

Churchgate Centre, Hitchin Public Realm Assessment



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Public Realm

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Introduction

Purpose of this document

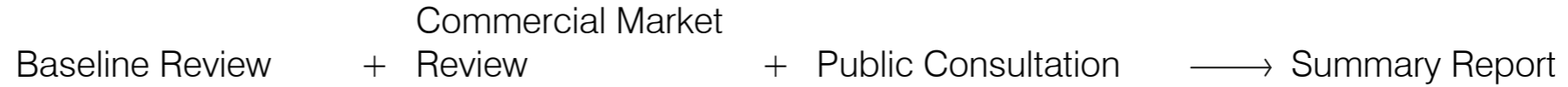
This document sets out the scope, approach, and deliverables for the development of concept designs for public realm within the Churchgate Regeneration Zone. Its purpose is to guide the design process by identifying opportunities and constraints, assessing existing provision in Hitchin Town Centre, and testing options for the public realm for the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

The document provides a framework for exploring 'Basic, Standard, and Premium' levels of provision, supported by area schedules, precedent imagery, and design narratives. It is intended to support engagement with stakeholders, inform cost planning, and establish a clear direction for the next stage of the regeneration project.

This document is set in the context of work done to date, which has been summarised in the Summary Report, an extract of which is included at the start of this report.

Work to date

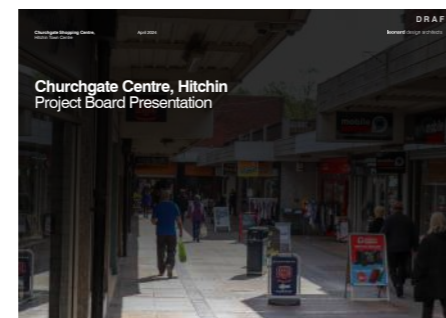
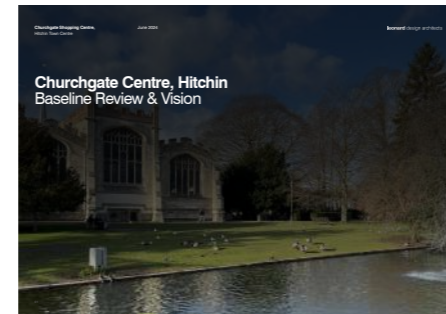
November 2025



The key outputs to date have included:

- Hitchin Town Centre, Market Assessment & Planning Overview Report (September 2023).
- Churchgate Centre, Investment Prospectus for UKREiif Conference (May 2024).
- Churchgate Centre, Hitchin: Baseline Review (June 2024).
- Churchgate Centre, Site Specific Planning Advice (June 2024).
- Churchgate Centre, Hitchin (RIF) – Property Market Summary (June 2024).
- Churchgate Centre, Hitchin (RIF) – Transport Review (June 2024).
- Churchgate Centre Consultation Questionnaire (September 2024).
- Detailed Exhibition Boards for Stakeholder Consultation (September 2024).
- PLMR Consultation Report (December 2024).

The relevant parts of these reports that effect the public realm provision have been extracted and can be found in the following chapters of this report.



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

Principles for any development

Baseline Review

The Origins of Hitchin
The Site Boundary
The Site Existing
Planning Policy Context
Planning Policy Review
Mapping Summary
SWOT Summary
Conclusions

The Origins of Hitchin

“My Hitchin grapes surpass them, or those of any country”
Queen Elizabeth I, 16th Century

“Hitchin is a large market town, and particularly eminent for its being a great corn market for wheat and malt...which is brought here for the London market”
Daniel Defoe, 1724

“Hitchin is an ancient market town, full of interest, 32 miles N. from King’s Cross...”
Herbert Tompkins, 1903

The ancient Icknield Way passes immediately to the North with evidence of Roman activity at the settlement.

The origins of the town start with the Saxon tribe name the ‘Hicce’ in the 7th Century.

Hitchin is recorded in the Domesday Book as a Royal Manor, ‘Rex Willelmus tenet Hiz’, translated to: ‘King William holds Hitchin’, with 600 inhabitants. That the market is not hold a charter suggests it was v long before the crown sought to control towns in this way.

Hitchin thrived on grain, sheep, cattle, cloth-making, brewing, tanning and other industries. Later expanding to malting and brewing.

In 1850 the Great Northern Railway placed Hitchin on the main route between London and the North. The Corn Exchange attracted merchants from as far away as Liverpool with grain moved by train.

Hitchin developed economically from the 1920’s, but its characteristics as an attractive market town have been maintained, while Stevenage and Letchworth expanded further.

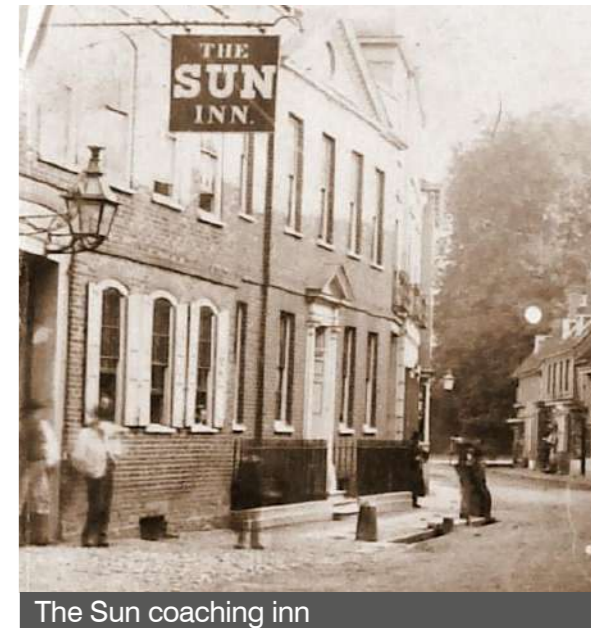
In 792AD the Mercian King Offa established a Benedictine house here, the precursor to the church of St Mary.

Hitchin Priory was founded as a Carmelite Friary in 1317, and The Biggin was established as a Gilbertine monastery in 1361.

In the 18th Century Hitchin experienced unprecedented prosperity driven by rising population, agricultural improvement, and better links via the railway.

In the late 19th century neighbouring towns such as Luton increased their importance at the expense of Hitchin. However it maintained its niche position its retains today.

Many people now commute into London or Stevenage.

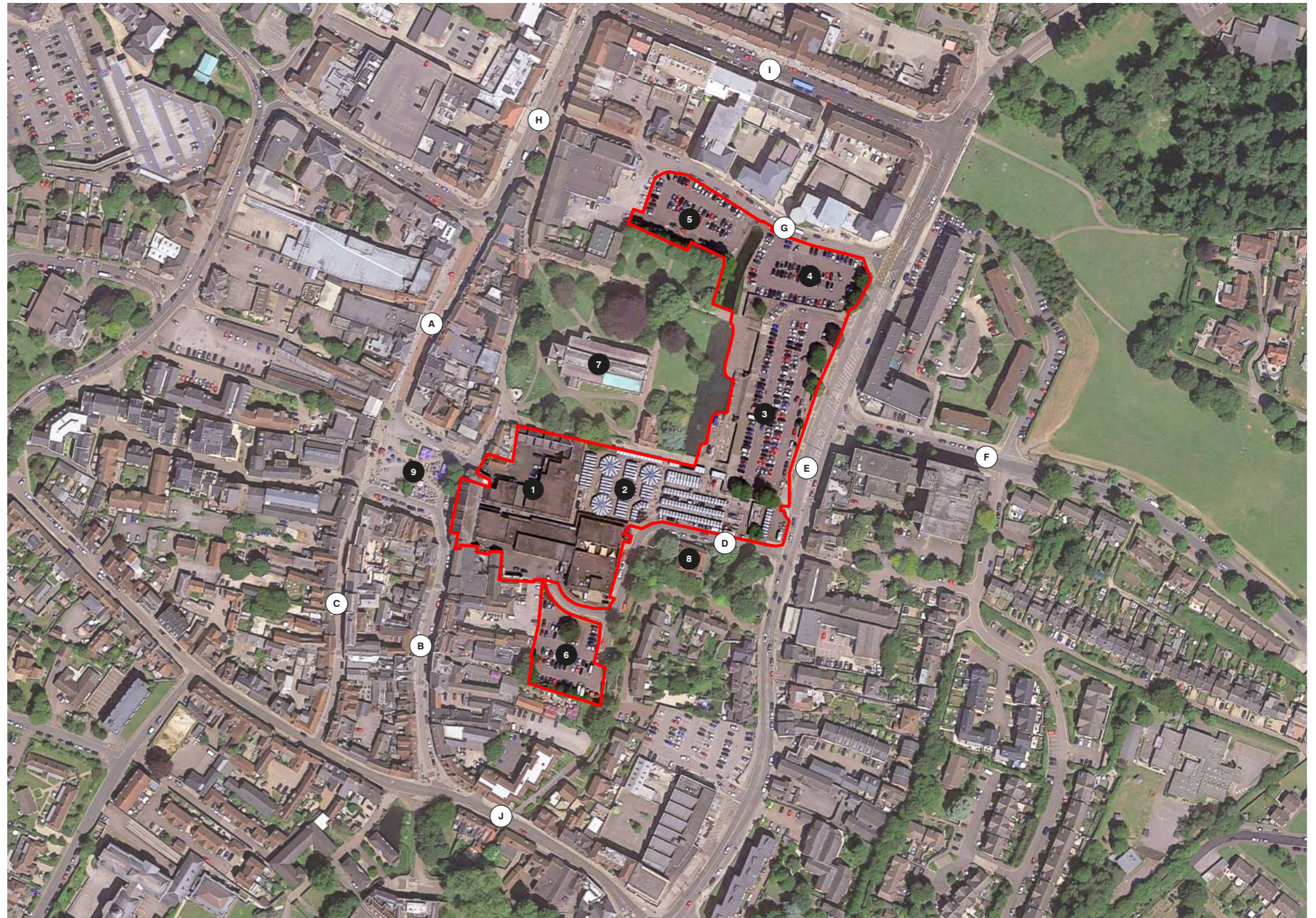


The Site Boundary

The Churchgate Shopping Centre is arranged on ground & first floor over 59,500 ft ² net lettable floorspace	Over a site area of 1.26 acres	The market is open every Tuesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and includes over 150 permanent stalls	The overall site is 5.35 acres	The site includes the Churchgate Centre, Market, and Biggin Lane, St Mary's Square, Portmill East and West car parks
	With 32 retail units		The service yard off Market Place is shared	

The site is located in the centre of Hitchin town centre, adjacent to the Market Place and wrapping around the historic parish Church of St Mary's and its churchyard. The site incorporates the Churchgate Shopping Centre, the market with permanent market stalls, four surface car parks and associated service yards. The site is bound to the north by Portmill Lane, to the east and south east by Queen Street and Biggin Lane. It wraps around the Churchgate Centre and associated service area to the south west, and follows the line of Churchyard Walk, the churchyard and the Garden of Rest to the west.

The site offers the potential to improve the eastern edge of the town centre and provide a more 'fitting' aspect to the Market Place. It also offers the opportunity to provide a better setting for the Grade I Listed church building and the market, as well as an opportunity to revitalise the river edge, and enhance the pedestrian linkages between the site and the rest of the town centre.



- 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
- A High Street
- B Sun Street
- C Bucklersbury
- D Biggin Lane
- E Queen Street
- F Hollow Lane
- G Portmill Lane
- H Bancroft
- I Hermitage Road
- J Bridge Street



Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

November 2025

The Site Existing

The Churchgate Centre provides the eastern façade to Hitchin's Market Place and provides frontage to Churchyard Walk. The shopping precinct was built in 1971 and included an area for the open- air market built over Hitchin's river, the Hiz. The development has been deeply unpopular with its 1960's brutalist architecture unsympathetic to the layout of the surrounding buildings in Market Place. The centre appears run down and is characterised by numerous empty and boarded-up units. Biggin Lane provides access to the market area, rear servicing of the Churchgate, a public car park and the Sun Hotel. The Churchgate centre presents a blank façade onto Biggin Lane and the river.

The traditional open-air market adjoins the eastern edge of the Churchgate centre, and expands into the area along the river frontage where plant stalls spill out along the river. The permanent market stalls are outdated and unattractive, but the market is seen as an important asset for Hitchin. The River Hiz flows northwards through the area either within concrete embankments, covered or in a 'tank' with raised water level for amenity purposes opposite the church. The Council's aspirations for the River Hiz are to create a walkway along the length of the river in the town centre, and have been defined since 1995 in the 'River Hiz Development Guidelines'.



