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From: planningcomments@highpeak.gov.uk
Sent: 22 July 2026 11:59
To: Planning Comments (HPBC)
Subject: Comment Received from Public Access

Categories: [REDACTED]

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

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Submission: Objection

Comments: I object to the Planning application proposed by Capital and Centric on a number of grounds.

Buxton is a living breathing and vibrant town. It is historic, and it is true that it has many beautiful buildings. It is a tourist town, but what gives it its breath is the quarries. You can't avoid them. They and their ancillary trades and the people who work in them live in and around the town and make it more than just a tourist theme park. The figures for the High Peak as a whole, and certainly in the Local Plan rarely acknowledge this letting them get subsumed in the overall figures and statistics. Stay in Buxton for any length of time and you will see a layer of dust from the quarries develop. But that's fine, it's a trade off and one that most residents willingly accept.

The application arose following High Peak Borough Councils successful bid from the Future High Street Fund. The scope of this fund was intended to revitalise the 'High Street'. In Buxton High Street is no longer the high street but Spring Gardens is. The development to develop the Springs Shopping Centre does not include Spring Gardens. C&C presents as offering very little in the way of retail opportunities and presents as being designed to draw people away from Spring Gardens and reduce the footfall thereby killing an already struggling high street. There is no evidence that the existing retailers would either remain in Buxton or return afterwards. Even AI believes that 'they focus more on independent, boutique, and food-and-beverage (F&B) operators' so maintaining stores such as Waitrose, Yorkshire Trading, Superdrug, Next, New Look etc. is not likely to be a priority for C&C and will be a great loss for the town. It also seems likely that the Nationwide will be ousted in this revamp. So, in my opinion their plans present as ones to further damage the town and its economy rather than to strengthen it.

The fundamental flaw in C&C's approach is that they are a company that specializes in Brownfield post industrial sites, usually converting warehouses or developing loft style apartment living which may work in areas such as Stockport or central Manchester but is not appropriate to Buxton. C&C have a house style which may work in other areas but is not compatible with the more domestic Georgian and Victorian buildings which dominate Buxton. It is these buildings that people come to Buxton to see and I believe that such a large and unashamedly modern development would be detrimental to the tourist industry that Buxton has increasingly come to rely on.

The Local Plan, however, is already outdated, especially in the analysis of the housing sector. The most recent figures, understandably, come from the 2021 census which show a population of 20,048, before that in 2011 - 21,108 and in 2001 - 20,836. It can therefore be seen that the population has remained fairly static despite the many housing developments in Buxton such as Foxlow Fields, Solomons View etc. etc. and there remains a shortage of available housing stock. One major contributory factor is the rise of Airbnb's and holiday lets. Many of the small houses in town have been bought up and now trade as such leaving little opportunity for people on lower incomes to access housing. One road in Higher Buxton is virtually all holiday lets now as are many of the flats that were once people's homes. Just building more properties will not alleviate the problem, as, as can be seen, this strategy has not been successful to date. The Local Plan acknowledges that Buxton in particular is heavily dependent of the hospitality sector, a sector that is notoriously low paid. Where as these people going to live to be able to serve the gentrification these plans suppose? This is where the housing need is and the proposed development by C&C will not address this. C&C have gradually increased the number of units they are proposing. When tenders were invited HPBC wanted only 75 homes but all the three interested parties insisted on more. A classic case of the tail wagging the dog. The current figure they are stating is for 332 homes for 880 people which would mean an increase of 4.38% in the population of Buxton with no additional resources in the way of GP's, Schools etc. This would seem particularly untenable at a time when the Health Authorities are looking to remove even more services from Buxton. Land near the train station had been earmarked for development as a health hub and a joint Social Services hub to be more accessible for resident. This never happened and it seems that this land is being repurposed for this development.

Councilor Madeline Hall states that 30% of any development is the 'target' for affordable housing but the offer put forward by C&C is 16 which is only 5% and even that is subject to Section 106 agreements under the national Planning Policy Framework which could reduce it to nil. These homes are not for working people and are unlikely to alleviate the housing issues that are present within the town

The High Peak in general and Buxton in particular needs to rethink it's more general housing policy. If we build more properties without any planning restrictions Buxton will become an empty husk with the people who work in the town not being able to afford to live close by, which in turn causes problems for the hospitality industry. This is known to be an issue in many parts of the country and in particular the South West with, notably, South Hams District Council only approving planning for new builds that have a restrictive covenant whereby the homes can only be sold to or rented by people who will be using it as their primary residence.

Then comes the issue of parking. Buxton was a market town. It is not a city. The plans proposed by C&C seem to be predicated on the 15 Minute City principle meaning that people can usually access most of what they need within 15 minutes by walking or public transport, reducing the dependence on cars. This is not possible in Buxton. The transport infrastructure cannot meet this demand. One train an hour to and from Manchester, and one every two hours on Sundays is not enough to encourage people to travel by train to visit. Similarly, the local bus service is not adequate to meet people's needs to come into town to shop, visit the doctor's etc. The rural location of the immediate environs of Buxton necessitates a higher dependency on cars and the need for parking. Reducing the parking spaces available under these circumstances is likely to deter people from coming into town and further reduce footfall. Why would people in general and tourists in particular travel into Buxton just to sit in a precinct similar to what they have encountered in the city?

There is some talk of 100 affordable homes being built on the Granby Road site, in part to offset the concerns around this proposed development. 100 extra homes, many with cars, trying to get up and down an already over congested Fairfield Road. Out of the town and well away from this proposed development.

The summary of the High Peak Local Plan identifies a number of outcomes sought

1. Increased council tax base
2. Increased business rates take
3. Reversal of population decline
4. Increased supply of housing including affordable and social housing
5. Increased economic activity including business start-ups, economic employment opportunities
6. Improved skills attainments
7. Increased apprenticeships
8. Increased visitor dwell time and spend
9. Reduced town centre vacancy rates
10. Increased local pride

I do not believe that this development will increase revenue through rates, either business or domestic. There is no indication how this will stem the population decline as there is no evidence to suggest that there will be sufficient uptake of the premises from the target demographic. It certainly does not meet the need for increased affordable and social housing. There is no evidence to suggest that this will lead to increased economic activity. A possible slight increase in hospitality jobs does not equate to improved skills attainments or increased apprenticeships. There is no evidence to suggest that there will be increased dwell time and spend, rather there is some evidence to the contrary. C&C's poor track record on encouraging retail and hospitality venues as well as reduced parking lean towards the view that town centre vacancy rates are more likely to increase than decline and given the majority views, to date, against this proposal it presents as highly unlikely that this development will result in increased local pride.

Finally, I have no confidence in Capital and Centric and their intentions. I was circumspect before, but a few days ago they posted a video talking about the 500 homes they were about to start building in Buxton with the clear implication that this had already been greenlighted to go ahead. No mention of the fact that there are planning issues to be further considered such as other planning permissions for care parks and land with Tree Preservation Orders on them etc. And the fact that the figure had suddenly bumped itself up to 500? The explanation given was that it was the marketing department being too enthusiastic. It was taken down very quickly but it raises many concerns as to C&C's integrity and their true plans for the area.

In summary, I believe that this proposed development does not meet the needs of local people and does not fit within the agreed Local Plan and as such should be rejected and a further one sought, one whose primary remit is to meet the needs of the residents of Buxton and the High Peak and not the developers.

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