

EAGLE QUARTER.

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Full: Phased redevelopment of the Kennet Centre comprising (i) partial demolition of existing building (ii) flexible-use commercial space (iii) headquarters office building (iv) 402 dwellings plus residents' ancillary facilities (v) access, car parking and cycle parking (vi) landscaping & open space (vii) sustainable energy installations (viii) associated works

The Kennet Centre,
Market Street/Bartholomew Street/Cheap Street/Market Place,
Newbury RG14 5EN

Lochailort Newbury Ltd

February 2021

LOCHAILORT

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1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Lochailort Newbury Ltd is committed to ensuring that appropriate stakeholder engagement has informed and influenced its proposed masterplanned mixed-use development of the *Kennet Centre* in Newbury town centre. Accordingly, the purpose of the consultation that has been undertaken was to provide the opportunity for residents, the Town Council and other key stakeholders to express their view about the proposed development, and to influence the proposal prior to its formal submission to the Local Planning Authority.
- 1.2 Prior to finalising and submitting a detailed full planning application for the proposed development, the applicant has therefore undertaken a number of rounds of engagement with the Town Council, local community interests and technical consultees which individually and cumulatively have influenced the form and content of the detailed planning application submitted for determination by the Local Planning Authority.

Consultation methods

- 1.3 The applicant has employed a range of consultation methods which together seek to ensure that views and opinions have been sought from a wide range of potentially interested parties. This has included:
- 1.3.1 Meetings with the Town Council
 - 1.3.2 Meetings with the Local Authority
 - 1.3.3 Technical consultee discussions
 - 1.3.4 Individual meetings with interested parties
 - 1.3.5 Public exhibition
 - 1.3.6 Online consultation
 - 1.3.7 Media engagement

Timetable

- 1.4 Several consultation events and meetings have taken place during the formative evolution of the proposed masterplanned development, which have influenced the mix of uses proposed and the general form of the development. That consultation was undertaken during a focussed period between January and November 2020.
- 1.5 Whilst consultation has properly taken place prior to the applications' submission, the applicant intends to continue to engage with technical consultees, stakeholders and interested parties during the application's consideration and determination by the Local Planning Authority.

2.0 Town Council consultation

- 2.1 The applicant held a number of meetings with Newbury Town Council during the iterative evolution and formation of the development proposals.

Meeting 1: Friday 14th February 2020

- 2.2 At this introductory first meeting, the applicant talked in general terms with the Leader of the Town Council, the Chairperson of the Planning & Highways Committee, and the Chief Executive. The applicant explained and agreed how it would be engaging with the Town Council during the pre- and post-application process, welcoming the Town Council's support in principle for the *Kennet Centre's* comprehensive redevelopment.
- 2.3 The Town Council representatives talked in general terms about the importance of:
- 2.3.1 Linking the railway station through the site to the town centre
 - 2.3.2 Having a range of commercial activities on the development's ground floor, with a particular focus on local, independent and artisan retailers
 - 2.3.3 The local declaration of a *Climate Emergency* and the importance of sustainability
 - 2.3.4 Encouraging people back into the town centre to live, work, shop and for leisure
 - 2.3.5 Rooting the redevelopment in the history of the site and the wider town
- 2.4 The applicant committed to incorporating the Town Council's initial comments into the masterplan, and to continue proactive dialogue as the design evolved.

Meeting 2: Presentation on Friday 9th October 2020

- 2.5 The applicant presented their emerging proposals in a videoconference to which all Town Councillors were invited.



Figure 1: Emerging masterplan proposal as presented to the Town Council on 9th October 2020

- 2.6 The initial masterplan was generally positively received by Town Councillors (as per the full presentation at **Appendix 01**), who requested that the applicant run a further *Question and Answer* session with the Town Council as a follow-up session.

Meeting 3: Presentation on Thursday 2nd February 2017

- 2.6 The applicant invited (**Appendix 02**) all Town Councillors to a dedicated *Question and Answer* session on 27th October. At this interactive session the applicant presented a refined masterplan (**Appendix 03**), answered Town Councillor's questions, and sought further feedback.
- 2.7 The event was well attended, with Town Councillors asking a range of questions (**Appendix 04**) which not only aided their understanding of the emerging draft proposal, but also gave the applicant further guidance on scheme refinements.

