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FAO: Matthew Shepherd
West Berkshire Council
Market Street
Newbury
Berkshire
RG14 5LD

29 February 2024

Dear Matthew

Planning Application: Eagle Quarter II, Kennet Centre The Mall, The Kennet Centre, Newbury, RG14 5EN (Ref: 23/02094/FULMAJ)

We write in response to the letter from Historic England dated 24 January 2024.

In summary, Historic England have maintained a concern with impact of the development on the significance of the Conservation Area and listed buildings partly due to the scale of the new buildings and partly due to design.

Responses to Historic England's comments have been prepared by the scheme's architects Professor Robert Adam and Roy Collado of Collado Collins, as well as that of our Heritage Advisor Tim Miles of Montague Evans and are attached to this letter.

Additionally, alongside this letter amended plans for elevations C, E and F are provided that respond to Historic England's design comments where relevant. These changes are as follows:

General

Details for the window reveals are provided alongside this letter alongside some updated details produced by Robert Adam.

Block C

The arch has been lowered and the gate designs have been given a more decorative approach while retaining their functional appearance.

Block E

Windows have been amended on this block to be made smaller and detail has been added.

Block F

The ground floor of the north corner building has been given solid elements below the pilasters.

These amendments address the comments made by Historic England and as their letter points out, should be sufficient to '*significantly reduce the harm*' alleged.

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I would be grateful if you could share this information with Historic England and I look forward to confirmation that they have reassessed their position in respect of this application positively.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Ballantyne-Way
Planning Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'SBWay' in a cursive, stylized script.

Enc: Robert Adam response
Roy Collado response
Tim Miles response

**RESPONSE TO HISTORIC ENGLAND'S COMMENTS ON THE MALL, THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY,
RG14 5EN, Application No. 23/02094/FULMAJ
PROFESSOR ROBERT ADAM PhD, 15th FEBRUARY 2024**

NOTES ON HE COMMENTS

BLOCK C

Revised highway advice has allowed some lowering of the arch. The gate designs have been given a more decorative approach while retaining their functional appearance.

The material on the elevations and to the rear is consistently brick.

BLOCK E

The small windows flanking oriels are a particular feature that distinguishes the second from the floors below and reflects the internal layout. The point on a lack of detail to their surrounds is accepted and a new detail shows canted surrounds; this emphasises the rhythm of small openings 'punched in' between the oriel windows. They have also been re-spaced to 'release' them somewhat from the oriels.

The apparent touching of the oriel windows to the arch below is a drafting error.

The missing brick arch in some of the third floor windows is a drafting error.

The ground floor openings are not to be confused as simply 'doorways', they are recessed porches, which creates a better entrance immediately off the street, while maintaining a street frontage. Their size reflects this function.

BLOCK F

Constructional polychromy is a well-established traditional feature but it is not the most critical feature on what is, in the end, a background building and so the string course is now consistent with the walling.

The railings on the north corner building are so minimal, set back and behind a projecting cornice that they will not be visible from much of the street, and even when they are will not compromise the strong elevational treatment. They are, however, shown as grey which, when they are seen, will make them more regressive.

While not in the HE comments, the ground floor of the north corner building has been given solid elements below the pilasters to avoid the impression of the classical orders floating on an insubstantial base.

Robert Adam, Robert Adam Architectural Consultancy, February 2024

**RESPONSE TO HISTORIC ENGLAND'S COMMENTS ON THE MALL, THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY, RG14
5EN, Application No. 23/02094/FULMAJ
ROY COLLADO 29th FEBRUARY 2024**

In broad terms their correspondence begins by re stating their fundamental objection to scale and massing, but in the letter's conclusion they go on to suggest that *'the proposals are edging closer to a point where we could accept that there is a clear and convincing justification to harm. However, the outstanding issues with block E, and to a lesser extent block C, means that harm could be meaningfully reduced further while still delivering the ambitions of the scheme'*. The HE letter provides a detailed critique of buildings E, C and F. They go on to note that *'until these issues below are addressed (and the issues referred to relate to the specific buildings C,E, F and H) our objection stands*.

I read in the HE summary a high degree of conditionality. It ventures that IF amendments can be made to blocks E and C in particular, then the level of harm (in HE opinion) can be deemed acceptable given the wider benefits, and that the wider benefits approach can be considered in overcoming their objection.

We have, with Robert Adams, sought to address each and every comment made by HE in their quite detailed commentary. In so doing, and assuming that they find our changes to be positive (which they ought as their comments are prescriptive) then it should follow that the benefits of the scheme can now be given their full attention as the blanket 'no' case has been addressed.

Notwithstanding this hopefully fundamental point, I maintain that the HE letter takes a very broad brush with its statements that do not at all reflect the specific areas of concern that have been raised, and nor do they give any credit for those many aspects of the scheme that have been well received but seemingly forgotten in these final exchanges, HE declines to give any credit for the plan form of the development which very clearly opens up the centre of Newbury to pedestrian movement and new public realm, re connecting places otherwise isolated by the homogenous Kennet Centre, and nor does it give any credit for the large part of the scheme which is low in scale and very contextual in nature. Instead, the HE positions initially focused on blocks A and B specifically, which we have reduced, and then with a very well-articulated and specific series of comments on blocks E,C,F and H, all of which we have also now addressed.

