

81 Lambeth Walk
London, SE11 6DX

9th May 2025

Hugo Haig Esq.,
Lochailort Newbury Ltd,
Eagle House, 108-110 Jermyn Street,
London, SW1Y 6EE.

Dear Hugo,

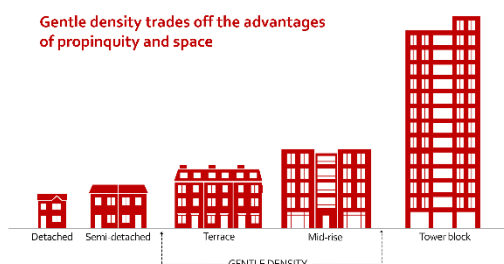
Old Town, Newbury

Thank you so for showing me round Newbury recently and for setting out your vision with such passion, clarity and detail.

Probably the best town centre development being proposed in Britain today

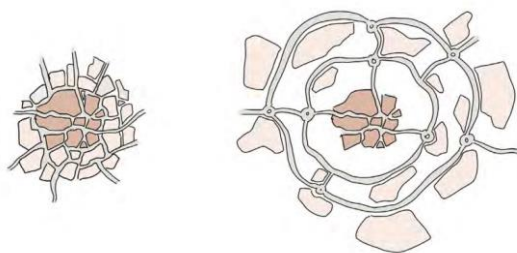
Your 'Old Town, Newbury' proposals are inspiring. They are a perfect example of three core concepts in creating more homes in such a way as to boost local prosperity, increase support for development and encourage sustainable living patterns:

1. *'Gentle density'* optimising advantages of propinquity alongside those of personal space.



Gentle density of terraced homes and mansion blocks

2. *Centripetal not centrifugal growth* creating more homes on less land with less infrastructure spend; tending to support not dissipate local vitality and productivity.



Intensifying centripetal not dissipating centrifugal growth

3. *Restitching towns* to be fine grained 'Lego towns' not desensitising them to be crude-gained 'Duplo towns'.



Restitching from crude-grained 'Duplo towns' to fine-grained 'Lego towns'

'Old Town, Newbury' is very probably the best example of truly regenerative town centre development taking place anywhere in Britain today. It is a triple win for homes, place and sustainability. You, your architects and your entire design and advisory team deserve high praise for your superlative planning application and for the philosophy, care, affection and long-running community engagement that underpins it. Delivered with love and with the necessarily relentless attention to detail, materials and ornament, your proposals should be transformational for the long-term prosperity, resilience and vitality of Newbury by bringing around 950 residents in 317 homes back into the town centre and by re-establishing town centre-living as aspirational and attractive.

This beautiful 're-stitching' of Newbury's town centre will not just revitalise town centre shops and businesses. It will also permit your new residents to live more healthily and to tread more lightly upon the planet by supporting lives within readily walkable reach of shops, restaurants, neighbours and friends. This is the most efficient and the most effective path to 'sustainable development.' As renowned climate scientist, Professor Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, put it to me recently in a podcast, 'we need regenerative architecture and places.' You are exemplifying this and bringing it to life.

What makes this approach so special

Making use of elements of the 'well designed place' framework in the National Model Design Guide and Code (below), amongst the elements that my colleagues and I at Create Streets would particularly praise are:

- *A profound response to the local context:* this is a deeply considered scheme responding to the history and nature of Newbury and of English market towns more widely. As towns grew in size and complexity, many central historic burgage plots with their narrow fronts and long deep form evolved into courts or alleys, some with homes, some with workshop, some private, some public. As the 1880 map of Newbury eloquently shows, this was very much the case in Newbury. Very many of these homes within the courts of former burgage plots survive within Newbury as we explored. Your proposed 'web' of new streets, mews, alleys and courts captures perfectly this tightly knit tapestry of town centre homes and people-focused streets. Your proposed range of place names (such as Crown Court and Eagle Yard) lovingly 'pick up' the

physical and human history of the town. And you are quite right to suggest iron gateways and arches, again echoing a clear pattern throughout the town, very probably in many cases using iron from the former Eagle Works on your site. Your pattern book of iron designs is a joy.



Houses in former courts within Newbury: a humane and sustainable typology that you are sensibly renewing and taking into the twenty first century



Historic iron gates and archways (left and centre) very possibly forged on your site: a design detail that you are rightly and carefully reviving with your joyful pattern book (right).