1 Churchgate Shopping Centre & 12-13 Market Place



2 Churchgate Shopping Centre



3 Churchgate Shopping Centre central street



4 The Market



5 Churchyard Walk



6 Churchgate Shopping Centre from Sun Street



7 Churchgate Shopping Centre central street



8 Market from Biggin Lane / Queen St.

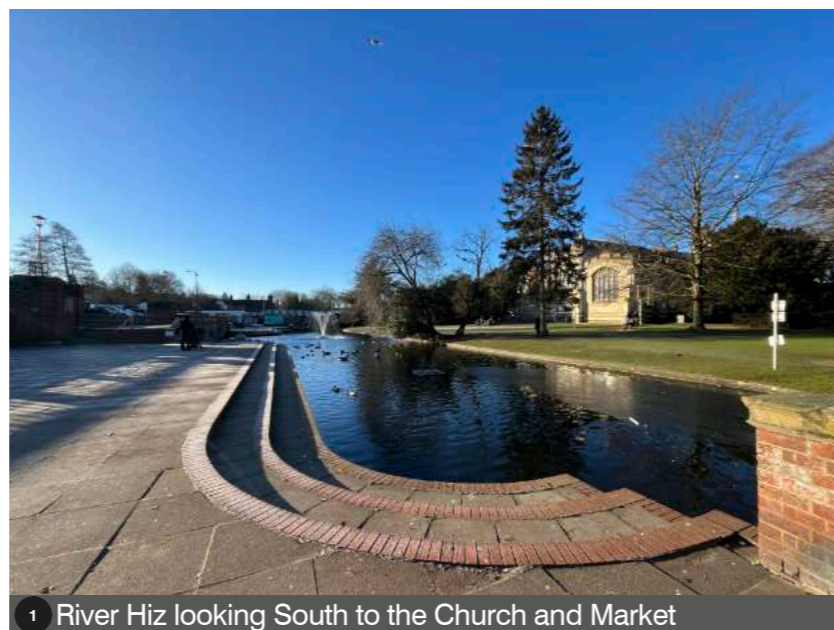
Churchgate Regeneration Zone
Hitchin Town Centre

November 2025

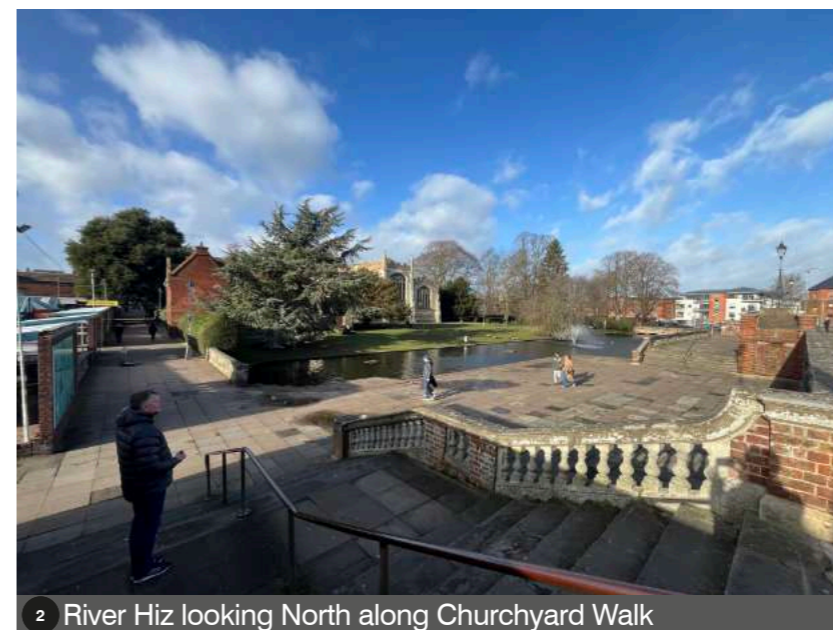
The Site Existing

Portmill Lane is highway land and runs from west to east forming the northern boundary of the site. Portmill Lane provides vehicular access from Queen Street to the two surface car parks. The car parks are basic with unattractive surfaces, and views across them relieved only by the River Hiz and the backdrop of the church, open space and trees in the churchyard. The western part of the road provides a footpath for pedestrians only. A narrow pedestrian route also provides access to the Hermitage Road.

St Mary's Square is another surface car park at the Queen Street level. Queen Street is heavily trafficked and provides an important location for bus stops. Formal steps, with a balustrade which also adorns the western edge of the car park, descend to the river level. Pedestrians can then access the town centre core via footpaths either side of the churchyard. The car park is utilitarian and fails to provide an attractive foreground to the church.



1 River Hiz looking South to the Church and Market



2 River Hiz looking North along Churchyard Walk



3 Biggin Lane Car Park



4 View from Hollow Lane to St Mary's Church



5 Portmill East Car Park



6 Portmill West Car Park



7 St Mary's Car Park

- 1 Site Boundary
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- C Sun Street
- D Bucklersbury
- E Biggin Lane
- F Queen Street
- G Hollow Lane
- H Portmill Lane
- I Bancroft
- J Hermitage Road
- K Bridge Street

Planning Policy Context

More information on the planning policy context can be found in the Planning Policy Review document by Lambert Smith Hampton.

Draft list of relevant Local Plan policies to the Churchgate Centre:

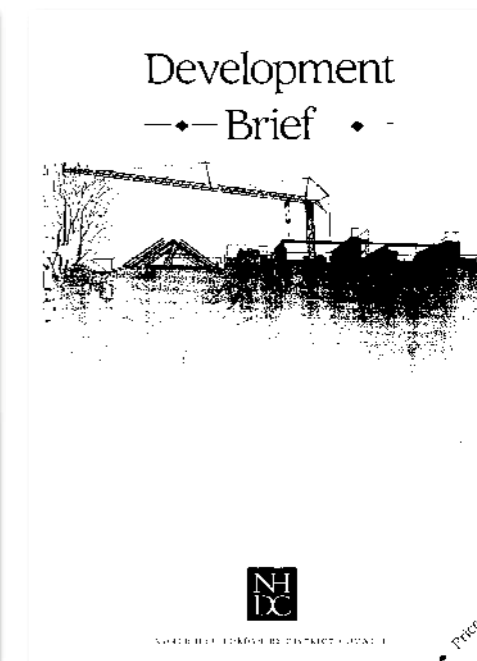
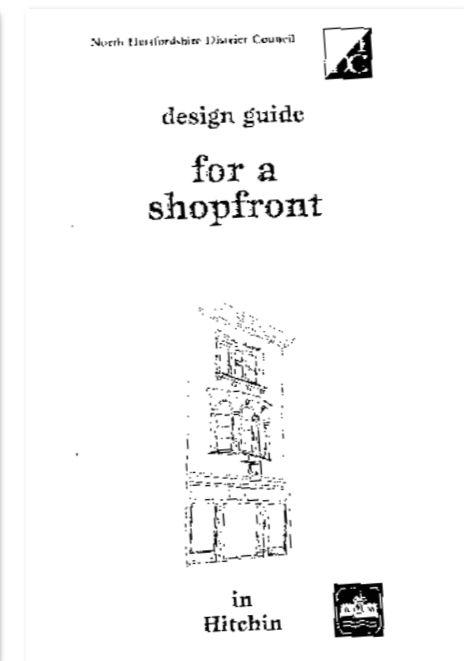
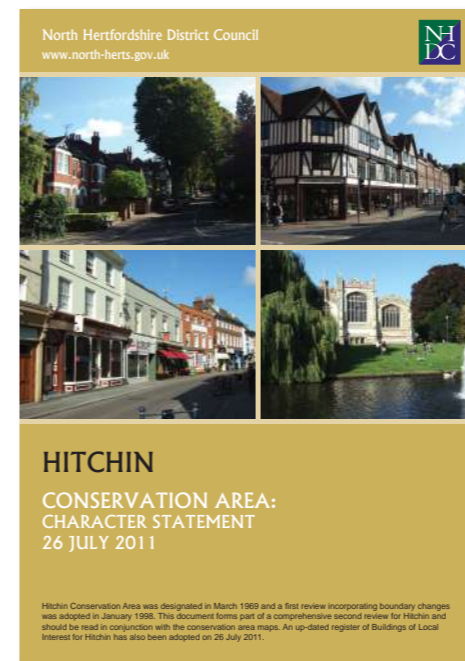
- Policy SP1 – Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP2 – Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
- Policy SP4 – Town Centres, Local Centres & Community Shops
- Policy SP6 – Sustainable transport
- Policy SP7 – Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions
- Policy SP8 – Housing
- Policy SP9 – Design and Sustainability
- Policy SP11 – Natural resources and sustainability
- Policy SP12 – Green Infrastructure, landscape, and biodiversity
- Policy SP13 – Historic environment
- Policy ETC3 - New retail, leisure, and other main town centre development
- Policy ETC4 – Primary Shopping Frontages
- Policy ETC5 – Secondary Shopping Frontages
- Policy T1 – Assessment of transport matters
- Policy T2 – Parking
- Policy HS2 – Affordable housing
- Policy HS3 – Housing mix
- Policy HS5 – Accessible and adaptable housing
- Policy D1 – Sustainable design
- Policy D3 – Protecting living conditions
- Policy D4 – Air quality
- Policy NE4 - Biodiversity and geological sites
- Policy NE6 – New and improved open space
- Policy NE7 – Reducing flood risk
- Policy NE8 – Sustainable drainage systems
- Policy HE1 – Designated heritage assets
- Policy HT11 – Town centre uses and site-specific allocation criteria.
- Hertfordshire’s Local Transport Plan 2018 - 2031
- Appendix 4 – Local Plan Car parking standards

Draft list Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance:

- Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (Adopted Nov. 2011)
- Design SPD (2011)
- Developer Contributions (Adopted Feb. 2023)
- Sustainability SPD (2024, draft)
- River Hiz SPG (March, 1995)
- Design Guide for a shopfront in Hitchin (Jan, 1998)

Other Guidance

- Hitchin Conservation Area Character Statement – July 2011



Planning Policy Review

Through the CRZ process 2 sessions were conducted with the North Herts planning team:

- The first to review the planning policy context and whether policies can be flexible.
- The second on the emerging options for the site.

More information on the planning policy context can be found in the Planning Policy Review document by Lambert Smith Hampton.

Key points include:

- Ensuring a “high quality” public realm;
- In keeping with its surroundings;
- With sensitive use of materials;
- Making better connections through the site;
- Providing space for events;
- With seating for casual dining;
- And improved connections for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

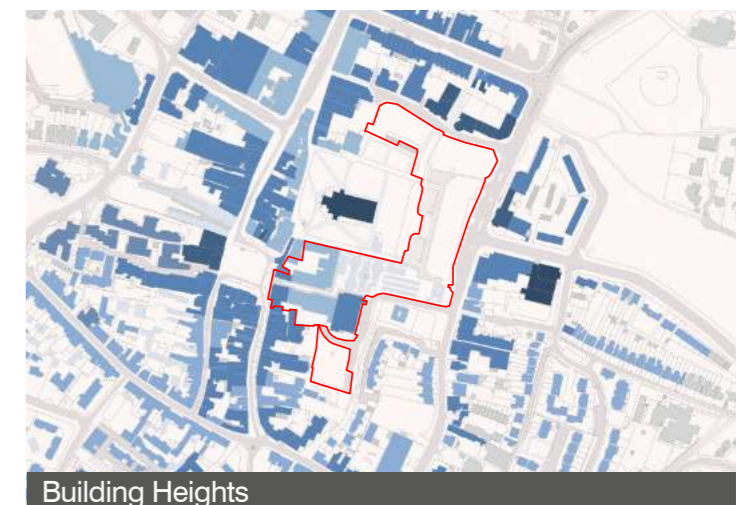
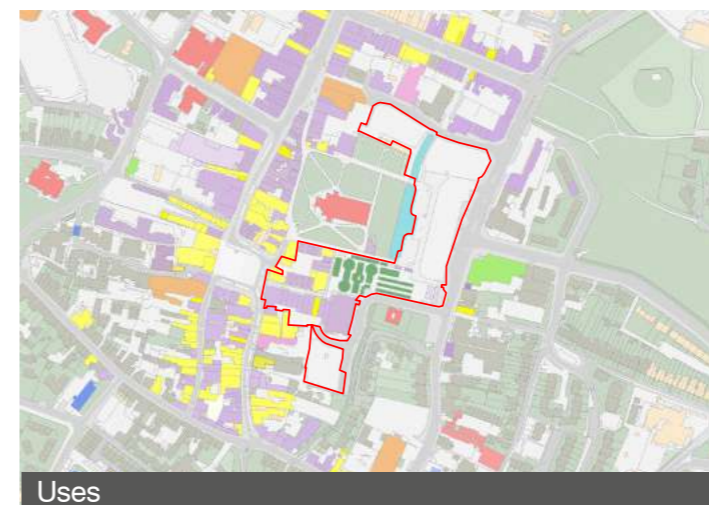
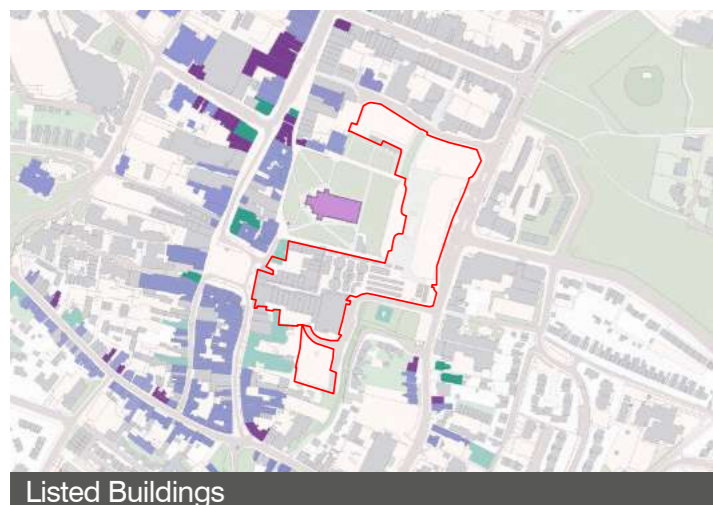
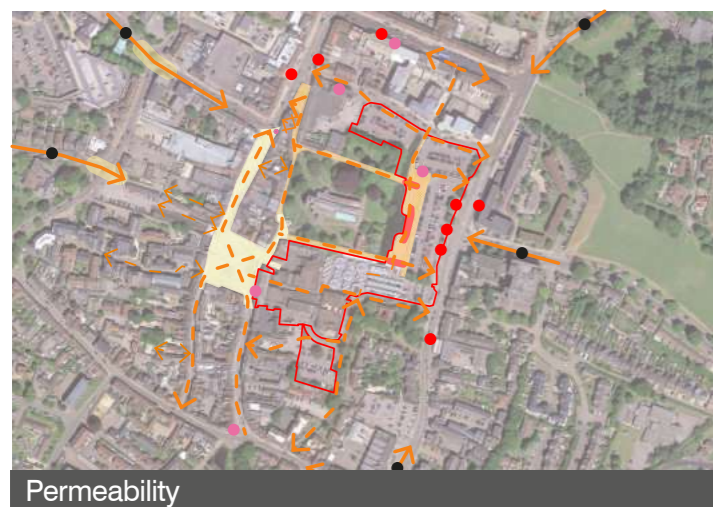
A summary of the planning policy issues is below:

Planning Designations	Land Uses	Phasing	Movement, Access, Parking & Public Realm	Design Principles and Height
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churchgate and its Surrounding Area Mixed-Use Allocation (Policy HT11). • Primary Shopping Frontage. • Secondary Shopping Frontage. • Hitchin Town Centre. • Hitchin Conservation Area. • Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, • Provide high quality public realm and better pedestrian links. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Relevant points to the public realm provision are highlighted in yellow.</p> <p>Development will be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Mapping Summary

The key points have been extracted to form the SWOT analysis in the next chapter, which then inform the key principles to development.

