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Planning Service
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
ME4 4TR

Thursday, 20 February 2025

Application Ref: MC/24/2495
Location: Go Outdoors, The Brook, Chatham, ME4 4NZ
Representation Type: Objection

Dear Nick,

Thank you for notifying us about the above application.

The application site is in the area covered by the Arches Chatham Neighbourhood Plan (ACNP), which was adopted as part of the development plan for Medway on 15 May 2024.

In recent years our neighbourhood forum has taken an active interest in the future of this site as it plays an important role in regenerating Chatham. As a result we allocated the site in our Neighbourhood Plan for a residential-led mixed use scheme as set out in Policy HO4 ('Site 2 - Former Go Outdoors'), therefore the principle of development is supported.

Yet, we are incredibly disappointed that the consultation has fallen short of expectations for a development of this scale. Despite our proactive attempts to engage, the applicant Arpenteur Nightingale failed to offer meaningful dialogue and collaboration throughout the process of preparing this planning application.

Our limited relationship with the applicant began when we initiated a meeting at the site in February 2023, during which we familiarised the Arpenteur Nightingale representative with the work of our neighbourhood forum. Since then we have not received any updates or invitations to collaborate on the applicant's future plans for the site.

Over a year later the applicant invited comments on their pre-submission consultation during March 2024. This was the first time our neighbourhood forum had seen Arpenteur Nightingale's plans, despite the ACNP rapidly approaching a public referendum and subsequent adoption. We submitted a formal response outlining a number of concerns and requesting the applicant to directly engage — our response was also shared via social media and on our website.

It appears that the applicant found time on Tuesday, 26 March 2024, to meet with the Leader of Medway Council and ward councillor for the site, Cllr Vince Maple, to discuss the proposals, yet had no capacity to meet with us — a statutory consultee. Adding to our disappointment, Cllr Maple is reported to be supportive of the proposals, commenting that the scheme is not particularly contentious compared to other applications. Vince has previously expressed public support for the ACNP, both before and after the referendum. As will become evident in the following pages, these two positions cannot logically coexist.

Following the consultation we attended a critical design review panel, administered by Design South East, on 1 May 2024. Here we reiterated our concerns and highlighted areas where the applicant's emerging proposals did not comply with the ACNP. On the following day our Neighbourhood Plan passed a successful referendum and was formally adopted by Medway Council a fortnight later.

To our dismay the Statement of Community Involvement makes no reference to our comments raised during the pre-submission consultation and the design review panel, nor has the applicant addressed them in the submitted proposal. This has resulted in a non-compliant proposal that fails to take into account our community's Neighbourhood Plan.

Whilst the applicant maintained silence, Medway Council similarly failed to ensure we were involved in the development of the proposals. We are not aware of any attempts to encourage or instruct the applicant to engage with us, undermining our role as a designated policy-making body and statutory consultee in this part of Chatham. At no point have we been invited to a pre-application meeting or directly contacted by the case officer to address our concerns before the planning application was submitted shortly before the Christmas period. Yet, we're aware of pre-application meetings for nearby developments being held with other groups, such as Intra Community Trust.

It was not until February this year, when hearing about our forthcoming objection, Medway Council called for a meeting to discuss their 'journey' with the applicant. The meeting took place on 11 February 2025 between representatives of our neighbourhood forum and Medway Council's Principal Planner (case officer for the application), Senior Urban Design Officer and DM Manager.

The officers did not indicate that Medway Council had any concerns with the submitted application, despite it not complying with the ACNP, and actively provided justifications on the developer's behalf. They also acknowledged Medway Council's failure in ensuring a meaningful opportunity for us to comment on the emerging proposal, although there appears to be no accountability or effort to understand how we have reached an objection.

It is crucial to recognise that, unlike much of Medway — where the failure of key actors has left planning policy in disarray — this site is exceptionally well-covered. It benefits from a made Neighbourhood Plan with the same legal status as a Local Plan, a design code via the ACNP, and the Chatham Centre Design Code in a Supplementary Planning Document.

Allowing this development to proceed as proposed — on one of Medway's most significant sites — would disregard 2024 policies and constitute a clear dereliction of duty. If Medway Council fails to uphold existing policy, what credibility does it have in drafting new policy via the emerging Local Plan?

