

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

URBAN DESIGN

Officer name:

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Application No: PL-2026-04365

Proposal: *The construction of a new 60 bed Care Home with associated landscaping and car parking facilities on the former site of the Co-op store accessed from Mill Street. The development also includes 7 Assisted Living units to the north on the former car park accessed from The Pippen. Both sites are linked by existing pedestrian bridges across the River Marden. The demolition of the Co-op store has been approved under a separate application (PL/2025/02050).*

Site Address: Co-operative Food, Mill Street, Calne, SN11 0HT

Case Officer: Isobella Wise

Reference:

Application files indexed 25.08.26

Policy and guidance:

- Wiltshire Core Strategy, Core Policy 57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping' (Abbreviated CP57)
- Wiltshire Design Guide – Wiltshire Council Supplementary Planning Document adopted 25th March 2024 (abbreviated WDG)
- Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan 2 2023-2038-Part A The Plan
- Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan 2 2023-2038-Part B Design Guidelines and Codes
- National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG December 2024) (abbreviated NPPF)
- National Design Guide (MHCLG January 2021) (abbreviated NDG)
- Building for a Healthy Life (Homes England June 2020) (referenced in the NPPF) (abbreviated BfHL)
- Streets for a Healthy Life: A companion guide to Building for a Healthy Life (Homes England) (abbreviated SFHL)

Note: Proposed update to NPPF expected March 2026 and incorporation of NDG, NMDC Parts 1 & 2, and BfHL/SfHL in a 'Design and Place making Planning Practice Guidance' document (DPPPG) expected shortly also.

Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping': A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality.

The NPPF recognises the role of design review in ensuring high standards of design and we encourage major development proposals to be independently assessed at an early stage in the process. The NPPF

indicates “significant weight” is be given to designs “which help raise the standard of design more generally in an area”. The draft NPPF intends to increase this to “substantial weight”. Where a project has a design review, we will consider the panel's recommendations in our planning process and decisions. The Council’s Urban Design Team can provide further information on this process on request.

Observations

A pre-application submission relating to the redevelopment of the site has previously been considered by the Council, and urban design comments were issued as part of that process. The current application has therefore been assessed having regard to both the submitted proposals and the previous pre-application correspondence.

Objection

This consultation response considers the urban design, townscape and placemaking aspects of the proposed redevelopment of 1-3 Mill Street. The site occupies a prominent and sensitive location within the Calne Conservation Area, adjacent to the River Marden and in close proximity to a number of heritage assets. As such, it is important that the development demonstrates a high standard of design, responds positively to local character and reinforces the qualities that define this part of Calne.

Whilst the principle of redeveloping this prominent brownfield site is supported, and a number of matters raised through the pre-application process have been addressed, significant concerns remain regarding the architectural quality of the proposed development, its response to local character, and the quality of placemaking achieved. For the reasons set out below, it is considered that the scheme does not currently satisfy the design quality requirements of Core Policy 57 and Policy BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan.

Reasons

- 1) It is acknowledged that urban design comments have been reviewed following the pre-application submission and that the gables facing Mill Street have been removed and the massing reduced to two storeys in this location. However, notwithstanding these improvements, the overall architectural design is not considered to meet the standard of design quality required by Core Policy 57, Policy BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan, or the statutory objective of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Calne Conservation Area.

The proposed elevations lack the degree of refinement, hierarchy and contextual response expected within this prominent Conservation Area setting. Given the site's location within the Calne Conservation Area, development should not only preserve but positively contribute to local character, townscape quality and the significance of the historic environment. Core Policy 57 seeks high quality design that responds positively to local context and creates a strong sense of place, whilst Policy BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan requires development to reflect and reinforce local distinctiveness.

The Mill street elevation is one of the principal public frontages of the scheme which directly engages with the historic street patterns and architectural vernacular of the conservation area. Whilst the use of pitched gables provides visual variation, these elements appear applied to the façade rather than forming a coherent and authentic expression of the building's form. As such, they appear somewhat superficial and are not considered to reflect the prevailing character of

Calne's historic streetscape, where linear building forms and parallel roof ridges are more commonly observed on streets.

The window proportions also warrant further consideration. The openings appear overly wide and square in proportion, which is at odds with the more vertically proportioned fenestration commonly associated with Calne's historic buildings. Taller, more slender window proportions would assist in creating a stronger visual rhythm, improve the overall composition of the elevation and provide a more contextual response to the surrounding townscape.

