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From: [REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]

Application Reference No. : HPK/2026/0228 Site Address: Spring Shopping Centre & Land South of Station Road
Buxton Derbyshire Comments by: Cllr Melandra Smith Derbyshire County Council
From:

Lascelles Rd
Corbar
Buxton
Derbyshire
SK17 6GH

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Submission: Objection
Comments: OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATIONS HPK/2026/0228 AND HPK/2026/0229

Submitted by Councillor Melandra Smith

Derbyshire County Councillor for Buxton North & East

Introduction

I wish to register my objection to Planning Applications HPK/2026/0228 and HPK/2026/0229 in their current form.

I do so as the elected Derbyshire County Councillor for Buxton North & East and as a representative of residents who have raised significant concerns regarding the scale, nature and long-term implications of these proposals.

I support regeneration of Buxton town centre. I recognise that investment is needed within the Springs area and that changing retail patterns require innovative solutions. However, regeneration must be assessed against adopted planning policy, the long-term interests of the town, and the principles of sustainable development.

In my view, the current proposals have not demonstrated compliance with several key objectives of the High Peak Local Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Buxton Design and Place Making Strategy SPD and the Station Road Design Framework SPD.

Furthermore, the applications raise significant strategic concerns regarding transport infrastructure, parking provision, heritage, civic assets, future rail connectivity, town-centre vitality and Local Government Reorganisation.

1. Buxton's Heritage Significance

Buxton is not an ordinary market town.

Known to the Romans as Aquae Arnemetiae, it is one of only two recognised Roman spa towns in England, alongside Bath. Its significance derives not only from individual listed buildings but from the wider composition of the town, its

Georgian and Victorian architecture, its historic landscape, conservation areas and role as the gateway to the Peak District National Park.

The High Peak Local Plan identifies Buxton as the Borough's principal town and seeks to reinforce its position as England's leading spa town.

Any major redevelopment within the historic core of the town should therefore be required to demonstrate the highest standards of design and place-making.

The scale, massing and appearance of the proposed development, including buildings of up to five storeys, represent a substantial intervention within the townscape and require particularly careful scrutiny.

2. Evolution of the Scheme

Residents were originally presented with regeneration concepts centred on:

- ¿ public realm improvements;
- ¿ enhanced links between the station and Spring Gardens;
- ¿ reuse of underutilised upper floors;
- ¿ retail enhancement;
- ¿ and heritage-led regeneration.

The current application has evolved into a predominantly residential-led scheme comprising approximately 332 homes for rent together with commercial space.

The scale of residential development (net increase of 25,102m²) now significantly exceeds the commercial element (net increase of 161m²).

The Council must therefore consider whether this is indeed a regeneration scheme or whether it has become primarily a residential development supported by ancillary commercial uses. If so, I question if its proposed location on top of our central car park is appropriate.

3. Conflict with Policies CF1 and CF2

The application site occupies a key position within Buxton Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area.

The proposal involves the loss of substantial existing retail floorspace and its replacement with a development in which residential use becomes the dominant component.

Policies CF1 and CF2 seek to:

- ¿ maintain vitality and viability;
- ¿ protect active frontages;
- ¿ support consumer choice;
- ¿ safeguard retail function;

¿ and strengthen the attractiveness of town centres.

The applicant has not demonstrated that the proposed reduction in retail emphasis will strengthen the long-term commercial role of Spring Gardens. No impact studies have been done for our three existing commercial hubs ¿ Spring Gardens, the area around the Quadrant and Crescent, and higher Buxton. This is inexcusable.

4. Parking Provision and Accessibility

The existing Spring Gardens car park provides approximately 422 spaces in a highly accessible town-centre location.

The proposed development removes this provision and replaces it with a significantly lower number of spaces that are further set back and relies substantially upon parking proposed through a separate planning application. This separate parking application, being an enabler to the project, should either be included in this application or be applied for first. This proposal is simply inappropriate without it.

The adequacy of parking provision within this application should be assessed on the basis of completed, deliverable and approved parking infrastructure rather than future assumptions.

This issue is particularly important given:

- ¿ Buxton's visitor economy;
- ¿ its rural catchment area;
- ¿ relatively limited public transport options;
- ¿ and the reliance of many businesses upon convenient town-centre access.

