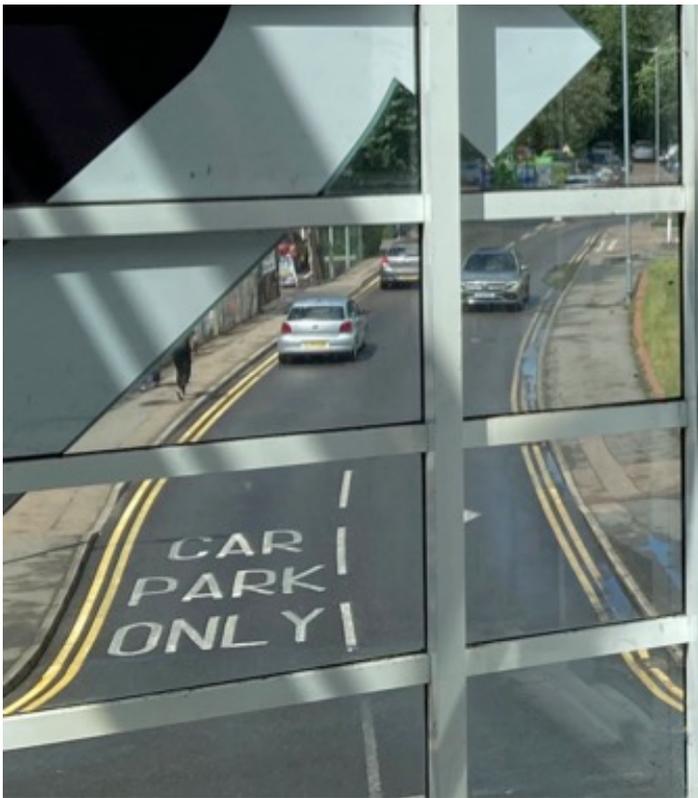


# A New Future for Old River Lane

Consultation document



Cross party working group on the future of the ORL site | July 2021

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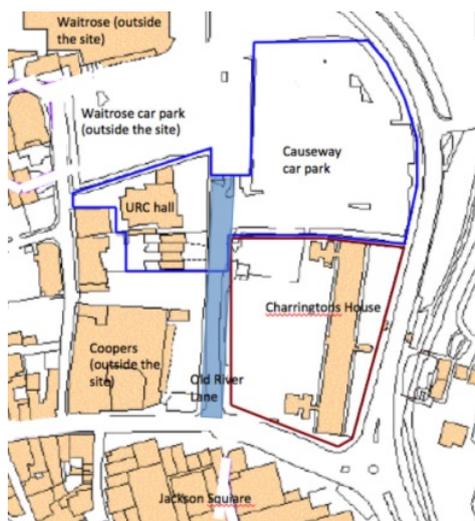
Oya Wilkes, Missing Children Coordinator

## A new future for Old River Lane Consultation report

For too long plans to develop Old River Lane have floundered in the absence of a coherent vision for the site. East Herts Council's current uninspiring plans to build a cinema, albeit one branded as an 'arts centre', are fated to go the same way as previous proposals.

We offer this paper to explore an alternative vision to the plans being pursued by East Herts. We believe an education and community hub at the heart of ORL will provide an invaluable and long-term resource for Bishop's Stortford and the surrounding area. We call for transparency about the land, finances, and the processes being followed, and we encourage you, the residents, businesses and community groups of the town, to respond to this report.

Faced by unprecedented financial pressures caused by Covid-19 and reduced central Government funding, EHC faces a budget gap of over £3m during the next 2 years. It has already been forced to slash the capital funding of the proposed 'arts centre' by £15m, and the prospect of a theatre has been abandoned. This is therefore an ideal time to pause and reconsider.



We are not opposed to development per se, but want a collaborative, public masterplanning process, to get the best outcome. New housing, home workspaces,

new business premises and public spaces on the larger ORL site must respond to local needs and enliven the economy. We believe that another cinema feebly disguised as an arts centre is a failure of imagination, a financial misjudgment and a missed opportunity in this 'county of opportunity'. Demolition of a sound, functional building is environmentally irresponsible in 2021. Demolishing the URC hall (an arts venue) while promoting the arts is perverse.

Our proposal centres upon the re-use of Charringtons House as an education and community hub for life-long learning - a space for varied formal and informal learning, supporting businesses, developing skills for modern business, and social cohesion, linking with surrounding colleges, exploiting the scientific and arts excellence embedded in the population and the region's technological industries. We also propose that the remaining outdoor space on the site could be the location of a consolidated chartered market, to attract more visitors and rebuild the vibrancy of Bishop's Stortford as an "historic market town".

There is however no indication that the council is having any second thoughts about its plans, despite the obvious widespread concern within Stortford itself. We invite the District Council and the senior councillors driving this project to take the opportunity to pause and reflect on the choices they have made.

We don't claim to have all the answers to the questions we raise in this report. We invite the residents, community groups and businesses of the town to join with us and create the Old River Lane Campaign Group which will campaign for our alternative vision for the site.

Please send your comments on our consultation paper to [ORLWorkingGroup@gmail.com](mailto:ORLWorkingGroup@gmail.com) by 1st October 2021. Groups and individuals wishing to join the ORL Campaign Action group should email us using the same address.

Elif Toker-Turnalar / Chair, ORL working group

## **1 Introduction**

We offer this paper to explore the opportunities for the Old River Lane development site. We support a collaborative approach to urban design. We promote education as a use to benefit our town instead of a pointless cinema. We ask for transparency about the land and finance. We encourage you to respond.

### **Who we are**

The ORL Working Group was established earlier this year and includes representatives from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. We have extensive expertise and experience in education, planning, law, social work and business and environment, and we live, study and work in Bishop's Stortford.

### **Our aim**

Our aim has been to investigate the merits of an education and community hub on the Old River Lane site.

We want to understand East Herts Council's financial and design approach to development options. We challenge the proposed cinema as an unwanted and misguided proposal.

We support regeneration, and believe in a rigorous design process.

We have reviewed EHDC decisions and seen the variety of local views questioning whether these decisions are in the best interests of the town.

### **This report**

Our report includes information about the need for a post-16 college in Stortford, the courses typically offered, potential sources of funding, likely development and running costs, and a consideration of any risks pertinent to the proposal. While the working assumption is that the education proposal has at least some merits, we are open and honest about serious obstacles to the proposal.

While we have focused on the education idea, we have also reviewed decisions and options for the whole site.

### **How we refer to the Council**

We do not typically say ‘the council’ in this report. It is helpful to distinguish between three aspects of East Herts District Council (EHDC) responsibility:

- **Leading councillors** – the leader and executive members
- **Strategic property and finance** – responsible for managing land owned by EHDC and promoting development.
- **Planning and building control** – the Local Planning Authority (LPA), with statutory responsibility for land use policy and regulating development in the public interest.

We therefore refer to ‘leading councillors’, ‘EHDC property’ and ‘the LPA’ – each have different interests and responsibilities:

# East Herts District Council roles and responsibilities

## Property and finance

Owner of all the land. Bought the URC hall and three houses.  
Responsible for sustainable, beneficial, viable regeneration.

### 1. Main ORL development

Appointed partner - Cityheart

### 2. Arts centre development

Arts centre steering group

ORL Delivery board

## Local planning authority (LPA)

Responsible for urban strategy and permissions in the public interest

East Herts District plan policies:  
The statutory development plan.

## Masterplanning

Glenn Howells  
Architects (Cityheart)

Herts Highway authority

Collaboration  
+ negotiation  
(Policy DES1)

LPA masterplan steering group

Adopt a supplement to the district plan (SPD)

Submit planning application

Determine planning application (with formal consultations)

### Decisions

ORL Delivery board.  
Head of Property and finance.  
Executive councillors.  
Full Council.

