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PLANNING APPLICATION HPK/2026/0228, and HPK/2026/0229, Springs Shopping Centre and land south of Station Road, Buxton.

I object to the above planning application in its current form, for the following reasons.

THERE IS A CLEAR CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The application site is owned by High Peak Borough Council (HPBC). HPBC have offered to pay the applicants, Capital & Centric (C&C) up to £2,000,000 to produce a planning application. It is totally unacceptable that the Council's own planning committee will determine the application. However hard the committee members might try to be even-handed, they will be acutely aware that, if they reject the application they will be accused of wasting \$2,000,000 of public money. Given that the majority of members do not live in Buxton, they will have little incentive to vote against the application. The application must be referred to the Secretary of State for determination.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION.

HPBC will soon be part of a wider North Derbyshire council. As part of the transition, the Government will require authorities, both HPBC and the new council, to agree on major proposals in order to ensure that the new authority does not have a legacy of expensive or unsuitable commitments. This will be done by a Section 24 Directive. At the time of writing, the operative date has yet to be announced, but clearly this development comes within the scope of the Directive. This is another reason why the Minister should be fully aware of the proposals.

INSUFFICIENT CAR PARKING PROVISION

C&C's plans include a housing development. However, the plans also include a reduction in car parking spaces! Belatedly, in response to warnings from the public, C&C and HPBC realised that car parking provision was totally inadequate. It has been reported that HPBC's response has been to buy land behind the railway station between Palace Road and Lightwood Road. This will be the subject of a future planning application, the outcome of which cannot be regarded as certain, given the destruction of the area between the Palace Hotel and the railway station (both Listed) to form the access. It should be made clear to all members of the planning committee that the application under consideration must be determined on its own merits, and not on the basis of some future application for parking that may or may not be approved.

THE APPLICANT'S PUBLIC CONSULTATION WAS INADEQUATE

C & C's efforts at public consultation were severely flawed. At the first public display, in the former Track & Trail shop, they picked up on the lack of public toilets in the existing shopping centre. In future announcements they emphasised the fact that, yes, toilets will be provided! This was parodied in a headline in Pure Peak magazine – 'At your convenience'. In concentrating on public toilets attention has been directed away from the real issues. Toilets, after all, are part of detailed planning.

C&C provided some very attractive images of the proposed development. We are used to an element of artistic licence in sales brochures, but C&C went far beyond acceptable limits. One picture of the self-styled 'Grand Boulevard' showed a level street fading into a pastoral scene of mature trees and parkland. The reality is that the street will have a steep slope to cope with height differences and the background will be the roofs of Spring Gardens and the Hardwick Mount area. The result is something that goes beyond artistic licence and becomes dishonest.

At the first public consultation exercise, it became clear that C&C knew little of Buxton. They didn't know that we already had a cinema. Had they walked around the town they would have seen restaurants, bars, coffee shops, a town hall, library, etc., all of which they propose to duplicate in their development. What happens to the redundant buildings?

THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT RESPECT BUXTON'S HISTORIC TOWN CENTRE

C&C have shown little or no empathy for the existing town. One of their early advertising pitches was to show an image of a current development next to Stockport's railway viaduct. They clearly don't appreciate that the Hogshaw Lane Viaduct in Buxton, even though Listed, actually serves as a barrier between Buxton and Fairfield, and is not seen as particularly important when compared with the Listed buildings surrounding the Crescent. This may partly explain why the proposed design has virtually nothing in common with Buxton and its heritage buildings. Buxton town centre consists of a number of Listed buildings. The development is visibly close to many of these buildings. This proximity must be taken into account in the external design of the buildings. Part of the development site is within the boundary of a Conservation Area. There is little to suggest that the designers have taken this into consideration. We have been assured that the buildings will have Mansard roofs. As this was a late Victorian development it bears no relationship to Georgian architecture. At a public meeting at Buxton's Pump Room in September 2025, the architect told the audience that he had overcome the Clerk of Works misgivings to give us 'bay windows'. Unfortunately, these bear no relationship to Georgian and Victorian bay windows in the town. There was a hint that they may be designed out by the Clerk of Works at the first sign of a budget over-run.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT IS UNACCEPTABLE

C&C's Grand Boulevard cuts right through the site in a destructive manner. One half of the existing shopping centre will be demolished in pursuit of something that is both unnecessary and unworkable. The suggestion of 'permeability' seems to come out of HPBC planning guidance produced around twenty years ago. Since these documents were drafted, the world and HPBC have moved on. There is more awareness of climate change and the urgent need to cause less damage to the planet. Developers should no longer demolish buildings simply because they don't fit in with their design. There is an increasing need to reuse and repurpose existing buildings. HPBC now owns the former Conway's building along with the upper part of Station Approach. It would be a simple task to design a route between railway station and shopping centre that would be curved and attractive. Entry to the Springs would be through the empty café adjoining Next.

It is unacceptable for successful businesses, including Next and Nationwide, to have their premises demolished in order to create a Grand Boulevard. The demolition and years of rebuilding involved would almost certainly lead to the closure of several other thriving businesses.

C&C appear to have missed the point that any route across the existing car park has to clear the current service road to Waitrose, Superdrug, Rymans, Specsavers, etc. Clearance below a bridge would need to be at least 5 metres. One solution is to terminate the route in an entrance to the Springs using little more than the former Currey's unit for a feature staircase and lift.

The existing Springs was built in the 1980s. Within twenty years it was described by HPBC as 'outdated'. C&C's proposal can be seen, almost in facsimile, in other towns and cities. Some of these were new a quarter of a century ago, and may by now be regarded by some as outdated. How long will it be before C&C's vision will be similarly seen as outdated, with calls for its replacement. Much of Buxton's town centre architecture may be regarded as timeless, and provides a good model for aspiring developers and architects.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE RIVER WYE ARE UNWORKABLE

The suggestion of opening up more of the river through the site is not going to work. The river bed is lower than the Springs floor level, and is in a channel. It is hardly a suitable place for people to sit in good weather. Rats are often seen at the other end of the culvert in the Pavilion Gardens, and are probably abundant in the culvert. There have been reports of human excrement seen floating down the river. This is quite possible because parts of the culvert were completed decades before Buxton had a modern sewage disposal network and the river would have been a convenient place to dispose of waste. Also, the applicants are probably not aware of the existence of the Duke's Level. This was driven under the moors for about three miles towards Flash. It drains the coal mines in the area, and in heavy rain brings large quantities of deposits from the mines. The best solution is to cover the rest of the river through the town centre and provide several water features to celebrate the town's Spa water history.

OVERDEVELOPMENT

Clearly, this is seen by C&C as a money making-exercise, and nothing else. They have fallen short of building a skyscraper, but have otherwise done everything possible to maximise revenue from the site. The reduction in car parking provision is a good example; income is low compared to the space it takes. This development will suck in successful businesses able to afford the rents, to the detriment of smaller local businesses. The rest of Buxton will decline.

VISITORS

C&C are planning to give us a viewing tower. We will be able to see the Crescent, Dome and many other Listed Buildings without having to leave their development. C&C are attempting to take over the views of our history. The shopping centre is seen as a visitor attraction in itself. This is not likely to be the case when C&C's emphasis is on flats and not shops.

If HPBC decides to go ahead and have its own planning committee determine the application, then it should be deferred or withdrawn. C&C must address all of the concerns mentioned above. Better the current eyesore than the bigger eyesore proposed by C&C.

Trevor Gilman