We have taken the time to thoroughly review the application and note the following policies of the ACNP are most relevant:

- Policy HO1 (Affordable Housing)
- Policy HO2 (Beautiful Design) — the Design Code is provided in Appendix A of the ACNP
- Policy HO4 (Site Allocations)
- Policy HO6 (Outdoor Space)
- Policy HO7 (Historic Environment)
- Policy BNE1 (Public Realm Enhancement)
- Policy BNE4 (Urban Greening)
- Policy BNE5 (Protection of Designated Sites)
- Policy ST1 (Air Quality)
- Policy ST2 (Active Travel Routes)
- Policy ST4 (Parking)
- Policy E1 (Encouraging New Business)
- Policy E2 (Retail Frontages)

In the following sections we have outlined our assessment of the application based on the policy areas of the ACNP and wider material considerations.

Affordable Housing

Policy HO1 of the ACNP sets out that developments of 10 or more homes should provide at least 10% affordable housing. This would equate to 32 homes being delivered as affordable on the application site.

The policy requires the affordable homes to be tenure blind and benefit from the same level of accessibility and amenities. It also highlights that on-site provision should be prioritised in the first instance.

In the exceptional circumstance that on-site provision is not feasible, off-site provision or a financial contribution in lieu would be acceptable with robust justification, and such provision or contribution should be made within the area covered by the ACNP where possible.

Policy H3 of the Medway Local Plan requires development in urban areas of over 25 homes to provide affordable housing. A target of at least 25% affordable housing is usually sought by Medway Council for developments of this scale.

Paragraph 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 requires affordable homes to be provided on-site unless off-site provision or an appropriate financial contribution in lieu can be robustly justified.

The applicant has submitted an Affordable Housing Statement that highlights the pressing need for more affordable homes in Medway, which we agree with. At paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 the applicant stated that:

'Arpenteur Nightingale Limited proposes the development of 319 dwellings of which up to 25% (88 dwellings) could be provided as affordable at Former Market Hall, the Brook. This level of provision would meet the requirements of the Medway Local Plan and the NPPF, albeit a lesser figure of 32 units would also apply by reason of the Build to Rent tenure.'

'The proposed tenure split would be 60% rented tenures and 40% affordable home ownership tenures which reflects the Medway Local Plan and the provisions of the NPPF.'

However, the Affordable Housing Statement concludes by making no formal commitment to affordable housing provision as highlighted at paragraph 6.12:

'In agreement with council officers the application is therefore proceeding on the basis of an open book viability appraisal undertaken by Pathfinder to determine what level of affordable housing and/or developer contributions can be allowed.'

Given the scale of development proposed, the provision of affordable housing in some form is important to our community. We request that the findings of the viability assessment are shared with our neighbourhood forum so that we understand the applicant's approach to the affordable housing provision. Until this is provided we cannot support the application as it does not satisfy Policy HO1 of the ACNP.

Design

The application site benefits from up-to-date policy relating to design. It is covered by two design codes: the Arches Chatham Design Code and the Chatham Centre Design Code, produced by Medway Council.

Policy HO2 of the ACNP states that proposals should respect the scale, density and identified valued characteristics of the Neighbourhood Area with particular regard to the Design Code. It forms part of the Development Plan via the adopted ACNP.

Valued characteristics are the qualities of a place that our local community has identified as important to them and would like to see more of (see p.7 of the Design Code). Development proposals are required to reinforce and enhance these valued characteristics, and the code contains rules and guidance on: building heights and typologies, materials and ornamentation, roofs, doors and windows, shopfronts, and streets.

In addition, Policy HO4 of the ACNP sets out that proposals should be developed with regard to the guidance for allocated sites provided in Chapter 4. The guidance indicates the application site could accommodate a residential-led mixed use scheme of 100-250 dwellings per hectare and up to 6 storeys in height.

The Chatham Centre Design Code was adopted by Medway Council in June 2024 as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The code provides a collection of design principles for the area, including matters such as building heights, materials and design options for street layouts.

Building Heights

The prevailing building heights surrounding the application site range from two to four storeys. There are three poor precedents that are not valued by the local community and demonstrably cause harm to the traditional, human-scale character of Chatham, such as the Bryant Street towers (13 storeys), Imperial Gate (7 storeys) and Market Hall multi-storey car park (circa. 8 storeys).

