

The Newbury Society response 3 to Kennet Centre application 23/02094/FULMAJ (validated 25 Sept. 2023, revised Dec. 2023)

SUMMARY

The Newbury Society objects to the Lochailort application 23/02094/FULMAJ for the redevelopment of the Kennet Centre in Newbury, as revised in December 2023, with 427 flats etc. None of the changes address the main objections that The Newbury Society has been raising repeatedly since 2021. We consider that this application should be refused on the grounds of:

1. Scale and Mass (see below)
2. Negative effect on Conservation Area and Listed Buildings (see below).
3. Design (see below)
4. Shortfall in Affordable Housing (see below)
5. Shortfall in Parking Spaces (see below)
6. Access and traffic
7. Lack of Public Open Space
8. Lack of Amenity Space
9. Local Opposition (see below)

1. Scale and Mass

In spite of the removal of the flats from the top floor of Blocks A and B in the amendments submitted in December 2023, the problems with the scale and mass of this development remain unaffected. The rooflines on both blocks remain at the same level, with an empty roof void rather than a roof partly occupied by flats. In spite of the change, the total number of flats proposed has not been reduced, but has risen by one to 427.

The largest Block, Block S, remains an eight-storey block with six-storey wings, altogether accommodating 121 flats, completely out of character for Newbury. Two six-storey blocks of flats are still proposed on the street-frontage in Market Street, significantly higher than the cinema and the new Weavers Yard development opposite. Five-storey blocks are still proposed on the street-frontage in Bartholomew Street and Cheap Street.

The proposed scale and mass is out of keeping with neighbouring buildings and the town centre as a whole.

2. Negative Effect on Conservation Area

In addition to the effect on listed buildings and other heritage assets previously identified, the proposed cluster of five-, six-, seven- and eight-storey buildings as a whole (even after the amendments of Dec. 2023) represents a fundamental change to a town centre which consists mainly of three-storey buildings, and it damages the character of the conservation area.

3. Design

In response to comments from Historic England, there have been improvements in the elevations to the details of designs for the Market Place and Bartholomew Street submitted in Dec. 2023. However, the design and scale of Blocks A, B and S; and (on the street frontages) the six-storey flats in Market Street and the five-storey block in Bartholomew Street remain out of character for Newbury and damaging to the street scene.

4. Shortfall in Affordable Housing

There has been no change in the significant shortfall in the provision of affordable housing; or in the uncertainty around even the small number of units proposed, as a result of these being “subject to viability.”

5. Shortfall in Parking Spaces

With the amended plans submitted in December 2023 comes a Car Parking Management Plan, which sees for the first time the detail of the developer’s proposals for parking for this development. As previously indicated, this involves only 83 new spaces, and accepts that 66 spaces (currently used by West Berkshire Council) will be lost.

The developers propose that the shortfall in parking for the 427 flats will be made up from the joint use and overnight use of all the spaces in the existing Kennet Centre multi-storey car park, on a first-come first-served basis and with the existing charges in place. The same charges would also apply to the new 83 spaces, together creating an incentive for car-owners to look for free parking as near to the development as they can find, with predictable damaging consequences for Newbury.

The proposals fail to conform to West Berkshire Council’s own standards in terms of parking provision for new developments, and the nature of the provision (identical to that of a fee-paying public car park) represent a departure from the established form of this provision.

9. Local Opposition

The Newbury Society launched a petition against the plans (23/02094/FULMAJ) in October 2023. This currently (Jan. 14) has 1,232 signatures opposing this development (1,075 online and 157 on a supplementary paper petition).

We also note the number of letters of objection which appear on the WBC planning website opposing this application, currently 59. In our assessment, local public opinion is strongly against this application, because of the harm it would inflict on the character of Newbury.

Given that this is now the fifth set of plans associated with the Lochailort redevelopment of the Kennet Centre, councillors should have regard to the responses to earlier versions of the plans, as well as paying careful attention to the detail of the current consultation responses (including the views of Newbury Town Council) and letters of objection.

The Newbury Society
January 2024