If the proposals under consideration are to be agreed, then they MUST contain a condition that planning for the proposed new car park behind Buxton Station is to be obtained before any work is allowed on the main scheme. This is vital.

5. Future Transport Infrastructure and the Peaks & Dales Line

A further concern relates to the proposed use of land behind Buxton Station as replacement parking.

Derbyshire County Council has recently endorsed progression of the Peaks & Dales Line proposal linking Buxton and Matlock. The PDL group has the support of 26 MPs and is liaising directly with DfT and other strategic authority bodies.

Should that project proceed, Buxton would cease to function solely as a branch-line terminus and could become an important through-station connecting the East Midlands, North West and Peak District.

In those circumstances, land surrounding the station may become strategically important for:

- ¿ station expansion;
- ¿ public transport interchange facilities;
- ¿ active travel infrastructure;

¿ visitor facilities;

¿ and wider transport investment.

Before land adjacent to the station is permanently allocated for replacement parking, the Council should be satisfied that future transport opportunities have been properly considered and that development today will not unnecessarily constrain options available to future generations. I am not convinced that this or upgraded rail travel options from Buxton have been considered - and if not, why?

6. Highway and Engineering Concerns

The proposed station car park (which is not on this planning application and is merely referred briefly in para 5.58 of this application¿s planning statement) raises a number of unresolved highway and engineering questions.

As currently understood, vehicle access would require traffic to pass through the existing car park beneath the station fanlight before continuing along what is presently a pedestrian route behind the station.

The proposals appear to require:

¿ access arrangements involving third-party land;

¿ significant alterations to the Palace Road and Station Road junction;

¿ excavation of land adjacent to a steep embankment;

¿ substantial engineering works;

¿ and the potential loss of mature trees, some reportedly protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

¿ The creation of two vehicle lanes (for in and out traffic) plus pedestrian walk ways which will substantially reduce parking space available on the site

¿ Such parking will require variable message signs, parking guidance signs and dynamic wayfinding signs given the limitation and segregated nature of the parking.

The cumulative impact of these works has not been satisfactorily demonstrated.

Given Derbyshire County Council's role as Highway Authority, these matters warrant particularly careful consideration.

7. Civic Assets and Public Confidence

The proposals cannot be viewed in isolation from wider changes occurring within Buxton town centre.

The disposal of Buxton Museum and Art Gallery and the proposed sale of Buxton Town Hall have generated much public concern. Condition reports have not been made public and decisions have been taken behind closed doors.

Many residents regard these buildings not simply as assets but as symbols of civic identity and public life.

The prospect of disposing of major civic buildings whilst simultaneously relocating functions into a private redevelopment scheme inevitably raises questions regarding long-term stewardship, transparency and public confidence in how the local authority has been operating.

Whilst these issues may not be determinative planning considerations, they form an important part of the wider context within which the applications are being considered.

8. Local Government Reorganisation

The timing of these proposals is significant.

High Peak Borough Council is expected to be abolished through Local Government Reorganisation, with responsibilities transferring to a successor authority.

Major regeneration schemes of this scale may take many years to deliver, meaning that implementation, oversight and long-term consequences will largely fall to an authority that did not originate the proposals.

The principles underpinning Section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 recognise the importance of ensuring that decisions taken by predecessor authorities do not unnecessarily constrain the options available to successor bodies.

In my view, this principle is highly relevant when considering the disposal of strategic assets and the long-term redevelopment of central Buxton.

Conclusion

Whilst investment in Buxton is welcome, regeneration must enhance rather than diminish the qualities that make our town distinctive.

These applications raise substantial concerns regarding:

- ¿ compliance with Policies CF1 and CF2;
- ¿ parking provision and accessibility;
- ¿ future transport opportunities;
- ¿ strategic use of land surrounding Buxton Station;
- ¿ highway and engineering impacts;
- ¿ heritage and townscape character;
- ¿ the balance between residential and commercial uses;
- ¿ and the long-term implications of Local Government Reorganisation.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that planning permission be refused unless and until these concerns can be satisfactorily addressed through substantial amendment, further evidence and a more comprehensive assessment of the long-term consequences for Buxton and our residents.

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