### Decisions

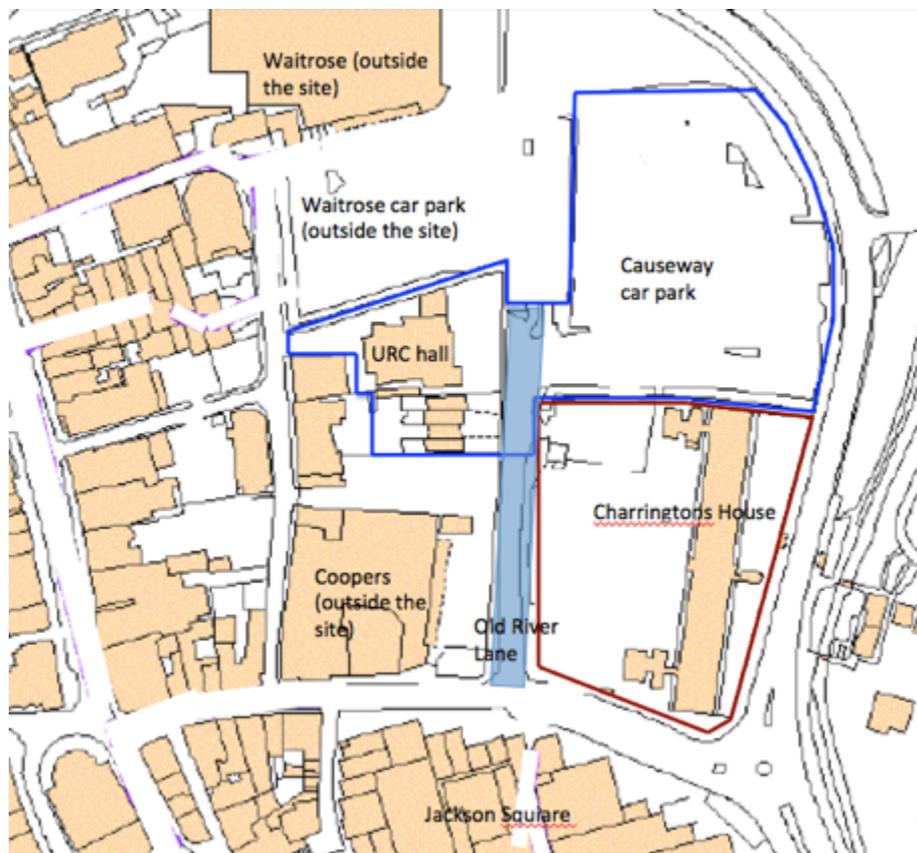
Head of planning.  
Executive councillor for planning.  
Planning committee.

## 2 The site

The plan below shows the approximate extent of the development area. This is intended to show the land areas for the two schemes - the 'main' development and the 'arts centre' development.

- The blue line is roughly the area of the 'main' development – the land leased to Cityheart for the ORL main development scheme. This site area includes the Causeway public car park, the URC church hall and three houses (purchased by EHDC Property) on Old River Lane, but excludes Waitrose car park.
- The red line is the rough outline of the 'arts centre' development, led by EHDC Property. This site includes Charringtons House (which they propose to demolish) and adjacent car park.
- The light blue is the existing public highway, which would be included in the masterplan.

These areas are not yet fixed: we know that a new vehicle access point will be created and this will reduce development areas once it is settled.



Our diagrammatic plan indicates that Charringtons House could be kept without reducing the Cityheart regeneration area. And that the Charringtons House car park could accommodate additional building – either as an extension to Charringtons House or further land for the Cityheart regeneration.

### 3 Old River Lane site: an analysis of planning policy

All decisions on planning applications need to be in accordance with the policies in the development plan unless there are sound planning considerations why those policies should not apply (as stated by the National Planning Policy Framework). For Bishop's Stortford, this comprises the adopted Local Plan; a confirmed Neighbourhood Plan; and adopted supplementary planning documents (SPD).

[East Herts District Plan](#) - adopted October 2018.

Policy BISH8: *The Bishop's Stortford Town Centre Planning Framework will form the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document which will be used to inform the master planning of this site.*

The policy makes it clear that the Town Centre Planning Framework (TCPF) is intended to form the basis for further work on a master plan for the ORL site which will be set out in an adopted SPD. However, it is clear now that the local planning authority will work on the master plan in collaboration with the developer and will adopt that masterplan as an SPD. The TCPF has **not** been adopted by the District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document.

In addition the District Plan has policies relating to masterplanning, responding to climate change, protection of existing community facilities, car parking, affordable housing and business.

[Neighbourhood Plan for Bishop's Stortford and Part of Thorley Parish](#) – amended following public consultation on Shared Policies for the period 2020-2032

The amended neighbourhood plan states the town centre should be '*providing a balanced mix of residential, cultural, leisure and business in the town centre and in particular at Old River Lane*'.

Policy TC1: *The development of Old River Lane should be subject of a supplementary planning document which was proposed under Policy BISH8 of the District Plan and at the time of writing has yet to be made, to inform the master planning of the site. Before any further works take place to ensure that full consultation with stakeholders and residents takes place on the mix of uses.*

If the neighbourhood plan is finally approved with that policy wording in place, no application for planning permission for any part of the ORL site can be approved in advance of a detailed master plan for the site in the form of an adopted SPD on which full public consultation has taken place.

### **Multi-screen cinema**

There is no express support in any of the adopted or emerging development plan policies for the development of a multi-screen cinema on the ORL site. The Town Centre Planning Framework identifies the centre of the site as accommodating '*new community or public service space*', a description which does not apply to a multi-screen cinema.

The legal position is that the Local Planning Authority may not grant planning permission to itself (as land owner) or to a partner developer for the ORL site until the it has undertaken a comprehensive public engagement exercise on a Supplementary Planning Document comprising a detailed master plan for the ORL site, and adopted that document as formal planning policy. Any such decision would be unlawful and would be open to challenge in the High Court.

## **4 Where EHDC property and planning are now**

### **First development partner**

In 2009 East Herts Council sold the Old River Lane site to Henderson Global Investors for £2.35m. Henderson planned to develop a department store, 35 shops, a cinema, an underground car park, a hotel and around 100 flats. However, by 2015 Henderson decided the site was no longer economical to develop. EHC then decided to buy back the site (slightly expanded, making a like-for-like comparison more difficult) for £19.55m, claiming it was 'a good investment'. This represented a loss of £15.05m on the original site.

The justification for the buyback was claimed to be the possible future rental income. This ignored the capital loss to taxpayers that made Henderson the only winner in the transaction. EHC's secretive decision making, avoidance of democratic scrutiny, weak negotiating and the huge financial losses led to this being widely known as the 'Henderson Causeway scandal'. No lessons were learnt from this debacle because EHC's one party dominance meant scrutiny was secondary to party loyalty. There was never any formal investigation or review of this huge loss.

### **Second development partner**

There was a full competitive tender for a partner for the redevelopment of Old River Lane, which was won by Cityheart. There will be a legal agreement between EHC property and Cityheart, currently in draft. The agreement will include the following provisions:

- EHC property will sell a 125 year lease for the land to Cityheart.
- Cityheart will design and build the development.
- They will sell homes, and rent business space.
- Cityheart will construct the 'arts centre' to a specification set by East Herts Council.

### **Where we are now – how the Council intends to proceed**

At an Extraordinary Council meeting on 18 March 2021, councillors decided to proceed with two schemes:

*The Arts Centre development* – this means the 5-screen cinema. Leading councilors and EHDC Property dropped the original theatre-based arts centre scheme. The new arts centre specification is under the direct control of the EHC Cabinet and EHC Property (see below).

