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From: planningcomments@highpeak.gov.uk
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Subject: Comment Received from Public Access

Application Reference No. : HPK/2026/0228 Site Address: Spring Shopping Centre & Land South of Station Road
Buxton Derbyshire Comments by: Natasha StylesThe Planning Bureau on behalf of McCarthy & Stone Retirement
Lifestyles Ltd

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Submission: Objection

Comments: I write on behalf of my Client, McCarthy & Stone, the freeholder and operator of Devonshire Place, which is located directly to the north of the site. McCarthy & Stone is the UK's leading developer and manager of retirement communities. Our retirement villages and developments enrich the lives of our customers and their families by offering independence, safety, care services, friendship and peace of mind. With an ageing population, our communities play an important role in easing both the housing crisis and pressure on care services. Quality and service are integral to everything we do. The purchase of one of our apartments is often the final home move our customers will make; therefore, it is important that any development surrounding our properties meets the high design standards we require of ourselves in creating communities that people are proud to live in.

The proposal seeks to deliver 11 new buildings comprising 332 residential units and 9,403 square metres of commercial floorspace, including town centre uses. The new blocks would range between four and five storeys in height. However, it should be noted that the ground floor of many blocks would contain commercial space with a significantly greater ceiling height than residential accommodation, often up to five metres or more. In practical terms, this could result in buildings that appear equivalent to six storeys. The chosen design appears to adopt a contemporary architectural approach, creating a largely box-like form with flat roofs.

The site is allocated in the adopted Local Plan under Policy DS22, 'Station Road and Spring Gardens Regeneration Area', for mixed-use development, where the principle of development is acceptable. Although limited detail is provided in the policy, paragraph 6.151 of the Local Plan notes that any proposals would need to be of high-quality design.

The site is located partly within both the Central and Hardwick Conservation Areas. Both Conservation Areas contain numerous listed buildings. Prominent within the Central Conservation Area are the Grade I listed Crescent and the associated Grade II registered park and garden of the Slopes. In this respect, both Policy EQ6 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are relevant to decision-making.

Policy EQ6, 'Design and Place Making', requires development to be well designed and to respect the character, identity and context of townscapes and landscapes. It requires development to contribute positively to an area's character, history and identity in terms of scale, height, density, layout, appearance, materials and relationship to other buildings and landscapes. It also requires a satisfactory relationship with adjacent development and that

proposals do not cause unacceptable effects by reason of visual intrusion, overlooking, shadowing, overbearing impact, noise, light pollution or other adverse impacts on local character and amenity. The High Peak Borough Landscape Impact Assessment, prepared by Wardell Armstrong to support the Local Plan, identified opportunities to improve the setting of the Conservation Area in the Spring Gardens area.

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework addresses conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Proposals that affect heritage assets are considered at paragraphs 207 to 221. These require local planning authorities to take account of the significance of heritage assets and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 212 states that ‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.’ Paragraph 219 states that ‘Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.’

Having assessed the proposals, we consider that the scale, height and density of the proposed buildings and development would be unduly dominant and would have a harmful impact on the significance of the conservation areas and nearby individual listed buildings, including the Station and the Viaduct, as well as the Grade II registered Slopes. The proposal would also have a harmful impact on the significance that the conservation areas derive from their setting.

The current design has few features that relate to the historic buildings within the nearby Buxton Conservation Area. The rectangular windows, strong vertical emphasis and absence of slate pitched roofs or architectural detailing do not sufficiently reflect the Victorian heritage of Buxton. Instead, they result in a rather stark and box-like appearance, more reminiscent of 1970s student accommodation blocks, or indeed some of the development the scheme seeks to replace. In addition, the proposal appears to fail to correspond with the Buxton Design and Place Making Strategy SPD.

In addition, Policy EQ6 requires proposals to have a satisfactory relationship with adjacent development and to avoid unacceptable effects by reason of visual intrusion, overlooking, shadowing, overbearing impact, noise, light pollution or other adverse impacts on local character and amenity. We consider that the proposal directly opposite Devonshire Place would result in unacceptable visual intrusion and would adversely affect residents of Devonshire Place through an overbearing impact, as well as causing harm to local character and amenity.

A design approach we would welcome would be similar to the recent Haddon Hall care home on London Road or Devonshire Place on Station Road. These buildings include architectural detail, use local materials and incorporate features that soften their visual impact and help them integrate with Buxton’s heritage architecture. We would wish to see the buildings reduced in height, scale and mass, and designed as a landmark development that people can appreciate, which complements the existing heritage assets rather than turning away from them.

We therefore consider that, as currently designed, the proposal would have a significant adverse impact on heritage assets across Buxton. It would not enhance or better reveal the significance of any heritage asset; rather, it would have limited regard to preserving those elements that make a positive contribution to their significance. It would also fail to retain the important historic skyline.

We therefore consider that the planning application should be refused, as it is contrary to Policy EQ6 of the Local Plan and would have a significant adverse impact on the heritage assets of Buxton. It would therefore also be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.

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