At ground floor level on the Mill Street elevation, the extensive areas of glazing create a modern shopfront like appearance which is not entirely characteristic of the historic streets surrounding the site. Whilst store fronts are seen nearby these are often with slight projecting timber elements and not floor level glazing. Having an active frontage here with uses which are also beneficial to the wider community is welcomed however.

In addition, the horizontal separation of materials across the façades is not considered to be characteristic of the local vernacular. The strong horizontal base element draws attention to the width of the building and conflicts with the prevailing vertical emphasis evident within many historic buildings in the town centre. A more vertically ordered composition, supported by a consistent fenestration hierarchy and material palette, would help create a more elegant and contextually responsive façade.

Recommendation: The elevations should be further refined to introduce a more coherent architectural language, with greater emphasis placed on vertically proportioned openings, a more contextually derived roof composition, amending the articulation of glazed ground floor openings and a façade treatment that reflects the vertical rhythm and material character of the historic townscape. This would better align with the objectives of Core Policy 57, the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan and the Calne Design Guidelines and Codes.

The challenge of designing a typology like a care home, with a high number of units, whilst balancing the need to create a building that is articulated in a way which is respectful to a historic urban centre like Calne is recognised. In this context perhaps the most appropriate example for a building which is accommodating a large amount of individual rooms is the Lansdown Strand Hotel and one possible approach could be to adopt design principles that this exemplifies. This too is a building with a long two storey elevation (approx. 40m).

- Firstly the windows are a largely uniform size and they adopt vertically emphasised Georgian proportions, characterised by a strong height to width ratio which gives the elevations a sense of elegance, rhythm and verticality.
- The Windows also adopt a rhythmic composition often paired together with a larger gap between pairings of windows.
- Windows also have well-defined reveals which provide depth and shadow to the façade, helping to articulate the elevations and create a more refined architectural composition. This can be achieved also with a more contemporary approach as can be seen below in the examples which adopt a tapering slim profile.
- Downpipes can also provide vertical articulation and there are further design options regarding these to enhance design quality such as recessing them.
- The façade is a consistent material and there is no base with a different material finish.



Landsdown Strand Hotel – Calne



Tall Georgian Window proportions on a contemporary scheme (Maccreanor Lavington Architects, Accordia)



Darbshire House – Niall McLaughlin architects. Here elegant tapered reveals have been used to provide depth, articulation and shadow to the façade.

- 2) Whilst the proposed architectural treatment seeks to break down the mass of the north eastern block, the building continues to read as a single large volume, particularly when viewed from the riverside corridor and surrounding public realm. The overall composition retains similarities with the existing Co-op building which had a steep mansard roof and was regarded as being incongruous with the Calne Conservation Area.

The previous urban design advice recommended the introduction of dual pitched roofs separated by a valley in this location. This approach would have helped to reduce the apparent massing of the building, create a more varied and contextually responsive roofscape and better reflect the traditional roof forms and hierarchy characteristic of Calne's historic townscape. The current roof arrangement is not considered to successfully achieve these objectives and consequently lacks the architectural quality expected by Core Policy 57, the NPPF and the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan Design Codes.

Recommendation: The applicant should revisit the roof design of the north-eastern block and explore the introduction of dual pitched roofs with a central valley, or an alternative roof strategy that achieves a comparable reduction in perceived mass and bulk. Any revised approach should demonstrate how the roofscape responds to the established character of Calne's historic townscape, creates a more legible building composition, and assists in breaking down the scale of the development when viewed from the River Marden corridor, The Pippin and surrounding public spaces. The example below is one possible approach of how a dual roof pitch can help break down a massing.



Dual pitched roofs with a valley can help break down the massing of a deep block which would otherwise have a large single roof

- 3) As noted under Point 1, the overall architectural approach would benefit from further refinement to ensure the scheme achieves the level of design quality expected within this sensitive Conservation Area context. Whilst a more ordered roofscape aligned with the street pattern is considered appropriate along the Mill Street frontage, there is an opportunity for the riverside elevation to adopt a more varied and distinctive architectural expression.

Historically, rear elevations often exhibited a more informal and relaxed character than principal street frontages, creating a clear distinction between public and private faces of buildings. The current proposal does not fully capitalise on this opportunity and the riverside elevation risks appearing as a continuation of the front elevation rather than a distinct elevation responding to its unique setting.

The introduction of pitched gables and greater roofscape articulation on the river facing elevation could help create a more legible and memorable approach from the River Marden. This would strengthen the building's relationship with the waterside setting, provide a more distinctive identity when viewed from the bridge and public footpaths, and assist in breaking down the perceived mass of the development. A more varied roofscape would also help create a hierarchy between the formal Mill Street frontage and the softer riverside elevation, reflecting the differing character of these spaces.