What is clear throughout this exercise is that the existing Churchgate Centre and Market are not of sufficient quality to properly serve the historic town of Hitchin. The acres of asphalt of 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 inject more green space into the centre of town and properly celebrate the River Hiz.



SWOT Summary

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,

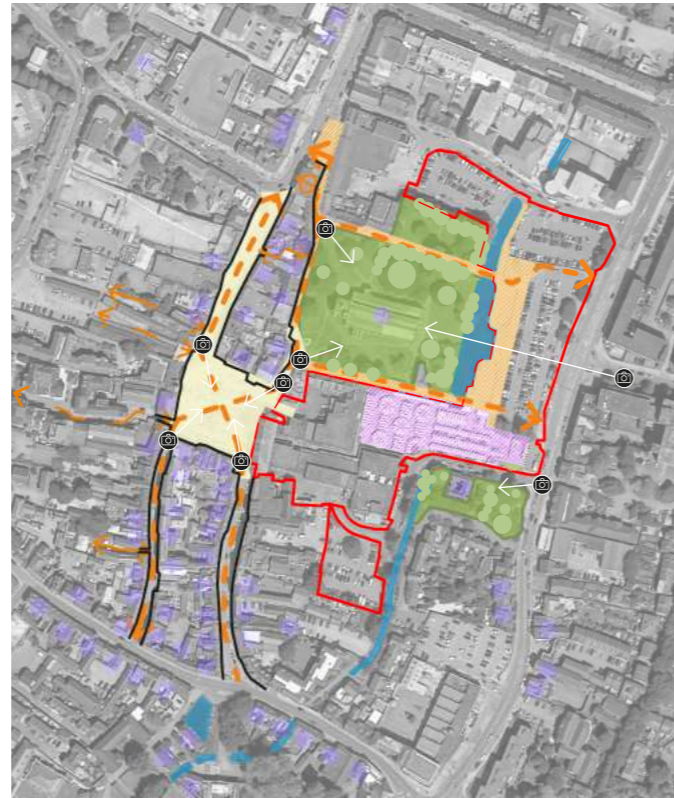
Views along the River Hiz,

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,

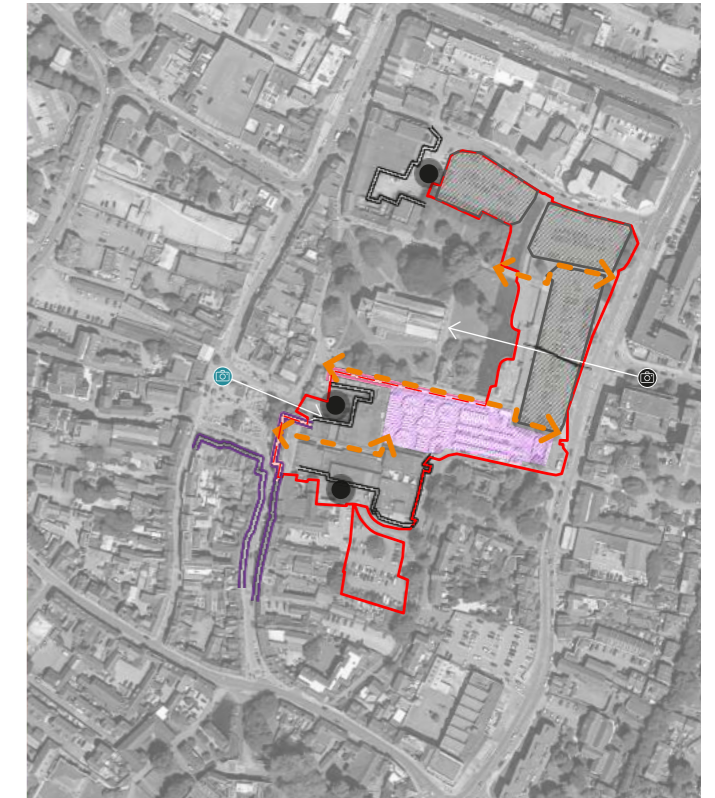
View from Market Place into a service yard,

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.

Relevant points to the public realm provision are highlighted in yellow.



Key points for the public realm include:

- Maintaining the historic street layout and mix of materials in the town,
- Creating and maintaining views along the River Hiz,
- Restoring the historic market,
- Create more green space,
- Create more permeability through the site,
- Improve the ugly service areas, especially in high-footfall areas.

SWOT Summary

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.

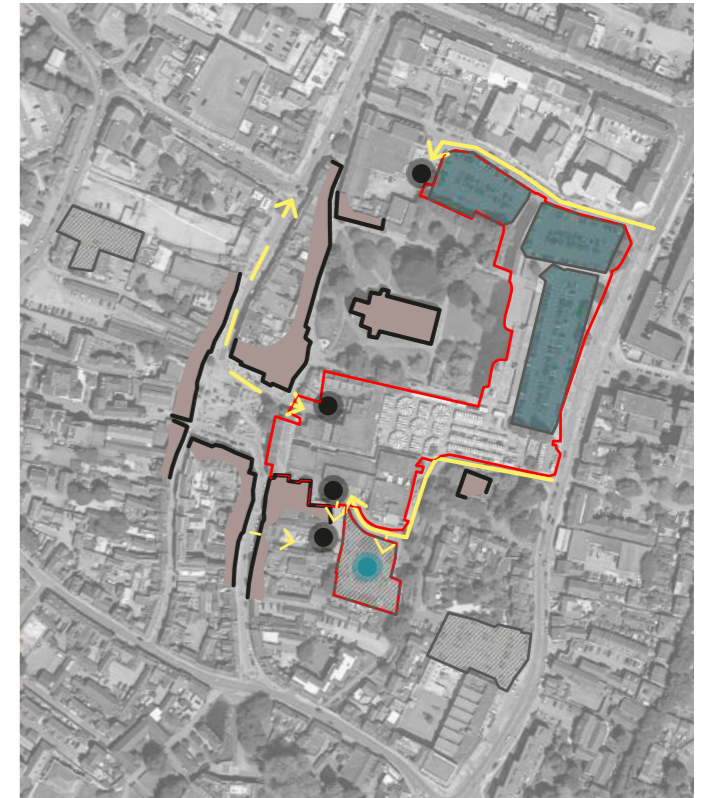


- Create active frontages to support the vitality of the town centre,**
- Inject more green space / biodiversity, sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) to permeate the existing asphalt car parks,**
- ↔ **Improve cycling and public transport connections into the town centre,**
- 📷 Safeguard important 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.**

Relevant points to the public realm provision are highlighted in yellow.



- Key points for the public realm include:**
- Open up the culvert of the River Hiz,
 - Improve permeability through the site,
 - Create new places for events and casual dining,
 - Ensure active frontage supports the vitality of the town,
 - Inject more green space,
 - Improve active travel connections,
 - Maintain service arrangements whilst improving the outlook of the town.

Baseline Review Conclusions



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.



Key

- 📷 Important viewpoint
- - - Important view corridor
- New key routes
- Connection along the River Hiz
- Pedestrian routes
- River Hiz
- Green spaces
- Retail
- F&B
- Market

Public Engagement

Public Engagement

Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

Public Engagement

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, and 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 was available both at the Consultation Hub and online, alongside a series of social media posts throughout the consultation period encouraging participation. A leaflet drop was sent out to the whole District to ensure maximum reach and boost response rates, and there was also 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.

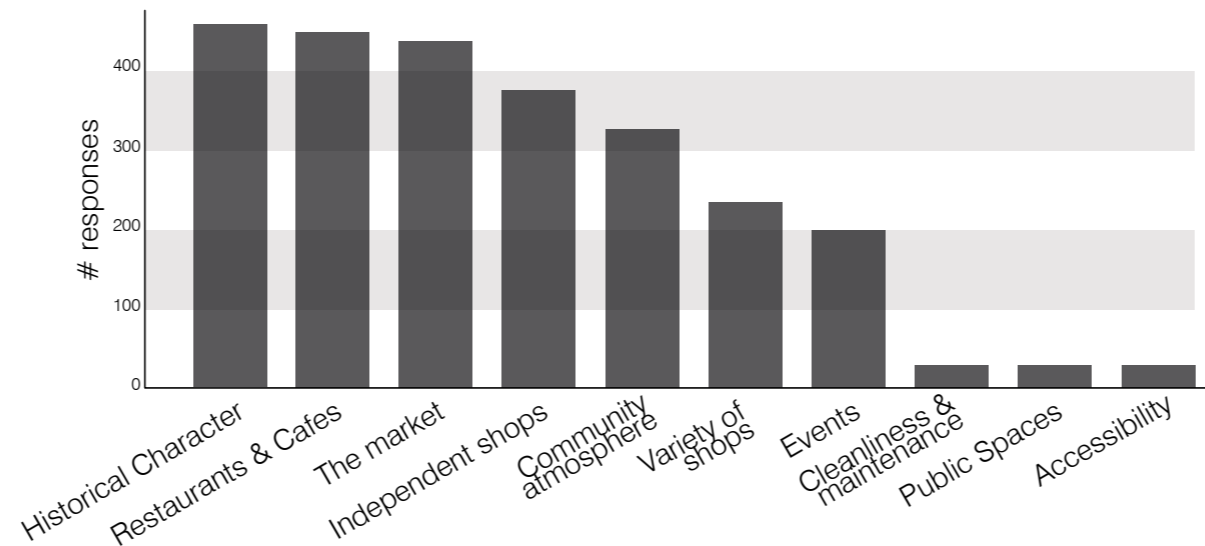
Key findings show that people really value Hitchin's historical character, the range of local restaurants and cafés, and the market, but feel that parking issues, traffic, and public transport are some of the town's main weaknesses.

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.

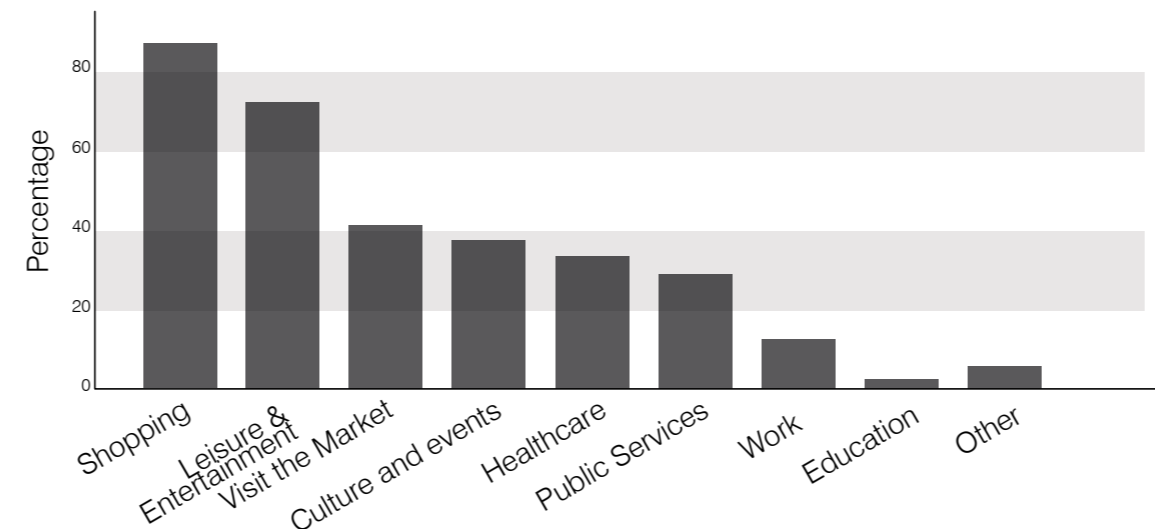
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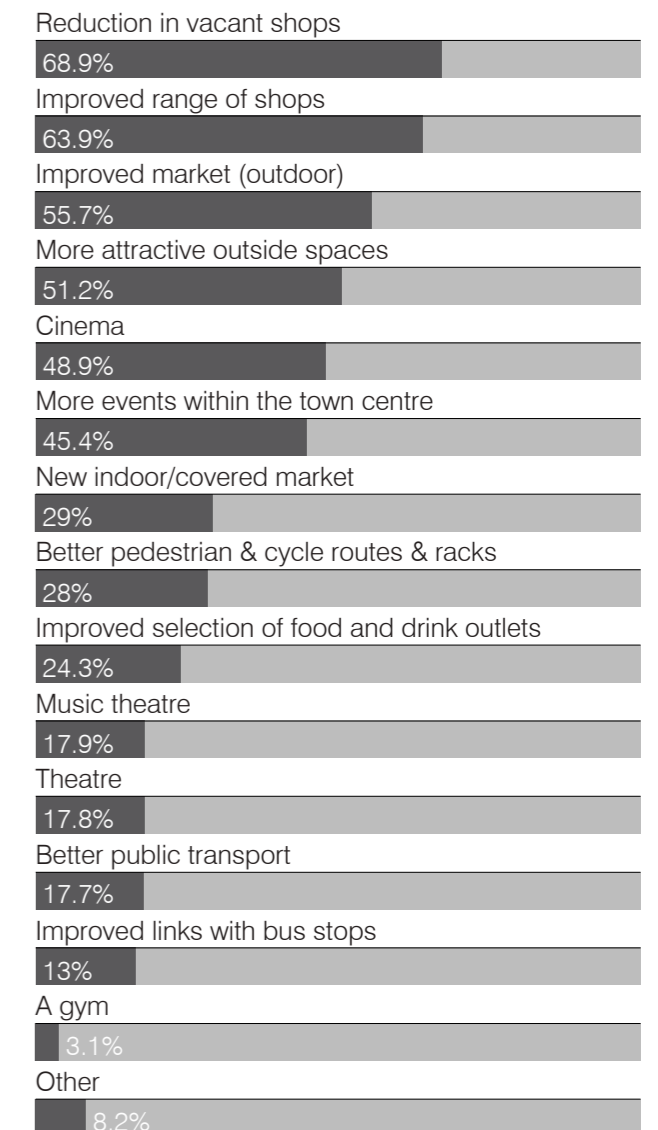
We asked people what they think Hitchin's greatest assets or strengths are:



We also asked people the main reason they visit Hitchin Town Centre:



We also asked which improvements would encourage people to spend more time in Hitchin town centre:



Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

Public Engagement

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.

