023, LSH identified a number of prominent developers, housebuilders and development managers with a strong track record of delivering comparable mixed-use town centre redevelopment schemes in centres across the UK.
- An Investment Prospectus (IP) was also prepared as part of the soft market testing.** Working in partnership with the Council, LSH used the IP to engage with investors and developers at UKREiiF (the UK’s Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum) annual conference in Leeds in May 2024. The IP showcased the opportunities in Hitchin, and specifically the potential for the regeneration and transformation of the CRZ.

- Stakeholder and Community Engagement.** To further help inform the development of the CRZ, the project team worked in partnership with the Council to plan for, and carry out, a comprehensive and wide-ranging stakeholder engagement. This included a formal public consultation which ran from the 16th September to the 3rd November in the town centre. This enabled the community and stakeholders (including the young and hard to reach members of the community) to ‘have their say’ on a wide range of issues and help shape the potential development options and end uses on the CRZ. As part of the engagement exercise PLMR (Communications Agency) was commissioned to support the Council to seek views from key stakeholders and the wider community on what they would like to see delivered as part of this programme of regeneration.
- Development Viability Appraisals.** The next phase of work currently underway since December 2024 involves the preparation of a high-level and robust desk-top development appraisal of the potential development options for the different opportunity sites to help test and inform their overall financial viability and deliverability (including phasing).
- Roadmap to Delivery.** Drawing on all the inter-related workstreams the RIF will advise the Council on the different development and delivery options available.

Subject to finalisation of the development viability appraisals and the Council’s preferred “*roadmap to delivery*”, we envisage the procurement process will commence in the second half of 2025.

Finally, it should be noted that a series of Officer and Project Board briefings have been carried out throughout 2024/25 to date. The Council’s officers have also attended the project team’s weekly Monday afternoon meetings (since March 2024) to review and update progress on the preparation of the RIF (as shown on the timeline).

01 Baseline Review

The Baseline Review contained several key work-streams, including:

- Site and context mapping ,
- Planning policy review,
- Transport review,
- SWOT and constraints analysis,



A review of existing information to date, including planning policy, transport issues, heritage and site mappings.

A Mapping Review

The Baseline Review (published June 2024) incorporated reports from LSH, Leonard Design and KMC Transport Planning. Initially, a mapping exercise was conducted to understand the site, a summary of which is illustrated here.

From a placemaking and urban design perspective this exercise identified that the existing Churchgate Centre and Market are not of sufficient quality to properly serve the historic town of Hitchin. The car parks do not give a proper setting to, and harm views of the Church and Churchyard. There is also a huge opportunity to introduce more green and blue infrastructure into the centre of town and properly celebrate the River Hiz.

Permeability

It is essential that strong pedestrian links are created within any new development and that these are linked into the existing pedestrian flows and circulation patterns of the wider town centre and surrounding area.

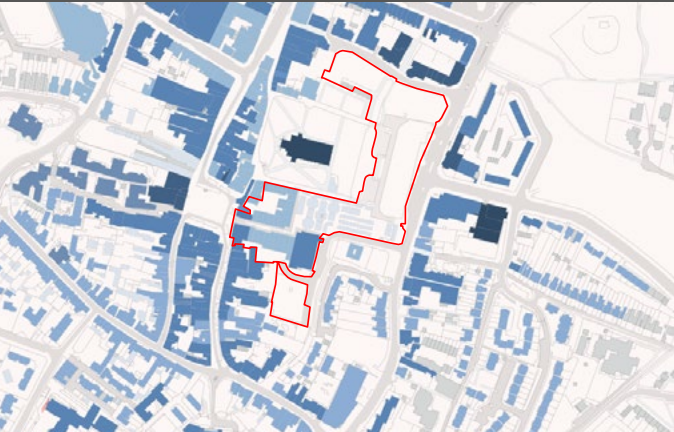
- Key:
- Pedestrian Routes
 - Shared Space Pedestrianisation
 - Fully Pedestrianised



Building heights

The buildings in the town centre are primarily two to four stories tall, creating a human-scale environment that contributes to the town's charm and walk-ability. The character of the town is defined by a mix of different architectural styles, with many buildings dating back to the Tudor, Georgian, and Victorian periods.

- Key:
- 1 Storey
 - 2 Storeys
 - 3 Storeys
 - 4+ Storeys



Heritage

Hitchin is one of the oldest continuously occupied urban centres in Hertfordshire. The ancient Icknield Way passes immediately to the North and there is evidence of Roman activity. The origins of the town, however, likely start later with the Saxon tribe named the 'Hicce', who's first mention dates from the 7th century.

— Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ) Boundary



Topography

St Mary's Square car park is at the Queen Street level, the area is terraced with steps along the western edge of the car park to allow pedestrians to descend to the river. There are attractive views across the river of St Mary's Church seen from Queen Street and from higher up in Hollow Lane. Even the notable Corn Exchange in Market Place can be seen from Lyle's Row.

- Key, AOD:
- 97
 - 57



Public Realm

The Hitchin Town Centre Strategy identifies a number of key spaces requiring improvement, these include: Queen Street, St Mary's Square, Portmill Lane, Market, Market Place, Hermitage Road South side, Bridge Street, River Hiz, Bancroft and Paynes Park.

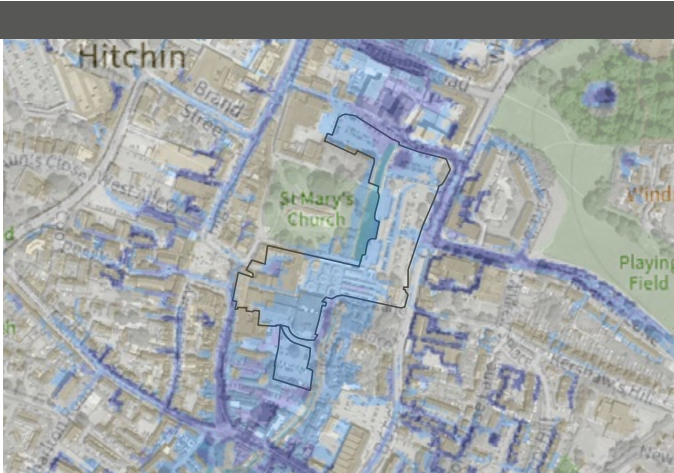


A Mapping Review

Flooding

The flood defences created by the terracing and canalisation of the River Hiz mean there is no risk of fluvial flooding in the town centre.

- Key:
- Flood Zone 3
 - Flood Zone 2
 - Flood Zone 1



Green Space

There are a significant number of high quality green spaces in and around Hitchin. The town is centred around the historic St Mary's Church and churchyard, providing a beautiful backdrop on the western bank of the River Hiz. Beyond the Market the Biggin is also set in a garden of large, verdant trees.