*The Old River Lane Main Scheme* - everything but the cinema. Cityheart will design and develop this.

Decisions about the development have been devolved to the Head of Property and Finance, endorsed by the Old River Lane Delivery Board, in consultation with leading councillors ‘when necessary’.

The Arts Centre Steering Group reports to the Old River Lane Delivery Board. Its role is to develop the brief for the arts centre and examine how it will operate day-to-day. Councillors, advised by the steering group, have not yet decided whether it will operate the arts centre in-house, create a charitable trust or tender for an operator to run the centre on its behalf.

Full council made the decision to go ahead on the basis of the financial viability demonstrated in the business case.

#### **The revised arts centre brief (from financial model)**

- 25,000 sq ft (2,322 sq m) building
- 5 screens with 410 luxury seats used for a mix of 1st and 2nd release screenings and 'live' digital screening
- Screen sizes: 150 seats, 80 seats, 80 seats, 50 seats and 50 seats
- Live performance weekly in 80 seat cinema on Friday/Saturday evenings (music/comedy/cabaret style events)
- Community based live performances/workshops to be held weekday afternoons (i.e. parent/toddler shows, dementia friendly music performances etc.) 2 –3 times per week in downstairs café/foyer space
- Downstairs café/bar will be a light café/bistro offer, not a destination restaurant.

- Operational model: cinema and café/bar spaces operated in-house

Outdoor performance in the public realm – the space may also be used for outdoor screening of live sports events, theatre productions, music concerts as well as other leisure use such as an ice-skating rink in the winter.

It has been very confusing for residents to understand these two separate projects. Each development will be managed differently, but both have to form part of a single masterplan. While we know what the 'arts centre will contain, there is no sense of how it will be integrated in the overall plan to make a successful place.

## 5 Questions arising from the EHDC business case

The summary business case was included in papers for a closed session of the full council. At this stage we have only seen a heavily redacted version of this business case.

Our challenges to this are:

1. How does removing the residential element of the Arts Centre scheme improve its viability?  
The report says that the residential element had an estimated cost of approximately £5m.  
Where has the loss of sales receipts for those residential units been taken into account?
2. Without the full business case it is impossible to verify the claims being made (paragraph 4.4) on borrowing, return on investment, and subsidy - with and without the Arts Centre. On the same basis it is impossible to substantiate the claim that an Arts Theatre scheme will deliver a lower return on investment and require a higher subsidy?

3. Why is there is no acknowledgement that both the Empire cinema and South Mill Arts can already live stream nationally, internationally and locally, as the proposed multiscreen cinema is being promoted for?
4. Why is there no reference at all to the impact that the new multiscreen cinema on the ORL site is bound to have on the existing cinema and its neighbouring units?
5. Why are the key financial assumptions on the level of public use not explained anywhere, despite concluding that a multiscreen cinema on ORL would achieve the predicted figures and be financially viable?

It is clear that the District Council ORL Board has not carried out any analysis at all of the extent to which its new version of the ORL scheme will have an adverse impact elsewhere in the town.

There is no specific policy in the Local Plan which requires the District Council in its role as Planning Authority to consider what impact granting planning permission for this version of the ORL scheme would have on town centre facilities elsewhere. The Local Plan policies on retail and other related development do require an analysis of the likely impact on the vitality of the town centre but only where out-of-town retail etc is being proposed. Policy BISH12 however seeks to promote the development of additional retail, leisure and recreation facilities on the Goods Yard and Old Mill sites as well as on ORL. It follows that the impact of the ORL scheme on the existing multiscreen cinema and the adjoining units and also on South Mill Arts is a matter that must be considered by the District Council in deciding what the ORL scheme should consist of.

There is nothing at all in the business case papers which have been disclosed which even attempts to explain why replicating the existing multiscreen cinema facility on ORL is an appropriate project which will enhance the vitality of the town centre. It is possible that the detailed financial analysis shows that the proposed Arts Theatre would come at too high a cost in the current economic climate. However, that does not entitle the District Council simply to replace the Arts Theatre with a multiscreen cinema without a proper analysis of its benefits and impact.

## Financial model for the revised arts centre February 2021

In early June 2021, the EHDC Chief Executive provided us with part of the financial model for the ORL scheme, but with the principal figures redacted. We consider that a number of serious concerns are raised by this analysis, as follows :

- The analysis claims that the cinema led scheme will require an initial subsidy of £170,000 in 2024/25, with that subsidy reducing over the initial 7 years of the operation. The scheme is then said to move into profit in year 8 and to produce a surplus of £6.9m over a 30 year period. It is not at all clear whether this takes into account the total capital and loan costs or only the operating costs. Without a sight of the detailed figures, it is impossible to verify this claim.
- By contrast, the analysis claims that the Arts Theatre project would have required an annual subsidy of £670,000 with a 30-year deficit of £10m. Again, no figures are disclosed which would allow us to verify this.
- There is no indication in the analysis of how the capital costs of the scheme are to be funded and what proportion of the total cost will be raised from the District Council's existing reserves and/or commercial loans.
- The analysis says that the scheme *'is not envisaged to be a multi-plex, like the current Empire Cinemas, but more like Curzon Cinemas, Everyman Cinemas or Picture House Cinemas'* but without explaining anywhere what that means.
- The analysis is based on a prediction that the ORL cinemas will attract 175,000 visitors each year. That is based on an assumption that each of the cinemas will be used at 32.7% capacity for an average of 3.5 screenings on every day of the year. To put this into context, that is the equivalent of every single person in Bishop's Stortford attending 4 screenings a year (based on the 2019 population figures).
- There is no explanation of the source of the visitor numbers and whether they are new customers or diversions from the existing multiplex and/or South Mill Arts. There is equally

no analysis of the extent to which the ORL facility will divert customers away from those other facilities or of the impact on the continuing viability of those facilities.

- The analysis includes an assumption about ticket sales for live performances, based on ticket sales at Hertford Theatre. This ignores the obvious fact that the Hertford Theatre does not have any competition in the form of an existing multi-plex cinema or another theatre.
- The viability of the ORL scheme is based on the assumption that the affordable housing element of the residential development will comprise only discounted market dwellings (i.e. dwellings sold on the open market but at 80% of open market value). This is contrary to the District Council's own planning policies on affordable housing which require the affordable housing element of any residential development to deliver an 84% affordable rent/16% intermediate split (the latter category includes shared ownership and discounted market dwellings). The District Council is therefore promoting a scheme which can only achieve viability if the Council completely ignores its own Local Plan policies.
- Finally, the analysis says that it includes no site assembly costs as '*any affected Waitrose spaces will be re-provided either within the new scheme or possibly overspill within the new multi-storey car park*'. It is unclear whether Waitrose be forced to give up existing spaces and accept spaces in the new multi-storey instead.

In our view, the District Council is pursuing a scheme for the ORL site which:

- is based on unsubstantiated and extremely questionable financial predictions;
- will if successful have a devastating impact on South Mill Arts and the existing multi-plex cinema;
- requires the Council to set aside completely its planning policies and its duty in relation to affordable housing.

## **6 Our alternative proposal for Old River Lane – an Education and Community Hub (EACH)**

### ***6.1 A mixed residential, business, leisure and education development***

We believe that another cinema feebly disguised as an arts centre is a failure of imagination, a financial misjudgment and a missed opportunity. Alongside new housing, new business premises and public spaces on the ORL site, we propose that Bishop's Stortford and the surrounding villages need an education and community hub. We call for the re-use of Charringtons House as this hub, rather than a fully-fledged FE college.

The usual assumption is that 'Further Education' means vocational learning for 16-19 year olds only. Our main interest is lifelong learning. We use the term *Education and Community Hub* rather than college. Indeed many existing colleges don't use the term Further Education in their names.

