

### Viability of Hertford Town Centre - Update

#### Summary:

- 1.1 At an earlier meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Members discussed the issue of Hertford Town Centre in terms of its economic viability but particularly in relation to Bircherley Green and the impact this was having on the environment. Subsequently at its meeting on 5 November 2019 Members felt that there was sufficient evidence to support the establishment of a Task and Finish Group but that this be delayed until February 2020 in order to allow the new owner of Bircherley Green Site (Chase Home) time to submit a planning application.
- Chase New Homes (owners of Bircherley Green) have indicated they are keen to submit a planning application this side of Christmas. Obviously that will be a key vehicle for town centre improvement and the Council looks forward to receiving it.
- It is worth noting however that East Herts Council is also making significant investment in the town generally. This includes the Council's agreement to invest a significant sum of money in expanding Hertford Theatre so it becomes a higher profile destination and refurbishing of Hartham Leisure Centre (which will bring significant enhancements to the health and wellbeing offering with the town).
- Town centre businesses have also recently come together to form a trader's association. Both the district and town council are supporting them where possible and this formal group now gives businesses within the town centre a stronger, more coherent voice on matters of interest.

- Retail as a sector, is struggling (locally, nationally and globally) i.e. changes in how people shop e.g online and Hertford's offer is slowly changing from one of shops to a mixture of catering, social and leisure. This is essential for the town centre to stay relevant. Data presented to PAGO on the 29 October (available on line) indicates town centre vacancy rates are not a cause for concern (with the only empty units being at Bircherley Green). Equally data from "*Visit Herts*" indicates more people are visiting Hertford and spending more money when they do so. Evidence from independent reports suggest that there are challenges but Hertford still has a strong base of independent shops and is well placed for the future.

## 2.0 Conclusion:

- 2.1 While the planning application is a separate issue, Members might want to consider what the Council can do in the interim to help with local issues of concern?