Meeting 4: Members of the *Heritage Working Group* Wednesday 11th November 2020

- 2.8 Members of the Town Council's *Heritage Working Group* requested a topic-specific discussion with the applicant, which took place via videoconference on 11th November. The applicants' heritage consultants presented a synopsis of their historic research thus far (**Appendix 05**), highlighting in particular the importance of Newbury's industrial heritage on both a local and national level.

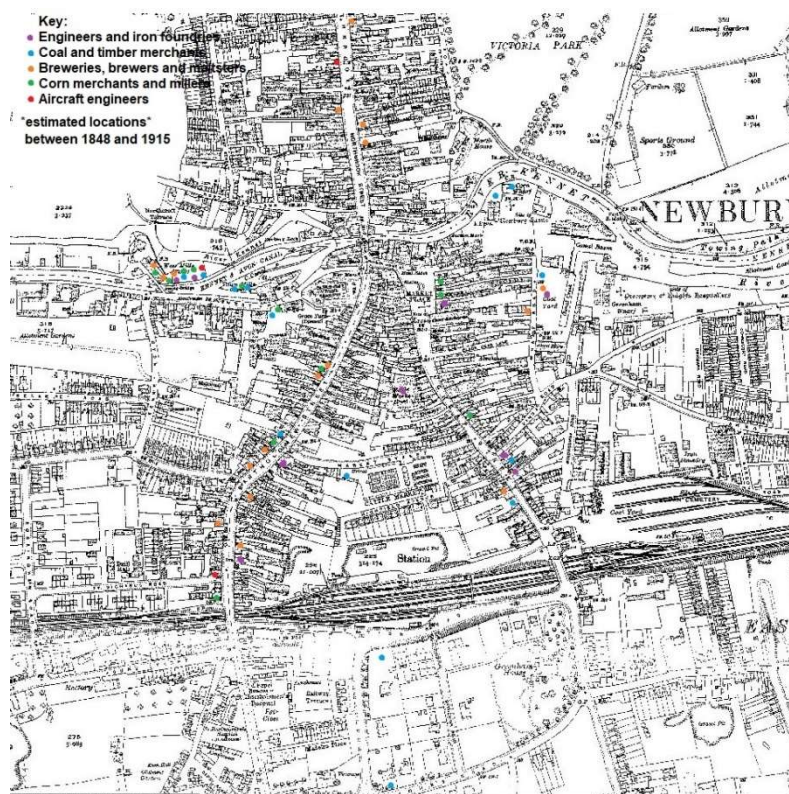


Figure 2: Extract from the heritage presentation to Town Council members on 11th November 2020

- 2.9 Members of the Town Council's *Heritage Working Group* were able to make valuable contributions that expanded the applicants' understanding and appreciation of the heritage of the site and the wider town.

Meeting 5: Planning & Highways Committee Monday 16th November 2020

- 2.10 The applicants' preapplication consultation was then considered by the Town Council *Planning & Highways Committee* as per their agenda at **Appendix 06**. The minutes of that meeting (**Appendix 07**) confirm that the Town Council did not adopt a view on the proposals at their November meeting, but rather simply noted that a formal planning application would be submitted in due course and that they would formulate their formal comments at that time.
- 2.11 The applicant will continue to engage with the Town Council following the submission of a formal planning application.

3.0 Local Authority pre-application consultation

- 3.1 In accordance with Government guidance and acknowledged best practice, the applicant has entered into a pre-application discussions with the Local Authority to facilitate timely and detailed technical pre-application advice.
- 3.2 To assist in the preparation of the planning application, pre-application advice has been provided at various points by:

Nick Carter, Chief Executive, West Berkshire Council
 Joseph Holmes, Executive Director (Resources), West Berkshire Council
 Councillor Lynne Doherty, Leader, West Berkshire Council
 Bryan Lyttle, Planning & Transport Policy Manager, West Berkshire Council
 Gary Rayner, Development Control Manager, West Berkshire Council
 Sinéad O'Donoghue, Planning Policy Team Leader, West Berkshire Council