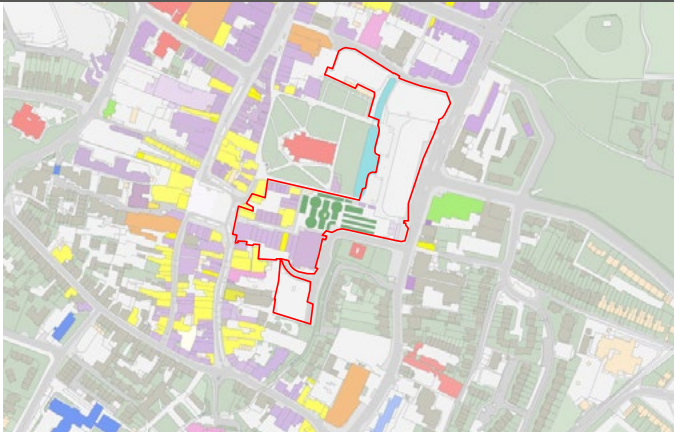
- Key:
- Green Spaces



Uses

Hitchin serves both its local community and a number of surrounding rural villages with a good range and choice of shops, services and community facilities.

- Key:
- F&B
 - Retail
 - Market
 - Supermarket
 - Local Interest
 - Accommodation
 - Office
 - Leisure
 - Residential



Vehicle routes, parking & servicing

The circulatory pattern, especially the one-way system around Paynes Park directs a significant amount of traffic through the western part of the town centre. This has the effect of isolating the Lairage multi-storey car park, the museum, the library and the Waitrose food store from the heart of the town centre.

- Key:
- Roads
 - Car Parks

Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ) Boundary



Conservation area review

The site lies within the town centre conservation area and is adjacent to several listed buildings including the Grade II* building of The Biggin and the Grade I building of St Mary's Church. Any proposed development must, therefore, respect the character, proportions, scale and materials and preserve or positively enhance the character of the Conservation Area and the settings of these important Listed buildings.

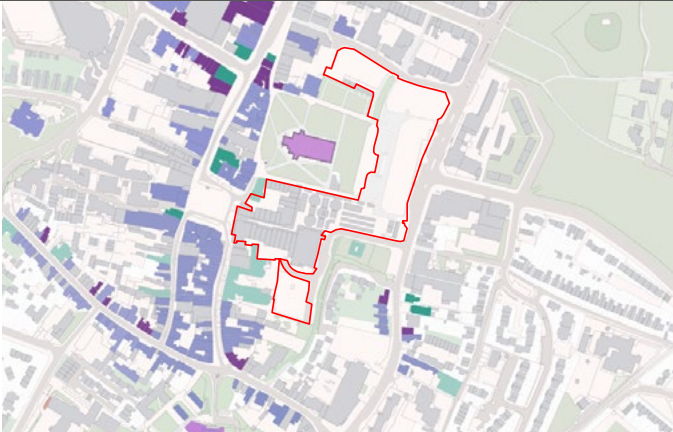
- Key:
- Important Views
 - Important Hardsurfaced Area
 - Landmark
 - Tree Group



Listed Buildings

There are about 300 listed buildings in the Hitchin Conservation Area, of which two are listed Grade I (St Mary's Church and The Priory) and there are eleven Grade II* listed entries on the register. The remainder are listed Grade II. There are no listed buildings within the boundary of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

- Key:
- Listed Building: Grade I
 - Listed Building: Grade II*
 - Listed Building: Grade II



B Planning Policy Review

LSH has carried out a comprehensive review of local and national planning policies, guidance and supplementary planning documents relevant to the potential redevelopment of the CRZ (see Planning Policy Review, June 2024). Some of the key policies and provisions are as follows:

Planning Designations

- Churchgate and its Surrounding Area Mixed-Use Allocation (Policy HT11).
- Primary Shopping Frontage (Policy ETC4).
- Secondary Shopping Frontage (Policy ETC5).
- Hitchin Town Centre (Policy SP4).
- Hitchin Conservation Area.
- Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3.

Land Uses

Should be a mix of uses and should:

- Have a long term strategy for the Market;
- Provide a flexible and diverse range of Class E / F1 / F2;
- Provide additional retail and F&B subject to assessment of capacity;
- Introduce new homes;
- Review car parking provision; and
- Provide high quality public realm and better pedestrian links.

Phasing

- Any development should be in keeping with the sites surrounding context and uses.
- Consider any development coming forwards at Paynes Park and Priory Park, both of which are allocated for development.
- Ensure continuity of trading for key retail outlets.
- Safeguard servicing arrangements of surrounding properties.
- Engage anchor tenants at the earliest opportunity.

Movement, Access, Parking & Public Realm

Development will be required to:

- Make new / better connections through the site between Market Place, Queen Street, Portmill Lane, Bancroft and along the River Hiz.
- Promote active frontages.
- Provide high quality public realm, potentially including meanwhile uses, event space and seating areas for casual dining.
- Consider how connections to the site can be improved including pedestrian, cyclist and public transport.
- Ensure that an appropriate level of parking is retained.

Design Principles and Height

- Development will be expected to display high quality urban design and architecture.
- A masterplan should inform land uses, public realm, movement networks and heritage assets.
- Development should respond positively and sensitively to the conservation area, taking into consideration position, orientation, scale, height, layout, massing, detailing and use of materials.
- Building frontage lines on Sun Street and Market Place should be respected.
- The architectural rhythm of the existing historic streets should be reflected towards Market Place.

C Transport & Car Park Review

KMC undertook a baseline assessment (June 2024) which have helped inform early options for development. The following summarises the initial key findings:

Conclusions from the transport and car park review are outlined below:

Servicing Access

Southern buildings are serviced via Biggin Lane (open access), while northern buildings use a time-restricted yard at Market Place. Market traders have controlled access for loading/unloading.

Parking Demand & Future Changes

Public car parks are well-utilised, especially on weekends. Any reduction in parking at Churchgate must be offset elsewhere, potentially through a multi-storey facility at Portmill Lane.