Plot 1:

- Homes (6)

Plot 2:

- Leisure (21)
- Culture, arts & community (11)
- Cafe/restaurants (9)
- Local shops (9)
- National retailers (7)
- Homes (3)

Plot 3:

- Local shops (16)
- National retailers (9)
- Homes (5)
- Revamped market (4)
- Cafe's & restaurants (4)
- Culture arts & community (4)
- Homes (4)

Plot 4:

- Revamped market (36)

Plot 5:

- Parking (17)
- Cafe's & restaurants (11)

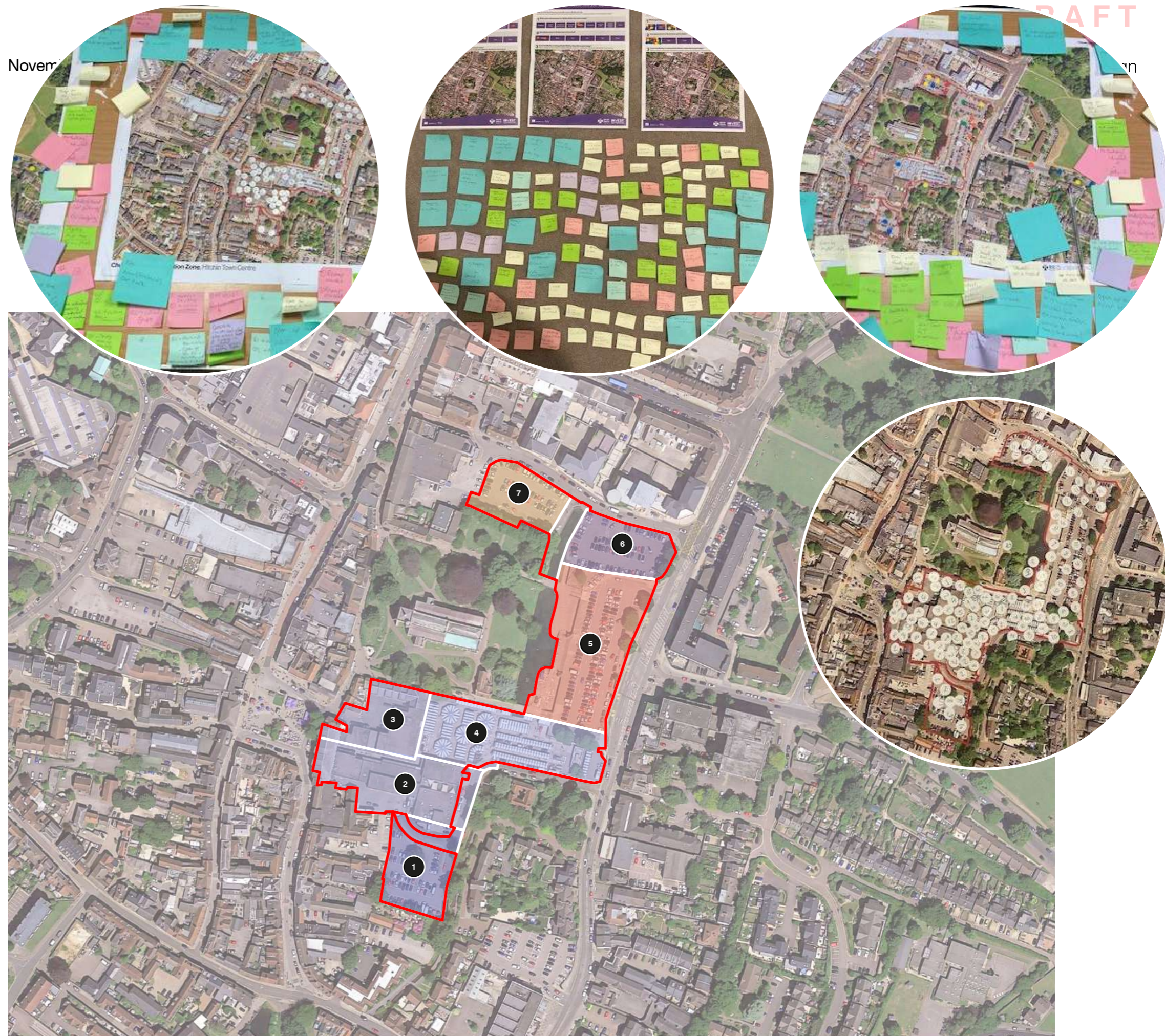
Plot 6:

- Parking (11)

Plot 7:

- Parking (10)
- Homes (4)

- Churchgate Centre & Market
- Biggin Lane Car Park
- Portmill East Car Park
- Portmill West Car Park
- St Mary's Car Park



Conclusion

Based on the analysis from 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:

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.

Sustainable regeneration

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

Improvement of accessibility

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

Affordable housing

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

Community and leisure space

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



Site Strategies

Existing Public Realm: Hitchin
Existing Public Realm: Site
Development Option
Existing Public Realm: Plan
Current Streetscape: Churchgate
Preferred Development Option
Site Strategy: Baseline Review

Site Strategies:

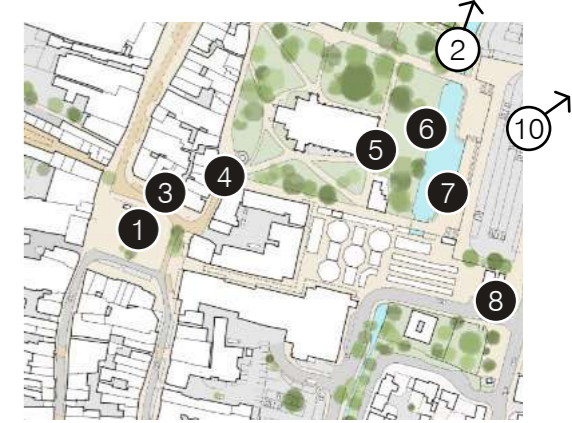
- No Foodstore with a refurbished outdoor market
- No Foodstore with a new covered market
- With Foodstore and a refurbished outdoor market
- With Foodstore and a new covered market

Summary

Existing Public Realm: Hitchin

This chapter looks at strategies to provide public realm that complements and enhances the streetscape of the town centre. The current environment of Hitchin is full of character, historic references and high quality hard and soft landscaping. There are limited areas where paving slabs are uneven and have been repaired with a patchwork of asphalt which negatively affects the streetscape.

leonard design



1. Paving & Surfacing



2. Paving & Surfacing



3. Street furniture



4. Lighting



5. Lighting



6. Landscaping & Planting



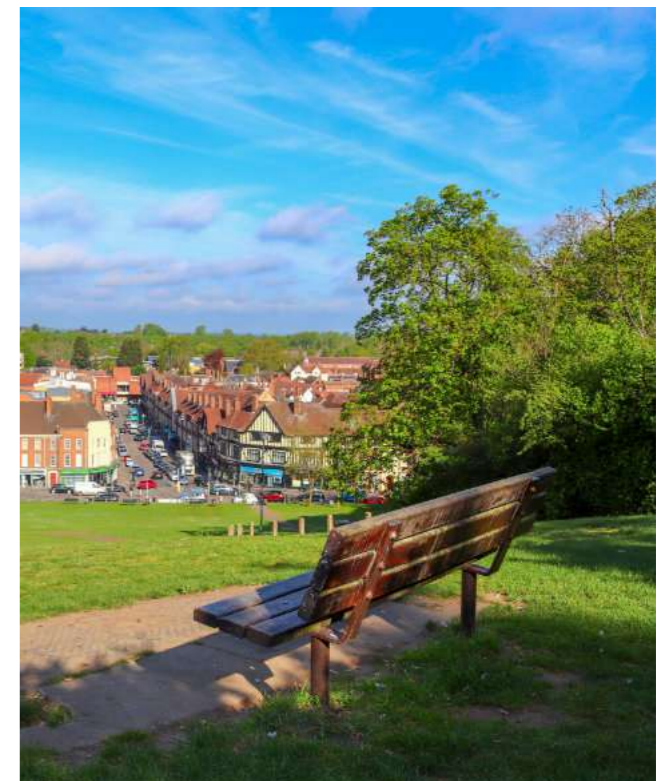
7. Accessibility



8. Accessibility



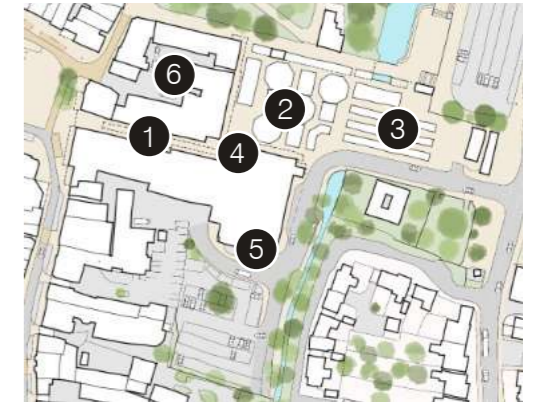
9. Wayfinding & Signage



10. Soft Landscaping

Existing Public Realm: Site

To contrast, the current streetscape in the Churchgate Regeneration Zone is of a much lower quality. There is a variety of different surface textures and materials, repaired with a patchwork of asphalt. The junction between Market Place and the street is a stark illustration in the difference in quality between the town centre in general and the Regeneration Zone.



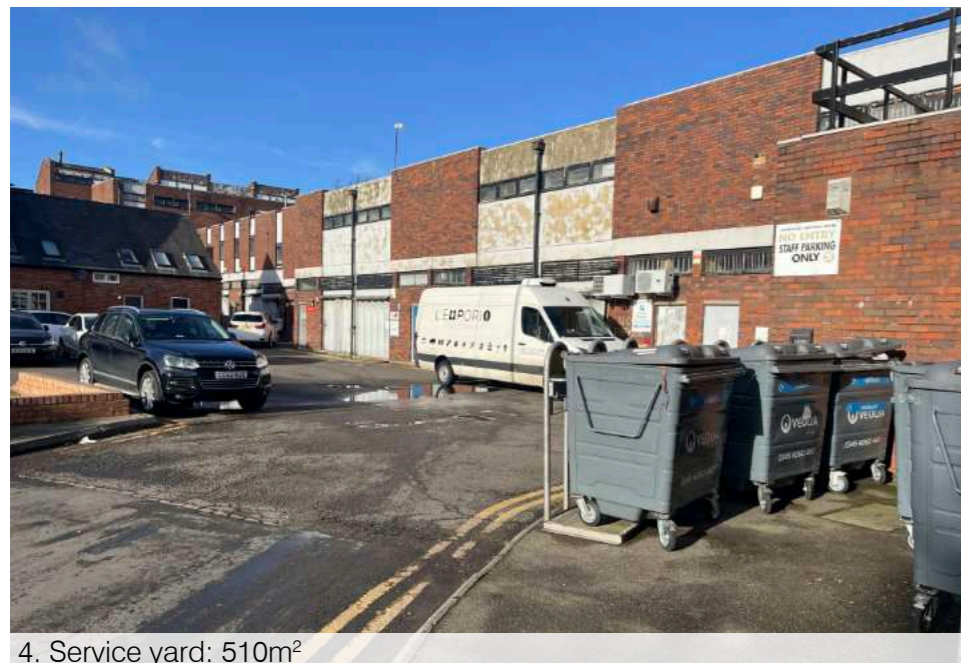
1. Churchgate external street: 498m²



2. Market (west): 2,278m²



3. Market (east) & culvert: 1,168m² & 234m²



4. Service yard: 510m²



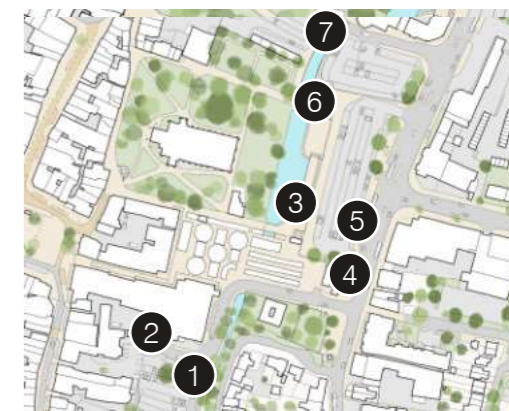
5. Ancillary (242m²) & Biggin Lane Car Park (1,885m²)



6. Service yard B: 601m²

Existing Public Realm: Site

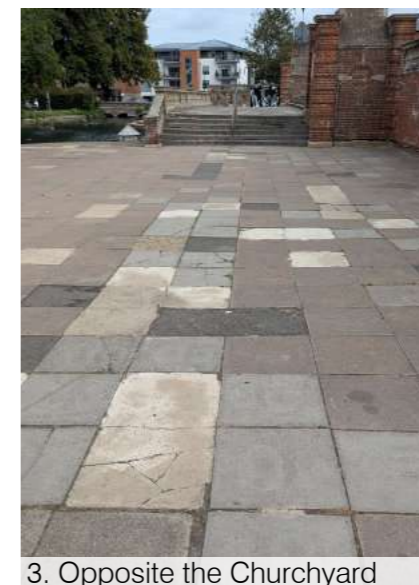
The Portmill Lane, St Mary's and Biggin Lane car parks are standard asphalt car parks, with pedestrian areas of flagstones and raised kerbs. In the limited pedestrian environment the flagstones are uneven in patches and have been repaired in concrete and asphalt. These areas could be significantly improved and more green space introduced to create a less vehicle dominated environment.