Pre-application meeting 1: Monday 23rd September 2019

- 3.3. Prior to the applicant's acquisition of the *Kennet Centre*, the applicant met with Chief Executive and Executive Director (Resources) to talk in general terms about the potential for a comprehensive redevelopment. High-level feedback from Officers was that a mixed-use redevelopment would be acceptable in principle, with:
- 3.3.1 A significantly reduced quantum of retail floorspace
 - 3.3.2 A direct pedestrian link between the railway station and the town centre
 - 3.3.3 The retention or reprovision of the cinema
- 3.4 The meeting included a general high-level discussion about the Local Authority's own future office requirements.

Pre-application meeting 2: Monday 13th January 2020

- 3.5 A project inception meeting to discuss the principles of the development and a consultation framework was held with key Officers from the Local Planning Authority, comprising the Planning & Transport Policy Manager, Development Control Manager, and Planning Policy Team Leader. There was support in principle for the comprehensive redevelopment of the *Kennet Centre*, which Officers recognised had been failing for some time and warranted a comprehensive, masterplanned approach. The principles that had initially been set out by the Chief Executive and Executive Director (Resources) were echoed by the Officers present. The importance of heritage and sustainability considerations was emphasised as the basis of the masterplanning approach.

Pre-application meeting 3: Thursday 14th May 2020

- 3.6 The applicants presented their initial draft masterplan (**Appendix 08**) to the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Executive Director (Resources). Initial feedback was positive, with specific encouragement for the new pedestrianised link through the site, the mix of uses, the retention of the cinema, and the animated ground floor frontages. The importance of heritage and sustainability considerations was underlined, and the applicant was encouraged to submit a more formal preapplication advice request to the Local Planning Authority in order to get more detail comments and advice.

Pre-application meeting 4: Thursday 2nd July 2020

- 3.7 The applicants met with the Executive Director (Resources) to continue to explore the Local Authority's emerging office requirements.

Pre-application meeting 5: Monday 27th July 2020

- 3.8 A detailed presentation was made to the Planning & Transport Policy Manager, Development Control Manager and Planning Policy Team Leader, comprising:

3.8.1 Detailed pre-application advice request (**Appendix 09**)

3.8.2 Heritage, Townscape & Visual Impact Assessment (**Appendix 10**)

- 3.9 Officers' feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with specific support for the:

3.9.1 Mix of uses proposed, including residential

3.9.2 Heritage-informed approach to the site's masterplanning

3.9.3 New link between the station and the town centre, including a clear route towards the Corn Exchange as well as Bartholomew Street

3.9.4 Attractiveness and interest of the new routes through the site

3.9.5 Thoughtful and high-quality materials palette

- 3.10 Only a limited number of matters suggested for further consideration:

3.10.1 Ensuring the use of high quality materials

3.10.2 Successfully integrating the cinema into the development

- 3.11 In light of this very positive feedback from the Local Planning Authority, the applicants proceeding to the full public consultation set out in **Section 4** of this statement.

Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Request: Monday 11th November 2020

- 3.12 The applicants submitted a formal request (**Appendix 11**) for the Local Planning Authority's to determine whether or not the proposed development might have any significant environmental effects such that a full *Environmental Statement* would be required to support the application.

- 3.13 On 1st December 2020 the Local Planning Authority published its screening opinion (**Appendix 12**) pursuant to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulation 2017 confirming that the proposed development does not constitute 'Environmental Impact Assessment development', and therefore that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would not be required as part of the decision-making process.

Summary

- 3.14 The applicant has sought, and has taken into account, detailed technical comment and advice provided by the Local Authority throughout the pre-application preparation, refinement and collation process.

- 3.15 The technical advice that has been received has informed the suite of supporting documents submitted with this application. Preapplication consultation in respect of each technical discipline is summarised within the respective supporting document.

4.0 Stakeholder & community engagement

4.1 Discussions with both the Town Council and the Local Planning Authority identified a number of key stakeholders that the applicant might consider engaging with, in addition to the applicant's intended public exhibition.