Active Travel & Public Transport Gaps

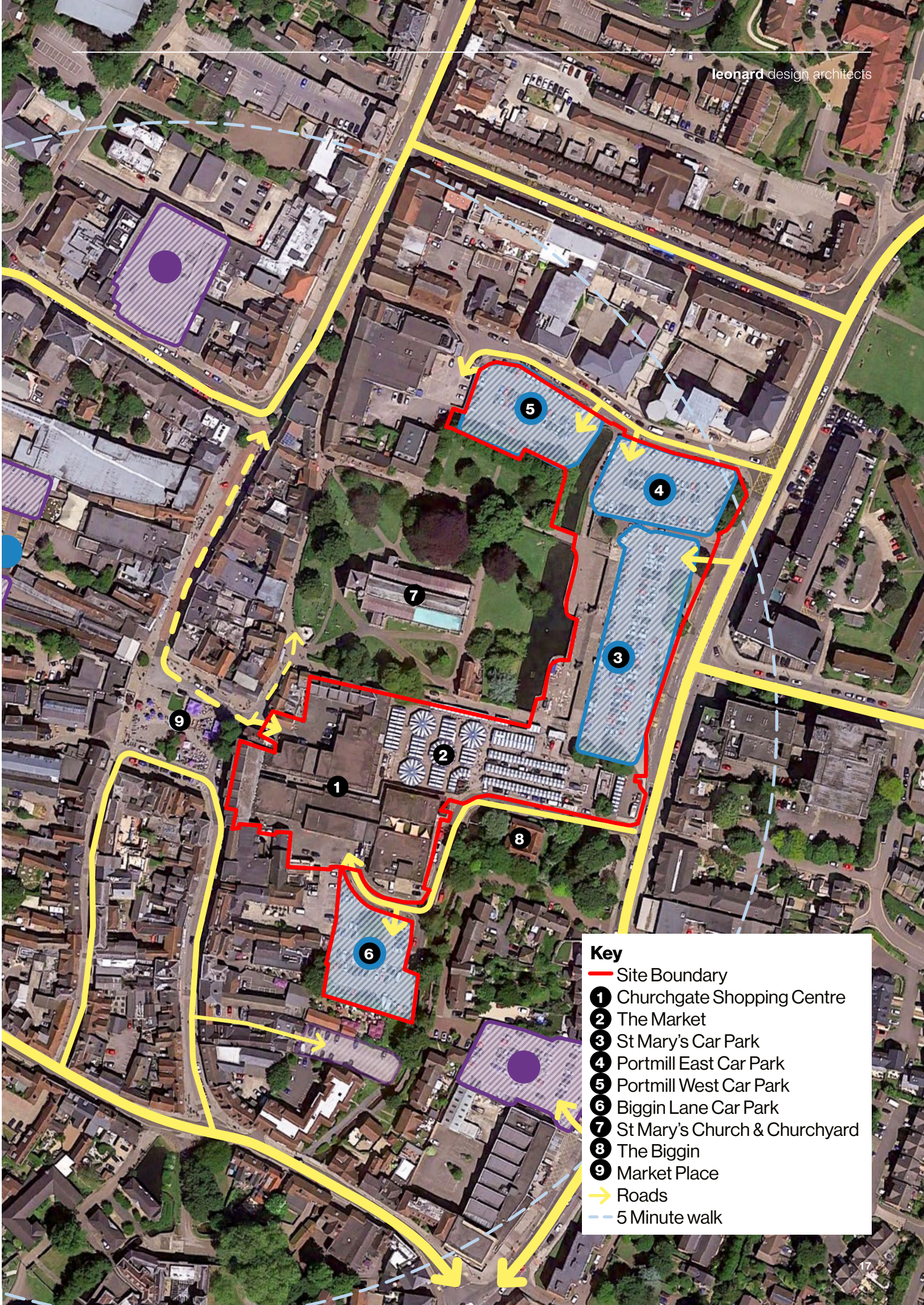
The site is pedestrianised with no cycling routes or facilities. Bus access is available, but secure cycle parking and better connectivity are needed to better serve the town.

Potential for Improved Connectivity

A key link between Market Place and Queen Street should be incorporated into redevelopment plans to enhance movement and accessibility.

Limited Impact of Queen Street Upgrades

Planned improvements (bus stops, crossings) offer minor benefits and should not restrict future redevelopment opportunities.



D Baseline Review: SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis consolidates the research conducted through the mapping, planning policy and transport and car parks reviews.

Strengths

- Historic street layout,
- Almost continuous frontages of high quality historic buildings along adjacent streets,
- High number of listed buildings,
- Mixture of residential and retail shopfronts provide variety to the town centre,
- Traditional mix of materials across the town in general,
- Characterful pitched rooves and chimneys,
- St Mary's Church, churchyard and Market Place setting,
- Views along the River Hiz,
- Views towards the St Mary's Church, Market Square, the High Street and up Windmill Hill,
- Ample parking,
- The Market as a key draw / offer for the local population,
- Mix of retail and F&B offers across the town centre.





Weaknesses






- Architecture of the Churchgate Centre not in keeping with the historic town setting and causes considerable harm to Market Place,
- Natural rhythm of the architecture of Sun Street and Market Place broken by the Churchgate facade,
- Large areas of asphalt car park, with very little green space,
- View from Hollow Lane to St Mary's Church blighted in the foreground by surface parking,
- View from Market Place into a service yard,
- Poor state of the market offer,
- Lack of permeability through the site,
- Ugly and inactive rear service accesses along Biggin Lane facing the historic Biggin Almshouses, River Hiz and Sun Hotel courtyard.








D Baseline Review: SWOT Analysis

Opportunities





-  Remove the concrete lid from on top of the River Hiz,
-  Open up a pedestrian route along the River Hiz,

Provide a range of different uses, including retail, F&B, leisure & homes:
 - » Including potential for new anchor / destination offers; and
 - » Potential for a range of residential offers, including flats above active ground floors and townhouses.
-  Create new permeability through the site, with better linkages between the Market Place, Market, Queen Street, Portmill Lane and Bancroft:
 - » Extend the traditional street pattern; and
 - » Reinststate the historic route between Market Place and River Hiz.
-  Provide an enhanced market offer,
-  Provide buildings reflecting the character & scale of the historic town,
-  Create new pedestrian-led, high quality public realm with the potential for event space and casual dining,
-  Redevelop the Churchgate to positively and sensitively respond to the conservation area, taking into account:
 - » Orientation and position;
 - » Scale and height;
 - » Layout; and
 - » Massing.



-  Create active frontages to support the vitality of the town centre,
-  Inject more green space / biodiversity, sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) to permeate the existing asphalt car parks,
-  Improve cycling and public transport connections into the town centre,
-  Safeguard important views within the town,
-  The entire site is designated an opportunity area in the Conservation Area Review.


Threats


-  Large areas of parking serving the town centre opposing the change to active / sustainable travel modes,
-  Existing parking requirements prohibiting development of any scale,
-  Historic scale of the town prohibiting developments of scale,
-  The requirement to safeguard any service arrangements for surrounding properties, including off Market Place.