1. Biggin Lane Car Park



2. Biggin Lane Service Yard



3. Opposite the Churchyard



4. St Mary's Car Park towards the Market



5. St Mary's Car Park & Queen Street



6. Biggin Lane Service yard



7. Portmill Road Car Parks & the River Hiz

Existing Streetscape

In plan, the existing public realm of the Regeneration Zone comprises of the 4 development plots previously work-shopped with the Council. These include:

Plot 1: Churchgate Centre & Market

- 1. Churchgate external street: 498m²
 - 2. Market (west): 2,278m²
 - 3. Culvert: 234m²
 - 4. Market (east): 1,168m²
 - 5. Service yard A: 510m²
 - 6. Service yard B: 601m²
 - 7. Ancillary: 242m²
- Retail Footprint: 3,579m²

Plot 2: Biggin Lane Car Park

- Car Park: 1,885m²

Plot 3: Portmill East Car Park

- Car Park: 2,181m²

Plot 4: Portmill West Car Park

- Car Park: 2,073m²

- 1 Churchgate Centre & Market
- 2 Biggin Lane Car Park
- 3 Portmill East Car Park
- 4 Portmill West Car Park



Churchgate Streetscape

To assess the existing streetscape, we have categorised areas where the public realm currently works well (green), has some scope for improvement (orange), and needs significant improvement or replacement (red). These areas include:

- Great public realm:**
 - Market Place
 - Churchyard Walk
 - Churchyard
- Areas needing some improvement:**
 - Portmill Lane Car Parks & the River Hiz Walkway
 - Opposite the Churchyard
- Areas needing significant improvement:**
 - Churchgate area
 - Market Area
 - Service Yards (both)
 - Link to Biggin Lane Car Park



Churchgate Streetscape

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 - Churchyard Walk
 - Churchyard
- Areas needing some improvement:**
 - Portmill Lane Car Parks & the River Hiz Walkway
 - Opposite the Churchyard
- Areas needing significant improvement:**
 - Churchgate area
 - Market Area
 - Service Yard
 - Link to Big



Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

November 2025

Development Option

To assess the existing streetscape, we have categorised areas where the public realm currently works well (green), has some scope for improvement (orange), and needs significant improvement or replacement (red). These areas include:

- **Great public realm:**
 - Market Place
 - Churchyard Walk
 - Churchyard
- **Areas needing some improvement:**
 - Portmill Lane Car Parks & the River Hiz Walkway
 - Opposite the Churchyard
- **Areas needing significant improvement:**
 - Churchgate area
 - Market Area
 - Service Yards (both)
 - Link to Biggin Lane Car Park

Overlaying the preferred development option illustrates where the highest levels of intervention are required.

The Preferred Development Option:

- Mixed Use redevelopment of the Churchgate Centre,
- Re-providing the charter market,
- Redevelopment of Biggin Lane car park,
- Redevelopment of Portmill West car park,
- Redevelopment of Portmill East car park.



- 1 Churchgate Centre & Market
- 2 Biggin Lane Car Park
- 3 Portmill East Car Park
- 4 Portmill West Car Park
- 5 St Mary's Car Park

Development Option

Categorising plot-by-plot, requirements include:

Plot 1

- Poor surface materials, flagstones replaced with concrete and asphalt,
- Uneven surfaces,
- Lack of green space,
- Pooling of water,
- Poor relationship with Market Place and Churchyard Walk.

Plot 2

- Standard car park asphalt finish,
- Poor relationship with the River Hiz and homes beyond,
- Lack of green space apart from the single large tree in the centre of the car park.

Plot 3

- Standard car park asphalt finish,
- Poor relationship with the River Hiz,
- Shallow pedestrian area next to the River Hiz, car bonnets project into the space making it tight and unable to walk side-by-side,
- Shallow pavement area to Portmill Road,
- Uneven flag stones adjacent to Rive Hiz,
- Poor green space next to the River Hiz,
- Large mature trees facing onto Queen Street partially mitigate the adjacency to the busy road.

Plot 4

- Standard car park asphalt finish,
- Wider pedestrian route along the River Hiz adjacent to the historic church walls.

Opposite the Churchyard

- Uneven flagstones, patchwork repairs,
- No accessible route from north to south.



- 1 Churchgate Centre & Market
- 2 Biggin Lane Car Park
- 3 Portmill East Car Park
- 4 Portmill West Car Park
- 5 St Mary's Car Park

Site Strategy Baseline Review

Applying the analysis from the Baseline Review, Commercial Markets Review and Stakeholder Engagement has provided a clear direction to the strategy of the site.

These key points include the 10 principles below and can be sketched on the plan on the right hand side.

1. Respect historic Hitchin.
2. Respect important views.
3. Revitalise and enhance the Market.
4. Better connect the site.
5. Establish walking route along the River Hiz.
6. Hierarchy of historic scale streets.
7. Open up the River Hiz.
8. Create green space.
9. Diverse range of uses.
10. Provide a range of homes.



- 1 Churchgate Centre & Market
- 2 Biggin Lane Car Park
- 3 Portmill East Car Park
- 4 Portmill West Car Park
- 5 St Mary's Car Park

Site Strategy: No Foodstore + Refurbished Outdoor Market

Plots 1 & 2:

- Mixed-use redevelopment with a refurbished outdoor market.

Plots 3 & 4:

- Residential developments with parking.



Site Strategy: No Foodstore + A New Covered Market

Plots 1 & 2:

- Mixed-use redevelopment with a new covered market.

Plots 3 & 4:

- Residential developments with parking.



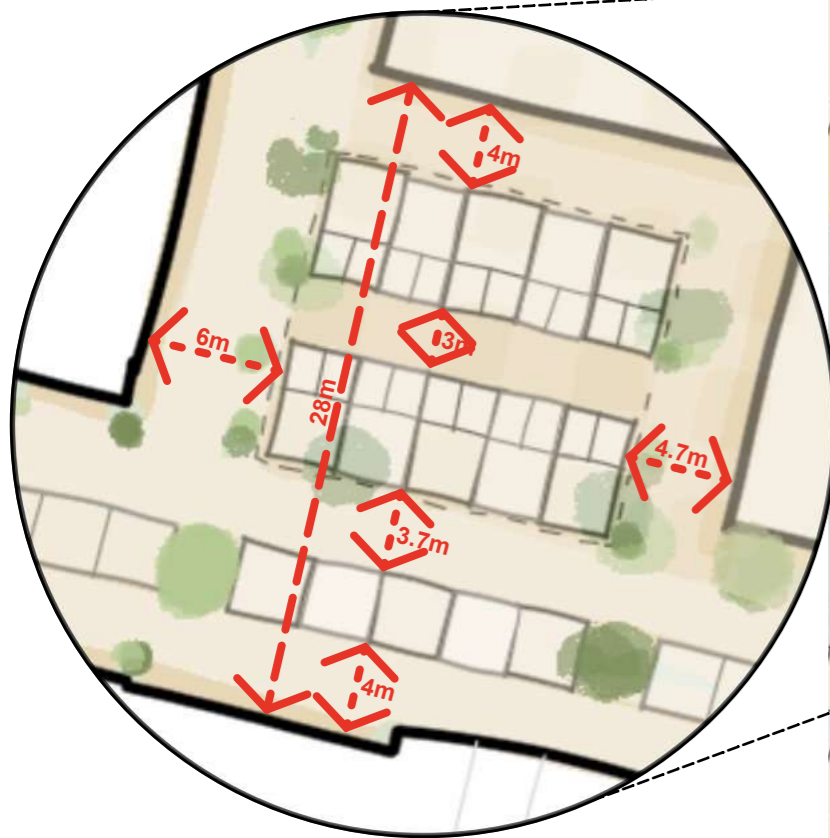
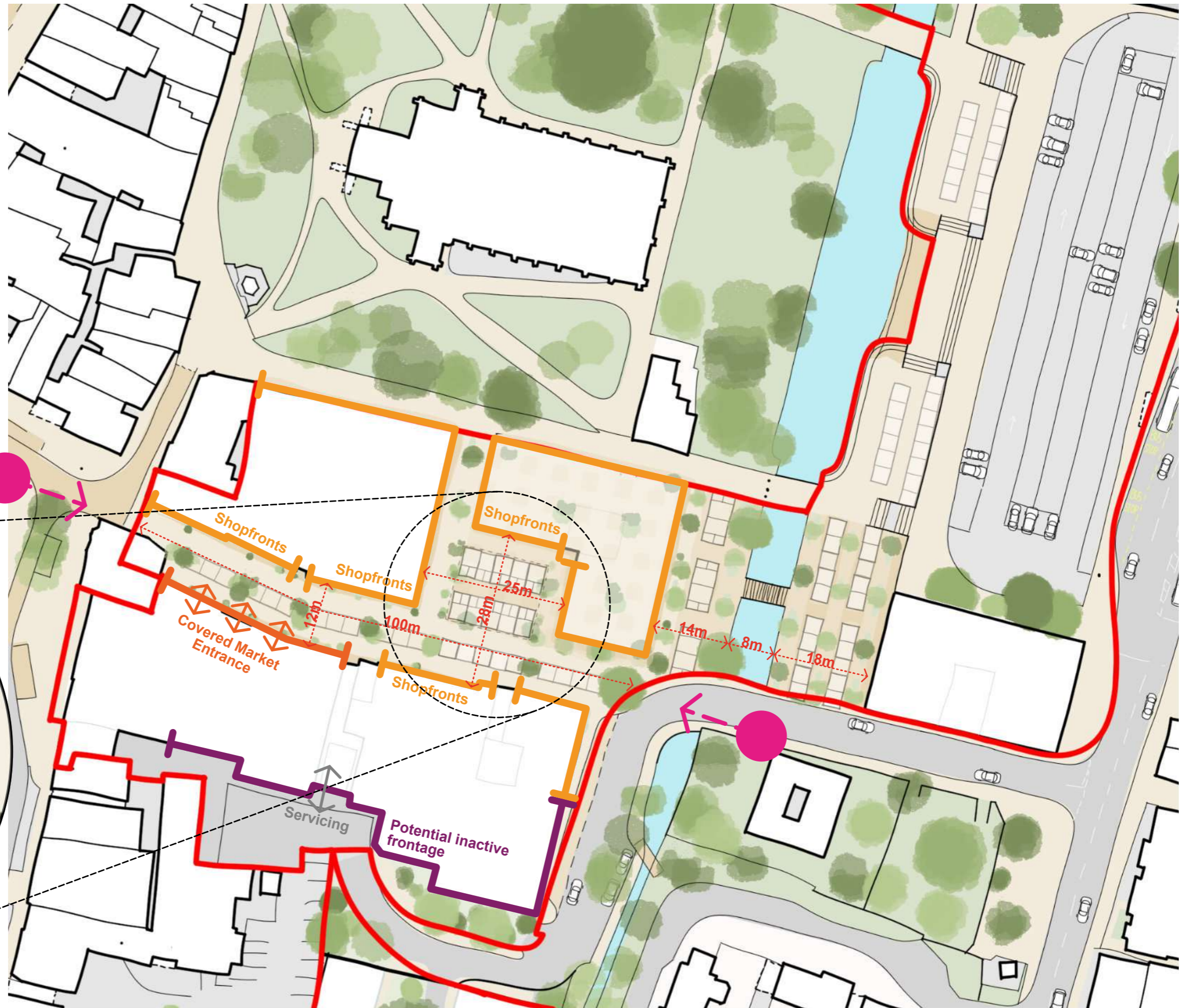
Site Strategy: No Foodstore Design Principles

Following urban design best practice the avenue is 12m wide, providing space for market stalls, green space, pedestrians and access for emergency vehicles.

There is space for permanent and pop-up market stalls throughout the public realm, complimented with shopfronts activating the pedestrian routes.

The River Hiz is opened up and has a green area around it to compliment the churchyard.

This creates space for outdoor events, festivals and markets, that compliments Market Place and the traditional high street.



