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LPA Reference: 23/02094/FULMAJ

ATE Reference: ATE/23/00625/FULL

Site Address: THE MALL, THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY, RG14 5EN

Proposal: Full planning permission for the redevelopment of the Kennet Centre comprising the partial demolition of the existing building on site and the development of new residential dwellings (Use Class C3) and residents ancillary facilities; commercial, business and service floorspace including office (Class E (a, b, c, d, e, f, and g)); access, parking, and cycle parking; landscaping and open space; sustainable energy installations; associated works, and alterations to the retained Vue Cinema and multi storey car park.

ATE Case Officer: William Everson

ATE Case Officer Email: william.everson@activetravelengland.gov.uk

Thank you for your email

Active Travel England, after reviewing the submitted proposals and their potential impact has provided a detailed response containing specific recommendations. Please find attached the following:

- Covering Letter (Executive Summary)
- Planning Application Assessment Toolkit Summary Report

ATE would like to be notified of the outcome of the application through the receipt of a copy of the decision notice, in addition to being notified of committee dates for this application.

Kind regards



Development Management Team

Active Travel England

West Offices Station Rise, York, YO1 6GA

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Your Ref: 23/02094/FULMAJ
Our Ref: ATE/23/00625/FULL
Date: 16 October 2023

Active Travel England Planning Response Detailed Response to an Application for Planning Permission

From: Planning & Development Division, Active Travel England

To: West Berkshire Council

Application Ref: 23/02094/FULMAJ

Site Address: THE MALL, THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY, RG14 5EN

Description of development: Full planning permission for the redevelopment of the Kennet Centre comprising the partial demolition of the existing building on site and the development of new residential dwellings (Use Class C3) and residents ancillary facilities; commercial, business and service floorspace including office (Class E (a, b, c, d, e, f, and g)); access, parking, and cycle parking; landscaping and open space; sustainable energy installations; associated works, and alterations to the retained Vue Cinema and multi storey car park.

Notice is hereby given that Active Travel England's formal recommendation is as follows:

- a. ~~**No Objection:** ATE has undertaken a detailed assessment of this application and is content with the submission.~~
- b. ~~**Conditional approval:** ATE recommends approval of the application, subject to the agreement and implementation of planning conditions and/or obligations as set out in this response.~~
- c. **Deferral:** ATE is not currently in a position to support this application and requests further assessment, evidence, revisions and/or dialogue as set out in this response.
- d. ~~**Refusal:** ATE recommends that the application be refused for the reasons set out in this response.~~

1.0 Background

Active Travel England (ATE) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this full planning application for construction of 426 new build to rent homes and 3,116sqm of new Use Class E floorspace as part of the partial redevelopment of the Kennet shopping centre (the site) in Newbury Town Centre. In addition, the proposals incorporate new areas of public realm, and amenity space for the residential accommodation and commercial space.

The site measures 2.2 hectares and currently comprises a purpose built 1970s shopping centre with a multistorey car park. It is noted in paragraph 9.1 of the submitted Planning Statement that *'There is no specific allocation or policy for the application site in the adopted Local Plan'*, however, the site is included within the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan 2022, which has been considered later in this response.

It is understood that the site history includes two refused planning applications submitted during 2021 and refused in 2022. One for a 402 unit residential scheme and another for a 91 unit retirement living scheme. These applications were refused by the LPA primarily on the grounds of dominance/design and subsequently appealed, although these appeals were withdrawn. There were no reasons for refusal which specifically related to active travel, however it is noted that some related to traffic concerns.

To date, ATE has not been involved in previous planning applications or pre-application engagement relating to this application or site.

2.0 Summary

The Gear Change strategy, published in 2020, sets out the government's objective for half of all journeys in towns and cities being walked, wheeled, or cycled by 2030, whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph prescribes in paragraph 105, for the purpose of promoting sustainable transport, that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

It is recognised that the site is in a highly sustainable location being within a two-minute walk from Newbury Railway Station and other town centre amenities and is therefore considered to be consistent with the aspirations of NPPF paragraph 105 in this respect.

The application proposes a new mixed-use residential/commercial community in the centre of Newbury. It will therefore be important to consider how opportunities to promote walking, wheeling, and cycling are realised for both new residents and users of the commercial space on site. Alongside this, new opportunities to travel through the site by active modes will be an important component in creating town centre permeability/connectivity, which is currently limited.