The Arches Chatham Design Code does not permit new buildings that exceed 6 storeys, inclusive of the ground floor, on the application site. This is a maximum allowance that helps the town centre grow through intensification while maintaining the community's valued characteristics.

The application site sits on a relatively level slab that is supported by a retaining wall structure and is bordered by the steeply sloped streets of Slicketts Hill and Upbury Way. The building heights set out in the Arches Chatham Design Code should be measured from the lowest level of the ground outside the structures. This approach has also been taken by the applicant.

Developments that reach 6 storeys are expected to mitigate the impact of their height through the introduction of a setback or half storey on the uppermost floor. Consideration to the significance of the Grade I-listed Naval War Memorial and the Brompton Lines Conservation Area is also required to retain views to these assets to aid our understanding and appreciation of them.

The Chatham Centre Design Code similarly sets out that building heights can rise up to 6 storeys at the application site as it lies within the Urban Avenues Area Type. Design proposals are required to adhere to the design code's height restrictions for all area types. Where additional height is sought via the Exemplary Design Process (EDP), heights of new built form must generally conform to the topography of the 'Chatham Bowl'.

Having reviewed the submitted documents we understand the proposed building heights to be:

- Block A: 7 storeys, 19.925m building height
- Block B: 7 storeys, 19.925m building height
- Block C: 7 storeys, 19.425m building height
- Block D: 8 storeys, 22.5m building height
- Block E: 7 storeys, 19.925m building height

The above building heights clearly exceed the building heights outlined in the Arches Chatham Design Code and Chatham Centre Design Code. To achieve policy compliance the applicant must reduce the building heights to a maximum of 6 storeys, inclusive of the ground floor. No evidence has been provided by the applicant to demonstrate that a smaller scheme with compliant building heights has been explored throughout the design development.

Chatham was deliberately designed to be low-rise for defensive reasons and characterised by tightly grained buildings. The introduction of tall buildings that in scale and bulk are dramatically at odds with the town's historic grain would therefore erode an understanding of its topography and built form, and ignores the local community's desire for new development to be in keeping with the low-rise character.

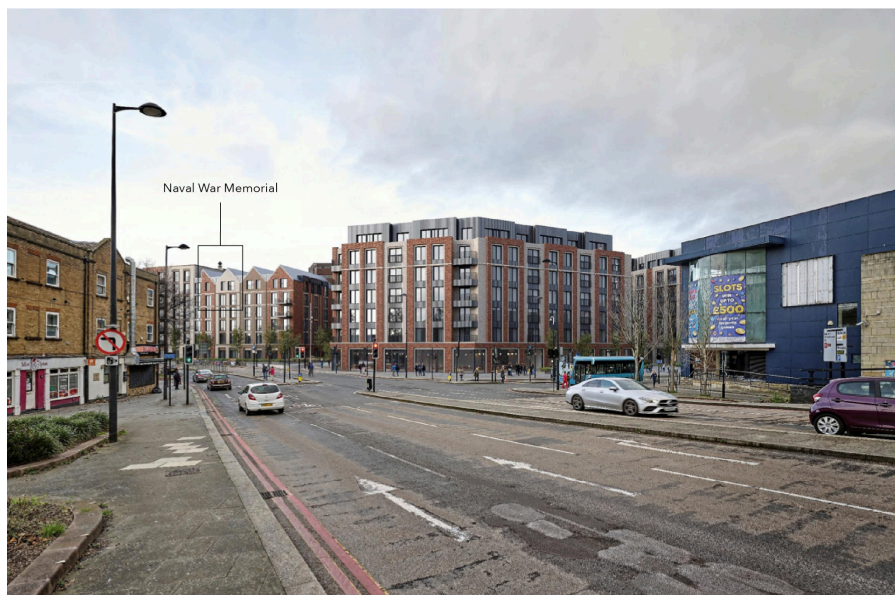
Additionally, we are concerned that the scale of the proposed buildings could cause harm to the significance of the Grade I-listed Naval War Memorial as the prominence of the monument would be diminished in local views.

