



Buxton Civic Association
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Buxton Civic Association Ltd,
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Andrew Stokes
Chief Executive
High Peak Borough Council

14/02/2021

Dear Andrew and colleagues,

BCA formal response on priorities for the Future High Street Fund scheme for Buxton as of February 2021

As requested at our last meeting, the BCA Future High Streets Working Group have taken another in detail look at the draft proposals for this scheme and identified elements that we see as high and low priority in the face of changes that may be required by the reduced offer of grant from the government. These were shared as recommendations to our Board of Trustees who have unanimously approved them as the formal position of BCA. We have also circulated your online questionnaire by email to all our members (now nearly 700) and have asked them to respond individually. We have encouraged the public to do the same via our social media feeds.

We greatly appreciate the increased efforts that you have made to develop closer working relationships over this crucial project with ourselves, Buxton Town Team and Vison Buxton as the key Civic stakeholders in the town. We also thank you for bringing the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council into our regular discussions on the issue.

BCA formal response

While we welcome the ongoing opportunities to help shape the future of this project, BCA's position remains one of concern about the ideas as shared in the original Masterplan. We welcome the fact that at our last meeting on 3rd February you all reiterated that the proposals within that plan remain indicative at this stage and that there is still considerable scope for changing these as the project progresses.

BCA broadly welcomes the proposal that the Council attempt to purchase The Springs Shopping Centre and surrounding land on the basis that public ownership of this key area of the town centre should provide more public say over its future, both in the short term for this project, and the long-term future if the shopping centres continue to decline. Interestingly we note that Councils all over the country are being increasingly forced into this stance with similar shopping centres.

We continue to be very disappointment about the quality and depth of the Council's public consultation exercises on this project. We found the current online questionnaire to be particularly shallow and unhelpful. We look forward to more meaningful and lengthy engagement with the public when the options for the final masterplan are being formulated.

In response to the Council's request to identify priority elements of the project, we have identified elements that we consider high or low priority and items which we recommend should be dropped completely. We have looked beyond the list of eight elements in your online consultation. The items are not in any specific order of priority within these categories.



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High priority elements to keep in the project

- All possible improvements to the High Street itself (i.e. Spring Gardens) should be given top priority. This includes grants for converting upper floors to residential and commercial use.
- The public realm proposals, including landscaping, planting, lighting, child orientated play sculptures etc. – we recognise that the Council is limited by Government to just 5% of the grant being spent on public realm improvements, but urge the Council to find ways of adding additional funds (either from their own resources or from others) to input to this crucial element of the proposed development.
- The new town centre residential developments, so long as they are genuinely ecologically friendly – see our original suggestion of a town centre eco-village.
- Work with the new owners of the old M&S unit to use it, ideally as a through route between Spring Gardens and The Springs Shopping Centre, and as a key part, or focal point of the development.
- Make provision for moving the Library to centre of town, possibly into the former M&S building. We would urge the Council and County Council to see this as a multifunctional community hub.
- The Station Forecourt redevelopment, but with a more radical proposal including a better public transport hub, cycle hire and links to the new health centre.
- A better linking route from the station to the town centre, rather than just to the Springs Shopping Centre, to replace the steps idea. Roddie MacLean has designed an alternative scheme to achieve this which would provide a much more organic connection with the town (see attached sketch). This could still be designed to provide an access to the Springs Shopping centre but would crucially provide the much-needed link from the station to the town centre and Spring Gardens itself for visitors, rather than funnelling them all through the unattractive shopping centre.
- The provision of public toilets in the Western end of the Shopping Centre to help address the need in the centre of town

Items we see as low priority

- The River Wye Square in its present design - this needs to be bigger and refocused with possible shop or cafe frontages on the end of the M&S building, rather than the proposed pods which lead to an unhelpful narrowing of the space around the river. More width is required to make any terracing down to the river effective.
- The large out of scale new buildings on the current car park. These should be more in scale with the nearby townscape.

Items to drop

- The steps from the railway station.
- The development of a new building for an FE college. Buxton has several significant older buildings currently looking for a new use in the town which should be used to house this.
- The cafe/restaurant pods facing the Wye square. This would enable the square to be widened out and better terracing down to the river to be included.
- The dependence on underground car parking. High standard multi-storey car parking should instead be developed to the north of the station (we know this is just outside the project boundary but it should not stop the Council pursuing this solution in parallel with the FHSF scheme) with limited underground car parking for residents and users with disabilities within the development.
- The picture frame at end of Spring Gardens.



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We understand that these points are in general agreement with comments being made by Vision Buxton and Buxton Town Team.

We had a go at trying to answer your online questionnaire but found that it was difficult to give coherent answers. We would prefer that you take this as a more in depth and meaningful response.

BCA looks forward to continuing to work with the Council to help mould a final scheme for this project that can be as beneficial as possible for the environment of Buxton and its people.

Please can you ensure that this response is shared with all relevant colleagues within the Council.

Yours sincerely

Peter

Peter Phillipson
Chair, BCA

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