Overall, it is considered that the proposals will enhance town centre north/south and east/west connectivity for pedestrians. There is however several concerns which are apparent from reviewing the application submission materials:

- There is some concern that cycles will not be permitted to use the new route through the development.
- The residential accommodation will be provided with sufficient levels of cycle parking and will benefit from proximity to the railway station and town centre

services/amenities. However, further clarity is requested as to the number and location of visitor cycle spaces proposed.

- It will be important to demonstrate how the proposals will contribute towards wider connectivity envisioned in the Town Centre Masterplan and deliver offsite active travel improvements.

After considering the proposals, ATE is requesting that the application is deferred and requests further assessment, evidence, revisions and/or dialogue as set out in this response.

3.0 National Policy and Guidance

These proposals have been assessed in consideration of the following national policy and design guidance:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

104. Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of... development proposals, so that: c) opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued;

105. ...Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

110. In assessing... specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:
a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location; [and]
b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;

112. ...applications for development should:
a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas...;
b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport; [and]
c) create places that... minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles...;

113. All developments that will generate significant amounts of movement should be required to provide a travel plan, and the application should be supported by a transport statement or transport assessment so that the likely impacts of the proposal can be assessed.

Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) provides guidance to local authorities on delivering high quality, cycle infrastructure, while paragraph 14.3.1 identifies that new housing development provides a major opportunity to create new and improved cycle infrastructure.

Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking is the Government's cycling and walking plan for England. This sets the Government's vision for cycling and walking to be

the natural first choice for many journeys with half of all journeys in towns and cities being cycled or walked by 2030, while recognising that the planning system can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Inclusive mobility: making transport accessible for passengers and pedestrians provides guidance on designing and improving the accessibility and inclusivity of public transport and pedestrian infrastructure.

Active Design (Sport England, supported by Active Travel England and the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities) sets out how the design of our environments can help people to lead more physically active and healthy lives. It states that through the NPPF, the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code, places that prioritise activity, health and the characteristics that underpin active environments are encouraged and recommended.

4.0 Opportunities

It is acknowledged that the Town Centre Masterplan sets out several Principles for guiding development in the town centre, of relevance being:

- 3 – *‘Make the town centre more ‘walkable’ and increase the appeal of the town’s spaces, buildings and key assets by enhancing north-south and east-west permeability by foot.’*
- 4- *‘Improve the sense of arrival for pedestrians, cyclists, rail and bus uses by enhancing arrival spaces and improving links from the rail centre to the town centre, improving routes for pedestrians and cyclists.’*

It is recognised in the Planning Statement that: *‘The site has poor legibility with the only permeability being internal via the main retail mall. This route is only accessible during the opening hours of the mall and as such, the site is entirely impermeable between 6pm and 8am on a daily basis.’* (Paragraph 3.7). Subsequently, the introduction of 24-hour permeability is a significant opportunity presented by the proposals and should be enhanced for all users of the development and wider town centre. The proposals are therefore considered in broad accordance with NPPF Paragraph 92, which requires new development to create healthy, inclusive and safe places, however by excluding cyclists it could be seen as non-inclusive, and this is covered further below.

Moreover, the development will deliver a significant number of residential units within a highly sustainable location where there are greater opportunities to benefit from and promote active travel. To ensure these opportunities are realised, and in the context of the policy and guidance requirements set out above, it is considered necessary for the applicant to address the following concerns.

5.0 Areas of Concern

Layout and permeability:

The application is accompanied by series of plans which demonstrate how the new development will come forward with a new pedestrianised street linking the railway station and new Market Place development to the town centre. As discussed, the general

approach to connectivity and permeability is supported and is a significant enhancement of pedestrian legibility in the town centre. There is however concern that Paragraph 10.2.3 states that *'Cycles will not be permitted to use the new pedestrian street through the development, instead they will be encouraged to use the existing road network around the site.'*

The route around the Kennet Centre is currently one way and requires cyclists to mix with vehicle traffic which is unlikely to encourage cyclists. The applicant has made no obvious attempt to improve the surrounding environment for cyclists or commit to fund any upgrades in view of the additional residential movements the development is likely to generate.