The Naval War Memorial lies to the north-west of the application site atop the green escarpment and is significant as one of only three such war memorials commissioned by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It was designed as a highly prominent monument to the naval dead from both world wars and is a focal point in views from the surrounding townscape. The ability to appreciate this aspect of its significance is possible in numerous views from Chatham town centre. The green escarpment further accentuates its high visibility and contributes to an understanding and appreciation of its significance.

Block E would entirely remove one existing view of the Naval War Memorial from the junction of The Brook and Union Street. This busy junction forms an important gateway into Chatham town centre from the east, particularly for people arriving into the town by foot or bicycle. Having reviewed the submitted Townscape and Visual Appraisal (TVA) we note that none of the viewpoints address this important sightline to the Naval War Memorial. The nearest positions are Viewpoints 8 and 9, although neither are in direct view of the monument.



Existing view of the Naval War Memorial from the junction of The Brook and High Street



Proposed view of the Naval War Memorial from the junction of The Brook and High Street

Furthermore, the scale and bulk of Block A would be a dominant feature in the streetscape, and this could also diminish an understanding of the memorial's intended prominence. We believe this would harm Viewpoint 10 from the A2 New Road, which would feature both the proposed building and the Naval War Memorial, as shown in Drawing Number 26.

In terms of protecting heritage assets, Policy HO7 of the ACNP requires developments to conserve designated assets in accordance with their significance. Subject to this, the use of traditional materials, patterns or designs where appropriate and the interpretation, alteration or use of heritage assets to better reveal their significance will be supported.

Paragraph 212 of the NPPF 2024 notes that: *'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'*

Paragraph 213 also highlights that applicants should provide clear and convincing justification to any harm to the significance of heritage assets. Furthermore, paragraph 219 supports proposals that seek to enhance or better reveal their significance.

In our view the applicant has not sufficiently demonstrated that all options to avoid or minimise the harm to the Naval War Memorial have been explored. In this case, the Naval War Memorial is an asset of the highest significance and therefore its conservation should be given greater weight. We advise the applicant to assess options to reduce the tallest elements of the proposal so that Policy HO7 of the ACNP and the NPPF policies are met. This could be achieved by reducing the scale of Block A and Block E to maintain the monument's visibility in local views.

Architectural Treatment

The Arches Chatham Design Code emphasises the importance of using high quality materials and ornamentation to achieve well-designed developments. Materials and detailing drawn from the identified valued characteristics combine to enhance the appearance of a building to ensure it is attractive in distant and close-up views.

We support the proposed use of bricks as this is the locally preferred building material and ties in with the surrounding context.

The use of ornamentation in all new developments is required by the Arches Chatham Design Code, while poor quality attempts will not be permitted. Ornamentation can be provided as brickwork detailing of aesthetic value, such as bonds, patterns, cornices and lintels, and/or stone detailing, including decorative lintels, quoins, datestones, and door and window surrounds.

In a similar vein the Chatham Centre Design Code (p.50) sets out that: *'the appearance of buildings should promote a locally distinctive design, contributing to Chatham's unique character, through promotion of craftsmanship, use of high quality, robust and durable contextual materials, considered detailing and a pleasing overall composition.'*

Section 3.1.5 of the Chatham Centre Design Code states: *'New developments should be high quality and relate well to the height, proportions and massing of the existing buildings and provide an interpretation of the rich heritage.'*

The proposal represents a generic, New London Vernacular-style design that poorly responds to the distinct character of Chatham. A meaningful effort to integrate sufficient ornamentation into the overall design has not been made. Alternating brick colours is not considered to be ornamentation, but this has helped to emphasise vertical expressions. Further work is needed to break up the horizontal expression and heavily glazed ground floor of Block A and Block B, which does not respect the historic, fine grain spatial pattern of the High Street, as highlighted in Section 3.5.83 of the Chatham Centre Design Code.

Exemplary Design Process

The Arches Chatham Design Code does not include a 'code-breaking' process allowing deviation from elements of the code, therefore applicants are expected to conform to the following:

- **MUST:** Mandatory design practices; developments that do not abide by them will not be permitted.

- **SHOULD:** Design practices which are strongly encouraged due to the benefit that it will have to the neighbourhood, except in situations where the design practice cannot be applied for specific reasons.
- **COULD:** Design practices which are recommended but whose absence will not drastically affect the overall quality of a development.