Baseline Review: Conclusions


The conclusions identified by the Baseline Review are:


- 


Respect the character & scale of St Mary’s Church, the churchyard, Market Place and the historic buildings around it.
- 


Respect and enhance the important views, including in the Market Square, from Hollow Lane and along Churchgate.
- 


Revitalise and enhance the Market.
- 


Connect Market Place and the Hitchin Market area to the River Hiz, Queen Street as well as Portmill Road.
- 

Establish a strong pedestrian route along the River Hiz.
- 

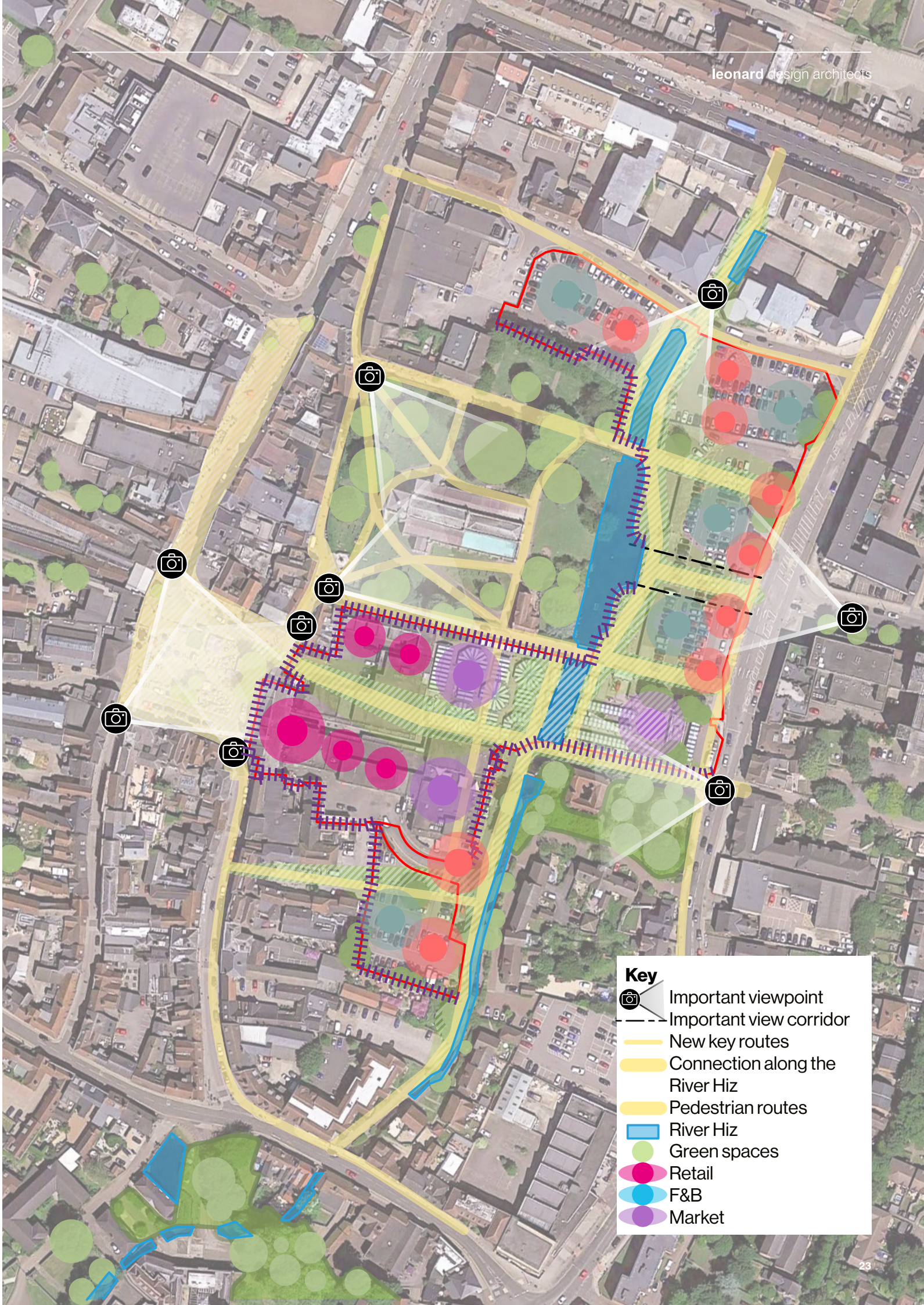
Create a hierarchy of streets and public realm reflecting the historic setting of the town, including lanes, arcades, streets and larger public spaces.
- 

Enhance the setting of the River Hiz by opening it up.
- 

Build upon the beautiful green spaces locally and inject greenery throughout the site, including SuDS where possible.
- 

Bring in a range of uses on the ground floor, including a range of retail and F&B offers, as well as leisure and community opportunities.
- 

Provide a range of homes of different tenure and type.



02 Commercial Market Review

LSH carried out a review of Hitchin Town Centre’s commercial and residential market, and placed this in the context of wider regional and national trends. Some of the headline findings include:

National Retail Trends

- Declining disposable incomes continue to impact consumer spending.
- The UK has an oversupply of retail space and the sector has continued challenges due to online shopping growth, cost-of-living pressure and post pandemic effects.
- Despite improvements in footfall, retail vacancy rates have only marginally decreased over the past 12 months.
- There has been an increased demand from independent and service retailers seeking flexible leasing models.
- The retail investment market has marginally improved during the course of 2024 although concerns exist over the impact of the forthcoming increase in retailer operational costs and how that will affect retailer expansion plans.

Hitchin Residential Market Overview

- Hitchin is a highly desirable residential location.
- Soft market testing confirms developers have a strong interest in residential-led regeneration with low-rise residential development (4–5 stories max) with associated car parking and amenity space.
- High-quality communal spaces and amenities are essential to attract buyers.
- Strong new build values with potential for growth in a regenerated town centre setting.

Hitchin’s Retail & Leisure Market

- Hitchin Town Centre has 650,000 sq ft of retail space.
- Key shopping areas include Bancroft, High Street, and Market Place.
- Whilst Hitchin’s retail sector has been affected by national trends and structural changes its attractive trading environment has meant it has not been as severely affected as some towns in the region.
- Retail vacancy rate is 8.1%, lower than the national average of 19.1% (Q4 2024).
- The Churchgate Shopping Centre and its surrounds require significant investment and revitalisation.
- Hitchin’s Market is an historic and important focus for town. However it needs investment and right-sizing to align with modern market trends.
- The local market has potential for revitalisation, particularly through a renewed focus on independent retailers and market spaces.

Hitchin’s Office Market

- Hitchin is a secondary office market along the A1(M) corridor with limited market activity.
- Vacancy rate is low (around 3%), which is well below the national average.
- Rental levels are also comparatively low, making new Grade A office development challenging.



03 Public Consultation

The Churchgate public consultation generated valuable feedback from the community and key stakeholders. The engagement process ran from 16th September to the 3rd November 2024 and included:

- Workshops with Hitchin Community Forum and Market Board (both on 09/09/24),
- Feedback from other stakeholder groups including the Labour Group (29/10/24) & Cycling UK (October 2024),
- Inviting current tenants of Churchgate to their own drop-in session at the Consultation Hub (16/09/24 – 03/11/24),
- An in-person Consultation Hub (with exhibition boards, overleaf) which was open on various dates for members of the public to drop-in and meet members of the project team (16/09/24 – 03/11/24),
- A feedback survey that was made available both at the Consultation Hub (physical copy), the Council’s online hub and via a QR code/link on the Council website (16/09/24 – 03/11/24),
- A programme of engagement with local schools to facilitate youth engagement (19/11/24 – 26/11/24),
- A social media campaign and outreach throughout the consultation period (16/09/24 – 03/11/24),
- A leaflet drop to households across the whole District (September 2024).