Site Strategy: With Foodstore + a Refurbished Outdoor Market

Plot 1

- Mixed-use redevelopment with a refurbished outdoor market.

Plot 2

- Parking for the new food store.

Plots 3 & 4

- Residential developments with parking.



Site Strategy: With Foodstore + A New Covered Market

Plot 1

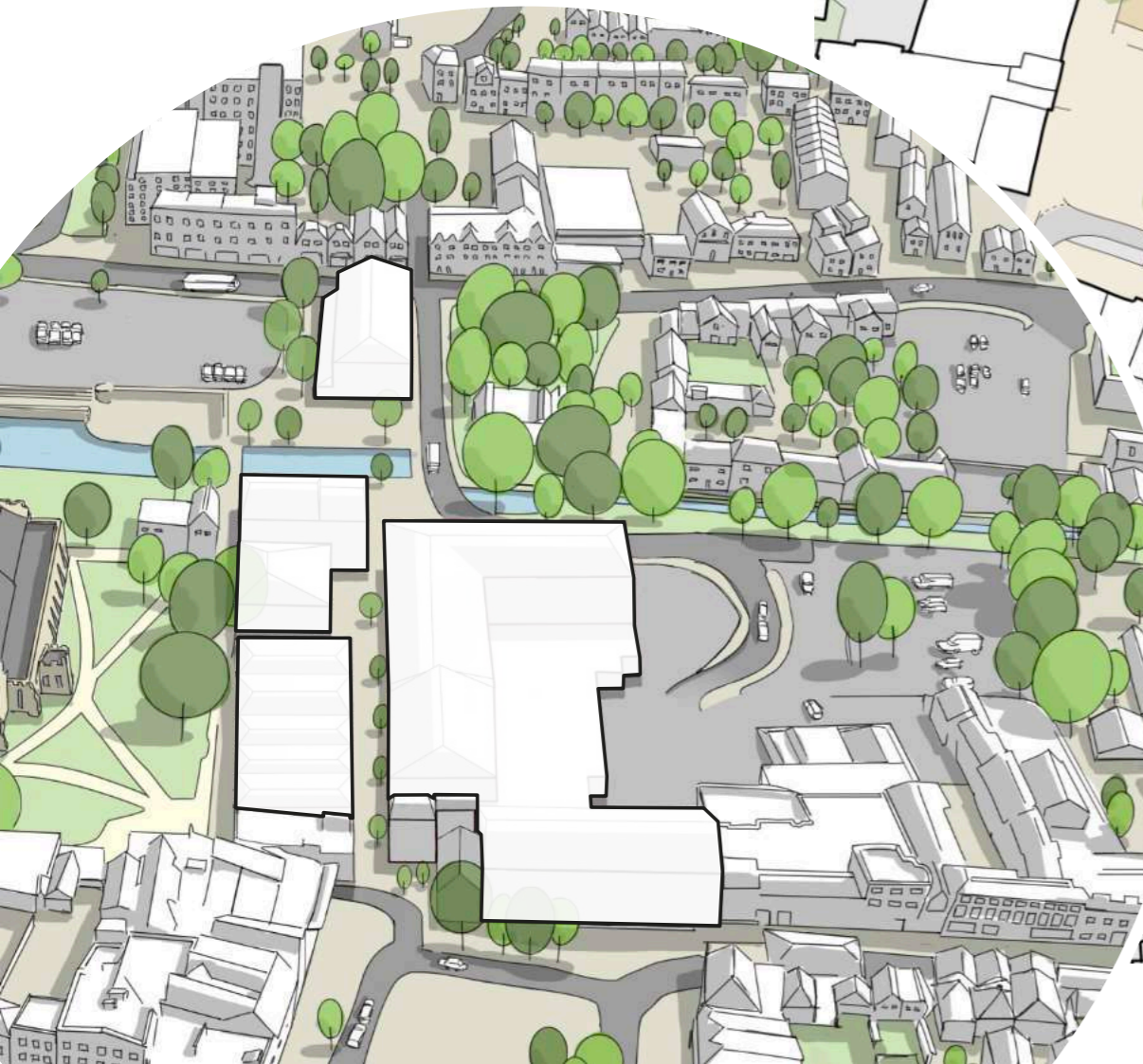
- Mixed-use redevelopment with a refurbished outdoor market.

Plot 2

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Plots 3 & 4

- Residential developments with parking.



Site Strategy: With Foodstore Design Principles

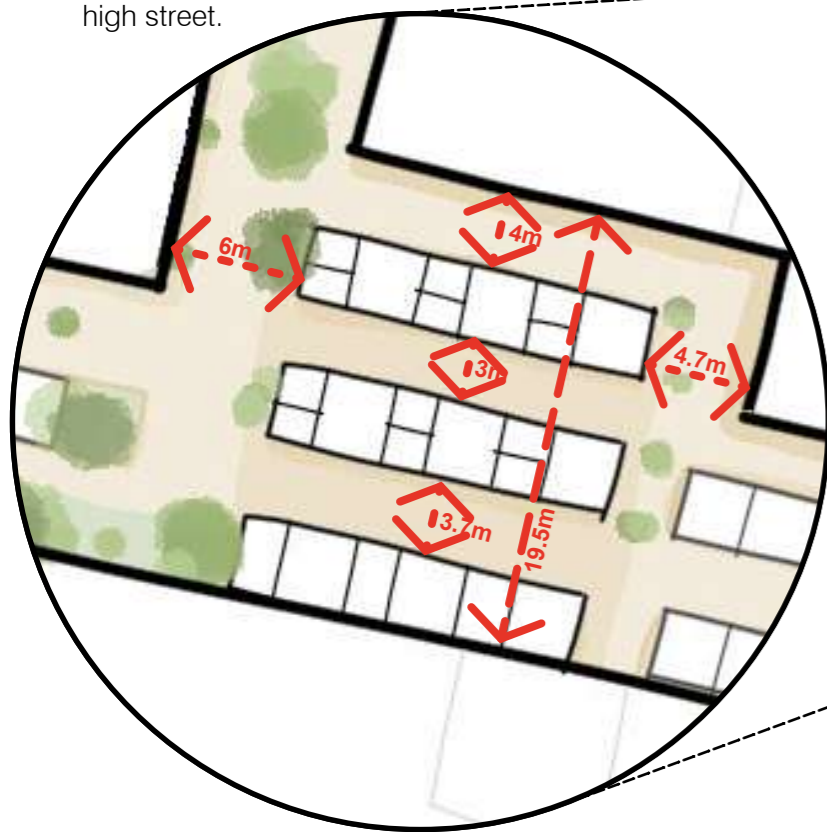
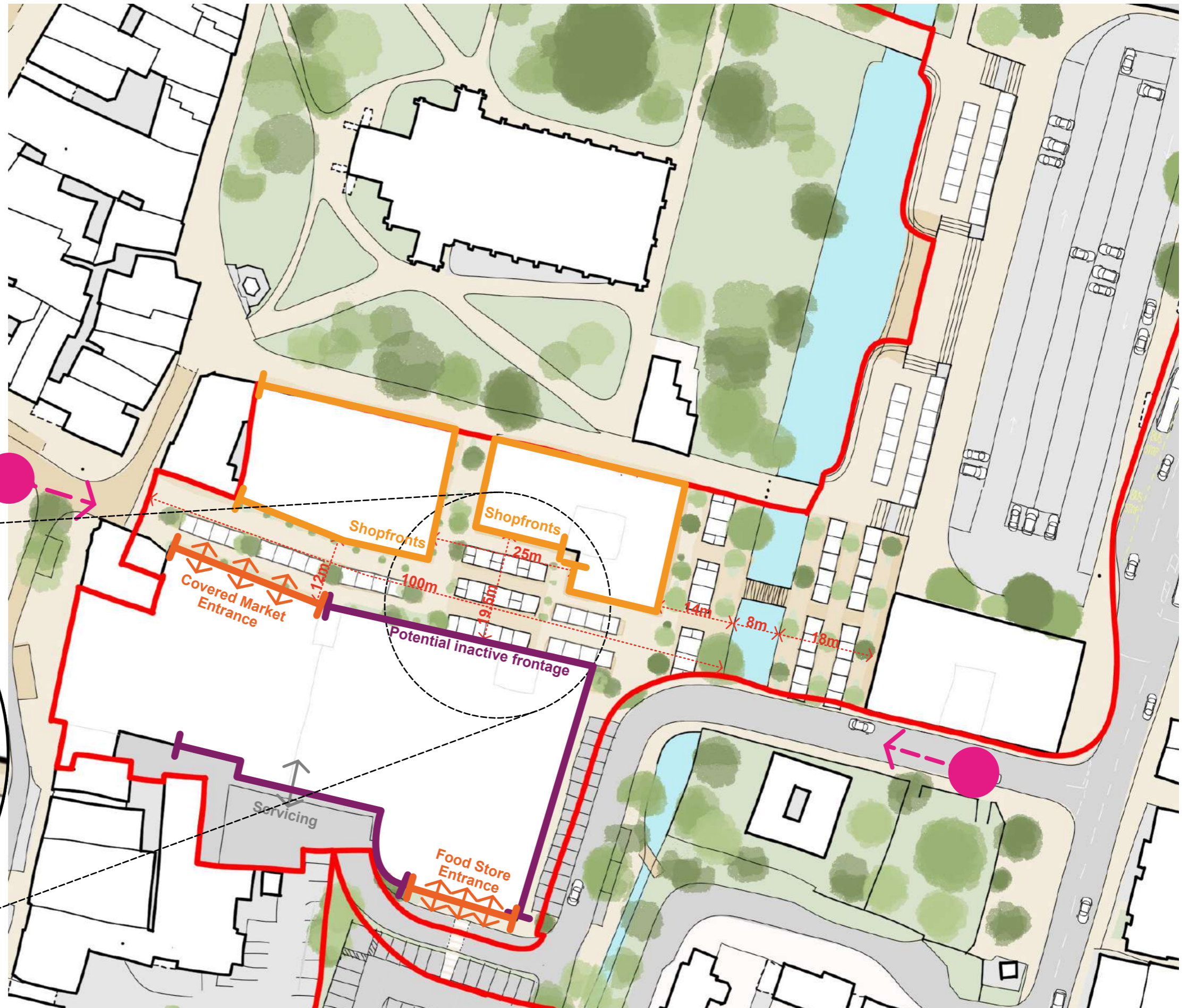
Following urban design best practice the avenue is 12m wide, providing space for market stalls, green space, pedestrians and access for emergency vehicles.

The foodstore would provide significant areas of inactive frontage, which would have to be mitigated with potential market stalls and green space.

There is space for permanent and pop-up market stalls throughout the public realm, complimented with shopfronts activating the pedestrian routes.

The River Hiz is opened up and has a green area around it to compliment the churchyard.

This creates space for outdoor events, festivals and markets, that compliments Market Place and the high street.

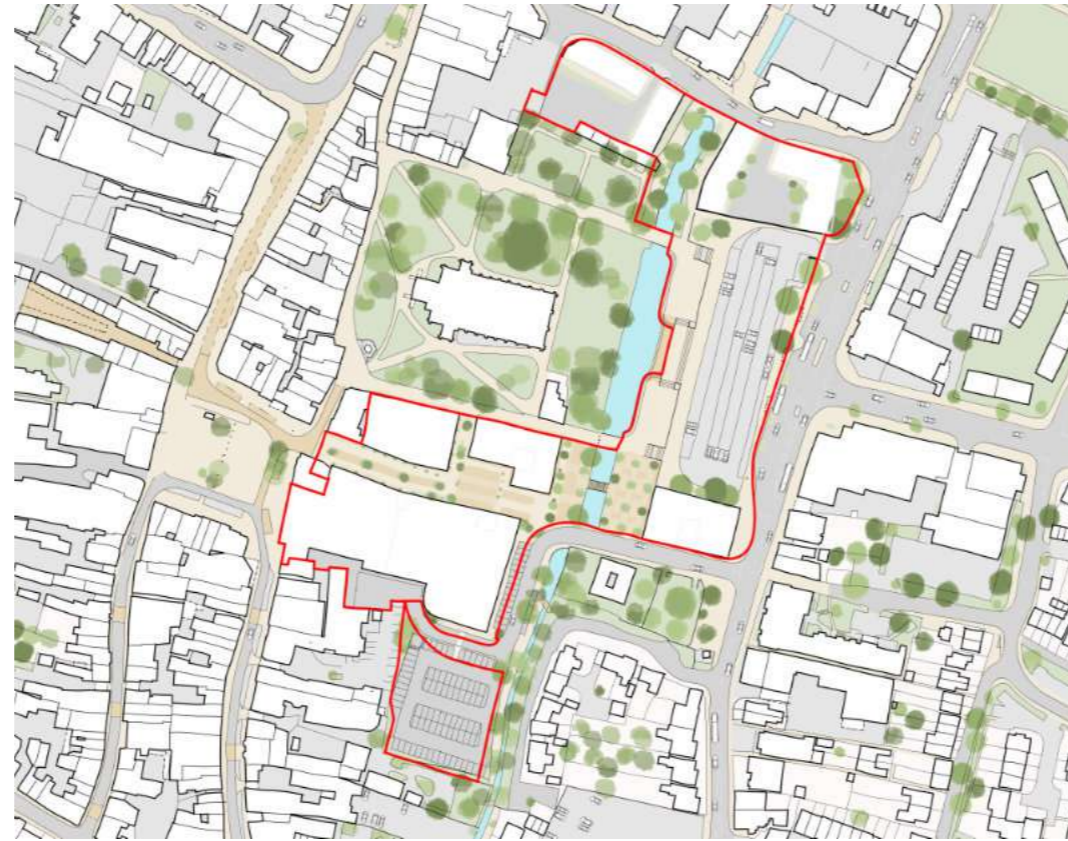


Site Strategy: Summary

These four site strategies can accommodate different uses and combinations of uses, and support the 10 principles from the baseline review and public consultation, which include:

