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From: planningcomments@highpeak.gov.uk
Sent: 14 June 2026 12:50
To: Planning Comments (HPBC)
Subject: Comment Received from Public Access

[REDACTED]

Application Reference No. : HPK/2026/0228 Site Address: Spring Shopping Centre & Land South of Station Road
Buxton Derbyshire Comments by: Madeline Hall
From:

Park Road
Corbar
Buxton

Phone:

Email: [REDACTED]

Submission: Objection

Comments: I was an enthusiastic supporter of plans for revitalising the Springs shopping mall and Spring Gardens when Buxton secured Future High Street funding. I have attended public consultations, briefings for councillors and scrutiny committees and have expressed support for plans to create a lively mixed-use space. I have also expressed reservations about the scale of the proposals. I am all for ambition but believe that it needs to be tempered with caution about practicability. I object to this planning application on the grounds that it is over-development, that it is not viable for a functioning town centre in the short-term or long term, that assertions of viability for residential tenants and commercial enterprises are questionable, that the architectural integrity of the scheme as a whole is compromised by its density and by styling detail and that public consultation was incomplete: effectively ending in September 2025 when plans for a development of 250 homes were shared (and displayed in the mall until June 2026).

Over-development

The original project brief and bid was for 75 new residential units in the town centre. On appointment of Capital&Centric this was increased to 180. After consultation exercises, boards were posted in the shopping mall outlining a scheme with 250(+) flats and houses. The planning application now under consideration is for 327 flats (approximately 150 with one bedroom, 150 with two bedrooms, the balance with three bedrooms, plus a terrace of five town houses with four bedrooms each. If all units were fully occupied there could be a total of 880 tenants.

Introduction of so large a housing estate into a constrained town centre would significantly change the character of the area and its capacity to meet needs other than residential. I do not share the confidence of the developers that so large a change may be accommodated. Capital&Centric have substantial positive experience of refurbishment and new build in city and urban centres. That experience doesn't necessarily transfer to a relatively small market town with challenging changes of ground level. The developers may be right in their confidence but if they are not the town risks losing its centre. I believe the risk is too great to take.

Viability

This application asserts viability of the development's cost profile, of residential occupancy, of commercial tenant retention, of new retail and hospitality tenants, and of parking. For a significant town centre development the bar for evaluating viability is necessarily high. Assessment needs to be robust. I suggest that all elements remain open to serious question.

The development cost profile relies on grant funding from Homes England to balance a viability gap. Residential occupancy rates are likely to be impacted by the relatively high rents proposed. Travel options for commuters are limited (a slow journey on one train an hour to Manchester costing £3,800 for an annual season ticket). limited parking provision for residential tenants(half of the flats have no parking).

Discussions with tenants of the mall appear to be tentative. Anchor tenants - including Waitrose, New Look and Next - will need reassurance that the complete development will meet their need for convenience and high footfall. They will also need to be convinced that significant disruption for up to three years is properly managed to mitigate risk.

The proposals do not address impact, short-term or long-term, on businesses elsewhere on Spring Gardens. Whilst disruption to individual businesses is not normally a material consideration in planning decision in this instance a special case may be made. Progressing the development plans as they are presented could result in long-term damage to the town centre rather than the hoped for reboot.

New commercial and civic tenants will also need to be confident that rents offer good value for money. Limitations on parking are likely to be a major factor here. Appraisal by AtkinsRealis, appointed as advisors by HPBC, notes that parking is a key priority item. I agree with that but don't see that it has been prioritised in practice.

Viability - Parking

The application form confirms current parking for visitors as 431 spaces (26 of which are for use by blue badge holders). 266 places are included in proposals. A decrease of 165 is noted. An additional decrease of 120 for the onsite parking for new residential tenants is not noted. This brings the decrease in parking for visitors to 285. Total visitor parking is reduced from 431 to 146. AtkinsRealis's July 2025 (noted in Transport Volume 1) report said bluntly that adequate parking provision was unlikely for the development as proposed. They suggested five avenues to explore:

1. Increase parking capacity
- 2 make the development car free
3. manage demand at peak times through, for example, Park and Ride
4. mode shift - encouraging greater use of public transport, bikes and walking
5. Review Residents' Parking Permit Scheme.

