

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
6G	Date:	16 June 2026
	Title of item:	Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 1
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 1

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 16 June 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 16th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the additional capital / revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.
- (2) Instructs officers to undertake a review of the Council's external communications approach, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Since the last Full Council update in July 2025, and subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussions in February 2026, the Churchgate Regeneration Project has progressed significantly and moved into a substantially more mature and evidence-led phase.
- (2) Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.
- (3) This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.
- (4) Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.
- (5) The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.
- (6) The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.

- (7) This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.
- (8) The proposed next phase reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

Audio recording – 3 hours 23 minutes 10 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Jon Clayden, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Clayden advised that:

- The Committee appreciated the opportunity to consider the report.
- They were keen to ensure that there was no softening of quality or affordable housing allocation resulting due to the updated process.
- There was concern over the sign off process for this project once the shadow authorities were formed.
- It had also been questioned why the work could not be completed inhouse, but that query had been answered.
- The balance of risk for the Council versus the risk for a developer as the project progressed was also considered.
- Recognition should be given to any increasing costs as these would be borne by the taxpayer.
- Some costs were distorting, but the Committee did not believe that the project had reached a point where there should be a cap on spending.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Clayden advised that the point raised during the debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that the project had reached a tipping point was not a formal position that the Committee had taken.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Churchgate Regeneration Project Update and Next Steps – Part 1' and advised that:

- Since the Full Council meeting in July 2025, the project team had worked to test and progress issues associated with the site including viability, parking, the market and public realm.
- It was important to recognise that the Council was in a stronger position than it was in July last year as there was a clearer understanding of the site and the viability and delivery channels, a stronger technical and financial evidence base and a greater insight into market appetite and delivery expectations.
- Soft market engagement indicated that Hitchin was viewed as an attractive and credible regeneration opportunity with long-term potential whilst acknowledging that it was a complex scheme that would require careful feasibility work and detailed delivery planning.
- The Council was seeking to appoint regeneration specialists to work alongside the project team to refine a deliverable scheme and help to transition ambition into implementation.
- The phased approach would ensure that the investment, funding and risk would remain proportionate to certainty at each stage of the project while progressing the project in a controlled way with strategic oversight and decision-making control.
- Further testing of deliverability and viability would reduce uncertainty before any future long-term delivery decisions were made.

- A confirmation of viability would not compromise the delivery of affordable housing or value for money, and this stage would allow the precise testing of design, quality, viability and delivery considerations together rather than separately.
- The ambition to deliver a high-quality, viable regeneration scheme capable of supporting the long-term vitality and success of Hitchin Town Centre remained.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was the right approach on a hugely important project.
- They would need to ensure clear communication with residents through the Churchgate website and other forms.
- The Project Board needed to urgently look at how they published the documents that were in the Agenda Reports Pack and communicated decisions on the project going forward.
- The documents were specialised and designed for the purpose of developers.
- Stakeholder communication had been considered by the project board, but there was also recognition that the public wanted to see progress, and they should communicate with an aim to demonstrate this.
- Communications Officers could attend project board meetings to ensure more communication.
- Additional layers of communication could be put in place to support the reading of more complex documents.
- The documents on this project were already in the public domain regardless of their appropriateness. Therefore, they should ensure that the information was shown in appropriate way.
- This project was one of the biggest projects the Council had undertaken, and it would be great for Hitchin.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Churchgate Project Manager advised that:

- The background documents were technical working documents on specialised topics prepared for internal decision-making purposes rather than public audiences, and it would be difficult for residents to interpret them without wider context.
- The project board would need to work on how to produce accessible updates for residents that would communicate progress going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed an amendment to include that Cabinet instructs officers to undertake a review of the external communications approach of the Council, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas accepted the amendment into the substantive motion, and this was also accepted by Councillor Daniel Allen as seconder.

Having been proposed and seconded, as amended and, following a vote, it was:

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