

CHURCHGATE REGENERATION ZONE, HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE: PRELIMINARY MARKET ENGAGEMENT (PME)

1. Overview

North Hertfordshire District Council (The Council) is undertaking this Preliminary Market Engagement in relation to the potential regeneration of the Churchgate area in Hitchin town centre.

2. Churchgate Regeneration Zone, Hitchin Town Centre



The Council is bringing forward the regeneration of the Churchgate area in Hitchin town centre, comprising the Churchgate Shopping Centre, Hitchin Market, and adjacent car parks including Portmill and Biggin Lane. The site sits at the heart of the town and plays a critical role in its economic, social and civic function. Since establishing the Development Principles in May 2025, the Council has undertaken a programme of further work to test the viability, deliverability and strategic direction of the scheme, including member workshops, technical analysis and engagement with the market. The ambition remains to deliver a high-quality, mixed-use scheme that supports the long-term vitality of the town centre, including new homes, a reimagined market offer, a viable commercial mix and enhanced public realm.

Hitchin Market and the Riverside

Building on the Development Principles and the Consultation Summary Report, this subsequent work has explored a number of key factors in greater depth. This has included testing different development scenarios and their impact on viability, reviewing the condition and performance of the existing asset, and examining delivery route options and associated risk profiles. Parking and accessibility have also been considered, including capacity, distribution and mitigation measures. In parallel, early engagement with developers and delivery partners has provided initial insight into market appetite, delivery structures and the conditions required to support investment.



The Churchgate Shopping Centre, Hitchin

This work has helped clarify the key factors needed to develop a viable and deliverable scheme, including the appropriate mix of uses, development capacity, the role of retail and food provision, market re-provision, and the relationship between parking, access and development potential. The Council will look to work with a development partner to build on this foundation.

Further work will focus on phasing, site assembly, and agreeing the most effective approach to risk, funding and responsibilities, ensuring the scheme can be progressed confidently and realistically.

3. Objectives of the Preliminary Market Engagement

The purpose of this Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) is to raise awareness among potential development partners of the opportunity within Hitchin town centre and the Council's emerging proposals for the site. It is intended to gauge market interest in participating in the regeneration and to identify parties with the capability and appetite to work in partnership with the Council.

The PME also aims to provide the Council with early insight into market perspectives on delivery, commercial structures, and risk allocation. In particular, it seeks to understand how developers would prefer to engage with the Council, what approaches would best support a viable and deliverable scheme, and what factors are likely to influence participation in any future procurement process.

Feedback from this exercise will help shape the Council's strategy, ensuring that future proposals and procurement arrangements are aligned with market conditions, commercially realistic, and capable of attracting strong and credible interest.

A PME Notice has been published ([Link to Notice](#)), in compliance with the Procurement Act 2023.

- Equal opportunity for all participants, with transparent findings.
- No unfair advantage to any participant, with conflicts of interest mitigated.
- Performance-based requirements instead of restrictive specifications.
- Fair access for SMEs to promote participant diversity.

PME findings will help the Council select the best procurement approach, contract structure, and evaluation criteria while considering whole lifecycle costs, sustainability, and social value.

4. Engagement Process

The Council and Lambert Smith Hampton are holding an informal briefing session at UKREiIF on 19 May 2026. This session is intended to provide background discussion and early market insight only. The formal route for submitting PME responses is through In-Tend, and any relevant information arising from the session will be made available through the PME process where appropriate.

5. Data Room

Please refer to the documents within the data room for further information on the opportunity. The Data room includes:

1. Development Principles May 2025
2. Churchgate Regeneration Zone Full Council Meeting July 2025
3. Churchgate Regeneration Zone Information Pack
4. Hitchin Parking Study Findings
5. Churchgate Progress Update (Internal Briefing Workshops) April 2026

Please refer to the Churchgate Regeneration Zone Information Pack document for the most up-to-date red line boundary, now excluding St Mary's car park, and the Council's latest site requirements.