In contrast, the Chatham Centre Design Code allows a tolerance of acceptable deviation via an Exemplary Design Process (EDP). In exceptional circumstances, limited code-breaking may be permitted where one or more design code rules are purposefully stretched or broken to deliver exemplary design. These circumstances would demonstrate a wilful and individual design whilst promoting a place-specific and contextually-driven high quality design response.

Where schemes seek to diverge from the Chatham Centre Design Code, applicants are required to demonstrate an EDP that must include at least two successful design review panel meetings by Medway Council's adopted provider, Design South East. Reviews undertaken by alternative providers or design review panels are not given weight in planning decisions made by Medway Council (p.14 of the Chatham Centre Design Code).

The applicant undertook the first design review with an alternative provider on 10 November 2023, which is not acceptable via the EDP. At our meeting with Medway Council officers on 11 February 2025 it was further confirmed that the first design review was deemed to be unacceptable.

A second design review, overseen by Design South East, took place on 1 May 2024 and our neighbourhood forum was in attendance. Here, the applicant failed to disclose which specific aspects and parameters of the Chatham Centre Design Code are proposed to be 'broken' and the rationale or justification for the deviation. This is set out as a requirement of the Chatham Centre Design Code on p.14.

The applicant has only just provided rationale for its 'code-breaking' at the point of planning submission via the Design and Access Statement, although sufficient rationale has not been provided for matters such as building heights that exceed 6 storeys.

It is clear the applicant has conducted only one acceptable design review, contrary to the requirements of the EDP. We are deeply disappointed the applicant has not engaged in a robust and considered design review process, and in our view a second design review should be completed with Design South East before this application can be determined.

Highways

Active Travel

Policy ST2 of the ACNP supports proposals which create or improve walking and cycling routes that are publicly accessible, well-maintained and designed for safety. Additionally, Policy BNE1 of the ACNP sets out a number of public realm improvements that would be supported, including enhanced pedestrian routes, urban greening, permeable surfaces and/or sustainable drainage systems, and road safety measures.

The proposed site plan shows gated access in the gaps between Block A and Block B, and Block A and Block D. These access points lead to the largest amenity space centrally within the site. We are concerned that restricting access would create an inward-looking, gated development that lacks permeable connections with the wider community. As questions remain about whether public access will be permitted to this space, we require further clarification to allow us to assess the application against Policy ST1 of the ACNP.

In terms of cycle parking, the proposed provision of 325 spaces is acceptable as this exceeds Medway Council's minimum requirement of 319 long stay spaces for the residential accommodation.

Car Parking

Policy ST4 of the ACNP emphasises that parking provision in new developments should be minimised and that opportunities for on-street parking should be supported by a parking stress survey. New car parking spaces for residential development should have electric chargers or passive electric chargers with future capability built in. Electric car club spaces will also be supported.

The Medway Council Residential Parking Standards 2010 highlights that:

'Reductions of the standard will be considered if the development is within an urban area that has good links to sustainable transport and where day-to-day facilities are within easy walking distance.'

As the application site is located in the centre of Chatham, with amenities such as shops, green spaces, public transport links and education facilities within an approximate 10 to 15 minute walking distance, we believe the site meets these parameters.

We note the proposal is effectively a car-free development, with the exception of five car parking spaces to be provided for the five three-bedroom homes. The proposed car club is supported in principle and we would encourage the use of electric vehicles as part of the facility.

However, the applicant has failed to provide a parking stress survey as set out in Policy ST4 of the ACNP. Additionally, the methodology used by Rappor Consultants to devise the Transport Assessment is, in our view, significantly flawed.

Paragraph 6.8 of the Transport Assessment discusses the trip generation forecast and states: *'As the proposed development is effectively car free, trips undertaken by car (both driver and passenger) have been removed and reassigned to other modes in proportion.'* Furthermore, Paragraph 6.8 goes on to highlight that *'those... working from home have been removed from the data'*.

Whilst we accept the highly sustainable location of the site as already discussed, it is unfathomable to assume that no trips by private car will be made by future occupants of the remaining 314 homes. It is also unreasonable to assume that residents who work from home do not travel by private car, given Medway's long-standing failure to resist out-of-town retail which has fostered a culture of car dependency.

