

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990**

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| **APPELLANTS NAME:** | c/o Agent |
| **APPEAL SITE**: | Land to Rear of , 8 - 13 High Street, Calne, Wiltshire, SN11 8JQ |
| **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**: | 39 Apartments for older people, Guest Apartment, Communal Facilities, Access, Car Parking, Landscaping and 4 Retail Units |
| **INSPECTORATE REFERENCE**: | APP/Y3940/W/19/3224155 |
| **APPEAL START DATE:** | 11 November 2019 |

I am writing on behalf of Calne Our Place (COP) to oppose, in the strongest possible terms, the above planning appeal by Churchill to the refusal of their original planning application.

COP is an independent voluntary community group that has for the last five years been working to improve the Calne area for residents, businesses, tourists and visitors. It has achieved or greatly assisted in a number of successful projects resulting in significant improvements in the town’s appearance to residents, visitors and tourists:

• The Great West Way tourist initiative,

• Branding the town as ‘A Town of Discovery’, the design and installation of road entry signs, production of a promotional video Calne A to B (Avebury to Bowood), development of a web site VisitCalne.co.uk integrated with the Visit Wiltshire website,

• Designation and promotion of Calne Heritage Quarter, installation of town finger board signs and map signs, and the Heritage Quarter car park signs.

Recently, COP has undertaken a review of its aims and objectives which have resulted in a number of initiatives intended to be aligned with the Calne Neighbourhood Plan. One of the main initiatives concerns working, with other stakeholders, to improve the appearance and vitality of the town centre.

What COP seeks to achieve is to promote a feeling of self-empowerment within the community. It was felt that a positive attitude and approach to give something a try, rather than wait for someone in ‘authority’ to take care of an issue would make a big difference in the future success of the Calne area. This approach has already proved successful.

*“When communities get involved they tend to have very positive outcomes – they know what their community needs. There are huge amounts of potential from community led regeneration in town centres.”* (Linsay Chalmers, community development manager at Community Land Scotland).

However, for this ‘community solution’ to work, it requires trust from all sides. Unfortunately, that there can be a disconnect between politicians and the community which can result in stagnation and discontent.

Calne Town and Calne Without Parish Council worked together with businesses and residents on the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan to safeguard and future proof the Calne and Calne Without neighbourhood area. This was to ensure development follows infrastructure, not the other way around, ensure the creation of employment, to tackle issues important for the town and surrounding parishes and create a framework of where and how we can achieve the community’s aspirations for the future. Equally, it will protect the community’s heritage and improve and support tourism in the area. The Neighbourhood Plan was approved or ‘made’ on 6th February 2018 yet this planning application appears not to conform to the spirit of the Plan and its requirements.

In Calne town centre, residents, visitors and tourists expect to find the usual facilities of a traditional market town, i.e. more retail activity, vibrant enterprise culture, opportunities to socialise, some green spaces – but not a large, out of scale, block of predominantly residential accommodation for only one category of occupant.

We have all seen the horror news headlines depicting the slow death of the town centres and Calne is not immune from this particular illness. A recent walk through (October 2019) the town revealed there was a vacancy rate of about 15%. UK data for April 2019 from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) gave the average national town centre vacancy rate of 10.2 per cent. Thus Calne has a retail vacancy rate about 50% higher than average for the UK, unfortunately, a number of the vacancies in Calne are in prominent locations and some are large premises making these vacancies highly visible. Empty premises discourage both shoppers and visitors engendering a negative feedback cycle that reduces the economic health of the town centre. Yet this planning application seeks to introduce 4 additional retail outlets that will directly or indirectly add to vacancy rates.

When the original planning application was presented to Calne Town Council, COP conducted a survey of the surrounding residents and businesses in order to understand their views. As part of this survey, 5000 leaflets were distributed that ‘signposted’ an accompanying on-line survey (SurveyHero.com). The analysis of the results shows the following:-

* Residents – 99.15% / Business – 0.85% (all within SN11 postcode)
* Total on-line responses (yes/no):-
  + **473 responses** (9.46%)
  + Question: Do you support the Churchill application – Yes 13%, No 87%
* Total on-line comments:-
  + **472 comments** (Supporting application – 18.8%, Rejecting – 81.2%)
  + Each of these comments was themed against (Neighbourhood Plan) Key Objectives with the highest number of comments recorded against the **Key Objective No.1 ‘Provide an exciting and vibrant centre which supports an active community.’** This resulted in **4% supporting** the planning application and using this Objective in support. In comparison there were **36% rejecting** the application using this Objective in support.