Over 1,000 people visited the Consultation Hub, and 1,505 survey responses were collected. The conclusions from the engagement feedback were:



Revitalisation of Hitchin Market



Sustainable Regeneration



Community, Leisure Space, and Entertainment



Improvement of Accessibility



Affordable Housing



The CRZ engagement and consultation gathered community feedback on the redevelopment potential of the site.

Over 1,000 people visited the Consultation Hub, and 1,505 survey responses were collected.

Next Steps: Have your say

Thank you for taking the time to visit us today and for providing your feedback.

Have your say - we need to hear from you!

We would most appreciate it if you could complete our online survey which asks more detail on your current use of H&H between centres, and your priorities and aspirations for the potential regeneration of the Churchgate Centre.

Your feedback will, as it will help inform the Council's vision and next steps for the future investment in, and development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

September to October 2020

The Council launches the online survey to enable residents to have their say on the future development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

Further information and advice is available for the Churchgate Regeneration Zone

November 2020

The Council will share the feedback and comments from the public consultation on the Churchgate regeneration stage.

December 2020

The Council will take in least the feedback from the consultation, and any comments made, to agree the next steps for the regeneration pathway for the delivery of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

2020-2021

The planning and construction of the sales-led development (either the existing or new building) with the Council's support will begin. The Council will support the regeneration of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone. This will be subject to further consultation with the community and planning authorities.

Together we will seek to shape the future of our town centre through the redevelopment of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone

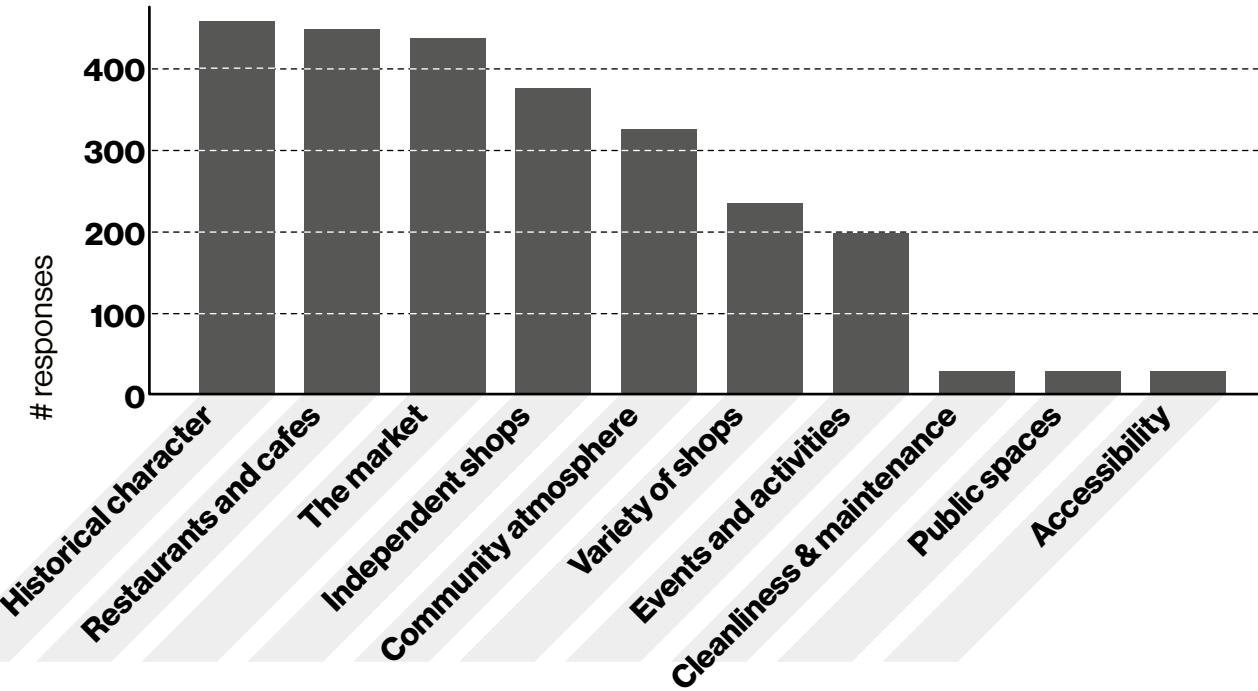
Churchgate Hub

The Churchgate Consultation Hub was open on various dates for the public from 16th September to 3rd November 2024. The hub also hosted drop-in sessions for existing tenants of The Churchgate Centre.