Such an approach would align with the principles of Building for a Healthy Life, which promote memorable, legible places with distinctive character, whilst helping to create a more clearly defined rear elevation that responds positively to the river corridor.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to introducing additional roofscape articulation to the river-facing elevation, potentially using pitched gables or other elements that create a looser and more informal composition. This would help establish a more distinctive riverside identity, improve legibility, strengthen the relationship with the River Marden and provide a clearer

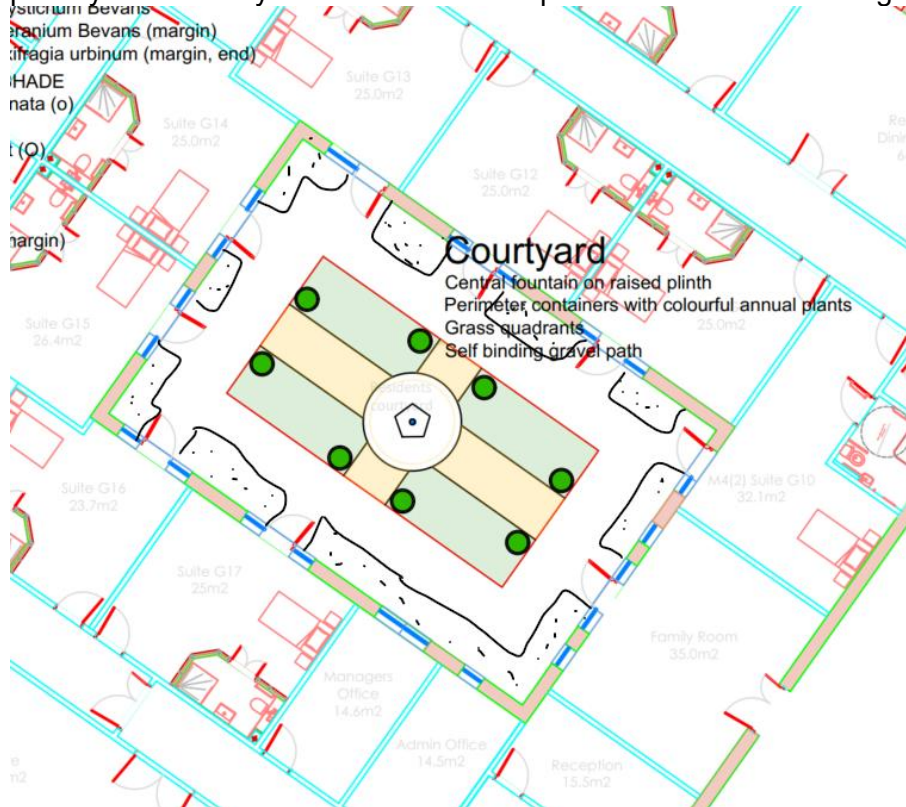
distinction between the principal street frontage and rear elevation. It is important that any gables form a genuine component of the building's massing rather than appearing as applied decorative elements. As identified at pre-application stage, there is a risk that superficially applied features can create a 'stage-set' appearance, where articulation is perceived as cosmetic rather than an authentic expression of the building's form. Any proposed gables should therefore contribute meaningfully to breaking down the massing and enhancing the overall composition of the roofscape, as can be seen in the precedent imagery.



Possible approaches to the roof design. Changing the direction of the roof pitches can also help create a more dynamic and memorable design which would be beneficial when approaching from the Riverside.

- 4) The courtyard precedent on the planting plan is welcomed however the current arrangement would benefit from some tweaks to ensure residents in these units have sufficient privacy. It is worth adding an area of landscaping to help offer a buffer from their windows and prevent residents getting too close to the windows.

Consideration should be given to design measures that support opportunities for passive surveillance, social interaction and natural ventilation whilst maintaining appropriate resident privacy and security. Half Doors are one possible solution in this regard as can be seen below.



Doors like this can provide opportunities for social interaction, and ventilation, offering the resident the opportunity to have passive or active interactions whilst not allowing unwanted entry into the unit.

- 5) The terraced housing is more successful in being more sympathetic to the vernacular thanks to the width of the plots and overall scale. The recessed entrances are welcomed, adding depth and

shadow to the façade whilst helping to define individual dwellings. The expressed party walls shown on the elevations should be carried through into the detailed design as they reinforce the rhythm of the terrace, reflect the historic plot structure and help break down the overall mass of the development.