As a general point, we have never set out to design a scheme that is not visible, there is an inevitability that any redevelopment of the Kennet Centre will be visible from a range of places as ones through and around Newbury. What we have done, with firm guidance from Montague Evans Townscape team, and with input on specific 'heritage' buildings from Robert Adam, is evolved and crafted a series of buildings that both blend into the existing street patterns (as a consequence of detailed analysis of the historical street patterns), are varied in style, form and nature, in keeping with the town centre, and where scale has been reduced where it sits alongside sensitive street edge buildings, and located deep within the site where it causes least impact but at the same time gives some focus to the town centre and new public realm. We defer to Montague Evans around the description of harm, noting that to our mind being visible does not constitute harm so long as form, roofscape, context and place are all properly considered.

Returning to the first point, HE notes that under recommendations on the final page of their letter that:

'Improving the appearance of blocks C and E would meaningfully reduce the level of harm. If the issues of design we have raised in our letter were addressed, we would reconsider our objection'

Hopefully the recent work undertaken by the team finally enables the application to move forward without their objection.

**RESPONSE TO HISTORIC ENGLAND'S COMMENTS ON THE MALL, THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY,
RG14 5EN, Application No. 23/02094/FULMAJ
TIM MILES, 28TH FEBRUARY 2024**

We note that HE have identified that some of the changes to the scheme in November 2023 have made a 'real positive difference'. We also note that HE identifies that the issues are 'relatively minor' and could 'easily be overcome'.

We set out our response to their outstanding issues in this letter. Their recommendation is that improving the appearance of blocks C and E would meaningfully reduce the level of harm that they have identified.

We also note and welcome HE's confirmation that they do not consider the effect of the development in View 2 to be harmful (indeed, we consider this to be a beneficial aspect of the development). We respectfully disagree with HE that View 1 has a greater visual effect overall. Notwithstanding, should the Council identify harm in this view (and they have not to date), the effect on the significance of the conservation area arising from this long distance view would be of a very low order and capable of being outweighed by the planning benefits of the scheme as a whole.

We note HE's closing comments that the Council should refuse the application unless they are confident that any residual harm has a clear and convincing justification and is outweighed by planning benefits. This is of course a matter for the decision maker considering the full range of benefits arising from the proposals.

HE's view of the design qualities of the scheme differ from the Council's in that the Council has previously raised no objection to the design approach of the perimeter buildings. Indeed, the Council has identified heritage and townscape benefits from the proposed design approach within the officer report prepared for application reference 21/00379/FULMAJ. However, in following the advice of HE, it is clear that there are further improvements to the designs of these buildings.

In relation to the effect of the development Corn Store we identify what must be a typo in HE's advice; we infer the correct drafting to be in bold, as below:

*"A mass of buildings visible above the roof of the Corn Store would clutter this view, diminishing the viewer's ability to appreciate this group of listed buildings and entailing some harm to their significance. This harm may **not** be of a high level, but remains material. "*

We do not repeat our assessment of the effect of the development on the Corn Store here, referring the Council to paragraphs 6.91-6.93 and 6.244-6.247 of the HTVIA prepared by Montagu Evans which addresses the effect of the development on the significance of the Corn Stores. Again, if the Council considers there to be harm arising from development in the setting of the Corn Stores this must be at the low level.

Design

The Council has previously raised no objection to the design approach of the perimeter buildings. Indeed, the Council has identified heritage and townscape benefits from the proposed design approach within the officer report prepared for application reference 21/00379/FULMAJ.

We have, as you know, worked with you over the previous months to identify design amendments which address HE's comments, including those issued ON 5 December 2023. The most recent design amendments can be summarised as follows.

Block C

- The arch contained within Block C has been lowered and the gates provided with amore decorative appearance.
- Confirmation that the materials to the rear are to be brick.

Block E

- The oriel windows on Block E have been re-spaced and a canted surround provided.
- A drafting error showing the missing brick arch at third floor has been corrected.

Block F

- Amendments to the string course to be consistent with the walling.
- The ground floor of the north corner building has been amended to provide solid elements below the pilasters.

As these amendments directly address the comments raised by HE, we strongly feel that these overcome the remaining design issues raised by HE and that along with the revised designs submitted in November 2023 (the majority of which are acknowledged by HE to be considerable improvement) the further developed detailing of Blocks C, E and F augments the townscape benefits to this part of the town centre. It seems to us that HE's objection can be lifted; indeed HE indicates:

"Improving the appearance of blocks C and E would meaningfully reduce the level of harm. If the issues of design we have raised in our letter were addressed, we would reconsider our objection."

This has been fulfilled.

We conclude by repeating that should the Council consider that the development proposals do result in residual harm to designated heritage assets following a consideration of the beneficial aspects of the development, then the development would fall to be assessed under paragraph 208 of the NPPF. Those benefits to designated heritage assets should carry great weight under the provisions of paragraph 205 of the NPPF. There are meaningful public benefits arising from the application, which we take the opportunity to reiterate here:

1. Rejuvenation and regeneration of Newbury Town Centre.
2. High quality new homes with exceptional facilities.
3. Creation of a new mixed-use quarter with new independent shops, pedestrian streets and alleyways connecting to the surrounding area.
4. Low carbon highly sustainable development.
5. New flexible workspaces for local, independent and artisan businesses that will help enhance Newbury's unique and special identity as a market town.