Walking through or entering the centre of Newbury, particularly from the train station, will be profoundly improved by this important development. At present the pedestrian walking through the Weaver's Yard development is presented with an ugly and featureless blank wall, the acme of post-war traffic modernism, of town centre as a bulwark for cars. This will be transformed into a welcome vista along Plenty's Place.



Walking into Newbury will be transformed from a repulsing fortress to an enticing vista

- **An inspiringly clear local identity:** most new British development remains ugly and faceless, trapped by a conceptual obsession with the 'spirit of the age' which, over a century since Adolf Loos first complained that ornament was crime', means that most architects are still scared of properly detailing a façade. This results in new buildings

which, even if they echo their surrounds' height and materials, are nevertheless crude and feature-less. Most designers like this 'honesty.' Most developers and planners have come to assume that it is the 'only way.' However, many polls and multiple pricing studies consistently shows that strong majorities of the public, old and young, rich and poor, left wing and right wing, categorically do not. This predictable difference in opinion is the 'design disconnect.'¹ You deserve huge credit for casting off these 'mind forged manacles' and for daring to design buildings whose complexity, detail and materials assertively rhyme and repeat the history and character of Newbury and Berkshire. Walking around the town with you comparing corbels and quoins, flush pointing and Flemish bond it is very clear that this desire to create a place that is 'of Newbury' is at the kernel of your plans. I am delighted to see that both the Conservation Officer and Historic England are supporting this application. Quite right.

- *Your built form is both learning from tradition and displaying modern innovation.* Your 'traditional' development with alleys, terraced houses, English bricks and textured patterns is firmly allied with innovation of technology and techniques. Your ground source heat pumps and proposed roof lights, roof gardens and internal glass partitions will create a more comfortable and sustainable neighbourhood.
- *Your approach to movement will create healthy and sustainably living patterns.* The evidence is very clear that people tend to lead healthier, happier and more neighbourly when they walk more frequently in everyday life.² By your development's location, by creating walkable streets of terraced houses and by limiting on plot parking you are certainly creating a place which will encourage everyday walking. This in turn will allow your new residents to tread more lightly upon the planet and normally correlates with higher long term values, often 10 to 20 per cent more like for like.³
- *Nature: your tree and plant-lined street design is the best way to 'green up' little and often.* It will certainly improve not just your new residents' lives but also the liveability and attraction of Newbury itself. The evidence is unambiguous that more tree-lined streets are more valuable and more walkable, conducive to neighbourly behaviour and supportive of more comfortable summertime temperatures, sometimes cooling by up to 12°C.⁴ The most effective approach to maximising the health and wellbeing consequences of urban greenery are to layer it 'little and often' everywhere as you are doing here. This will also of course help offset carbon. My team and I would encourage you to consider Dutch examples for how to encourage resident-led 'greening up' as well as the charming British mews examples that your rightly cite.

¹ [Architecture-for-Architects-Milner-Salingaros.pdf](#)

² [createstreets.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/MoveFree_190324_CreateStreets.pdf](#)

³ Boys Smith *et al* (2017), *Beyond Location*.

⁴ [createstreets.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Greening-Up-061123.pdf](#)



The Dutch 'tegelwippen' approach gives residents the right to plant outside their front doors on

- *By creating streets to live in and walk all your urban infrastructure will also act as public spaces.* The best streets are not just places to pass through but places to be. The proposed highway and carriageway design with 'greening up' should achieve this. They also situate hundreds of new homes within easy reach of important urban and green public space in the Market Place and along the Kennet and Avon Canal as well as the wider countryside beyond.
- *Uses: focusing on homes is totally right in the context.* Critically, this proposal will bring homes, families, owner-occupiers and renters back *en masse* into the town centre. Over the last century, many of our town centres 'went wrong' as they 'zoned' residents out of towns and tried to reinvent themselves as purely retail or commercial zones. This approach has proved deeply resilient and unsustainable. Town centres need people living in them and aspiring to live in them if they are to weather the unknowable storms of the future. With a chronic undersupply of homes across the south of England, with West Berkshire's housing target increasing 118 per cent from 495 to 1,078 and with a very generous supply of shops nearby, creating 317 new homes will provide nearly 30 per cent per cent of the local councils housing requirement.⁵ It will also provide customers and footfall for local shops and restaurants, potentially around £5m of per annum local retail spend as well as a wider boost to the local economy.⁶ This is exemplary 'gentle density', centripetal not centrifugal development which is good for people, prosperity and the landscape.
- *The split of home sizes will intensify the prosperity boost provided by the scheme.* 77 per cent of the homes are one or two bedrooms. It is quite right to provide lots of smaller homes for a well-located site such as this. This will be a perfect location for older residents and for first time buyers.
- *By building with brick you are, quite rightly, creating buildings with a long potential lifespan* in contrast to the ridiculously short lifespan of the failed shopped centre that you are replacing. We would encourage you to create streets and homes for hundreds of years not dozens. This is the path to true sustainability and durability.