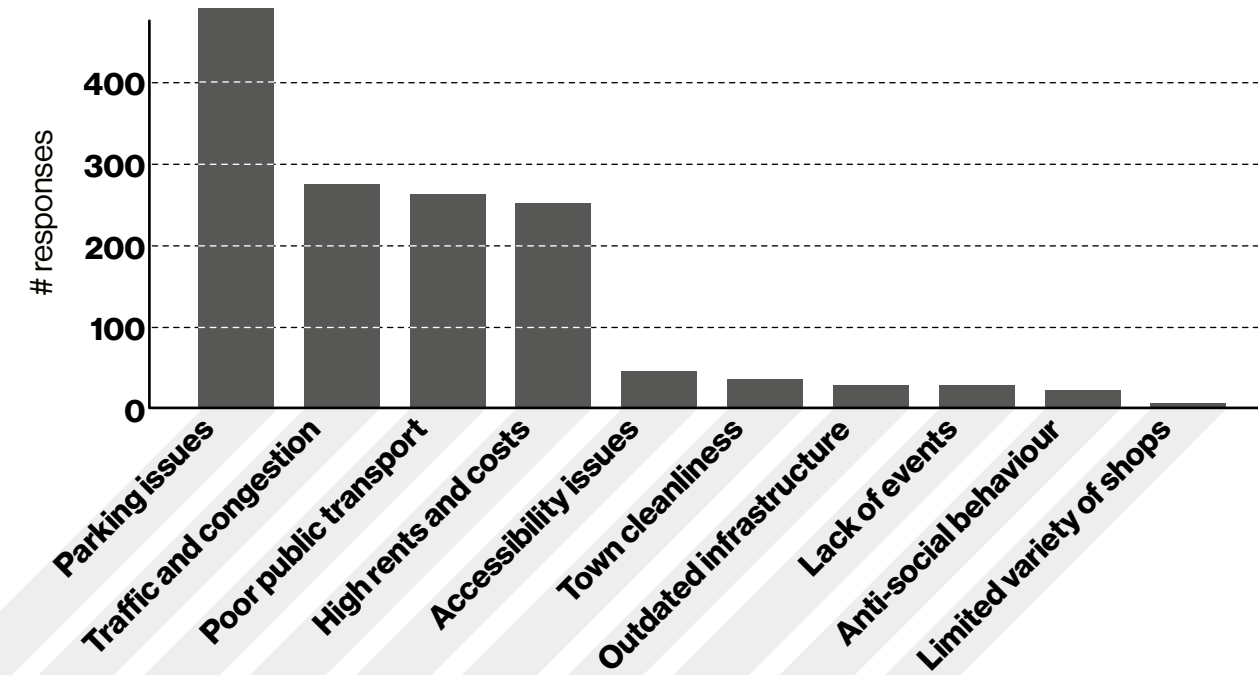


Public Consultation Report

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



Shops and services

We asked people what types of shops or services they would like to see within the Churchgate Regeneration scheme. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer. The figure below shows the results.

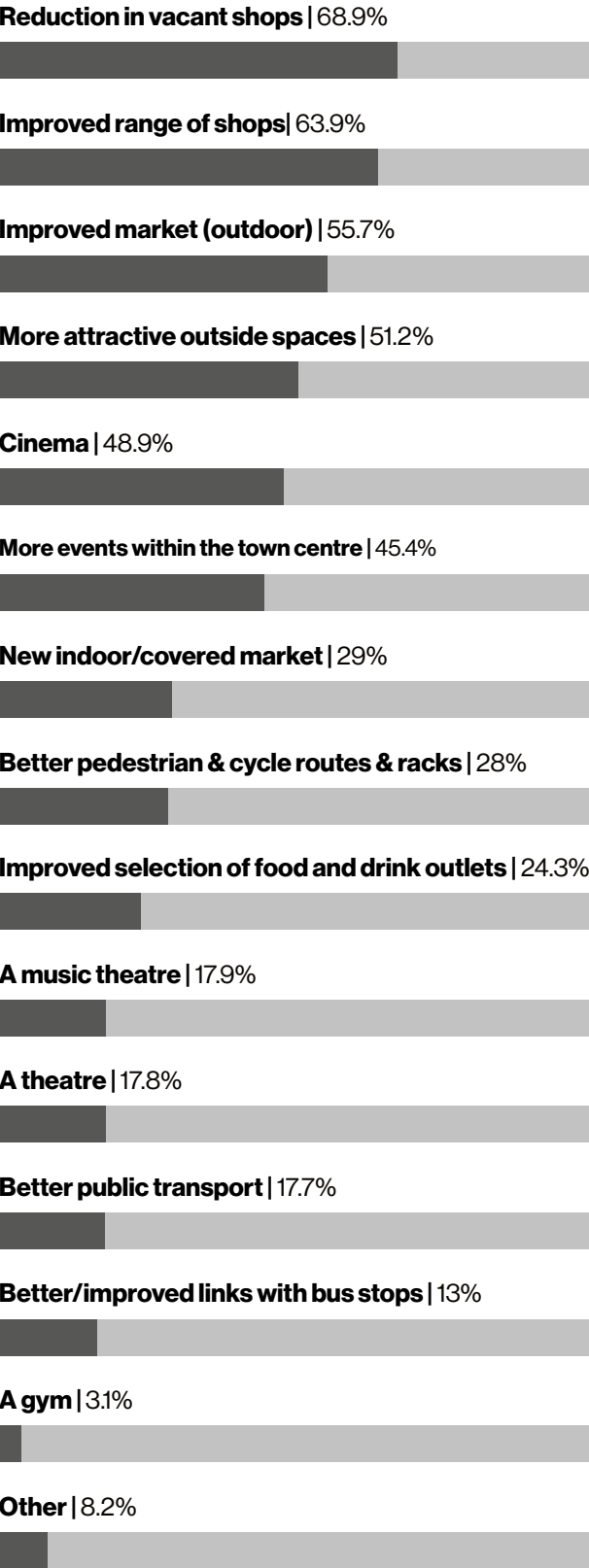
Specialist food stores and a cinema were the shops / services that people would most like to see in the town, with a gym the least popular.

Of the 15% of people who chose 'other', some of the suggestions included: Multi-storey parking, co-working space, gallery space, information centre, bookshops, vintage / second-hand stores or affordable clothing shops.



Potential improvements

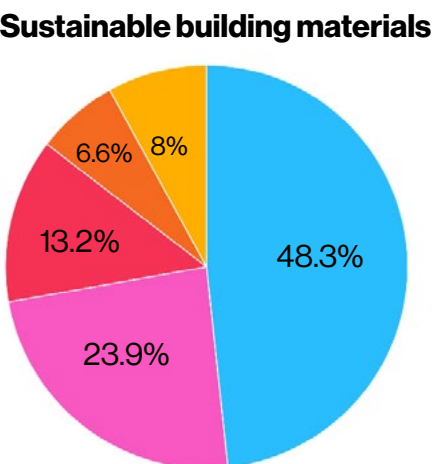
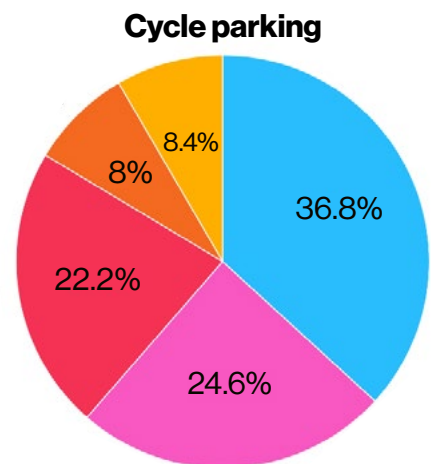
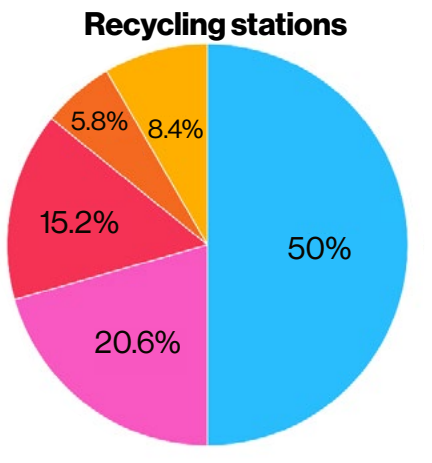
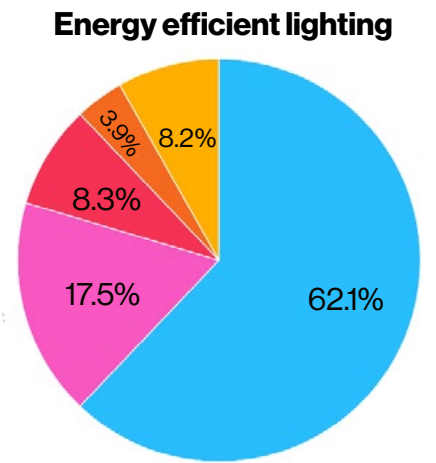
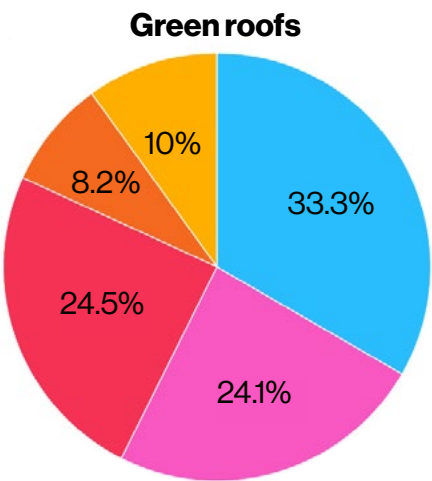
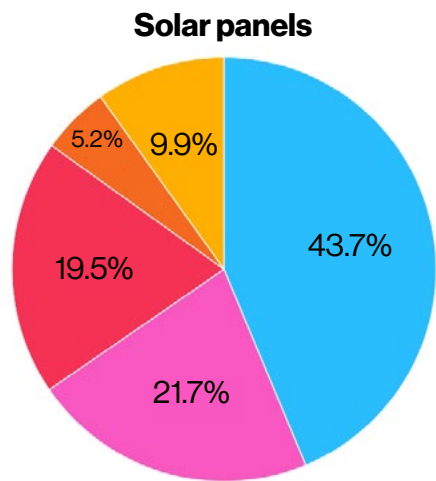
Which improvements would encourage people to spend more time in Hitchin town centre, with respondents allowed to choose more than one.