### ***6.2 Beyond an FE college***

The old model of further education focused on 16–19-year-old students does not fit easily with Bishop's Stortford.

- FE colleges take a very small proportion of school leavers from Bishop's Stortford.
- There are a tiny number of young people not in education, employment or training ("NEETS") and so no untapped pool of 16-19 year olds to offer FE to.
- The only significant source of students would be from existing colleges, which would not make sense.

This would not come close to meeting the minimum threshold numbers of students to support a medium sized FE college with (say) 5000 students. Arguably Bishop's Stortford already has an FE college - in Harlow. Government approval for a new stand-alone FE college would be very hard to secure: there is limited evidence of unmet or emerging need of the magnitude required and the site would seem too small to accommodate the range of courses and administrative and service functions required.

### **6.3 Our vision**

A community-focused educational enterprise 'Lifelong Learning' for EACH. The first three revolutions in our economy were enabled and accompanied by primary, secondary and then tertiary education. Individuals and our economy now need lifelong learning to respond to new opportunities and challenges, and continuous professional development.

An *Education and Community Hub* (EACH) would offer a diverse and flexible curriculum responsive to local needs and wishes. It would be accessible to a wider demographic in terms of age, educational trajectory and aspiration - as well as offering vocational qualifications to 16-19 year olds (in association with existing providers). It would exploit the opportunities of virtual and blended learning. An *Education and Community Hub* would also recognise the growing link between education and leisure and provide a meeting space for the town's many societies.

A hub can be established under a range of finance and governance models combining income-generating activity with subsidised services.

The nature of modern learning, working and social spaces is such that they can be constructed in a manner which is flexible, relatively cheap and achieves high occupancy due to their multi-function nature. Such spaces are increasingly used in workplaces, universities and colleges.

## An Education and Community Hub

### What is it for?

An Education and Community Hub provides an integrated, flexible and responsive real and virtual space designed to meet the following objectives:

- a) To extend and enhance existing training and educational provision for young people and adults offering courses and services which complement the offer made by schools, colleges and training provision. The aim of a 'hub' is to complement and fill in 'gaps' and not to compete.
- b) To respond positively to the changing wider working and learning environment. The opportunities offered by the reduced need to commute and rise of mixed mode learning is met by flexible working spaces where working and 'on-demand' learning and upskilling can be combined and achieve synergies.
- c) To revive and develop the economic and cultural life of the town centre attracting sizable numbers of residents daily for work, learning and leisure. The trickle down of such a facility would occur throughout the day and evening.
- d) To support the digital upskilling of residents for economic, leisure and learning activities in line with the [European Digital Capability Framework](#) and the [UK Government's Essential digital skills framework](#)

### What is it and how does it work?

A 'hub' offers a real and virtual flexible working and learning space which can be reconfigured in response to demand throughout the day, week and year. It might offer:

- A high quality serviced workspace allowing 'home working days' to escape from 'the kitchen table', providing a range of support services and meeting spaces.
- Spaces for 'learning events' including formal and informal learning, courses and independent study.
- Open access flexible spaces for community activities, gallery/exhibitions and small scale performances.
- Franchised spaces for afterschool and weekend tuition, A level revision support, adult classes in digital skills, languages and business skills.
- A virtual environment offering services, courses and opportunities for informal learning integrated with the above extending the reach and scope of the hub's offer.

### Key questions

- What combination of spaces, facilities and courses would match the needs of the town?
- Who are the main stakeholders?
- How does such a hub integrate with existing provision?
- How is 'trickle down' to town centre shops and services maximised?

## **6.4 Shaping our educational offer**

We believe our vision of an Education and Community Hub offers 'something for everyone' and could have a central role in supporting and enhancing other education provision, rather than competing with it:

***A means to re-skill and re-train our working population***, which is likely to be mix of day-release, on-the job and home-based learning. The following are particularly relevant:

- ***Retail and hospitality sector.***

The high street has been hard hit and changed for good. The impact of Covid19 has altered shopping habits and many pubs, cafes and restaurants may never reopen.

- ***Workers needed for social care jobs***

The demand for care workers is high, and EU nationals who did these jobs have now returned to their home countries. As a result there is a national shortage of qualified care workers.

- ***Retro-fit homes to help attain 2050 net zero carbon emissions.***

Domestic gas boilers and other heating systems are responsible for about 10% of UK carbon emissions. A major programme of home upgrades will be needed if the country is to hit its target of net zero emissions by 2050. Skills are needed to insulate and heat existing homes; companies need training for potential employees. 38% of homes were built before 1946. Let's create training opportunities for this sector, for example, plumbers to retrain as heating engineers to fit heat pumps.

- ***Skills for the differently abled***

Access to courses developing skills for the less able and people with special needs.

- ***Younger people***

A youth centre that works and is attractive for our young people after school and at weekends.

- ***Digital arts and media education hub***

A core area of economic growth and consequent skills shortages is in the field of digital arts and media. This sector encompasses the areas of web development, digital film production, games development, virtual reality and artificial intelligence. It links with our aspirations for the arts in Bishop's Stortford.

Almost all areas of employment require increasing levels of digital literacy and digital upskilling of the existing workforce. Nationally we have a significant digital deficit, leading to skills shortages for businesses and social exclusion.

The idea of a 'digital arts and media education hub' draws together digital learning with actual 'digital doing'. A hub could also have space for digital startups. Bishop's Stortford, situated between London and Cambridge, offers the ideal location for a digital arts and media education hub, with these aims:

1. Provide formal and informal education opportunities in digital arts and media;
2. Provide broader digital skills to all age groups;
3. Complement the work of schools, colleges and employers in digital skills, arts and media;
4. Host small scale digital start-ups, complementing the educational offer.

- ***Life-long learning***

Many adults including retired people choose to do more GCSE's or A levels. Formal, informal and semi-formal education are a means of community engagement. Adult education has been an extremely valuable resource, but this has withered over the past decades. Bishop's Stortford has a large and active U3A (University of the Third Age) group as well as Open University students and WEA (Workers Education Association) members. A venue to meet and access formal courses would be a thriving centre of learning and community activity. The benefits would go far beyond just a certificate.

- ***Public access to facilities throughout the day and week***

An education and community hub would provide access to its ancillary facilities by the public throughout the week, and throughout the day. If the key 'theme' for the development is 'an arts centre', a broad based educational facility would integrate well with library provision and offer:

- Formal educational spaces.
- Exhibition/ semi-formal education spaces.
- Informal and supported study spaces.
- Digital learning hub
- Flexible performance spaces.
- A flexible meeting space for the town's groups, clubs, and societies.

### **6.5 *Is it deliverable in the local circumstances?***

Options for realising this include:

*EACH as a 'satellite' coupled with an existing college.* This would reduce the need for formal approval; reduce the need for administrative support which would be provided centrally' and get around problems of unwanted competition. This could be combined at the design stage with the requirements for the building to provide ample opportunities for life-long and leisure learning meeting the needs of the community beyond 16-19. Acting as a satellite could be a way of sharing the costs of governance and administration so reducing the income required for viability.

*Combining hi-tech start-up accommodation alongside 16-25 training in media and digital technologies.* Such training could be 'administratively hosted' under the umbrella of an existing provider - operating like Regus for educational purposes. The nature of such an enterprise could also accommodate a range of short courses and up-skilling in terms of digital skills. There are almost certainly other 'market niches' which might be exploited without competing with existing provision

### **6.6 *Economic impact***

We have given some consideration to the economic impact of the Community Education Hub proposal.