4.2 All current *Kennet Centre* tenants were advised of the broader public consultation before it was published.

Newbury Business Improvement District ("BID") meeting 1: Friday 9th October 2020

4.3 The applicant first met with the BID's Chief Executive Officer, Melissa Hughes, in early October to discuss the proposed redevelopment. Initial comments were supportive and the applicant was invited to make a presentation to the BID's members.

Newbury Business Improvement District meeting 2: Wednesday 4th November 2020

4.4 The applicants presented their proposals (**Appendix 13**) to the BID's *Talk of the Town* forum via videoconference. BID members' feedback was positive, particularly welcoming the:

- 4.4.1 Focus on local, independent and artisan retailers
- 4.4.2 Small commercial unit sizes
- 4.4.3 Flexibility for units to be combined or split as demand requires
- 4.4.4 Simple and flexible tenancy options, including the potential for turnover rents
- 4.4.5 Manner in which the leisure/retail/commercial offering would complement other parts of the town centre, rather than competing or detracting from them
- 4.4.6 Positive effect of having more people living in the town, particularly on footfall and vitality/vibrancy
- 4.4.7 Retention of the cinema and its integration into the development

Newbury Business Improvement District letter of support: Friday 29th January 2021

4.5 The applicant was delighted that the BID was able to formally support the proposed redevelopment, as set out in its letter of support at **Appendix 14**.

Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company meeting: Friday 9th October 2020

4.6 The applicant met with the local *Economic Development Company's* Chief Executive Officer (Robyn Brookes) who expressed significant support for the proposed redevelopment. The *Economic Development Company* was dissolved in December 2020.

Public consultation: exhibition Thursday 29th October – Friday 13th November 2020

4.7 The applicant undertook a wide-ranging public consultation which ran for two weeks in October and November 2020. The consultation was publicised in advance with an advertisement (**Appendix 15**) in the *Newbury Weekly News* on both Thursday 29th October 2020 and Thursday 5th November 2020.

4.8 Display boards (**Appendix 16**) explaining the proposed mixed-use redevelopment were prepared by the applicant and left on display in a prominent unit in the *Kennet Centre* throughout the two-week consultation period.

4.9 Throughout the same period a bespoke consultation website www.eaglequarter.com presented the same information with a Q&A feature and comments/feedback section.

- 4.10 Feedback questionnaires from both the exhibition (**Appendix 17**) and the consultation website were collated and assessed once the two-week consultation period had closed.



Figure 3: the public exhibition that ran for two weeks in Autumn 2020

- 4.11 78 respondents completed the applicant's feedback questionnaire at the exhibition. In summary, respondents who attended the physical exhibition commented as follows:

- 4.11.1 When asked whether new streets should be designed for pedestrians and activity rather than through traffic:

56 respondents (72%) supported or strongly supported this

15 respondents (19%) made no comment or were undecided

7 respondents (9%) disagreed

Of those respondents that disagreed, there was a common theme that an undercover indoor shopping centre was preferable to an open-air street.

- 4.11.2 When asked whether a pedestrian street between the railway station and the bus station would be useful:

56 respondents (72%) agreed or strongly agreed

17 respondents (22%) made no comment or were undecided

5 respondents (6%) disagreed

Of those respondents that disagreed, there was the same common theme that an undercover indoor shopping centre was preferable to an open-air street.

- 4.11.3 On the matter of whether the cinema was a facility that should be retained and enhanced:

62 respondents (79%) supported or strongly supported this

14 respondents (18%) made no comment or were undecided

2 respondents (3%) objected

The small minority of respondents who did not value the cinema or wish to see it retained did not elaborate why.

- 4.11.4 When asked whether they thought the town centre would be enhanced and would be a more unique place if it had more independent/specialist shops, restaurants and bars:

56 respondents (72%) agreed or strongly agreed

16 respondents (20%) made no comment or were undecided

6 respondents (8%) disagreed

Of those respondents that disagreed, some cited a preference for named national chain stores currently absent from the town centre, and the remainder did not explain why they disagreed.

- 4.11.5 On being asked whether, if more people lived and worked in the town centre, it would help existing shops and businesses:

60 respondents (77%) agreed or strongly agreed

13 respondents (17%) made no comment or were undecided

5 respondents (6%) disagreed

The small number of respondents who disagreed did not say why.