ATE believe this approach would conflict with NPPF 92(a) which sets out that development should *'promote social interaction...through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages.'*

Moreover, LTN 1/20 Paragraph 6.5.9 explains *'Research shows that cyclists alter their behaviour according to the density of pedestrians – as pedestrian flows rise, cyclists tend to ride more slowly and where they become very high cyclists typically dismount.'* ATE would therefore ask the applicant takes account of guidance in LTN 1/20, particularly with regard to managing user conflict (8.2) and encourages the safe movement of pedestrians and cyclists, rather than seeking to restrict/exclude users.

It is also important to consider Inclusive mobility guidance, particularly within regards to widths, surface treatment and objects that might impede mobility. See 4.7 Street furniture.

Offsite improvements and wider connectivity:

As discussed, the Town Centre Masterplan seeks to improve connectivity by improving routes for pedestrians and cyclists and the introduction of a pedestrianised central street will make a significant contribution towards achieving this.

The Town Centre Masterplan sets out that *'The masterplan proposes enhanced arrival spaces at the rail and bus station. The Kennet Centre proposals, together with the Market Street redevelopment, create stronger links from the rail station to the town centre.'* A key part of this will be improving pedestrian crossing facilities south of the site across Market Street to join up with the Market Street development currently under construction.

A review of previous applications submitted on the site (21/00380/FULMAJ and 21/00379/FULMAJ) show a zebra crossing over Market Street, however the submission documents associated with the current proposals do not include this. It is however recognised that *'Improvements to Market Street including the provision of a new pedestrian crossing'* are included in the Planning Statement as 'S.106 and S.278 Contributions', however it has not been possible to identify this within the Transport Statement, which refers to the Bartholomew Street / Market Street Junction Improvements only. Further clarity around the intention to create a crossing south from the site as envisaged in previous applications would be welcome.

Moreover, clarity around how the Bartholomew Street / Market Street junction improvements will improve the quality and attractiveness of the environment for those choosing to walk, wheel and cycle would be welcome.

Cycle parking:

It is understood that *'cycle parking would be accommodated with 632 spaces provided for residents and a further 50 spaces provided for the flexible-use commercial units (Use Class E). A reasonable number of visitor cycle parking spaces would also be provided within the site located in convenient positions.'* (8.2.3 Transport Assessment)

ATE support the number of cycle spaces being provided for residential and commercial uses on the site. However, whilst it is recognised that the town centre is well served for cycle parking spaces, further clarity is needed as to the number of visitor spaces provided, both existing and proposed, to ensure the town centre is adequately provided for now and in the future. Additional Sheffield stands could be introduced at all entrances into the site and these should align with LTN 1/20 11.2 Cycle parking – general principles.

It is requested that the LPA ensures proposed cycle parking is sufficient for larger bikes (including cargo bikes, mobility bikes and e-bikes). It is therefore recommended that at least 5 per cent of all spaces should be capable of accommodating non-standard bicycles, in accordance with Table 11.1/Table 11.2 of LTN 1/20. Provision for charging within the residential accommodation stores would also be welcomed.

The provision of a *'Cycle workshop offering cycle repair / servicing and associated equipment for sale;'* is supported. Further information would be welcomed as to the operation of this facility. For example, will residents be able to use tools and equipment to service their own bicycle for free or would all services be paid for?

Travel plan

NPPF paragraph 113 states that all developments that will generate significant amounts of movement should be required to provide a travel plan. Travel plans must clearly outline the mode share targets and proposed measures to achieve these, monitoring strategy and remedial measures to be implemented if targets are not met. Agreed travel plan measures should be secured either by way of planning obligations or conditions.

The submitted Travel Plan sets out that *'The Travel Plan seeks to achieve a reduction in car journeys to and from the application site through the promotion of alternative modes of transports and implementation of measures to make these attractive to new residents/employees.'* This aim is supported; however, it has not been possible to identify a baseline split for walking and cycling modes within either the main body of the Travel Plan or Transport Assessment. To properly assess sustainable transport aspirations, it will be necessary to provide baseline targets for walking and cycling, rather than just vehicle trip generation set out in Table 3 of the Travel Plan. This is particularly important given the positive steps that have been taken by the applicant to provide cycle facilities for new residents, the highly sustainable location of the site and mixture of uses onsite.

6.0 Next Steps

We request that these recommendations are provided to the LPA case officer and forwarded to the agent and applicant. ATE would be content to review further submitted information to help address the above identified deficiencies, with a view to providing a further response and recommended wording for planning conditions and obligations.