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Application Reference No. : HPK/2026/0228 Site Address: Spring Shopping Centre & Land South of Station Road
Buxton Derbyshire Comments by: Stephen LambHarewood Moor Estates Limited

From:
Brookfield Hall
Manchester Road
Buxton
Buxton
Derbyshire
SK17 6SU

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Submission: Objection

Comments: PLANNING OBJECTION

Revitalising Buxton & Spring Gardens Regeneration Scheme

Buxton's Economic Importance, Visitor Economy and Town Centre Context

Buxton plays a significant role within both the High Peak and the wider Peak District economy. The Peak District and High Peak area attracts approximately 6.5 million visitors annually, with recent visitor surveys indicating that around 43% of those visitors spend time in Buxton, making it one of the most frequently visited destinations in the region alongside Bakewell and Castleton (Peak District Visitor Survey Q1 2025).

Whilst Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data is not published at town level, Buxton is the principal settlement within the High Peak Borough, which generates an estimated Gross Value Added (GVA) of approximately £1.55 billion. The borough's GVA per head is approximately £19,718 and reflects an economy that is strongly influenced by tourism, mineral water production, advanced manufacturing and extractive industries (Office for National Statistics; High Peak Borough Council Local Context and Case for Culture).

Buxton's economic significance extends beyond its role as a retail centre. The town acts as a gateway to the Peak District National Park and supports a substantial visitor economy. Its reputation as a historic spa town, together with its exceptional Victorian and Georgian architecture, cultural attractions and unique setting, attracts visitors from across the United Kingdom and beyond.

Alongside tourism, major employers such as Nestlé Waters, operating from the Waterswallows bottling facility, and significant quarrying and mineral extraction businesses within the wider High Peak area contribute substantially to local employment and economic activity. Consequently, maintaining Buxton's attractiveness as both a visitor destination and a commercial centre is of considerable importance to the wider regional economy.

There can therefore be little doubt that tourism is a fundamental component of Buxton's economic success. Both day visitors and longer-stay tourists contribute significantly to local businesses, supporting retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure and cultural sectors throughout the town.

It is also important to recognise that town centres across the United Kingdom are undergoing structural change. The growth of online retail, increased home working, the expansion of out-of-town retail parks and the convenience of home delivery services have altered traditional shopping patterns. As a result, town centres are increasingly evolving into destinations focused on leisure, hospitality, social interaction and experiences, rather than solely retail activity.

However, this evolution should not be interpreted as the decline or disappearance of the High Street. Essential service-based businesses such as hairdressers, beauty salons, dental practices, dry cleaners, locksmiths, IT repair services and postal facilities continue to play an important role within town centres. Likewise, convenience retailers and specialist independent businesses often remain resilient and continue to attract local customers. The challenge for town centres is therefore adaptation and diversification rather than wholesale replacement.

Buxton is somewhat unique in this regard. Its geographical location and relative distance from larger urban centres provide a degree of protection from some of the competitive pressures experienced elsewhere. Whilst certain forms of retail may be in decline in major cities, Buxton's role as the principal commercial centre serving a wide rural catchment area provides opportunities for businesses that might struggle in more heavily saturated markets.

It is also evident that parts of Spring Gardens would benefit from investment and renewal. Many upper floors above existing commercial premises appear underutilised, neglected or in need of refurbishment, representing an opportunity to improve the overall quality and vitality of the town centre.

Similarly, the Spring Gardens Shopping Centre itself has suffered from increasing vacancy levels and, in its current form, does not present the most attractive or welcoming environment. The loss of publicly accessible toilet facilities within the centre has further reduced its convenience for shoppers and visitors. More broadly, the availability of high-quality public conveniences remains an issue within Buxton, particularly given the town's importance as a tourist destination.

Nevertheless, whilst investment and regeneration are clearly needed, it is important to recognise the factors that make Buxton successful in the first place. Visitors are attracted not simply by retail provision, but by Buxton's nationally recognised heritage as a spa town, its exceptional historic architecture, its cultural significance and its reputation as an attractive market town within the Peak District. These characteristics form a vital part of the town's identity and economic appeal.

Any redevelopment proposals should therefore seek not only to address existing shortcomings within the town centre but also to preserve and enhance the qualities that make Buxton distinctive. Regeneration should reinforce Buxton's unique character and heritage, ensuring that future development contributes positively to the town's long-term economic vitality, visitor appeal and sense of place.

Objection Introduction

I object to this application because I do not believe the proposal has demonstrated compliance with several key policies of the High Peak Local Plan, the Buxton Design & Place Making Strategy SPD, the Station Road Design Framework SPD and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Whilst I support regeneration of this part of Buxton and recognise the need for investment, regeneration should strengthen the town centre's economic function, respect Buxton's unique character and heritage, and deliver sustainable development that benefits existing residents, businesses and visitors.

In its current form, the proposal raises significant concerns regarding:

- ¿ The loss and dilution of retail function within the Primary Shopping Area;
 - ¿ The balance between residential and commercial development;
 - ¿ Parking provision and accessibility;
 - ¿ The impact on town-centre vitality and viability;
 - ¿ The effect on Buxton's heritage and distinctiveness;
 - ¿ The impact on existing businesses during construction; and
 - ¿ Compliance with adopted planning policy.
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1. Conflict with Policy CF1 ¿ Retail and Town Centres

The application site lies within Buxton Town Centre and within the designated Primary Shopping Area. The Planning Statement confirms that Policy CF1 applies to the site.

