



## HITCHIN CHURCHGATE SURVEY 2018: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. BACKGROUND

During March and April 2018 the Council carried out a public consultation exercise, seeking views on initial ideas to improve Hitchin's Churchgate Centre and historic market. The survey was predominantly carried out online, although paper copies were made available to those without internet access.

The consultation followed a decision by Full Council on 8 February, where Councillors agreed to support the principle of a joint venture regeneration of the Churchgate Centre in Hitchin, with the Council as funder of the regeneration. The potential joint venture between the Council and Shearer Property Group would see a 'face-lift' of the existing shopping centre, improving the quality of the units available and in turn make them more attractive to tenants. The scheme would also see improved public open space and investment in Hitchin's historic market.

At this early stage, the Council sought the views of people who live and/or work in North Hertfordshire on the broad principles of the proposals, in order to inform our thinking. There will be further opportunity to comment on any scheme proposed in the future as things progress.

### 2. DEMOGRAPHICS

The consultation received 578 responses in total, with 76% of respondents living in Hitchin, 12% living in a village or rural area in North Herts and 6% living in Letchworth. There was a fairly even gender split with 48% male / 50% female responses (just under 3% preferred not to state their gender).

### 3. KEY FINDINGS

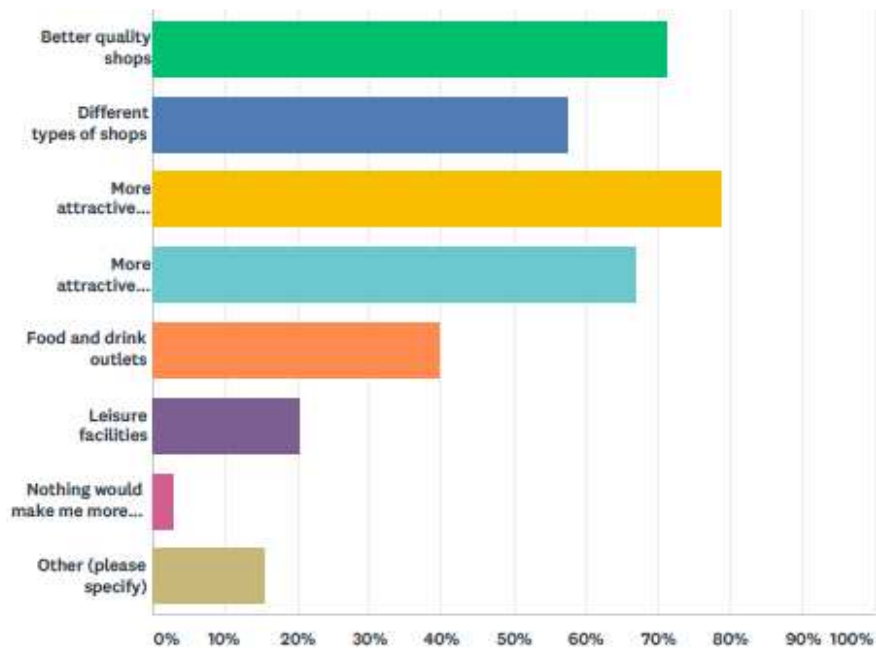
#### 3.1 Visiting Hitchin and the Churchgate Centre

82% of respondents visit Hitchin at least once or twice a week including 28% who visit daily. 95% of respondents visit Hitchin for shopping, with just over 60% of respondents currently shopping in the Churchgate Centre. However, 53% of those people visit the Centre only monthly or occasionally.

Respondents who visited the Centre less often than fortnightly were asked what would make them visit more often. The top three responses were: more attractive environment (79%), better quality shops (71%) and more attractive buildings / shop fronts (67%).