A 2nd on-line survey was conducted in May 2019. Results for the 3 questions:

• Do you agree that the scale of the proposed development is out of keeping with the local area - and would result in harm to the setting of the Grade II Listed Building Zion Chapel, and the character and appearance of the Calne Conservation Area?

**84% Agree**

• This proposal is likely to generate an increase in pedestrians and the use of wheelchairs/mobility aids on highways in the area. The pavement immediately outside is already narrow and inadequate for pedestrians. Do you agree that the proposals do not make adequate provision for pedestrians to access local facilities, with consequent additional hazards to all users of the highway?

**85% Agree**

• Do you agree that the proposal does not address the community aspirations for the site and therefore is contrary to the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan and Town Centre Masterplan?

**86% Agree**

Since the planning appeal process has begun, an on-line petition was started asking the community to support the appeal against current Churchill development plans. The petition was only on-line a few weeks and has already accumulated **293** **responses**, not all from the Calne area though, but a good percentage was. There were **28 comments**, all were against the application. A typical comment was "*I want the Calne town plan, formulated by the Calne town council to be implemented, breathing new life into the centre of Calne. I do not want a retirement building in the middle of the community that brings no benefit to the centre of Calne. This project is purely profit driven by developers with no regard to the social consequences for the town"*

Calne is well supported by community events which, the Bike Meet, fill the town with people enjoying themselves. However with this development at the heart of the town centre the flat owners are unlikely to welcome the noise and disruption of large scale community events - which would be a great pity for the majority of the town’s residents if these newcomers opposed them.

The potential new owners will not welcome the noise of deliveries from nearby stores in the early morning - which only emphasises that this is the wrong development in the wrong place. As the two surveys show, the town doesn’t want it.

**Summary**

Analysis of the two community surveys shows an overwhelming rejection of this planning application (87% rejection) which followed the overwhelming rejection of the similar McCarthy Stone application.

COP, alongside other community organisations, are working tirelessly to improve the appearance and vitality of Calne and based on survey comments, this proposal will make that task so much harder.

The revised application by Churchill offers purely cosmetic changes to their original plans. This development of retirement homes is in the wrong place. It would ruin all future development of a mixed housing, retail, social, community and environmental friendly space in Calne town centre. The proposed site is a critically important location to the regeneration of the centre of Calne.

Without being political, it seems strange that an important planning decision, supported by Neighbourhood Plan, the town council and the overwhelming community could be overturned by Wiltshire Council!

For all the above reasons, Calne Our Place strongly opposes this planning appeal from Churchill to build 39 apartments for older people on this site. We ask the committee to listen to the Voices of the Community.

**Voices of the community**

* "The Community Neighbourhood plan has been agreed by residents and so this should not be done because it goes against that."
* "Tree’s being planted would be better; I would love to see that area tidied and made useful for recreation and wildlife, rather than filled by buildings."
* "Already limited car parking for shops. This would bring Calne to grinding halt by the Pippin."
* “I disagree with this development on the basis it’s against the neighbourhood plan and restricts community use in the town centre"
* “We don't want it here, put it somewhere else that's ok"
* "There is no provision for public green space or community facilities. Another private development for the use of residents only will add nothing to our town centre. We do need affordable housing for older people but not in this form."
* "It goes against our agreed community neighbourhood plan. It has already been rejected: it beggars belief that it seems to have been put forward again! This is diminishing local democracy. Calne needs to build strong community bonds by investing in its people. This space should be used for community projects."
* "Calne needs more to bring visitors in, not more housing."
* "This was already rejected for good reason and as others have said, Calne needs more business and community development, not more housing for people with no extra facilities."
* "I have just moved to Calne and moved here because it is a small town with a history. And more building and the place will lose its charm."
* "This development provides benefit for the minority and not the majority of our wider town needs. Retirement apartments can be outside of town without issue, whereas much needed local shops can’t."