

**Keith Hoskins** said it very clearly at the Hitchin Initiative AGM, and here are some of his words -

*The announcement by North Herts District Council of a potential joint venture on Churchgate regeneration is welcomed with cautious optimism; there have been false dawns before but this news confirms the long-held rumour that the Shearer Property Group were obtaining the long lease from Hammersmatch.*

*Regeneration rather than wholesale demolition and redevelopment will be welcomed by the many community groups who were wary of 'cramming' which was the downfall of the old Simon's scheme all those years ago and with the advantage of hindsight, what a good decision that was! Refurbishment recognises the changing demands of retailers on today's High Streets where there is little appetite for major developments outside of main conurbations.*

*It is early days yet and I am sure that there will be opportunities for consultation and comment but I do hope that matters can be expedited. The Council will be mindful of maintaining the integrity of the Market and will no doubt seek to minimise disruption to existing businesses in what continue to be difficult trading times. One of the first steps will be the Council's need to take back the management of Hitchin Market when the current agreement expires at the end of July to facilitate negotiations on the whole parcel of land that is publicly owned; that is not to say that they will necessarily retain it once the investment and refurbishment has been carried out but certainly in the interim. These are once again exciting times and Hitchin Initiative as always is ready to assist in anything which maintains and enhances the vibrancy of the town.*

We look forward to progress on this proposal and the public engagement and consultation on this major project which must follow.

Cautious optimism are the buzz words.