## Q8 What would make you more likely to visit the Churchgate Shopping Centre or visit more regularly? (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 408 Skipped: 170



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Better quality shops	71.08%	290
Different types of shops	57.60%	235
More attractive environment	78.92%	322
More attractive buildings/ shop fronts	66.91%	273
Food and drink outlets	39.71%	162
Leisure facilities	20.34%	83
Nothing would make me more likely to visit	2.70%	11
Other (please specify)	15.44%	63
Total Respondents: 408		

### 3.2 Improvements to the Churchgate Centre

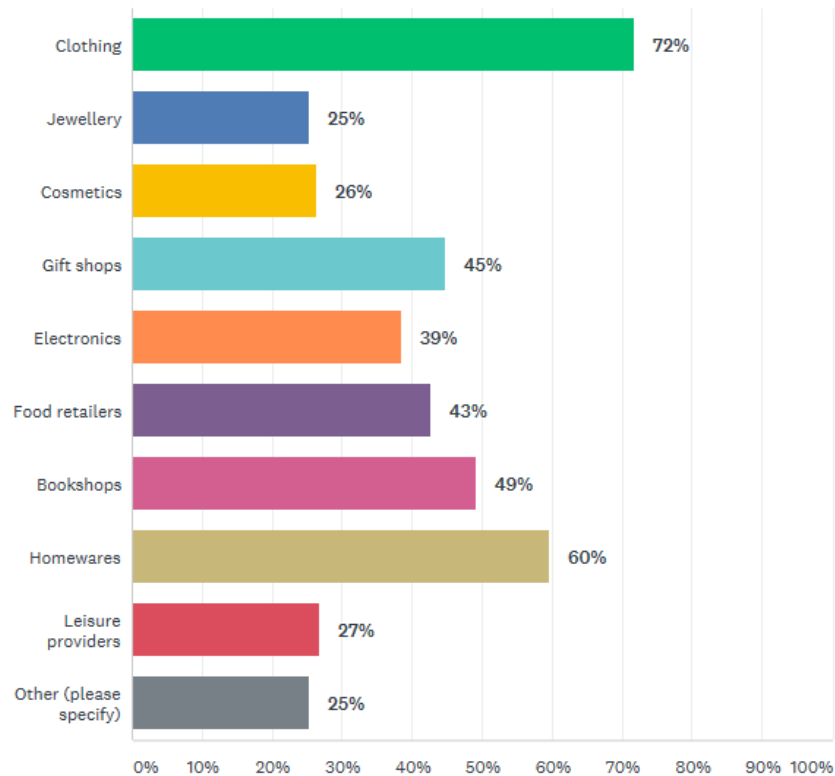
86% of respondents supported the idea of regenerating the existing Churchgate Centre to provide improved shop units.

When asked about what type of food and drink outlets they would like to see in an improved centre the top three responses were: Family (44%), Gastropub (38%) and Italian (35%). There were however a significant number of respondents (16% of total respondents) who stated that they feel that Hitchin already has enough food and drink establishments and no more were needed.

When asked what sort of retailers they would like to see in a regenerated Churchgate Centre, the most popular responses were: clothing (72%), home-wares (60%), bookshops (49%), gift shops (45%) and food retailers (43%). Of those who selected 'other' 26% said they wanted independent shops (6% of total respondents).

What sort of retailers would you like to see in a regenerated Churchgate Centre? (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 555 Skipped: 23



Some of the specific brands people mentioned that they would like to see are in the Word Cloud below:

Cinema Range White Company Colanders Marks and Spencer  
 Reiss M&S H and M Lush Children's Clothes John Lewis  
 Waitrose Independent Priced Shops Flying Tiger  
 H&M Men's Clothing Local Department Wagamama HMV  
 Oliver Bonas Look River Island Bigger Marks Space NK

### 3.2 Improvements to public space

When asked whether they support the principle of regenerating the public space to the rear of the Churchgate Centre, including opening up the views of the Church from the market, 76% of respondents said yes, 11% said no and 13% didn't know.