Policy CF1 seeks to:

- ¿ Maintain and enhance town-centre vitality and viability;
- ¿ Strengthen consumer choice;
- ¿ Create attractive and accessible centres;
- ¿ Ensure adequate parking provision;
- ¿ Maintain active frontages; and
- ¿ Support local distinctiveness through high-quality design.

The proposal introduces:

- ¿ 25,102m² of residential floorspace;
- ¿ Demolition of 4,073 m² of commercial floorspace but only 4,234m² of new commercial floorspace; and
- ¿ 332 residential units.

The scale of residential development substantially exceeds the commercial element.

Although the applicant presents the proposal as town-centre regeneration, the figures suggest that it is primarily a residential-led scheme. The Council should therefore carefully consider whether the development genuinely strengthens the vitality and viability of Buxton town centre as required by Policy CF1 or whether it risks reducing the site's role as a commercial destination.

2. Conflict with Policy CF2 & Primary Shopping Frontages

The application site forms part of Buxton's Primary Shopping Area and includes Primary Shopping Frontages. The applicant acknowledges that Policy CF2 applies.

Policy CF2 seeks to protect retail function and states that changes away from retail uses should not:

- ❑ Create concentrations of non-shopping uses;
- ❑ Harm the retail character of the area;
- ❑ Adversely affect vitality and viability.

The existing shopping centre currently performs an important retail function within Buxton town centre.

The application proposes the demolition of approximately 4,073m² of existing shopping centre floorspace.

Whilst replacement commercial floorspace is proposed, the overall emphasis of the development shifts significantly towards residential use.

The Council should therefore be satisfied that the proposal does not undermine the purpose of the Primary Shopping Area designation and does not weaken the long-term retail function of Spring Gardens.

3. Failure to Demonstrate Adequate Parking Provision

Policy CF1 requires adequate parking provision in suitable locations to support town-centre development.

The application proposes:

- ❑ The removal of the 422 existing spaces at Spring gardens,
- ❑ 264 new on-site parking spaces; and
- ❑ Reliance upon additional parking to be delivered through a separate planning application.

The Planning Statement explicitly acknowledges that additional parking is required and that off-site solutions are still being explored.

This is particularly concerning because:

- ❑ The scheme introduces 332 dwellings whose occupants will need to park
- ❑ The development seeks to increase commercial activity.
- ❑ The site serves a key town-centre location.

❧ Buxton's economy is heavily dependent on visitors and tourism.

The adequacy of parking provision should be assessed on the basis of completed and deliverable parking arrangements rather than future proposals that have yet to receive planning permission.

4. Impact on Town-Centre Vitality During Construction

The Planning Statement refers to phasing and acknowledges that construction will need to be managed whilst parts of the shopping centre remain operational.

However, insufficient information has been provided regarding:

- ❧ Protection of existing businesses;
- ❧ Construction impacts on footfall;
- ❧ Temporary loss of parking;
- ❧ Access arrangements for customers;
- ❧ Measures to support affected retailers.

Spring Gardens remains an important commercial area within Buxton.

A prolonged period of disruption could adversely affect existing independent businesses and reduce confidence in the town centre.

The economic impact of construction should therefore be given significant weight in the planning balance.

5. Conflict with Design Guidance and Local Distinctiveness Objectives

The High Peak Residential Design SPD emphasises the importance of respecting traditional built form and local character.

The Buxton Design & Place Making Strategy SPD seeks to ensure that development is rooted in a careful understanding of Buxton's distinctive character and promotes the highest standards of urban design.

Whilst the applicant states that the proposals draw upon Buxton's architectural traditions, the scheme introduces several large contemporary blocks and landmark structures which represent a significant departure from the character of much of the surrounding townscape.

The Council should carefully assess whether the proposal genuinely reinforces Buxton's unique identity or whether it introduces a style of development that could equally be found in numerous urban regeneration schemes elsewhere in the country.

The importance of preserving local distinctiveness is particularly relevant given Buxton's role as a historic spa town and visitor destination.

6. Heritage Concerns

The applicant accepts that there will be harm to the significance of the Grade II listed Winster Place, albeit described as "less than substantial harm".

Under the NPPF, even less than substantial harm must be given considerable importance and weight.

The Council must therefore be satisfied that:

- ¿ Public benefits are substantial and demonstrable;
- ¿ No less harmful alternatives exist;
- ¿ Heritage impacts have been minimised.

Given the scale of redevelopment proposed, careful scrutiny of the Heritage Assessment is required.

7. Housing Mix and Community Sustainability

The application proposes 332 dwellings as the dominant land use within the scheme.

The Council should carefully examine whether the proposed housing mix reflects identified local housing needs and contributes towards the creation of a balanced community.

A successful town centre requires a mix of residents, workers, visitors, retailers, cultural uses and community facilities.

There is a risk that the scale of residential development could fundamentally alter the function of this part of the town centre without sufficient evidence that such a change is necessary or desirable.

Conclusion

Whilst investment in Buxton town centre is welcomed, regeneration must be assessed against adopted planning policy rather than aspiration alone.

The application has not, in my view, demonstrated that it:

- ¿ Protects the vitality and viability of Buxton's Primary Shopping Area as required by Policies CF1 and CF2;
- ¿ Provides adequate and deliverable parking provision;
- ¿ Safeguards existing businesses during construction;

- ¿ Fully respects Buxton's distinctive character and townscape;
- ¿ Minimises harm to heritage assets; or
- ¿ Delivers a genuinely balanced mix of town-centre uses.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that High Peak Borough Council refuses planning permission unless these concerns can be satisfactorily addressed through substantial revisions to the scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen MR Lamb

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