Public Consultation Report

We asked people to rate the importance of various sustainable and environmentally friendly aspects to potentially be incorporated into the regeneration. The graphs below show how people rated each aspect.

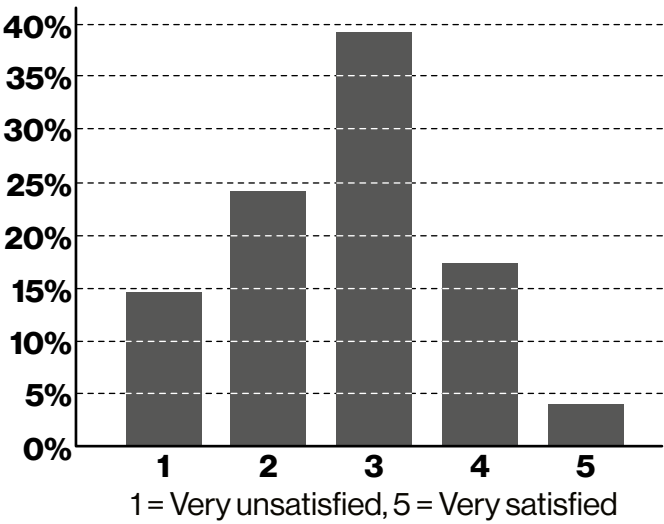
- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant



Hitchin Market

Satisfaction with the Market stalls

When asked how satisfied they are with the current selection of stalls at Hitchin Market, the majority of respondents either had no view or were unsatisfied / very unsatisfied, the below table shows the spread of ratings.

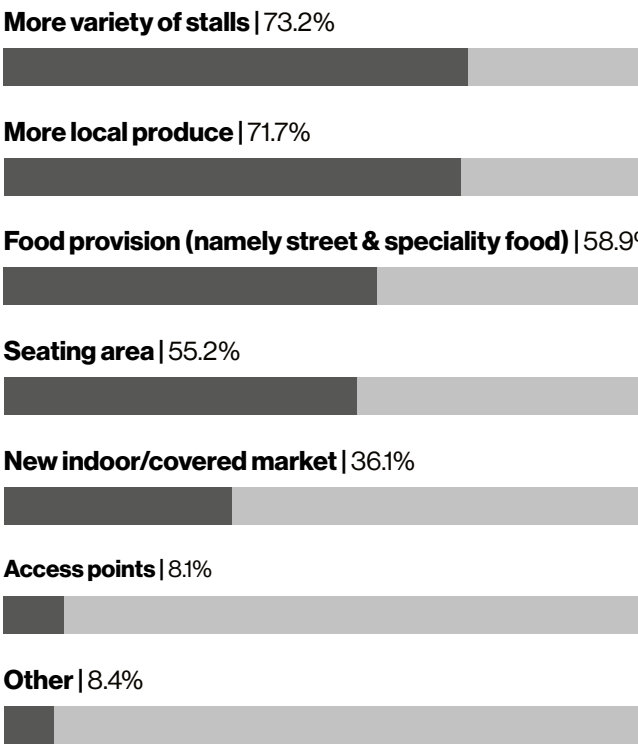


Potential improvements to the Market

When asked what improvements respondents would like to see at the Market (results below) the most popular options were more variety of stalls and more local produce. Access points were the least desired improvement.

8.4% of people chose 'other' and the suggestions given included:

- Move to Market Square;
- Late night market;
- Cleaner/tidier; and
- Higher quality stalls.



Public Consultation Report

In support of the Churchgate Consultation, we designed an engagement programme to specifically target the youth of Hitchin. We recognise that this demographic are key stakeholders in this project and are vital to the future of any regeneration that occurs on the site, as current residents and users of the town, and future users of the space and Hitchin town centre more widely.

We created Churchgate briefing packs to circulate to Hitchin schools, to be sent to parents and shared in classes to engage pupils and spread the word about the Churchgate project. We also offered schools the opportunity to attend an in-person interactive workshop in the Churchgate Hub in Hitchin town centre, which we had previously been using for the consultation to speak to residents and encourage them to take the survey. The outcomes of the workshops are illustrated below.

Year 5s:

- 52 lived in Hitchin;
- Most have shopped at and visited Churchgate and the market;
- 53 are currently regularly visiting the market; and
- 36 regularly use the Churchgate Shopping Centre.

These groups suggestions are illustrated through the below word cloud, in which you can see the most common ideas show up the largest.



Year 9s:

- 17 lived in Hitchin;
- Most have shopped at and visited Churchgate and the market;
- 5 are currently regularly visiting the market; and
- 16 regularly use the Churchgate Shopping Centre.

These groups suggestions are illustrated through the below word cloud, in which you can see the most common ideas show up the largest.



Six formers:

- 6 lived in Hitchin;
- Most have shopped at and visited Churchgate and the market;
- 4 are currently regularly visiting the market; and
- 4 regularly use the Churchgate Shopping Centre.