- 4.11.6 When asked whether we should not longer be relying on fossil fuels in new developments:

56 respondents (72%) agreed or strongly agreed

19 respondents (24%) made no comment or were undecided

3 respondents (3%) disagreed

- 4.12 Respondents were invited to make general comments and observations, which were varied in their nature and covered topics such as:

4.12.1 A current lack of secure cycle parking in the town centre

4.12.2 The need to take internet deliveries into account in the design

4.12.3 A mix of apartments types and sizes

4.12.4 Rents levels that would be affordable for small local businesses

4.12.5 Additional electric vehicle charging points

4.12.6 Using local red bricks as the main building material

4.12.7 How shelter from the elements might be provided

- 4.12 In summary though our analysis of the questionnaire responses from the public exhibition **revealed a significant majority of respondents being supportive of the proposed redevelopment.**

Public consultation: online consultation via www.eaglequarter.com

- 4.13 As set out at **Appendix 18**, there was a total of 380 visits made to the consultation website in the period 29th October – 14th November 2020.
- 4.14 Far fewer online questionnaires were completed compared to those at the physical public exhibition, but there was the same high level of support for the proposed redevelopment from the online respondents as those who completed the paper questionnaires.

Media coverage

- 4.15 The consultation attracted a significant amount of local media coverage, including:
- 4.15.1 A full front page article in the *Newbury Weekly News* on the day the public consultation started (29th October 2020) as well as a ¼ page editorial follow-up on Thursday 5th November, again highlighting the public consultation (**Appendix 19**);
 - 4.15.2 An independent online poll run by the *Newbury Weekly News* (**Appendix 20**) in which 1,905 people voted and 1,289 were in favour of the proposed redevelopment (**68%**);
 - 4.15.3 Articles in *The Penny Post* at www.pennypost.org.uk
 - 4.15.4 Articles in *Newbury Reporting* and the *Reading Chronicle*
 - 4.15.5 Articles in *Thames Tap* at www.ukpropertyforums.com/thamestap
 - 4.16.6 Press releases to a wide range of local and national media outlets, as per the example at **Appendix 21**.

Briefing meeting with Laura Farris MP, Friday 27th November 2020

- 4.16 The applicant presented the proposed redevelopment to the local Member of Parliament, Laura Farris MP, as per the presentation at **Appendix 22**. There was support in principle for the comprehensive redevelopment of the *Kennet Centre* and in particular for the residential element, with more general discussion around:
- 4.16.1 How poorly the shopping centre had been trading in recent years
 - 4.16.2 How independent retailers can be attracted to and accommodated within the redevelopment
 - 4.16.3 The demand in Newbury town centre for flexible start-up office space, suitable for entrepreneurs and the local technology cluster

Summary

- 4.17 The public consultation was well publicised, ran for a two-week period, and confirmed there to be **widespread public support** for the proposed mixed-use redevelopment.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 The public consultation confirmed there to be widespread support for the proposed mixed-use redevelopment.
- 5.2 Consultation with Town Council and the Local Planning Authority has led to amendments to the original draft masterplan, which now form part of the formal planning applications. Those additions and alterations include:
- 5.2.1 Additional flexibility in the commercial units
 - 5.2.2 Enhanced linkages between the development and the retained cinema
 - 5.2.3 The addition of flexible office space suitable for entrepreneurs and small local businesses, particularly in the technology sector
 - 5.2.4 A direct link into the development from the retained multi-storey car park
 - 5.2.5 The addition of secure public cycle parking and additional electric vehicle charging points.
- 5.3 Interested parties have provided comment on a range of matters, which has informed the supporting documentation and technical reports that now accompany the formal planning application.
- 5.4 Given the nature and extent of consultation that has been undertaken, and the manner in which this has demonstrably resulted in amendments to the initial proposals, *National Planning Policy Framework* paragraph 128 is undoubtedly engaged:

“Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.”

- 5.5 This ***Statement of Community Involvement*** sets out the extensive steps that the applicant has taken to engage with the Local Authority and wider community from the inception of the design process, and the overwhelming positive feedback that has been received as a result of that consultation. The application should ***“be looked on more favourably”*** as a result.