### *Economic benefits to the town of education*

The value of such a project might be seen as a wider range of outcomes in addition to financial return. A cost benefit approach might include the degree to which an educational facility would:

- Enhance the social infrastructure providing a focus for community engagement with the benefits accruing to physical and mental health.
- Facilitating social cohesion by offering opportunities for cross-generational engagement in relation to courses and the use of shared study spaces.
- Supporting existing and new social enterprises in relation to the learning economy e.g. tuition support.
- Offering economic trickle-down to surrounding businesses with breadth and diversity of provision leading to footfall extending into the evening. Unlike a cinema which will be largely empty during the day, and provide a small number of poorly paid part-time jobs, an education hub would bring lots of people into town throughout the day and evening, and create more well-paid jobs.

### *Economic harm to the town of an additional cinema*

The other likely impact of the council's cinema plan is that it would lead to the closure of the Anchor St cinema, and the knock-on closure of the restaurants and the bowling alley there. A key principle is to introduce an activity that complements the town's business, not duplicate or nullify.

## **6.7 Lessons from our survey**

Responses to our survey highlighted some significant themes on the short and medium term implications of an education hub:

- A percentage of post-year 11 students don't choose to study A levels. Those that don't have very few options. Providing an 'alternative pathway for those not wishing to go to university' is on the surface a 'positive' comment but this academic/vocational divide may be problematic with the local demographic. As [Alison Wolf](#) has put it... 'vocational education (is) a great idea...for other people's children'.

- Some comments suggest a fixed vision of a 1970s FE college. Now the educational landscape is far more varied and complex. This offers advantages for a facility embracing a far wider ‘clientele’ and so gaining more support. Also, it offers a sound answer to the question “why would you want it in the town centre?” - because it places learning alongside shopping and other leisure activities at the centre of daily activity.

### **6.8 Current educational provision and gaps**

We looked at what is currently provided and what will be required. We identified gaps in tertiary and lifelong learning which can be filled by an Education and Community hub.

Colleges - Harlow College offers a wide range of vocational courses and is relatively accessible.

Schools – Bishop’s Stortford is well served by schools with strong 6<sup>th</sup> forms.

#### **Where pupils go to when they leave school:**

School	Total no of school leavers	Destinations:	
		FE college or other provider	School sixth form
St Mary's Catholic School	154	19% = 29	71%
Hockerill Anglo-European College	121	2% = 2	84%
The Hertfordshire & Essex High School and Science College	163	13% = 21	77%
The Bishop's Stortford High School	154	17% = 26	78%
Birchwood High School	228	32% = 73	54%
Forest Hall School	64	58% = 41	20%
Leventhorpe	176	28% = 49	62%

## **6.9 Understanding local skills needs**

The CBI produced a [report](#) on Lifelong Learning in 2020, which forecast the national reskilling challenge over the next ten years to prevent skills gaps across the economy. This found that:

- 21 million will need basic digital skills
- 15 million will need leadership and management
- 14 million will need Interpersonal and advanced communication
- 5 million will need teaching and training
- 9 million will need STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) knowledge
- 16 million will need Critical thinking and information processing

## **6.10 Assessing viability**

As set out above, we are investigating a flexible menu of the possible for lifelong learning, how that is met now, what shortfall there is now and what might be expected.

Our survey found support for life-long learning with a bias to STEM subjects rather than the traditional trades.

There seems very little government appetite to subsidise non-career learning. The Greater London Council published Floodlight every year full of day and evening courses. They didn't cost much but the leisure and evening classes contributed positively to the costs of the colleges, keeping premises earning 12 hours per day.

## **6.11 Capital funding for community education**

Given the demand we have identified, what funding is available from all levels of government, employers and participants?

Since 1993, 'Further education corporations' and 'sixth-form college corporations' are stand-alone institutions, which operate like a 'trust' with special charitable status. 16-19 year old course fees are paid directly from central government to the college ([here](#)).

Central Government approval for a new *FE corporation* is needed before seeking capital funding. This would look in great detail at the projections for student recruitment, and how it fits within the local educational provision. ADA college in Tottenham appears to be the only new corporation since 1993, which faced a huge challenge in gaining DfE approval.

This is not realistic for our vision, and we do not propose to follow the FE corporation path.

However, some understanding of the governance and finances of further education can be learned from Harlow College. The [Report and Accounts](#) shows what their mission is and for whom.

In addition, it is important to bear in mind that:

- 'FE funding has fallen by 20% since 2010, and the number of colleges has dropped by a quarter, with 9,000 fewer FE teachers (who are paid £7,000 less than school-based teachers)' [source]
- The [Herts Infrastructure Plan](#) seeks to predict how the county will change and what needs to be done to address those changes. They expect to spend very little on further education from a ten year budget of about £6bn(page 6)
- Local authority funding – Further education was removed from LEA control in 1993. So local authorities have little to do with provision and funding (as with academy schools). LA funding in FE is peripheral e.g. supporting a student with special needs. LAs typically do not provide capital for buildings.

Any project would need to be undertaken as a 'social enterprise'. Such an enterprise would seek, in the medium term, to become self-supporting.

Funding from the wider development is our key opportunity - we need to consider the parameters of the funding of the wider ORL development and the possibilities they might afford for physical provision of an education hub in a repurposed Charringtons House.

However, an Education and Community hub offers a way forward on funding issues and provides a solid justification for retaining a building in the centre of the town.

The economics of such a 'municipal enterprise' are interesting in that we start with the aim of a self-sustaining project; not from the notion of a drain on central or local government funding.

Drawing on a broad range of provision it may be possible to insulate the enterprise from changes in funding channels by reconfiguring its 'mixed economy'.

Staffing is the main expense of such enterprises and in this case it would require a relatively small core team to 'manage, maintain and market'. Plus a large array of 'service providers'. As the 'centre' acts as broker for courses they do not employ the 'tutors'. Indeed this is increasingly how FE works!

Example sources of income might include a variable mix of:

- Franchise space to local schools and colleges.  
Space let for training and meetings (we are between London-Cambridge and Stansted).
- Space let for digital start-ups. In addition to upskilling of the workforce, there are media specific opportunities for digital enterprise.
- Conference centres are a growing business.
- Space let for 'after school tuition' - currently booming.
- High quality casual study and workspace - increasingly in demand as people 'work from home'.
- Self-funded course e.g. languages, IT etc. Re-skilling and 'leisure learning'.
- Subscription access to course, exhibitions and social spaces etc.

This is an idea we have researched and explored. It potentially offers great benefits for the future population of the district. As something building-in flexibility, it is resilient to economic changes; as something based on the retained and adapted building, it carries less long term financial risk. Combining education, skills and business is a win-win.

## 6.12 Options for moving the library

We understand the library wants and needs a new home, and that a converted Charringtons House provides an option for this.

Councillor Terry Douris, Herts County Council Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Localism told the ORL Working Group that:

*'The Libraries Service in Hertfordshire has for some time been in discussion with the Project Team at East Herts District Council regarding the EHDC plans for the Old River Lane development and the part that a library would play in this. There have been a number of discussions over a period about this but towards the end of 2020 the Libraries Team at HCC were advised that the Project Board had decided that due to financial considerations a library space was not financially viable within the arts centre and that the space would be allocated for an alternative provision.'*

## 7 Charringtons House and URC hall - Why re-use and adaptation is environmentally responsible

We believe that demolition of Charringtons House and new-build would be environmentally damaging compared with potential benefits of retention and conversion. An education and community hub is appropriate to the scale of Charringtons House.