6. Method of Engagement and Clarifications

North Hertfordshire District Council uses an E-Tendering system (In-Tend) for all procurement activities, including Preliminary Market Engagement (PME). Participants must submit their responses via the Supply Hertfordshire Portal at: [Supply Hertfordshire Electronic Tendering Site - Home](#)

- You must be registered on the portal to submit a response.
- If already registered, use your existing username and password.
- A password reminder link is available on the homepage if required.

For technical difficulties, please contact the In-Tend Helpdesk at 0845 557 8079 or support@in-tend.com

7. Instructions for Participants on Responding to PME Questions

Participants should provide clear, concise, and relevant responses to the questions in Annex A. Responses should focus on market insight, deliverability, viability, commercial considerations, procurement strategy, and any relevant evidence or experience that may assist the Council in shaping its future approach.

Participants can download this PME from the Supply Hertfordshire Portal. Participants are requested to complete all the questions at Annex A ensuring responses are returned in Microsoft Word

Please upload the completed document to the In-Tend e-tendering portal before the submission deadline, ensuring all supporting documents are included, where applicable.

8. Deadline for Submission & Clarifications

All PME responses must be submitted by **5pm, Monday 5 June 2026**. Late submissions may not be considered.

Any requests for clarification must be submitted via 'correspondence' function of the InTend portal before the deadline in the PME Timetable to allow the Council sufficient time to respond.

The Council reserves the right not to respond to clarifications submitted after the deadline or via any other means. If a clarification is relevant to all participants, the Council will share it anonymously with all participants.

If a participant considers their query confidential, they must state this when submitting their request. The Council will notify them if confidentiality cannot be maintained, allowing them to withdraw or amend the request.

Participants must monitor clarifications issued via the Portal, as the Council accepts no liability for participants missing important updates.

9. Confidentiality and Fair Competition Measures

The Council is committed to protecting confidential information shared during the Preliminary Market Engagement (PME). Any proprietary or sensitive data provided by participants will be:

- Kept strictly confidential and used solely for the purpose of informing the procurement process.
- Not shared with competitors unless deemed necessary for transparency, in which case it will be anonymised.
- Stored securely within the Council's procurement system, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations.

All relevant non-confidential findings from PME will be included in the final tender documents to ensure transparency. Participants will receive a summary of market insights where appropriate, without revealing individual participant contributions. This ensures that all bidders have access to the same information, maintaining fair competition.

To ensure a level playing field, the Council will:

- Engage with a broad range of participants, including SMEs, to encourage competition.
- Make key PME insights publicly available in tender documents, ensuring no participant has exclusive access to information.
- Avoid overly prescriptive specifications that could favour specific participants, instead focusing on performance-based outcomes.
- Where appropriate, meeting summaries, key discussion points, and market insights will be shared with all potential bidders.
- Any confidential aspects will be redacted before publication to maintain participant trust.
- Any potential conflicts of interest identified during PME will be logged and assessed before proceeding to tender.

10. Next Steps and Indicative Timeline

Following the Preliminary Market Engagement (PME), the Council will:

- Review participant feedback to refine specifications and procurement strategy.
- Incorporate relevant market insights into the final procurement documents.
- Publish the tender notice, ensuring a fair and competitive process.
- Communicate any clarifications arising from PME findings to all potential bidders.

The following indicative timetable provides an estimate of key procurement milestones:

Stage	Indicative Date
Publication of this Preliminary Market Engagement (PME)	1 May 2026
Deadline for clarification questions	22 May 2026
Deadline for Council responses to clarification questions	29 May 2026
Deadline for submission of PME Annex A responses	05 June 2026
Participant feedback review & analysis	30 June 2026
Finalisation of Procurement Strategy (estimated)	03 August 2026

ANNEX A QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSE FORM

Procurement/Contract Name	Churchgate Regeneration Zone, Hitchin Town Centre
Procurement Initiation Document Reference Number	NHDC01128038

A. Viability, Market Appetite and Land Use

Background

The Council is progressing a mixed-use regeneration vision for the Churchgate area, incorporating residential, retail, food and beverage, market, public realm, and community uses. However, the appropriate balance of uses, market demand, and overall commercial viability requires further testing. The Council is seeking market feedback to refine the proposed land use mix ahead of a future procurement.