Further articulation could be achieved through the use of downpipes or other vertical elements to define individual units and strengthen the rhythm of the elevation. Where feasible, additional roof articulation, such as expressed party walls, would also be welcomed.

The inclusion of windows within two of the gable elevations is supported. However, additional windows should be considered on the remaining gables, particularly where they occupy prominent corner locations. Increased fenestration would improve passive surveillance, add visual interest and avoid the appearance of blank elevations. Larger windows, including bay windows or Oriel windows, serving habitable rooms should be explored where internal layouts permit.

Recommendation: Retain and strengthen the expression of individual units through party walls, vertical detailing and, where possible, roof articulation. Additional fenestration should be introduced to prominent gables to improve surveillance, legibility and the overall quality of the streetscape.

- 6) The positioning of the eastern terrace does not currently respond positively to the established street pattern, which is set back from the western terrace and inconsistent with the historic street pattern in this area. This arrangement also appears inconsistent with the linear development patterns and continuous frontages identified within the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan Design Guidelines and Codes as important characteristics of the historic townscape.

The resulting break in the building line diminishes the ability of the development to reinforce local distinctiveness and respond positively to its context, contrary to the objectives of Core Policy 57 and Policy BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan. Staggered inconsistent street alignment aligns with 'what red looks like' in p.68 of Building for a Healthy life and should be avoided.

In addition, the treatment of the corner is not considered successful. The prominence of the bin store at this location creates an inactive frontage and results in servicing infrastructure occupying a visually important position within the streetscape. Corner plots play a significant role in defining views, assisting wayfinding and creating positive transitions between streets, and therefore warrant a higher quality architectural response.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the applicant may have sought to maintain views towards the church towers, the set back is not considered to successfully reinforce the established building line or the linear development pattern identified within the Calne Design Codes.

Recommendation: The alignment of the eastern terrace should be reviewed with a view to bringing it into alignment with the western terrace and reinforcing a stronger, more coherent street frontage. Consideration should also be given to relocating the bin store and strengthening the architectural treatment of the corner to provide a more active frontage and improve the quality of the public realm. This would better reflect the linear development pattern and continuity of frontage identified within the Calne Design Guidelines and Codes.

As noted previously there is an opportunity to create a key corner with this gable which would be experienced sequentially when approach from the Pippin. The National Design Guide places importance on turning the corner and there is an example of how this can be achieved below.



*Flats are used to turn the corner of this urban block. Stepped bay windows and a large chimney stack to create a positive and interesting facade treatment on a prominent corner. **Pottergate, Alnwick, Northumberland***

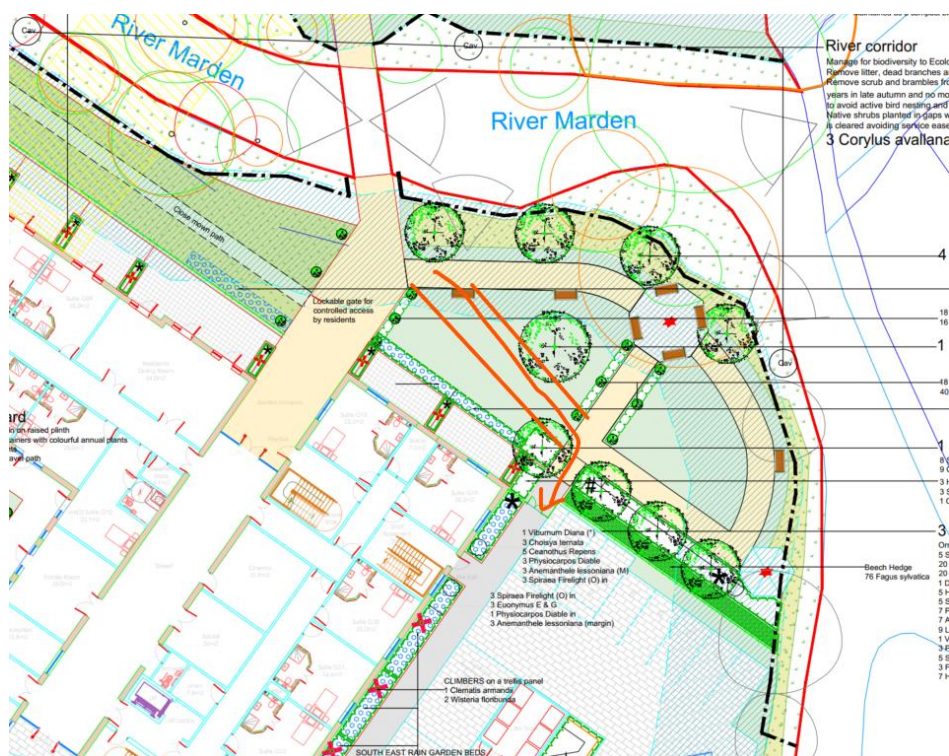
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- 7) There appears to be inconsistencies between the submitted planting plan the proposed site layout which it make it difficult to fully understand the intended landscape strategy and boundary treatment approach. For example:
- A lockable gate is indented on the planting plan however the corresponding secure boundary treatment either side of this is not apparent?
 - A curving pedestrian route extending from the bridge is shown on the planting plan but does not appear on the site layout.