These groups suggestions are illustrated through the below word cloud, in which you can see the most common ideas show up the largest.





04 Summary: Key Conclusions

01 Baseline Review

1. Respect the character & scale of St Mary's Church, the churchyard, Market Place and the historic buildings around it,
2. Respect and enhance the important views, including in the Market Square, from Hollow Lane and along Churchgate,
3. Revitalise and enhance the Market,
4. Connect Market Place and the Hitchin Market area to the River Hiz, Queen Street as well as Portmill Road,
5. Establish a strong pedestrian route along the River Hiz,
6. Create a hierarchy of streets and public realm reflecting the historic setting of the town, including lanes, arcades, streets and larger public spaces,
7. Enhance the setting of the River Hiz by opening it up,
8. Build upon the beautiful green spaces locally and inject greenery throughout the site, including SuDS where possible,
9. Bring in a range of uses on the ground floor, including a range of retail and F&B offers, as well as leisure and community opportunities,
10. Provide a range of homes of different tenure and type.

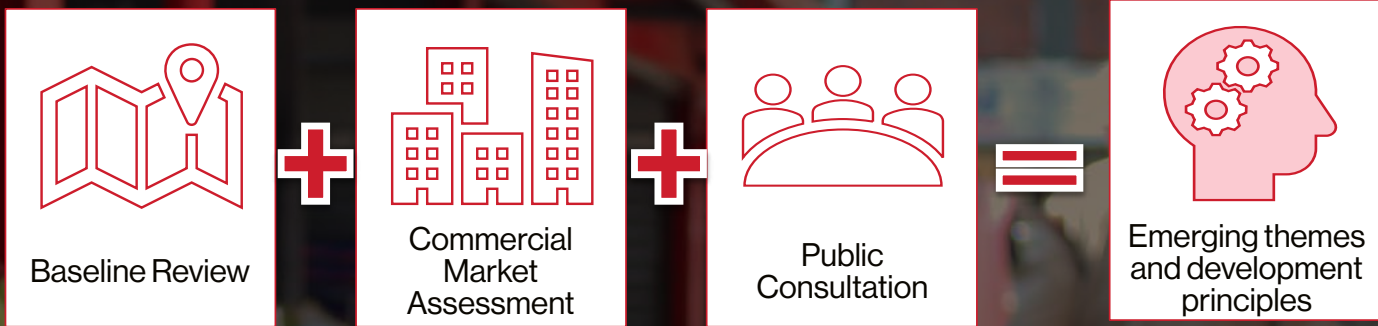
02 Commercial Market Review

1. Hitchin is well-positioned for future growth, but regeneration should focus on mixed-use developments incorporating retail, leisure, and residential space.
2. The town's strengths lie in its attractive streetscapes, affluent demographic, and potential for revitalisation through placemaking and a focus on independent retailers and market spaces.

03 Public Engagement

1. **Revitalisation of Hitchin Market.** Enhanced with flexible, community centered spaces with better visibility, accessibility and affordability of new market units with a mix of permanent stalls and casual trading spaces.
2. **Sustainable Regeneration.** Opening up the River Hiz, green spaces, energy-efficient buildings and sustainable infrastructure, with better cycle routes, pedestrian-friendly designs and transport links.
3. **Improvement of Accessibility.** More convenient parking locations, more reliable public transport connections and improved cycle and walking routes.
4. **Affordable Housing.** Strong support for a balance of affordable housing with a mix to maintain Hitchin's identity.
5. **Community, Leisure Space, and Entertainment.** The community desires multi-functional spaces catering to different demographics. Suggestions included performance spaces, a covered food hall, arts and entertainment hubs and youth-friendly areas, as well as a new cinema, multi-use arts hub, theatre, exhibition space and a live music venue.


Summarising the learnings from the Baseline Review, Commercial Market Assessment and the Public Consultation.



The broad findings from the detailed baseline analysis and consultation suggest that the optimal strategy and future vision for the CRZ is likely to comprise a blend of options that come together to create a resilient, vibrant, and sustainable Hitchin town centre. This will be underpinned by the following themes:



Emerging themes and development principles:



01 Heritage-Led Regeneration



02 Mixed-Use Intensification



03 Market & Riverfront Revitalisation



04 Sustainable & Smart Growth Strategy



05 Strategic Development of Underutilised Sites

01 Heritage-Led Regeneration

Objective: To retain and enhance the historic fabric while introducing complementary development.

Rationale:
Preserves character and identity of the town; and
Enhances local community support and local pride.

02 Mixed-Use Intensification

Objective: Maximise land use efficiency by integrating residential, retail, and leisure into a cohesive development.

Rationale:
Supports a diverse day, evening and night-time economy;
Increases town centre population density and footfall;
Strengthens retail resilience with ‘built-in’ local demand; and
Supports independent businesses in unique settings.

03 Market & Riverfront Revitalisation

Objective: Transform Hitchin Market and the River Hiz corridor into a dynamic, community-centred hub.

Rationale:

- Enhances the town’s natural assets and public realm;
- Creates a destination space for both locals and visitors alike; and
- Supports independent traders and local businesses.

04 Sustainable & Smart Growth Strategy

Objective: Future-proof any development in the CRZ by integrating green infrastructure, low-carbon technologies, and smart mobility.

Rationale:

- Future-proofs the town against climate change; and
- Enhances air quality, biodiversity, and overall liveability.

05 Strategic Development of Underutilised Sites

Objective: Unlock new development potential in key areas of the CRZ such as the car parks while balancing density and character.

Rationale:

- Unlocks new opportunities without overdeveloping heritage areas;
- Expands the town’s functional footprint sustainably; and
- Can be phased over time to align with demand.

05Next Steps

High level viability assessment of the development options has commenced based on the themes defined previously. This will blend options that contribute to creating a resilient, vibrant, and sustainable Hitchin town centre.

The Council is on an early part of its regeneration journey for the Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ). The Council's overarching aim through the revitalisation of the CRZ is to raise the attraction and profile of Hitchin as a place to live, work, shop and visit for a wide range of uses and activities.

As we move forward, we are seeking to further explore opportunities with potential development partners who will share our passion and drive to transform Hitchin into a thriving town that everyone can be proud of.



Council purchase Churchgate Centre leasehold	LSH commissioned to prepare a high level Asset, Property Market & Centre Health Check	LSH Member briefing to full council	Leonard Design and KMC Transport appointed	Reporting outputs, including: Baseline report Investment prospectus UKREiiF Market testing update & further developer testing	Stakeholder consultations, including with: Residents Community forum Market board Tenants Interest groups Youth	Consultation reporting	Viability analysis	Next steps subject to delivery strategy	
Q3 2022	Q3 2023	Q4 2023	Q1 2024	Q2 2024	Q3 2024	Q4 2024	Q1 2025	Q2 2025 onwards	



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