⁵ [lhn-outcome-of-the-new-method.ods](#)

⁶ [Old-Town-Newbury-Economic-Benefits-Report.pdf](#)



You are hitting the target of 'Well designed place' framework from the National Model Design Code PPG⁷

Your process and popularity

It is notable that throughout you have engaged with public preferences in evolving your design. Of the twelve public comments available on the West Berkshire portal at the time of writing (9 May 2025), ten are supportive and only two are opposed, both on grounds of noise pollution from The Catherine Wheel pub. This is a legitimate concern but one that is manageable. It strongly corroborates your own February 2025 *Statement of Community Engagement* which records that all of the 50 responses you received were supportive.⁸ I am not surprised. From Create Streets's wider work into public preferences across the UK and internationally, this wider public support is highly predictable. People generally welcome development that is not too massive in scale and is sufficiently textured and local in design. As one member of the public has put it in a supportive message;

*'This application respects Newbury's historic streets and architecture and I think harmonise and blend in with our remaining local historical buildings. I think it will improve Newbury as the Kennet Centre has no local architectural merit.'*⁹

The Newbury Society, despite some reservations, also regards the application as 'an asset to Newbury and to the town centre conservation area.'¹⁰

It is also notable that both you and your architects have set great store on the importance of hand drawing. As your architects put it;

'All of this had to be done by hand, i.e. drawn the old-fashioned way, the right way, with a pen on paper. This gives the designer the essential freedom to put down a line and then instantly challenge themselves over it to ensure the designer gets the best possible result for the creation.'

⁷ [National Model Design Code - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ [Old-Town-Statement-of-Community-Involvement-FV.pdf](#)

⁹ [25/00391/FULMAJ | 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 resident's ancillary facilities; commercial floorspace \(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 block and additional floor to multi storey car park. | The Mall The Kennet Centre Newbury RG14 5EN](#)

¹⁰ [Old Town Proposal - The Newbury Society](#)

We consistently find that the best schemes are those which dare to use hand drawing and 'unleash' the love of texture, detail and ornament that is innate. It would seem that this is taking place on this project.

Parking forward

In many towns, 're-stitching' schemes of this nature have been rendered unachievable by undeliverably high parking requirements that fail to adjust for the town-centre nature of the homes as opposed to the differing requirements created by suburban or rural new homes. Sensibly, West Berkshire Council have not placed too high a burden on this development. Central Newbury appears to be more than adequately provided with parking space, many of which lie unused much of the time. The scheme ingeniously makes use of the existing Kennet Centre car park, which you own and which you have leased to West Berkshire District Council. You propose building an extra storey on the car park as well as providing 80 spaces on the site. You are also providing three car club places, which can reduce the need for cars outside London by up to 20 per place each.¹¹ My expectation is that the use of cars on site will reduce in future years particularly if you are able to provide more car club places which I would encourage.

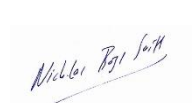
Opportunities and risks

As you are aware, and as both the Conservation Officer and Historic England observe, a 'finely-grained', walkable and gentle density scheme of this nature will be very visible to those walking by. The quality and the locational appeal of the windows, the doors, the bricks and the iron work will not just influence the lives of those living within but also of those walking besides as they visit Newbury town centre to shop, dine or relax. The control of material and design quality will be crucial to the long-term success of this scheme. I would therefore strongly recommend your own personal ongoing focus and a rigorous process of 'internal critical challenge' during delivery.

* * *

In conclusion, Newbury Town Council rightly aspire to 'making Newbury a town we can all be proud of.' This is a very, very good way to achieve that. I sincerely hope that the local planning authority are wise enough to seize the opportunity that you are creating for the town of Newbury and for all who care for it.

Yours sincerely



Nicholas Boys Smith MBE

Founder and Chairman, Create Streets

¹¹ [6810c3d44eec2eaf38bd6687_CoMoUK Annual car club report 2024.pdf](#)