Recommendation: A coordinated landscape plan should be submitted demonstrating consistency between the scheme drawings. Given the prominence of the site within the Conservation Area, a comprehensive boundary treatment strategy should also be provided.

- 8) The meandering route noted above does not appear to reflect natural pedestrian desire lines. BfHL promotes legible, direct and convenient walking routes that align with the way people naturally move through places. Routes which unnecessarily divert pedestrian movement can encourage informal desire lines forming which erode the landscape over time.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the alignment of pedestrian routes is reviewed to ensure they respond to likely movement patterns between the bridge, Mill Street, the care home and assisted living accommodation. Consideration should be given to creating more direct and intuitive connections where appropriate.



- 9) I share concerns from the environment agency regarding the flood risk assessment. And the risk to basement accommodation. The site is located within an area affected by flood risk and parts of the site fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

Given the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events associated with climate change, the introduction of accommodation below ground level raises concerns regarding long-term resilience, occupant safety and emergency management.

Recommendation: Further justification should be provided demonstrating how any below ground accommodation will remain safe and operational throughout the lifetime of the development, taking account of climate change allowances, residual flood risk and emergency access arrangements.

- 10) The proposed parking areas remain dominated by hard surfacing. Whilst some landscaping is proposed, greater provision of trees and green infrastructure should be considered throughout these areas.

The impacts of climate change are expected to result in more frequent periods of extreme heat. Large expanses of paving can exacerbate urban heat island effects, reduce user comfort and diminish the overall quality of the environment.

Recommendation: Increase tree planting within and adjacent to parking areas to provide meaningful canopy cover over time. Consider the use of structural tree pits, rain gardens and permeable surfacing integrated within parking courts.

Consideration should be given to using changes in materials, paving colour and texture to distinguish parking bays from access and circulation routes. This would improve legibility, reduce the visual impact of large areas of hardstanding and create opportunities for increased permeability. Additional tree planting and rain gardens should also be incorporated throughout the parking areas to provide shade, enhance biodiversity and contribute positively to the character of the

development, consistent with Building for a Healthy Life and Policies NE3, NE4 and BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan.



Variation between parking area and circulation routes adds interest and helps define routes rather than a large expanse of hard surface.

- 11) Whilst the attenuation tank is acknowledged and appears justified in part by site constraints, made ground conditions and the volume of storage required, it is not clear that the submitted scheme has fully explored opportunities to maximise surface based SuDS in accordance with current best practice. Below ground attenuation infrastructure provides limited placemaking, biodiversity or amenity benefits. Further information should be provided demonstrating how opportunities for above ground attenuation and SuDs features have been explored and incorporated in the landscape strategy which have benefits to the public realm and placemaking objectives above ground.
- 12) Consideration should be given to the use of green or sedum roof treatments on flat roof elements throughout the scheme such as the link building. Green roofs can make a valuable contribution to biodiversity net gain, provide visual amenity for residents overlooking roof areas from upper floor accommodation, and assist with sustainable drainage by attenuating rainfall and reducing runoff rates.
- 13) The treatment of the public realm along Mill Street remains unclear. Whilst this area may fall outside the application boundary, it forms part of the setting of the development and is represented as landscaped space within the submitted visuals. Clarification is sought regarding the extent of proposed works and how the development will integrate with the existing streetscape.

Summary

The principle of redeveloping this prominent brownfield site for care accommodation and assisted living is welcomed and it is recognised that a number of urban design concerns raised at pre-application stage have been addressed. In particular, improvements have been made to the overall massing, reductions in building height adjacent to Mill Street and the design of the assisted living terrace. However, significant concerns remain regarding the architectural quality of the elevations, roofscape composition, placemaking, landscape coordination and the integration of SuDS and green infrastructure. As currently proposed, the scheme is not considered to fully satisfy the design objectives of Core Policy 57, Policy BE1 of the Calne Community Neighbourhood Plan and the Calne Design Guidelines and Codes. Further design refinement is therefore recommended.