1. Respect historic Hitchin.
2. Respect important views.
3. Revitalise and enhance the Market.
4. Better connect the site.
5. Establish walking route along the River Hiz.
6. Hierarchy of historic scale streets.
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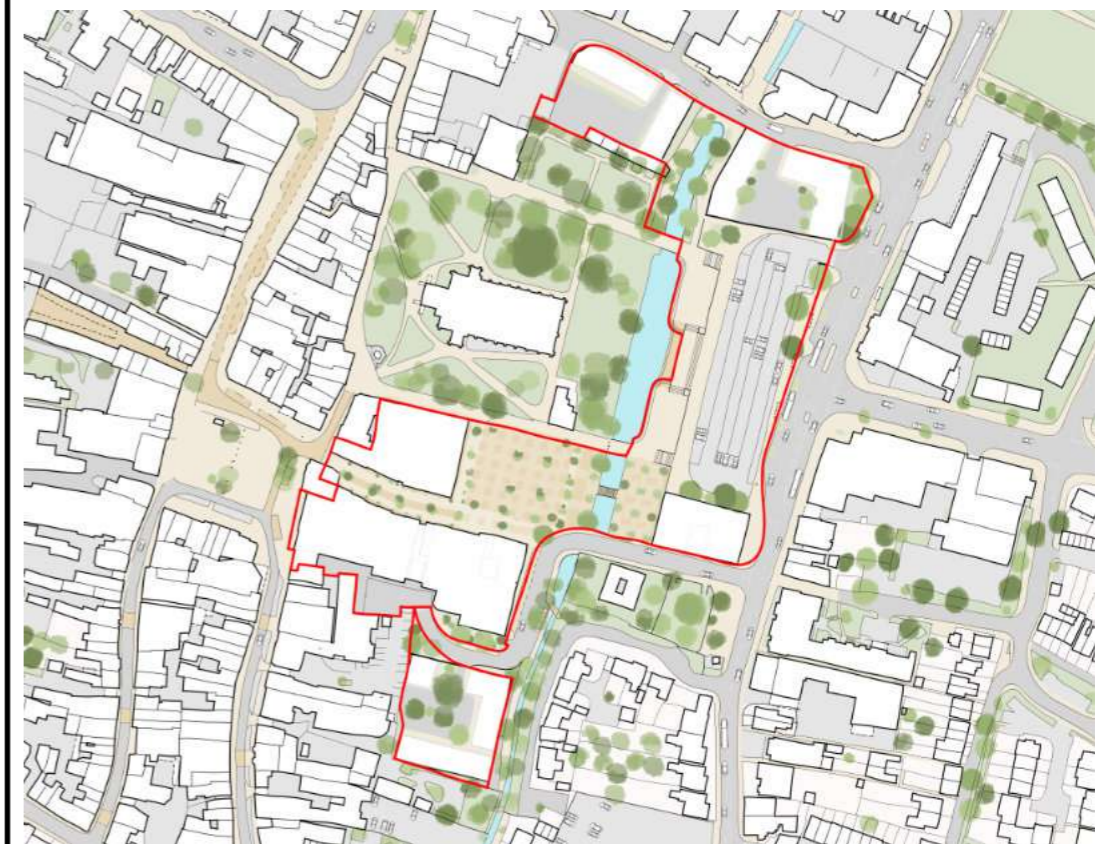
With new covered market



With Foodstore No Foodstore



With refurbished outdoor market



Site Strategy: Areas Summary

The area schedule below outlines the areas of hard and soft landscaping, car parking, servicing and the culvert to be opened up. These are to aid assessment of the costs.

The basic, standard and premium levels of provision outlined in the next chapter can be applied to either strategy to result in outline costings for the various levels of finish.

With new covered market

With refurbished outdoor market

With Foodstore | No Foodstore

With Foodstore, with a new covered market building						
Overall		Landscaping		Car Park	Servicing	Culvert*
Building Footprint	Public Realm	Hard	Soft			
5,626	3,642	2,354	543		510	235
0	1,885			1,885		
1,108	1,073	154	102	817		
1,052	1,021	155	103	763		
7,786	7,621	2,663	748	3,465	510	235

No Foodstore, with a new covered market building						
Overall		Landscaping		Car Park	Servicing	Culvert*
Building Footprint	Public Realm	Hard	Soft			
5,563	3,705	2,131	829		510	235
975	910		132	778		
1,108	1,073	154	102	817		
1,052	1,021	155	103	763		
8,698	6,709	2,439	1,167	2,171	510	235

With Foodstore with a refurbished outdoor market						
Overall		Landscaping		Car Park	Servicing	Culvert*
Building Footprint	Public Realm	Hard	Soft			
5,019	4,249	2,961	543		510	235
0	1,885			1,885		
1,108	1,073	154	102	817		
1,052	1,021	155	103	763		
7,179	8,228	3,270	748	3,465	510	235

No Foodstore, with a refurbished outdoor market						
Overall		Landscaping		Car Park	Servicing	Culvert*
Building Footprint	Public Realm	Hard	Soft			
4,743	4,525	2,951	829		510	235
975	910		132	778		
1,108	1,073	154	102	817		
1,052	1,021	155	103	763		
7,878	7,529	3,259	1,167	2,171	510	235

Public Realm Provision

Public Realm Provision

Character Areas:

- Residential Courtyards
- The Boulevard
- The Square
- The Riverside

Public Realm Provision Levels

This chapter examines the different provision levels for the public realm, separated into different elements. In this way, the Council can prioritise which elements are most important to better inform the cost appraisal of the site.

The following table illustrates a high-level indicative public realm specification for the CRZ, broken down into the three levels of provision for a variety of different elements.

	Basic Provision Functional, minimal interventions	Standard Provision Balanced, moderate enhancements	Premium Provision Aspirational, high-quality design
Paving & Surfacing	Cost-effective, durable materials (concrete flags, asphalt). Simple patterns, slip-resistant surfaces	Higher-quality paving (concrete blocks, small natural stone areas). Defined pedestrian/vehicular zones, coordinated edging.	High-quality natural stone (granite, yorkstone) with bespoke patterns. Decorative inlays, heritage references, seamless transitions.
Street Furniture	Standard off-the-shelf benches, bins, cycle stands. Minimal quantities, robust materials.	Coordinated suite of benches, bins, and cycle stands in unified style. Additional seating, occasional planters.	Bespoke furniture reflecting local identity. Integrated seating-planter combinations, smart furniture (charging, Wi-Fi).
Lighting	Basic LED street lighting, uniform light levels. Standard column fixtures.	LED lighting with improved ambience. Feature lighting for key buildings, pedestrian-scale columns.	Layered lighting scheme (general, accent, feature). Up-lighters, ground lighting, artistic installations.
Landscaping & Planting	Minimal shrub beds or lawns. Hardy, low-maintenance species.	Structured planting beds with seasonal interest. Small to medium street trees, low-level irrigation.	Extensive planting for biodiversity and year-round colour. Mature trees, rain gardens, water/sensory features.
Accessibility	Step-free routes where feasible. Standard tactile paving at crossings.	Step-free access on all key routes. Extended tactile paving, clear sight-lines.	Universal design principles. Tactile maps, audible cues, frequent seating.
Wayfinding & Signage	Existing signage repaired where needed. Minimal new standard signs.	Updated, consistent wayfinding signage. Visitor maps at strategic points.	Bespoke signage with local branding. Digital wayfinding, interactive heritage trails, public art integration.
Additional Opportunities			Public art commissions. Flexible event spaces with integrated power/water. Heritage interpretation in design.

Notes

Basic provision assumes minimal disruption to existing utilities and no underground works beyond resurfacing.

Standard provision assumes minimal disruption to existing utilities. Includes moderate public realm enhancements, limited bespoke work and modest planting.

Premium provision assumes disruption to existing utilities where necessary and includes underground works, highest quality materials, bespoke detailing, integrated technology and associated infrastructure and specialist features.

Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

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Public Realm Hard Landscaping

There are 3 levels of public realm provision explored through this document. These include:

Basic provision includes:

Cost-effective, durable materials (concrete flags, asphalt). Simple patterns, slip-resistant surfaces

Standard provision includes:

Higher-quality paving (concrete blocks, small natural stone areas). Defined pedestrian/vehicular zones, coordinated edging..

Premium provision includes:

High-quality natural stone (granite, yorkstone) with bespoke patterns. Decorative inlays, heritage references, seamless transitions.

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions

Concrete flags



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements

Coordinated paving slabs with different finishes



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design

Decorative inlays and bespoke combinations



Painting existing surfaces



Zoning areas with different colour / finishes



High-quality stone slabs (eg. granite, york stone)



Re-grouting existing paving



Concrete slabs with areas of stone



Reflecting heritage



Public Realm Soft Landscaping

There are 3 levels of public realm provision explored through this document. These include:

Basic provision includes:

Minimal shrub beds or lawns. Hardy, low-maintenance species.

Standard provision includes:

Structured planting beds with seasonal interest. Small to medium street trees, low-level irrigation.

Premium provision includes:

Extensive planting for biodiversity and year-round colour. Mature trees, rain gardens, water/sensory features.

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions

Areas of maintained grass



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements

Planters integrated with seating in strategic locations



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design

Lush planting in a combination of raised and flat beds



Resin bonded tree pits



Raised planting



Seating and planting integrated seamlessly



Pots



Flowers, grasses and wild planting mixed with sculptural



Bespoke raised planting beds



Public Realm Street Furniture

There are 3 levels of public realm provision explored through this document. These include:

Basic provision includes:

Standard off-the-shelf benches, bins, cycle stands. Minimal quantities, robust materials.

Standard provision includes:

Coordinated suite of benches, bins, and cycle stands in unified style. Additional seating, occasional planters.

Premium provision includes:

Bespoke furniture reflecting local identity. Integrated seating-planter combinations, smart furniture (charging, Wi-Fi).

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions

Standard benches



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements

Off-the-shelf modular systems



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design

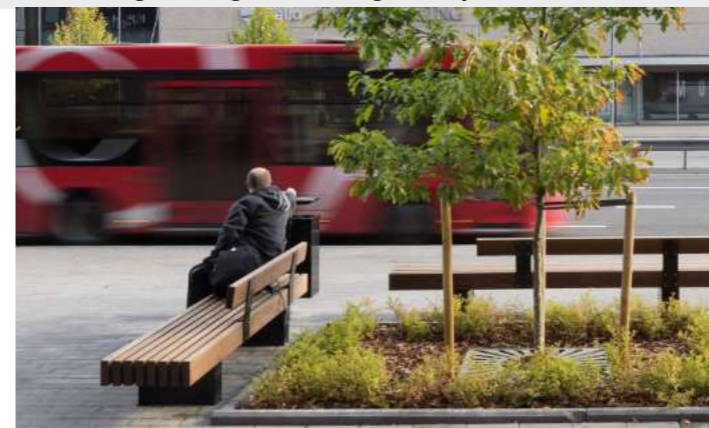
Bespoke 'Hitchin' seating



Off-the-shelf bins street furniture sets



Combining seating, bins and green space



Seating and planting integrated seamlessly



Standard products with a variety of materials



Modular solutions



Bespoke materials with integrated wifi & charging



Public Realm Accessibility

There are 3 levels of public realm provision explored through this document. These include:

Basic provision includes:

Existing signage repaired where needed. Minimal new standard signs.

Basic LED street lighting, uniform light levels. Standard column fixtures.

Step-free routes where feasible. Standard tactile paving at crossings.

Standard provision includes:

Updated, consistent wayfinding signage. Visitor maps at strategic points.

LED lighting with improved ambience. Feature lighting for key buildings, pedestrian-scale columns.

Step-free access on all key routes. Extended tactile paving, clear sight-lines.

Premium provision includes:

Bespoke signage with local branding. Digital wayfinding, interactive heritage trails, public art integration.

Layered lighting scheme (general, accent, feature). Up-lighters, ground lighting, artistic installations.

Bespoke signage with local branding. Digital wayfinding, interactive heritage trails, public art integration.

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions

Standard signage



Standard lighting



Basic policy compliant ramps



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements

Bespoke signage totems and maps



Off-the-shelf lighting poles



Planting combined with ramps and stairs



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design

Bespoke signage with digital elements



Bespoke lighting



Considered planting, ramps and public realm



Public Realm Street Art & Heritage

There are 3 levels of public realm provision explored through this document. These include:

Premium provision includes:

Public art commissions. Flexible event spaces with integrated power/water. Heritage interpretation in design.