Questions

1. Is the proposed mixed-use vision commercially viable in current market conditions? If not, what changes to the land use mix would be required to deliver a viable scheme?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

2. What level and type of retail, food and beverage, and residential development could be realistically supported in this location, taking into account demand, planning, and wider constraints?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

B. Market, Retail and Town Centre Function

Background

Hitchin Market, the Churchgate Shopping Centre, and surrounding town centre uses are central to the area's identity and function. Evidence highlights a need for investment, revitalisation, and potential right-sizing of the market and wider commercial offer. The Council is seeking views on how the market, alongside retail, food and beverage, leisure, community uses, and public realm, can work together to enhance footfall, complement the wider town centre, and remain commercially sustainable.

Questions

3. How would you see Hitchin Market and the surrounding mix of retail, food and beverage, and community uses working together in practice, particularly in terms of their size, layout, and day-to-day operation, to support a vibrant and commercially sustainable town centre without duplicating the existing offer?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

C. Heritage, Parking, Access and Physical Constraints

Background

The Churchgate area sits within a sensitive historic town centre context, close to St Mary's Church, River Hiz, and the conservation area. It also includes parking, established servicing arrangements, and key pedestrian connections. These factors are likely to influence the scale, layout, viability, and deliverability of any redevelopment. The Council is seeking market views on how these constraints can be addressed in a practical and commercially viable way.

Questions

4. What scale and form of development is realistically deliverable in this location, taking into account viability, heritage sensitivities, and planning considerations?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

5. How should parking, access, servicing, and movement be managed to enable development while continuing to support the function and vitality of the town centre, and what are the viability implications of different approaches?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

D. Phasing, Land Assembly and Deliverability

Background

The Churchgate area is an active town centre location with existing trading uses, market activity, access requirements, servicing arrangements, and multiple land and legal interests. As such, any redevelopment will need to carefully consider phasing, land assembly, and delivery constraints. The Council is seeking views on the practical steps required to move from the current position to a viable and deliverable regeneration scheme.

Questions

6. How could development be phased to enable delivery while maintaining the function and vitality of the town centre during construction?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

7. What key land, legal, or operational challenges could affect deliverability, including any risks that could prevent the scheme proceeding in its current form, and how should these be addressed prior to market engagement?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

E. Delivery Model, Commercial Structure and Investment

Background

The Council has not yet determined a preferred delivery model or commercial structure for the Churchgate scheme. Different approaches will have implications for risk, control, funding, viability, phasing, and market appetite. The Council is seeking views on the delivery and investment arrangements most likely to support a viable, deliverable, and investable scheme, including the potential need for public sector intervention.

Questions

8. What delivery model and commercial structure would be most appropriate for a scheme of this complexity, and how should risk, control, and funding be balanced between the Council and a delivery partner?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

F. Procurement Strategy

Background

The procurement will be undertaken in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023. The Council is also aware of the time, cost and resource implications of undertaking a conventional procurement.

Questions

9. How can a procurement process be structured to remain fully compliant while also being proportionate and commercially realistic for bidders?

Response	Word Count (400 words max)

H. Additional Observations

Please identify any additional observations, lessons learned or practical suggestions that the Council should consider when developing its procurement and delivery strategy for the Churchgate Regeneration Zone.

Response	Word Count (500 words max)

CHECKLIST FOR SUBMISSION

Description	Check
Completed Annex A PME response form in Word	
All supporting documents uploaded and referenced	
Confidentiality declaration included (if applicable)	
Submitted via In-Tend before the deadline	
Signed and dated	

The Council looks forward to your participation in this Preliminary Market Engagement and appreciates your valuable input.

SIGNATURE:	_____
NAME (PRINT):	_____
POSITION:	_____
COMPANY:	_____
DATE:	_____