### 3.3 Hitchin Market

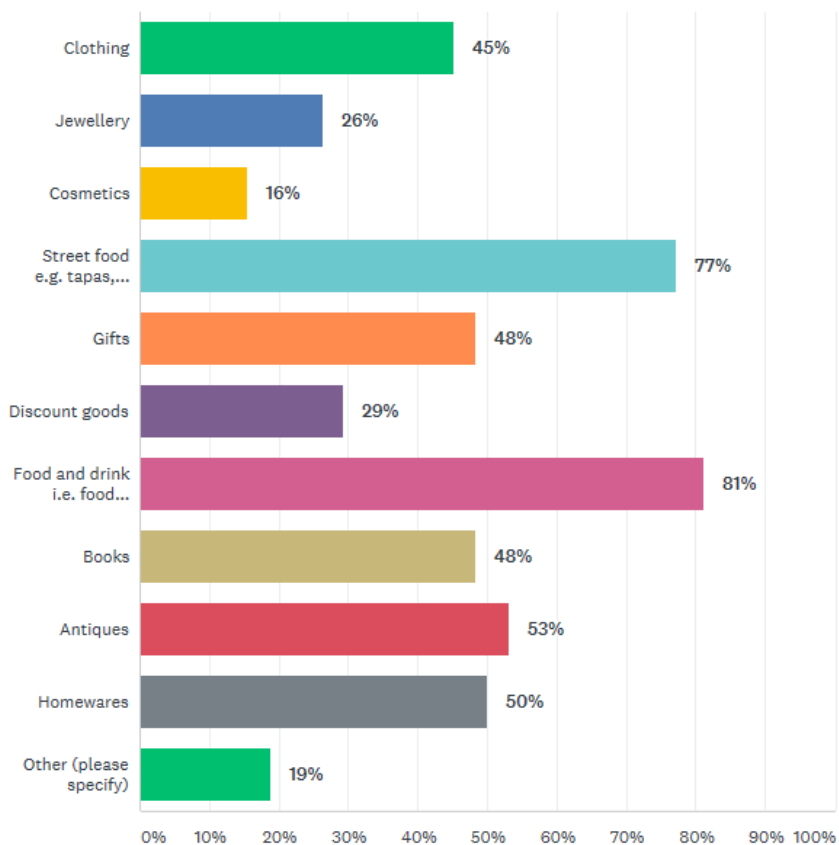
68% of respondents currently shopped at Hitchin Market with almost 40% of those shopping there at least weekly. Those respondents who shopped there less frequently or not at all were then asked what would make them shop there more often. 73% said a more attractive environment, 60% better quality traders and 59% more attractive stalls. Other factors that would make people more likely to shop there include having farmers / food markets and having better or cheaper parking – both cited by just under 2% of total respondents.

The vast majority (93%) of respondents supported the principle of investing in Hitchin's market to ensure it is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

When asked what types of regular stalls they would like to see in an improved market, the most popular response was food and drink i.e. food consumed at home (81%), followed by street food e.g. tapas (77%) with antiques and home-wares receiving 53% and 50% support respectively.

What types of regular stalls would you like to see in an improved market?  
(Please tick all that apply)

Answered: 541 Skipped: 37



93% of respondents supported the idea of holding regular specialist markets as well as the general market, with 94% of respondents wanting to see farmers markets, 82% craft markets and 74% Italian / French / German markets. Other suggestions for specialist markets are shown in the word cloud below:



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results show that there is widespread support for a scheme to improve both the Churchgate Centre and the Market. The feedback will now be used to help inform the development of the Council's proposals moving forward. There will be further consultation opportunities as the scheme progresses.

The results for improving the public space in the area also received a positive response, however there were a significant proportion of people who either didn't know if they supported this proposal or didn't support it. In any future consultations plans for this part of the proposal in particular will need to be explained in more detail.

The full results of the survey can be found on the Council's website here: [www.north-herts.gov.uk/churchgate](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/churchgate)