### The context

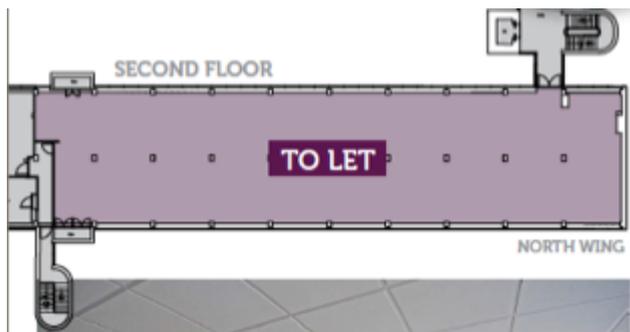
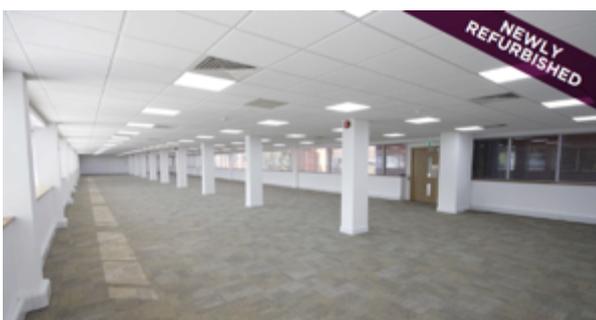
In July 2019 EHDC agreed a climate change motion to tackle climate change in our district. This committed the Council to:

‘Do everything we can in supporting the whole of East Herts to become carbon neutral by 2030 – as well as develop a strategy to reduce its own emissions so that the council matches that district goal; work with partners to ensure that where at all possible it supports climate-friendly regulations’ Councillor McAndrew said: *“East Herts Council's key role is to educate, facilitate and encourage behaviour change when it comes to tackling climate change.”* Councillor David Snowdon said: *“Tackling climate change is about actions not words.”*

EHDC Property owns the ORL site. Carbon neutral development is critical to meet its commitment to act on climate change, and to serve as an exemplar to other developers. As awareness of the climate crisis has grown, retention and adaptation of old offices is now seen as responsible.

### The building

Built in 1971, this is a concrete frame, curtain wall (glass and panels) building with brick stair and lift towers. Entrance lobbies, stairs and lifts are set to the side so the floor areas are unimpeded. Each floor has a rectangular plan and is just over 1000 Sq m; the whole building is 4,350 sq m (47,000 sq ft). It is in good condition. It is occupied. Floors get refurbished for letting.



## **Conversion**

If the building is retained, architects would meet the brief for new economic and public uses by adapting the entrances, extending the ground floor or altering glazing. The building could be used for workspace (offices, studios, labs, workshops, research, data processing, distribution); education (teaching rooms, studios, labs, library); public library; residential (flats, lofts, live-work) café, restaurants.

## **Use for education**

The building is 10m wide with a central row of columns, but limited floor to ceiling heights. Within these constraints the building is easy to adapt to education use, with classrooms, tech suites, design studios, workshops and labs.

## **Use for public library**

Alternatively the public library could extend into two or more floors and contain much more study space. Extensions and new staircases would increase the scope for library use.

## **Environmental considerations**

### **Embodied carbon and natural resources**

All buildings have embodied carbon – the one-off fossil fuels that were burned in production of concrete, steel, glass, the oil and electricity of the building process, the travel of materials to site by lorry and workers by car. In addition, the used-up natural resources used in brick and stonework. Demolition gets rid of all that – it is possible to quantify the embodied carbon cost of the building and this must form part of any environmental sustainability assessment. ‘Embodied carbon emissions can’t be reduced later – they have already happened. Therefore, not taking “rapid and far-reaching” action on embodied carbon now is undeniably kicking the can down the road.’ Building Research Establishment (BRE).

A new building duplicates that cost with new materials and construction energy, albeit with some more environmentally friendly materials and methods. ‘The greenest building is the one that already exists. VAT charges 20% on refurbishment work, but 0% on residential new builds...those rules must change’ *The Times, June 2021*

## **Making the building energy efficient**

The current building's energy efficiency is based on materials, boilers, ventilation and insulation that can be tested accurately by an independent assessor. In a conversion, there will be changes that would seek to improve energy efficiency, including generating sustainable energy on site. It is possible to make an existing building meet very high standards. Use of south facing and flat roofs for solar electricity generation improves efficiency and easier to put in solar panels at design stage that to fit them afterwards.

The link between design choices and embodied carbon performance requires life cycle assessment (LCA) calculations and a large quantity of data. It is difficult to prove the accuracy of LCA, which explains why embodied carbon is not widely understood or considered by the construction industry. The few construction projects that do consider embodied emissions do so voluntarily or to fulfil the requirements of a sustainability standard (like BREEAM, CEEQUAL or the Home Quality Mark).

BRE IMPACT<sup>®</sup> allows construction professionals to measure the embodied carbon, life cycle environmental (LCA) and life cycle cost (LCC) performance of buildings. IMPACT is designed to allow simple integration into 3D CAD/BIM (Building Information Management) software tools or bespoke LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) applications. The results generated by IMPACT can be used to award credit within whole building assessment schemes like BREEAM.

## **Developer attitudes to conversion**

By changing perceptions, office buildings are reused and upgraded. The government introduced rules in 2016 allowing any office building to be converted to housing and developers went into conversions with gusto (albeit leading to a lot of sub-standard housing).

'We start with an existing building, then reposition it, try to make the unattractive attractive. We follow the creative, digital economy and see where the talent of the future wants to live, work and play.' *Robert Wolstenholme – Trllogy Real Estate: Monocle 24 'The Urbanist' podcast Feb 2020.*

'The Pritzker prize - highest honour in the architecture world - has been awarded to Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, whose most impressive projects are all refurbishments....Their victory ... signals a remarkable shift in priorities among the world's best city-makers. If embraced more widely, this could transform how buildings everywhere are regenerated.... Building is one of the most polluting activities in the UK economy. The emissions it causes come from a combination of heating existing buildings and the energy expended in demolitions and new construction. The key to bringing the environmental impact of architecture in line with planetary limits is to dramatically improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings while radically reducing new construction. In other words: less demolition, more refurbishment.' ***Guardian March 2021***

### **Examples of converted office buildings**

Gloucestershire County Council's Shire Hall retrofit and refurbishment. A 1960's building, an eyesore, tired and inefficient, was responsibly and dynamically transformed into an elegant and highly sustainable workplace. The project developed from energy efficient re-cladding and window replacement to re-engineering of work spaces for multiple stakeholders and new tenants. Kier Construction created a method of working that left staff at their own desks whilst work was completed. *[Kier Construction is a Cityheart partner for ORL]* BRE says: 'Shire Hall's 'retrofit' aligns with the Government's Construction 2025 strategy.'

### **Windmill Green, Manchester**

An office building left empty for 7 years, a series of redevelopment planning permissions, all failed. The developer chose to keep the existing building and work with it, reclad, repurpose, keep the embodied carbon, small areas of new building, some new materials giving new character. Now the 'most green office building in the city', BRE AAM Outstanding, RIBA award for social impact.

We are now all much more acutely environmentally aware; demolition would be an affront to all of us trying to tackle climate change. It is simply a building in good condition, and architects and engineers can make it continue to work. You don't have to knock it down to have a knock-out development. It is prudent to adapt.

## United Reformed Church Hall

EHDC Property bought the church Hall to demolish it, possibly to provide private parking. The URC church hall is a community and arts asset for the town. There is no indication that one of the cinema screens / flexible performance spaces in the proposed scheme will offer an equivalent affordable community space. But we consider keeping the URC Hall and improving it need not jeopardise the overall masterplan.

Council ownership of the property opens up interesting opportunities:

- To create a much better pedestrian route from North Street / Water Lane into ORL.
- To completely alter public access and essential servicing access to the hall.
- The ugly first floor addition can be removed, the stage could be extended.
- The back of the stage could be opened up to an open-air audience.

