

Updates from North Herts Council's Enterprise and Estate Teams

Churchgate Regeneration Project

The team have now held three successful Churchgate all member briefings, which provided Cllrs with an opportunity to find out the latest progress updates and to ask them team specific questions. The discussions held were constructive, and the team are now pulling together a FAQ style document detailing all questions asked/points raised at the sessions.

More recently, the team have returned from this year's UKREiiF event in Leeds. This is the 3rd time that North Herts have had presence at this event, both in a Churchgate capacity and 'Invest Hertfordshire'. The event was a great success, and demonstrated to lead developers the amount of progress that the Churchgate Regen project has achieved since last year. NH held a breakfast event, attended by 45 representatives from developers, investors, and interested parties. This was a great platform to tell the 'market' what we've been up to, and to generate even more interest in preparation for future procurement.

On that note, the team have launched a pre-market engagement to appoint a developer who will take us through the crucial next steps of the project - bringing us up to the main 'delivery' procurement. This partner will tell us what is possible, keeping in mind the wealth of work the team have already completed on the project - and of course, the 5 key development principles. The Project Board know what they'd like to deliver on the site, with input from the public consultation - now it's time for the developers to tell us what is possible before committing to any large investment/programme.

It is an exciting time for this project, and we are moving forward with pace. Our next milestone will be at Cabinet on 16th June, whereby we are seeking approval to appoint the successful developer.

Churchgate Shopping Centre Management

Praxis Property Management continue the day-to-day management of the centre. The Council continues to manage the centre to support and maintain existing lettings and attract new tenants pending any potential longer-term redevelopment. This includes exploring a number of innovative short term community uses of vacant units, including Unit 21 (former Iceland) and 16/17 Market Place. Further details to follow. Praxis continue to work collaboratively with Visit Hitchin regarding events over the coming months that we can work on together. A number of new lettings have completed recently, including 39 Churchyard Walk (Physiotherapist), Unit 6 (Richard Taylor Travel), 8-10 (Italian restaurant) and Unit 19 (Charitable use - workshops and a small retail area for furniture sales).

Riverside Walk – Riverside Walk, Hitchin

This remains within the Responsible Growth priority of the Council Plan to deliver opening up the walkway between Bridge Street and Biggin Lane to increase footfall in this part of the town centre. The Council have a consulting engineer leading on the project and the drawings are now in final form subject to approvals. We are now at a key juncture to finalise the detail, timescale for delivery and required budget. This follows a period of information gathering including trial pits to check ground conditions and the position of existing underground services, consultation with the Environment Agency, Highways Authority and initial discussion with the planning authority. We have also had ongoing discussion with nearby residents regarding the position of fencing, gates and how to mitigate impact where appropriate.

Preliminary works to repair uneven surfaces and clear the river banks have already been undertaken.

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. There are a number of stages to delivery of this project including outline and detailed design (including lighting), consultation with key stakeholders, planning and conservation area consents, Highway and Environment Agency consents, procuring the bridge manufacture, tender for the works and delivery. The timing of the works are subject to receipt of the necessary consents and final budget approval and will be advised in due course.

Charnwood House

The Council remains committed to delivering its policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups and the wider town centre. The Council is in the final stage of appointing the chosen agent to undertake a new marketing of the property this summer. This will clearly set out the Council's aspirations, seeking proposals from suitable interested parties (or groups) and offers based on the Council's proposed letting arrangement which will include works required to the property, lease length and acceptable uses. We are maintaining a list of organisations and groups who have expressed an interest previously and they will be contacted once the property is due to be marketed.