In any event, just because the development is designed to be car-free, the likelihood of parking demand cannot be entirely discounted. The proposal represents the largest car-free development in Medway, yet it has been assessed without a robust methodology and has not taken into account adopted planning policy.

In the absence of any submitted information to the contrary, we consider that the development would impact highways safety and on-street parking availability. The proposal is therefore not in accordance with Policy ST4 of the ACNP, Policies T1 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan, and paragraph 116 of the NPPF 2024.

The applicant should undertake a parking stress survey to assess the extent to which the development could impact local parking availability. Recent planning applications for schemes of a much smaller scale have submitted a parking stress survey, such as a proposal for 24 homes at 43-47A Luton High Street (MC/24/0251) and a three-bedroom house at 2 Connaught Road (MC/21/0207). Therefore, there are clear policy grounds for a parking stress survey to be required in this case now the ACNP is adopted.

We advise that Medway Council as the Local Highway Authority confirms its preferred methodology for undertaking a parking stress survey.

The Lambeth Parking Survey Methodology has been accepted as the de facto industry standard parking methodology. It is used to calculate the total parking capacity and stress observed in local streets, by determining a survey area within 200m walking distance of the site.

Amenity

Outdoor Space

High quality and well-designed outdoor amenity space is fundamental to achieving an acceptable standard of amenity to future occupants. The availability, accessibility, utility and size are important considerations when designing outdoor amenity space.

Policy HO6 of the ACNP sets a requirement for all new developments to provide high quality outdoor space for use by future occupants.

In order to meet the requirements of Policy HO6, outdoor amenity space should not blindly meet the minimum sizes outlined in the Medway Housing Design Standards (interim) 2011 without due consideration of the design, layout and quality.

The applicant has submitted drawings relating to the proposed layout and materials of the outdoor amenity spaces, including the hard and soft landscaping. Policy BNE4 of the ACNP supports the planting of new trees, hedges and hedgerows. It highlights that new developments should take opportunities to increase green infrastructure through features such as green roofs and walls, and pleached trees. All new tree planting should be of a native species suited to pollution absorption wherever possible.

The applicant has submitted drawings relating to the proposed layout and materials of the outdoor amenity spaces, including the hard and soft landscaping. We are satisfied that these aspects will help achieve a high quality design in accordance with Policy HO6 and BNE4 of the ACNP.

Despite this we are concerned by the overall quality and usability of the outdoor amenity spaces between Block D (Communal Amenity A2) , Block E (Communal Amenity A1) and the existing multi-storey car park to the north of the site. The applicant has submitted a Daylight/Sunlight Assessment and an Overshadowing Assessment, both of which demonstrate that significant areas of the outdoor amenity space will not receive sufficient light for a large part of the year. This would result in damp, chilly and uninviting spaces that are not used well by future occupants.

The BRE Guidelines recommend that for a garden or amenity area to appear adequately lit throughout the year, at least 50% of an amenity area should receive at least two hours of sunlight on 21st March. The graphical outputs in Appendix A.2 and the results outlined in Appendix A.4 show that only one of the communal amenity spaces will receive in excess of two hours of direct sunlight to over 50% of its area on 21st March.

Furthermore, the Transient Overshadowing Images in Appendix A.4 show that Communal Amenity A1 and A2 will receive little to no sunlight at different times of the day all-year round.

Project Name: The Brook, Chatham Project No.: 4008 Report Title: Two hours Sunlight to Amenity Analysis - Proposed Scheme Date of Analysis: 10/10/2024					
Floor Ref	Amenity Ref		Amenity Area	Lit Area Proposed	Meets BRE Criteria
Communal Amenity					
Ground	A1	Area m2	437.50	0.00	NO
		Percentage		0%	
	A2	Area m2	944.21	242.48	NO
		Percentage		26%	
	A3	Area m2	1479.88	1000.96	YES
		Percentage		68%	

Tabulated results of sunlight to proposed outdoor amenity spaces (Appendix A.4, Daylight/Sunlight Assessment)



Graphical representation of sunlight to proposed outdoor amenity spaces (Appendix A.2, Daylight/Sunlight Assessment)

For a development of this scale, the applicant has provided very limited access to well-lit, high quality outdoor amenity space for the future occupants. It is likely that this could create unacceptable additional pressure on Communal Amenity A3 behind Block A as it is the only outdoor space to be adequately lit throughout the year.