The latest plan of the ORL site, on the Cityheart website, shows that the Council has acquired the hall to replace it with surface car parking. The irony is acute: after a major council strategy to build Northgate End, to release surface car parking for regeneration, they demolish a community asset for surface car parking.

Demolition will conflict with the LPA policy CFLR8 in the District Plan? Planning policy requires that demolition of a community facility should be accompanied by replacement with an equivalent facility – not currently in the ORL plan.

Adaptation saves the embodied energy and allows for years of use. Design options should explore how this familiar and well-used arts and crafts style building can be retained within a wider masterplan for ORL. It is brazen to knock down a community landmark for car tarmac.

## Two options for an arts performance space



**Option 1** – retain, repair, adapt and extend the existing URC hall. Move parking to Northgate End, widen path to Water Lane

**Option 2** – build a new one, same size or larger as a carbon-neutral, state-of-the-art entertainment facility as an extension to the converted Charringtons House.

## 8 Masterplanning

Looking at the wider site, currently an expanse of surface parking, the masterplanning process offers the prospect of a well-conceived addition to the town. Although Northgate End car park has been criticised, now that it is under construction it enables beneficial regeneration of the existing carparks, with housing and businesses.

We support District Plan Policy DES1 which sets out the required approach to masterplanning: ‘setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses; access, sustainable high quality design and layout principles.... The masterplan will be collaboratively prepared.... Informed by public participation.

### *The process*

EHDC Planning initially intended to adopt a town centre supplementary planning document (SPD), but instead of this will now produce a site-specific SPD for the Old River Lane site, enshrining the emerging masterplan. This will guide the future planning applications on this site.

- The masterplanning process has the benefit of being an iterative process – whereby ideas can be drawn up, tested and revised over and over again to reach the best solution.
- Cityheart and their architects will lead the site analysis and options for masterplanning.
- To accord with Policy DES1 collaborative approach, the LPA will set up an masterplan Steering Group of key stakeholders, including:
  - EHDC Councillors,
  - a Town Councillor,
  - officers from the County Highway Authority,
  - officers from the LPA,
  - selected community group representatives.
- Stakeholders will therefore be able to influence the masterplanning, which will be formalised as a site-specific SPD.
- The masterplanning process will use the contents of the Town Centre Planning Framework, alongside other policy considerations and design iteration.
- As part of the development plan, the SPD has to follow formal consultation and undergo environmental assessment.

The LPA will establish a firm timeline for the Masterplan SPD – including all of the steering group meetings, the statutory SPD consultation period, as well as the expected dates for relevant reports and SPD drafts to go to Exec / Council for decision and a potential adoption date.

### ***Dialogue between Cityheart and the LPA***

Cityheart are already working on masterplanning options, even though the legal ‘development agreement’ with EHDC Property has not yet been signed. Cityheart includes Glenn Howells Architects, who are doing the masterplan design.

The LPA have had some engagement with the developer team (Cityheart) relating to high level pre-application discussions, as well as some of the changes to the elements on the site.

The LPA have discussed the Masterplan SPD process with the developer team; what the expectations are and various stages required. The LPA often meet with developers to outline the requirements before embarking on the Masterplanning process. From that perspective the LPA

has been able to advise the developer team about what the community engagement expectations of the masterplan process are.

### ***What work is already in progress?***

Although the LPA say that ‘the masterplan and SPD has not yet formally started’ some masterplanning is well advanced. A core masterplanning matter is the position of the road turning into the site. We know that the highways entrance and exit from the development has only recently been resolved with Herts Highways and is at a new location off the Causeway. County highways will have considered suitable access points in relation to anticipated traffic generated, which will come from private parking, business servicing and Waitrose servicing as well as maintaining access to Coopers, and possibly market traders for a new square.

We know that Cityheart have been working with EHC property for some months already. Even though ‘masterplanning’ has not yet started, Cityheart have done a lot of analysis and design on the masterplan and have displayed a fairly detailed plan on their website over the past few months. We must regard this as illustrative, but their plan is based on the following principles:

- A north-south pedestrian route between Northgate End carpark and Jackson Square / Bridge Street shops;
- A pedestrian route to the park;
- Small and medium sized business premises, which could be shops, restaurants or offices;
- Flats on upper floors;
- Private parking under or behind the buildings;
- The URC hall demolished and the three houses demolished, replaced by private parking;
- A very large public square between Old River Lane and the arts centre.

The perspective drawing of the plan below, is in EHDC Property’s business case for the cinema-led scheme, but showing the original theatre-based arts centre. It shows an illustration of new buildings with businesses and flats, with pitched and flat roofs and up to six storeys.



### ***Encouraging openness and engagement in masterplanning***

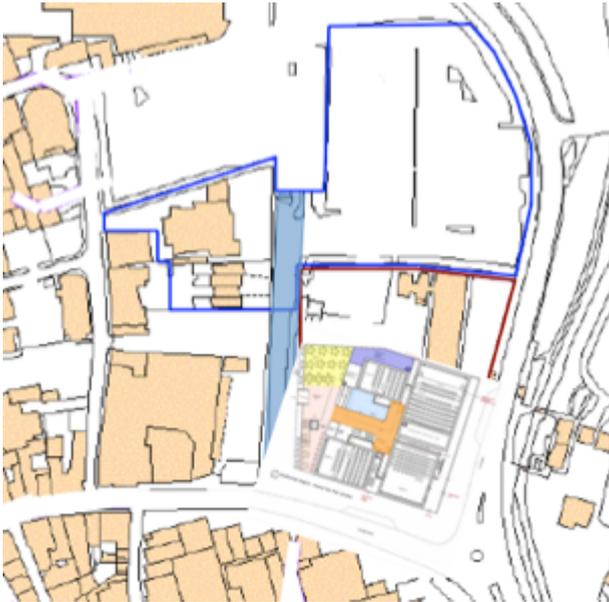
We understand this is a complex process, but we encourage Cityheart and the LPA to be as open as possible about the work in progress. The simplest way is to have a dedicated website helping us understand the constraints, the objectives, the options being considered, with a chance to make informal suggestions. We would encourage independent design review at key stages.

### ***Principles for a masterplan***

Some of the points we would urge the masterplanning process to consider are:

- Retention and adaptation of the existing Charringtons House and URC hall;
- Net zero carbon, with exemplary energy solutions including solar and ground or water source heat pumps;
- Retention of the small woodland;
- New pedestrian routes to North Street and Castle Park;
- Direct link into Jackson Square;
- Much less private parking (0 or 1 space per home) and zero public parking as it is all in Northgate End;
- Homes designed for working from home;
- A safe, shady, small square to consolidate the historic market, and attract more visitors

The Council has complex responsibilities, but must not allow its property objectives unduly influence its judgement as local planning authority. Regeneration will be good for the town if based on both viability and real public benefit.



The current arts centre proposal superimposed on the whole site.

The five-screen cinema scheme requires demolition of Charringtons House.

It is placed at the south of the site, with blank cinema sides next to Bridge Street and The Causeway, facing the park.

The active frontage, with entrance and foyer containing social space and exhibitions is alongside Old River Lane. There is no outdoor performance space shown, contrary to the illustration and questions in the consultation.

The masterplanning process will have to explore how this, and the rest of the demolition site, integrates into the wider Cityheart regeneration area.

## 9 Next steps



East Herts Council has committed to its cinema-led vision for ORL. The multi-storey car park is being built and is the eye-sore all feared it would be (picture above). There is no indication that the council is having any second thoughts about its plans, despite the obvious widespread concern within Stortford itself. This report articulates a clear alternative vision for Old River Lane, and we invite the District Council and the senior councillors driving this project to take the opportunity to pause and reflect on the choices they have made.