The first has been addressed, at least in theory, with purchase of DB Schenker land. However, planning permission has not been sought yet for either ground level parking and access or a double deck structure. Second and third suggestions have not been pursued. Buxton Town Team has done sterling work on alternative transportation but behavioural change is tricky and changes to public transport are not in their gift. The fifth suggestion is presented as good practice in addressing net-zero and the climate emergency declared by the council in 2019. I appreciate that studies elsewhere show that car parking provision may act as an inducement, or encouragement, for people to drive when other options are more sustainable. However, it is disingenuous and perverse to make the argument exclusively for this new development. A whole town, and whole borough, approach needs to be adopted should changes be made to the current Residents' Parking Permit Scheme.

AR have used standard methodology to moderate the figures for adequate parking. For proper implementation though smarter parking needs support to avoid large numbers of vehicles cruising for dispersed spaces and causing traffic disruption across the town. In addition, calculations of parking need do not take account of the 63 businesses elsewhere on Spring Gardens with customers who may need to park.

The calculations are done for the development once work is complete. Disruption will last for up to three years with parking exclusively off-site. The demolition plan attached to the application indicates that all existing car parks will be cleared before work begins. Throughout the building programme there is no provision for parking. As well as causing traffic ,management challenges, this will impact on air quality through the town.

The limitations on disabled parking are striking, both for residential tenants and visitors: significantly less than the current 26 (24 are reported by SKTransport, this is inaccurate) which are generally fully occupied.

I fear that the preliminary measurement assessment is flawed. Once the car parks are replaced with housing there will be no remedy should the numbers be provided in practice to be unworkable. The risk to Buxton is huge, threatening the viability of the reconfigured town centre.

I understand that temporary disruption caused by works in progress is not normally deemed a material consideration for planning decisions. However , this proposed development is a special case. Plans are focused on refreshing the town centre. Maintenance of existing hospitality and retail units, including anchor stores and independent shops is a key foundation. Disruption consequent on severe limitations on parking for up to three years undermines the development's vision and purpose.

Viability - Residential Units

Capital&Centric have great experience of running tenanted properties elsewhere and are confident in their projections for filling their rental homes. I believe that their confidence may be misplaced for Buxton: monthly rental and service charges are above average costs in Buxton. Are there really sufficient takers to make the development financially viable? Opposing assertions of viability can only be truly tested in practice. I believe the risk to Buxton of building an under-occupied housing estate in the centre of town is too great. A phased approach to test the waters and review practicability would mitigate that risk.

Architectural Integrity

Buxton benefits from the care of civic bodies and individuals with a wide-ranging knowledge of heritage and sympathetic modern architecture. Many will no doubt contribute to this statutory consultation. My comments are those of a lay person.

The Fifth Duke of Devonshire made much of this town. His architects were sparing with adding his crest and insignia. C&C plan to stamp their logo writ large on four imposing buildings: across the top two storeys of the gateway Block1; across 1.5 storeys on the Bridge Street facade of the terrace of town houses (Block 6); on the top two storeys of the

four storey iconic Block 7; and on the upper two storeys of the observation tower (Block 10/11) at the heart of the development. I question how this respects and celebrates the architectural tradition of Buxton.

Celebration of profits accumulated by the Cavendish family from copper mining in Staffordshire is heralded as a nod to the town's heritage. I'm not convinced that cladding prominent buildings (Block 7 and Block 1) in copper-coloured metal is a fitting tribute.

Conclusions

The development proposals as submitted retain many of the positive aspects welcomed by residents and visitors: commercial, civic and community elements coming together. I believe however that the final proposals over-reach. Construction of significant new build encircling the unattractive block of the Springs mall may not be the only way forward. A more modest development, as originally envisaged, or a phased development allowing time for review before full realisation could be better future-proofed.

Should this planning application be approved I submit that it should be subject to strict conditions including:

1. Planning permission should first be sought and secured for parking provision on land purchased behind the train station. Without this, plans for parking are compromised.
2. The existing main car park should be retained throughout the works.
3. Phasing of works should focus first on completion of the west end, which includes two decks of parking and an access ramp from Station Road.
4. Blocks planned for Wye Street and New Wye Street car parks to be second phase.
5. Construction of the 110 flat Block 4 on the existing main car park to be conditional on review of viability once other elements are in place.

Are we presented with a simple choice: yes or no to plans which are immutable? Or may adjustments yet be made to revitalise the town and safeguard its future?

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