Overall, we do not consider the proposed outdoor amenity spaces to meet a high quality standard, failing to satisfy Policy HO6 of the ACNP.

Outlook

As with natural light, outlook is important as a home without adequate outlook is an undesirable place to live and could harm the living conditions of future occupants.

The north-facing flats of Block D and the northeast-facing flats of Block E would be placed in close proximity to the existing Market Hall multi-storey car park. By virtue of its height and massing the car park structure would completely dominate the outlook of the flats and it will have an overbearing impact. This would result in a restricted level of outlook and an unacceptable enclosing effect.

Although the flats would achieve satisfactory levels of internal daylight, they still require good levels of outlook. In our view the proposal fails to provide an adequate outlook and is therefore not in accordance with Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan and paragraph 135(f) of the NPPF 2024.

Air Quality

The application site is bordered by The Brook and High Street, both of which are within the Central Medway Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

As outlined in Policy ST1 of the ACNP, all residential developments should demonstrate how they will contribute to the improvement of local air quality. Proposals should also be in accordance with any local air quality action plan and planning guidance.

The LPA is expected to ensure the development provides measures to mitigate any impact upon the AQMA in the interests of amenity and air quality, in accordance with Policy ST1 of the ACNP and Policies BNE2 and BNE24 of the Medway Local Plan.

Other Matters

Protection of Designated Sites

Policy BNE5 of the ACNP requires all development proposals to demonstrably avoid harm, directly or indirectly, to the scientific or nature conservation interests of designated sites including SPA, Ramsar, SSSI and national nature reserves.

As the application site is within 6km of the North Kent Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites, the development is likely to have a significant effect, either alone or in-combination, on the coastal North Kent Special Protection Areas (SPAs)/Ramsar sites from recreational disturbance on the overwintering bird interest.

Therefore the applicant is expected to submit a SAMMS Mitigation Contribution Agreement and payment, in line with Policies S6 and BNE35 of the Medway Local Plan and paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF 2024. This is to mitigate for additional recreational impacts on the designated sites and to ensure that adequate means are in place to secure the mitigation before first occupation.

Commercial Space

Policy E1 of the ACNP supports the development of new Class E(g) business space with superfast broadband, social and cultural enterprises and/or affordable workspace at rents below the market average.

We welcome the principle of the proposed commercial spaces along the High Street as the units will help to reinstate an active frontage and animate the street scene.

Section 106 Contributions

We are currently unaware of any Section 106 contributions being required as part of the proposed development. Whilst our neighbourhood forum is unable to set the content of S106 obligations, we can highlight infrastructure deficiencies that could be addressed to mitigate the impact of a development. The ACNP includes a Community Action Plan outlining projects and potential improvements put forward by the local community.

In our role as a designated policy-making body and statutory consultee, we formally request to be involved in discussions between Medway Council and the applicant to ensure the S106 contributions are used effectively. We are also aware that the Intra Community Trust has already been granted this privilege with respect to developments in their area, despite not being a statutory consultee or a designated policy-making body.

Conclusion

Whilst we agree with the principle of a residential-led mixed use development to help rejuvenate this part of our town, the proposal is not policy compliant and is inappropriate in its scale, massing, architectural treatment, quality of residential amenity and impact on the local townscape.

It is regrettable the applicant has chosen not to engage at an early stage in the design process to address our concerns before the point of application submission. We therefore object to the submitted proposal until our policy requirements are met. Should the applicant submit any revised drawings or further information, please reconsult as soon as possible.

Let this representation serve as an opportunity. After a decade of disappointment, Chatham deserves policy-compliant development. Over 700 people voted for our Neighbourhood Plan, expecting it to shape the future of our community. This is a chance to honour that democratic mandate, restore faith in the planning process, and uphold the policies to safeguard tomorrow.

Given the significance of the development, we will publicly share our objection via social media and our website, and we have copied in local Ward councillors for their information.

Yours sincerely,

Arches Chatham Neighbourhood Forum

Sketch Studio, 13 Military Road, Chatham, ME4 4JG