

INQUIRY PROGRAMME – APP/W0340/W/25/3359935Newbury Town Council Closing Statement

Good morning.

I am Cllr Gary Norman, Leader of Newbury Town Council and Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee. I am standing in on the last session for my colleague Cllr Andy Moore. Firstly, I would like to thank the Inspector for allowing Newbury Town Council to be a Rule 6 Party to these proceedings which I understand to have been conducted in a very measured fashion. I trust that my colleagues have made a positive contribution to the deliberations. From our side I know we are pleased to have got our points across, to have shared the Rule 6 status with our friends in the Newbury Society, and to have supported West Berkshire Council and those Members on the District Planning Committee who refused this application.

Notwithstanding all that has been said over the days of this appeal hearing, we remain seriously concerned about the significant and irreversible negative consequences that approval of this appeal would have on our community and the townscape of Newbury. We continue to urge the Inspector to dismiss this appeal.

As we have made clear, we are not opposed to the principle of developing the Kennet Centre. Indeed, we acknowledge the need for thoughtful, sustainable and imaginative development appropriate to its setting, and we understand the importance of making good use of available land within the town.

We have presented evidence in various ways on four key planning grounds that form the basis of our objection:

- **Firstly, Heritage Assets and Design** – We have referenced several policies and guides on the subject of protecting heritage and developing in sympathy with the existing setting. The plan put forward by the appellant is, in our view, out of scale and character with the surrounding area, and especially with its conservation status. It fails to respect the unique historic and architectural context of our town centre, and risks overwhelming nearby landmarks that are of significant local and cultural importance. Much has been said about views of the proposal: our concerns include both those close up and from distance, particularly as the town is set with high ground to north and south. Rather than enhancing the town, this proposal would dominate it – to the detriment of the very qualities that make this place special. This has been and remains our major concern, notwithstanding all that has been seen and heard in these recent days.
- **2nd. Parking** – We are grateful that we have been able to voice our concerns about the adequacy of parking provision. Again, we recognise that the appellant and WB council have an agreement on this, but the shared use by both the occupants of Eagle Quarter and town centre visitors, all of whom would be charged, still seems to us to be ripe for dissatisfaction to be voiced by individuals from both groups.
- **Thirdly, Amenity Space** – We are aligned with WB Council’s contention that the proposal provides insufficient amenity space for future occupants. We do not accept the suggestion that New Street can be considered to be amenity space for the occupants; indeed, in other parts of the application it is portrayed as an important new thoroughfare as well as being the access to retail businesses.

As an aside, we recognise that it is WB Council and the appellant who make the agreement on contributions (Section 106 and CIL),

but you have heard that it is the Town Council who is responsible for maintaining the many of the parks and open spaces that have been highlighted during the discussions, especially Victoria Park. I am sure that the residents of Newbury (as represented by the Town Council) would be grateful if the appellant could find additional sums to help us maintain these community assets on which future occupants of the site will depend, whichever scheme may be built.

- **Finally, Planning Balance** – While the proposed re-development might deliver some benefits – including additional housing (albeit of a variety not urgently needed in Newbury), and retail units (although there must also be a question about whether we need those either in this location, given the current volume of empty retail outlets in town) – we do not accept that these outweigh the harm identified in the scheme’s excessive height, mass and scale and lack of integration with its historic context. In addition, as previously stated: unresolved parking concerns and inadequate amenity provision, further tip the balance in our view against granting the appeal.

We ask the Inspector to recognise that better alternatives are both possible and necessary. A more appropriate scheme, grounded in good design, local character and considerably more imagination, has already received broad support, not least from ourselves. The town centre deserves a scheme that enhances the public realm, supports a vibrant local economy, and responds sensitively to its unique historic context. We thank the Inspector for the opportunity to present our views and ask that he dismisses the appeal.