The chances are however that the council is unlikely to change course. We therefore invite the residents, community groups and businesses of the town to join with us and create the Old River Lane Campaign Group which will campaign for our alternative vision for the site.

Groups and individuals interested in joining the ORL Campaign group should email us at [ORLWorkingGroup@gmail.com](mailto:ORLWorkingGroup@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX 1

### Our informal consultation

The ORL Working Group Survey gathered responses from 240 people to four questions. The online survey closed on 14<sup>th</sup> March. In summary it is clear that there is very little support for a cinema on ORL. The proposal to have a venue for lifetime education in a repurposed Charringtons House was supported by a large majority of those who responded.

#### Breakdown of responses:

#### 1. 'Do you agree with the council's proposal to build a five-screen cinema on the Old River Lane site in Bishop's Stortford?'

No = 85.42% (205)	Yes = 8.33% (20)	Don't know = 6.25% (15)
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114 respondents offered additional comments to this question, none of which came from the cinema's supporters. The most common views were:

- Stortford already has a cinema
- Cinemas will be made increasingly redundant by streaming, while others pointed to the little used cinema on Anchor Street.
- Retail space on ORL would compete with existing retail outlets in the town centre; many outlets are already empty.

#### 2 - 'Do you support the alternative proposal to retain Charringtons House and use it for mixed retail, commercial and educational purposes?'

Yes = 62.08% (149)	Don't know = 22.50% (54)	No = 15.42% (37)
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94 respondents offered additional comments. With the most commonly held views first, these were:

- A college would be good for the education and economy of the town
- Repurposing Charringtons House would be more in keeping with sustainability than demolition
- A theatre would be preferable to either cinema or college

- There will be much less demand for more retail space given the pandemic accelerated use of internet shopping

### **3 - 'If a college were to be established on the ORL site what subjects, courses, qualifications should be offered , and to what age groups?'**

There were 80 comments, with the most common views being:

- Three times as many supported lifetime learning (teens, working age and retired) as wanted a teens and twenties only college
- Vocational training was mentioned more often than learning for personal development
- IT, STEM & coding were cited almost twice as often as building or motor trades

### **4 - 'Any other comments?'**

There were over 100 other comments which are largely reflected in the answers to the first three questions.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Supporting references– our alternative proposal for Old River Lane – an Education and Community Hub**

We drew upon a wide range of sources when developing our alternative proposal for Old River Lane including:

**Local Government Association** [\*Learning for Life: the role of adult community education in developing thriving local communities – A handbook for councilors.\*](#) This is an important reference to understand the local council's responsibility and capability to accommodate community education.

### **EDSK think tank** [\*Colleges need a clearer identity and more investment to thrive\*](#)

With a White Paper on the future of the Further Education (FE) sector due this autumn, a new report from education think tank EDSK finds that colleges in England have been hampered by a lack of a clear purpose as well as budget cuts stretching back years, if not decades.

.....by becoming providers of everything to everyone, colleges have lost a clearly defined role in our education system, particularly when compared to schools and universities.

.....Often in response to financial pressures, colleges have chosen to focus on what is best for them rather than what is best for their learners, employers and their local area. This has resulted in duplicated courses, a lack of specialisation among colleges and unnecessary confusion for learners and employers – all of which make the sector less financially secure.

One of the EDSK report recommendations: FE colleges should be split into separate institutions for different groups of learners:

- *Community Colleges* (for basic skills courses, community learning and other entry level programmes),
- *Sixth Form Colleges* (for A-levels and other classroom-based Level 2 and 3 courses) and
- *Technology Colleges* (for vocational and technical training including apprenticeships up to Levels 4 and 5);

Guardian editorial 22 Mar 2021 – *It's time to bring back evening classes and stop ignoring older learners*

[Guardian article](#) 2 April 2021 *Boris Johnson's latest 'build back better' pledge won't get Britain back to work*  
[Polly Toynbee](#)

[Youth ConnectHerts](#)

[FE News](#) - report of the future of FE 18 Sept 2020,

## APPENDIX 3

### The alternative case for a new theatre in Bishop's Stortford

The Arts Community in Stortford has been campaigning for a new venue to be built on the ORL site for some time. In the interest of balance the following is a summary of their position:

How Bishop's Stortford could really benefit from an arts complex. A new arts complex in Stortford would serve every club, group and society in town. South Mill Arts will continue to host tribute bands, amateur productions and dance classes but there are many local companies that can't use SMA, due to its limited facilities. Companies like Uncle Funk, BS Sinfonia, BS Choral Society, Laughing Bishop's Comedy Club, Contexture Theatre, BS Camera Club and BS Arts Society all need a base. Stortford would also benefit from the array of touring theatre companies, A-List comedians, and wide variety of classical and modern music acts that could finally visit B.Stortford.

BS is the biggest town in East Herts and has a catchment area of 80,000. Hertford is two thirds the size of BS and is getting a loan of £20M to refurbish its theatre this year; but the current arts provision in this town does not satisfy the current population, let alone the increased numbers due to happen in the near future.

Looking at Hertford Theatre's Growth and Legacy Scheme, there's no reason why ORL theatre can't reduce its need for subsidy if it has a talented and professionally trained, creative team to run it. Its effect on the local economy will be profound. For every £1 spent at the Old River Lane Theatre £5 will be spent in the surrounding shops and restaurants. Having an artistic focal point in the centre of town will bring a huge amount of footfall to the town centre. Many clubs will benefit from the increased number of rehearsal rooms, main theatre and studio performance space. The cafe and bar area will be an open space, used both day and night, spilling over on to the Square which can host street theatre, musicians and art installations. We have an abundance of talent in Stortford that would complement the outside companies visiting the venue. If we don't build a theatre and it becomes a cinema, office, flats or college, the Square will just become a very wide pavement.

A 80 standing studio is far too small to use as anything other than a classroom and will not be hired as an effective performance space for drama, comedy or classical music, especially if it doesn't have raked seating. Companies such as Uncle Funk, BS Sinfonia, BS Laughing

Bishop’s Comedy Club, Contexture Theatre, BS Choral Society, BS Arts Society, BS Camera Club are all in need of a professionally run arts facility that will form the basis of an artistic hub. Many companies are having to leave town to find suitable accommodation. By keeping them in BS, the theatre will already have an expansive and diverse audience pool. 'But BS already has a theatre' – South Mill Arts plans to continue to host amateur companies, tribute bands and dance classes, but most touring theatre companies can't use SMA. No access yard for scenery trucks; no dock to offload equipment on to the stage; no fly tower for scenery; no wing space for props; no stage door; very little parking; and only 2 dressing rooms with no doors separating artists from the toilet facilities. This lack of facilities makes it an undesirable venue for the majority of touring companies and local companies. A-list comedians won't use the theatre due to its limited seating and orchestras can't use it due to its poor acoustics and small stage. The plot of land SMA sits on is not big enough to expand or develop the venue and the location makes it less prone to walk-ins during the day and evening.

## APPENDIX 4

### Acronyms

<a href="#">BID</a>	Business Improvement District
BRE	Building Research Establishment
<a href="#">BREEAM</a>	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method
<a href="#">CBI</a>	Confederation of British Industry
CEEQUAL	Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment and Award Scheme
<a href="#">DfE</a>	Department for Education
<a href="#">EHDC/EHC</a>	East Herts District Council
FE	Further Education
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
<a href="#">LEP</a>	Local Enterprise Partnership
LPA	Local Planning Authority
MSCP	Multi-storey car park
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
ORL	Old River Lane

<a href="#">SMA</a>	South Mill Arts
SPD	Supplementary Planning Documents
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TCPF	Town Centre Planning Framework
<a href="#">U3A</a>	University of the Third Age
URC	United Reform Church
<a href="#">WEA</a>	Workers Education Association