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions

Murals



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements

Bringing history to life



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design

Sculptures



Community youth art projects: Wolsey 550



Activating blank frontages



Bringing history to life



Activating hoardings



First floor murals



Winter lights festivals



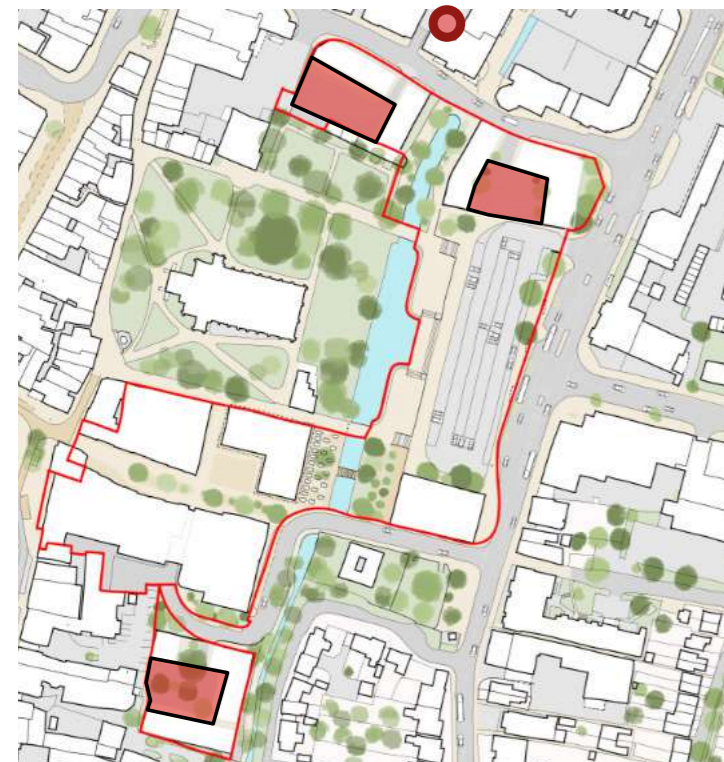
Character Areas

Residential Courtyards

The residential courtyard is designed as a shared space that balances the need for car parking with a welcoming and attractive environment for residents. Planting and landscaping play a key role in softening the look and feel of the parking area, ensuring it contributes positively to the character of the courtyard. Key elements include:

- Planting and greenery - trees, hedges, and planters to break up hard surfaces.
- Permeable paving - moss or grass between paving joints to soften appearance.
- Green walls or climbing plants - on boundaries to create enclosure and visual interest.
- Integrated seating and play areas - maintain social and recreational use.
- Flexible layout - allows parking while keeping the courtyard active and welcoming.

Existing - Church View, Portmill Lane, Hitchin



Character Areas

The Boulevard

The boulevard is designed as a generous, clear route through the heart of the scheme. It provides a safe corridor for emergency access while also allowing space for pedestrians to move freely on either side. A central strip accommodates occasional market stall overflow, ensuring the boulevard remains lively and flexible in use.

Around the market building, the space widens to allow for outdoor activity and spill-out, creating an active frontage. At its eastern end, the boulevard opens into a public square, offering a welcoming place for events, gatherings, and everyday social use.



Churchgate Regeneration Zone

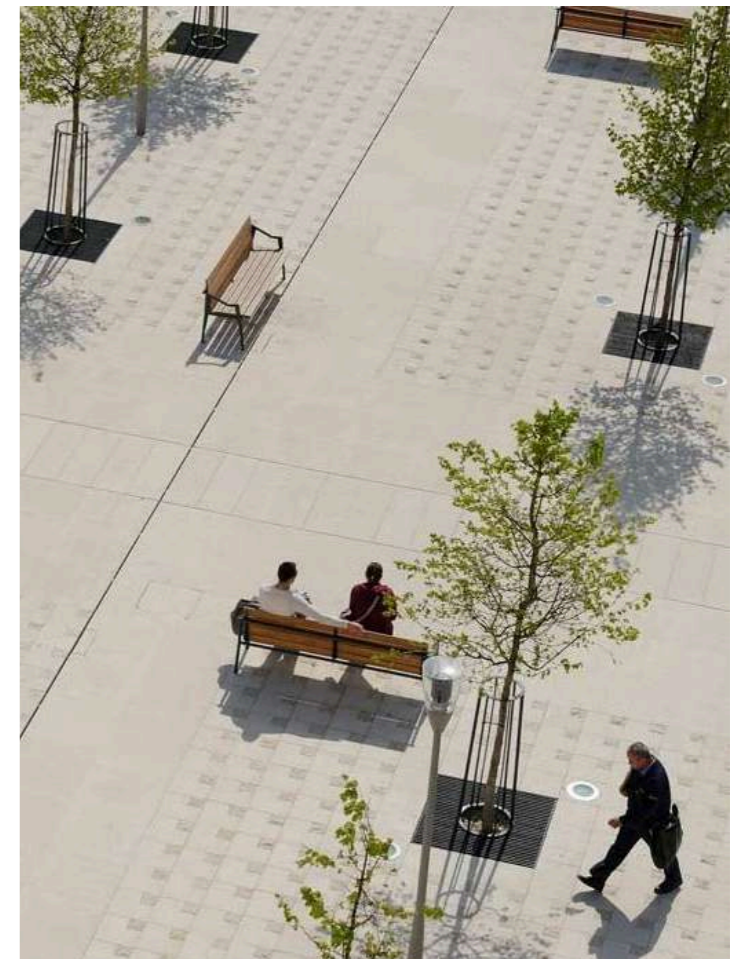
Hitchin Town Centre

November 2025

Character Areas

The Square

The square forms a central gathering space within the scheme, designed to accommodate both everyday use and larger community events. It provides flexible areas for market stall overflow, ensuring the market can expand outdoors during busy periods. The surrounding buildings activate the edges with community uses spilling out into the space, creating a lively and sociable atmosphere. Seating, planting, and clear sight-lines make the square welcoming and accessible, while its open layout allows it to adapt easily for performances, pop-ups, and seasonal celebrations.



Churchgate Regeneration Zone

Hitchin Town Centre

November 2025

Character Areas

The Riverside

The riverside is designed as a lively edge to the scheme, combining hard landscaping with outdoor seating to encourage activity along the water. The water's edge is activated with features such as steps offering places to sit, gather, or enjoy views across the river. Planting along the road edge provides a natural buffer to reduce noise and create a calmer setting, while flexible open areas allow for pop-up uses and seasonal events to spill towards the water.



Summary

Levels of Provision

Existing Site

No Food Store + New Covered Market

No Food Store + Refurbished Outdoor Market

Food Store + New Covered Market

Food Store + Refurbished Outdoor Market

Conclusion: Site Strategy

These four site strategies can accommodate different uses and combinations of uses, and support the 10 principles from the baseline review and public consultation, which include:

1. Respect historic Hitchin.
2. Respect important views.
3. Revitalise and enhance the Market.
4. Better connect the site.
5. Establish walking route along the River Hiz.
6. Hierarchy of historic scale streets.
7. Open up the River Hiz.
8. Create green space.
9. Diverse range of uses.
10. Provide a range of homes.

With new covered market



With Foodstore No Foodstore



With refurbished outdoor market



Conclusion: Site Strategy

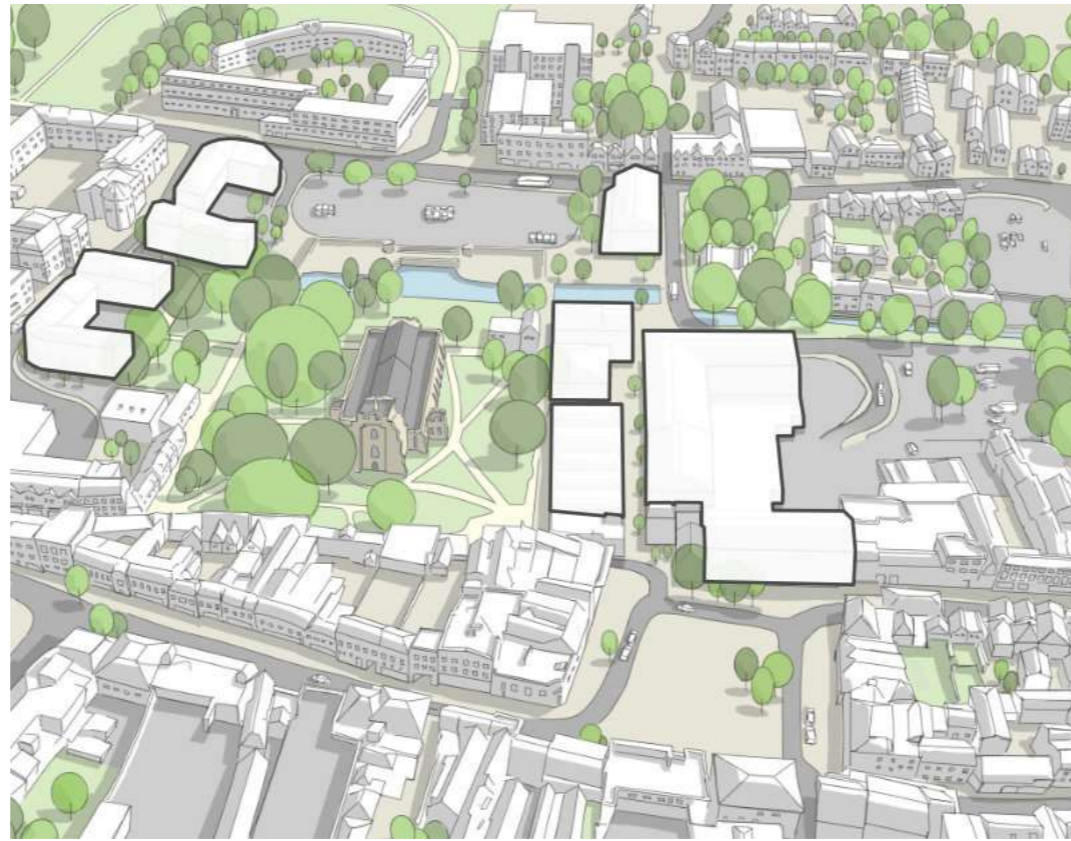
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Existing Aerial View



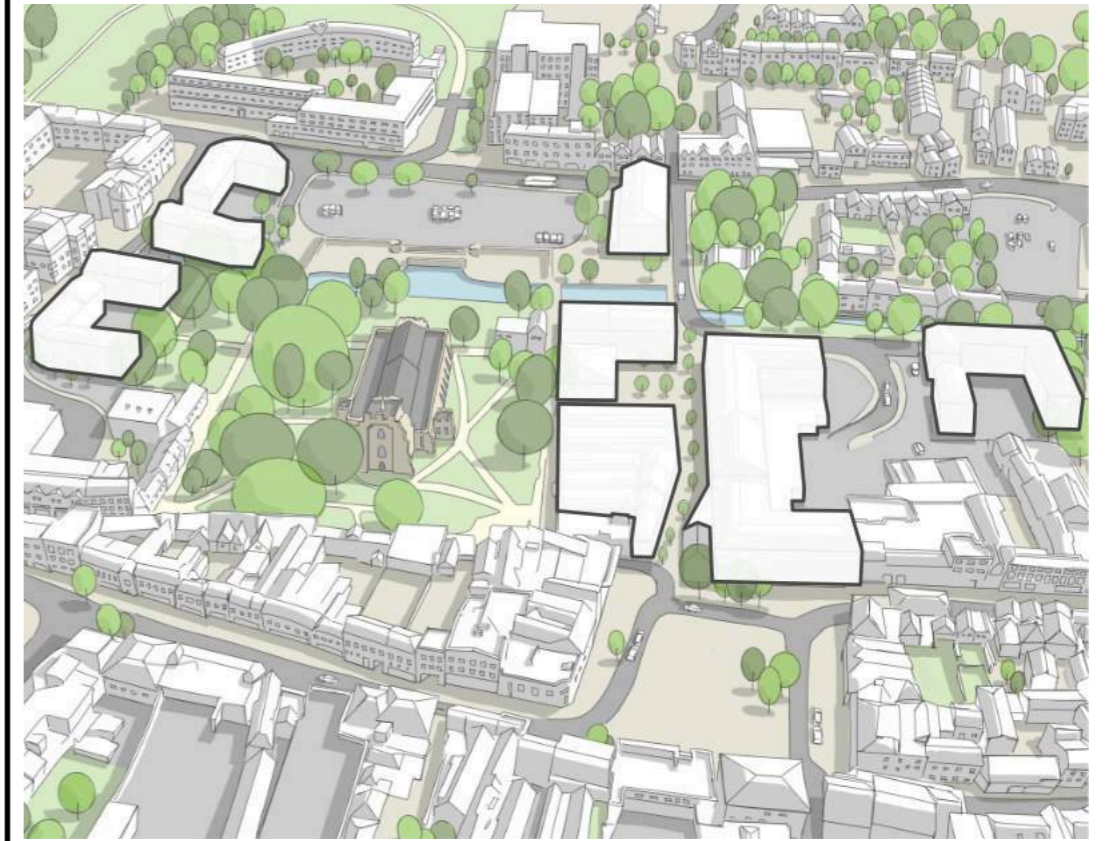
With new covered market



With refurbished outdoor market



With Foodstore



No Foodstore



Conclusion: Levels of Provision

Different levels of public realm provision have different cost implications therefore the Council has the opportunity to provide different levels provision for each public realm type, including:

- Hard landscaping
- Soft landscaping
- Street Furniture
- Accessibility
- Lighting
- Signage and wayfinding
- Street art and heritage

Basic Provision
Functional, minimal interventions



Standard Provision
Balanced, moderate enhancements



Premium Provision
Aspirational, high-quality design



www.leonard.design

Nottingham UK

Albion House
5-13 Canal Street
Nottingham
NG1 7EG

+44 (0) 330 165 7889

London UK

Baird House
15-17 St Cross Street
London
EC1N 8UW

+44 (0) 207 440 9960

Berlin GER

Dom Palais
Charlottenstraße 62
10117 Berlin

+49 (0) 301 663 6573

Kuala Lumpur MY

Unit 11-01A
Vida Bukit Ceylon
Jalan Ceylon
50200 Kuala Lumpur

+60 (0)3 2022 2105

Sydney AU

Level 1, 60 Miller St
North Sydney
NSW 2060

+61 (0) 498 323 080
