

Sent: 01 June 2026 11:40

Subject: Planning application no 2026/62/90232/W New Mills, Brougham Road, Marsden, Huddersfield, HD7 6AZ

Introduction

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Marsden Blueprint Partnership and Marsden Community Trust. The application is so important and complex that it is not possible to compose comments in adequate detail within the word count limit accommodated on the website, so this email is used instead with a brief summary on the website referring to its submission

General observations and community engagement

There has been very good collaborative liaison between the New Mills team and the community at two levels: initially with three representative 'experts', all of whom have professional and commercial experience in design and development of projects of this sort, and thereafter public displays of proposals in Marsden Mechanics to which the whole community had free access.

It is heartening that the designs have progressed a long way from the initial sketches to the stage they now stand. Consequently the scheme that has now emerged through the pre-application process is one that the community broadly welcomes and supports. That said, it does not feel appropriate for that collaboration to now cease because there are numerous shortfalls in the level of detail necessary for us to sign over freedom for that detail to emerge without further engagement.

This comment is therefore one of support in principle but with the fervent desire for greater assurance that can only come from a mixture of planning conditions and further drawings and pledges by the developer.

Relationship with Marsden Blueprint

To understand the nature of the community's misgivings it is necessary to understand the relationship between the mill complex and the rest of Marsden village centre. The 'slumbering giant' of New Mills has cast a dead hand on the village for over quarter of a century, suffocating economic recovery and marring the otherwise attractive built environment. Ideally the Blueprint brief would have addressed this relationship holistically but the separate Levelling Up funded project had already started rolling. There has therefore been limited opportunity to date for the interface to be crafted to best effect, so joint working remains crucial going forward.

Pedestrian permeability into and through the mill site has been the prime aspiration of the Blueprint, so the exclusion of the pedestrian link from Warehouse Hill in anything more than a 'future intention' is of the utmost concern, without which the site will continue to feel like an island. The Council is urged to support attempts to secure funding to restore this to an early phase and, for the time being, demand its inclusion in an outline planning application. In anticipation of the link eventually being built it is important for a design exercise to be completed to ensure that pedestrian and wheeled circulation within the development are ready to receive that traffic: gradients must be manageable and unobstructed, which means that the cycle storage currently indicated on plans is unacceptable.

The opening up of the river is most welcome but there is scant detail of how the margins will be detailed and finished, so this must be conditioned as a priority. The interim arrangement of a walkway from Crowther Bruce Mill Road is a poor substitute owing to the awkward connection to it from Warehouse Hill. That said it could become a popular leisure walk provided the detail design is attractive, which is difficult to judge from material available now.

Conservation of the historic mill structures has been a core wish of many local people and it is pleasing to see how far the scheme has moved in that direction. The loss of the wages office fronting onto Brougham Road is highly regrettable but we accept

the economic analysis that rules out its retention. Replacement by a modern building would be emphatically the wrong thing to do, so the crafting of a usable open space is welcomed, as is the retention or reconstruction of the elegant stone elevation up to first floor.

Programme

Arguably the biggest concern remaining is one of timescales and certainty of the elements most important to the village coming to fruition. Retail and housing uses are mentioned repeatedly in the commentary but timing of phase 2 is unstated and there is no formal application for outline consent on all remaining later phases, most notably the housing that is critically needed and would secure the long term future of the West and East Mills.

To resolve this uncertainty Kirklees should press for an outline application to cover the whole development and use conditions to ensure that each phase prepares the ground for subsequent phases in a way that safeguards and facilitates delivery. For instance, the demolition phase needs to be completed all in one rather than piecemeal and to be fully resolved before the commercial new-build is built, so that disruption to the village environment is minimised. Similarly the timing of remedial work on the shells of West and East Mills should be conditioned to precede occupation of Phase 1 new-build.

In terms of relationship with the Blueprint this has greatest relevance in the timing of the single storey buildings between West Mill and the rear of Peel Street shops. This area is vital for accommodating some off-street parking to facilitate relieving pressure on Peel Street: design work is starting on that for the Blueprint but has no certainty of when it can be implemented without assurances from this scheme. Those assurances need to include design details, dedication of spaces and management that avoids later conflict with housing when it comes on-stream.

We believe the Co-op is keen to relocate into the ground floor of West Mill. This move is welcomed but there is worrying uncertainty about timing and we urge the Council to put pressure on to bring this forward at an early stage, ideally to coincide with or closely follow occupation of phase 1.

Boundary treatment and visibility

The scale of technical drawings is such that confident appraisal is difficult, whereas the CGIs do little to give comfort because there is an impression of high walls that may limit visibility in and out of the site. That 'fortress' impression is one of the main shortcomings of the existing complex and works against the sort of permeability referred to above. It would be helpful to have conditions imposed that require more detail of visibility to be shown prior to construction. Treatment of the cleared area north of the river channel is of particular interest as this could provide valuable visibility of the river. Railings may be more appropriate than even more stone walls along riversides. Designation of natural green space without access instils fears of it gathering litter and doing little to improve the experience of walking or driving along Crowther Bruce Mill Road.

Architectural design and materials

Treatment is broadly welcomed, especially use of reclaimed stone where possible, and the new gable of West Mill is especially pleasing. Final choice of paving materials will have a significant impact on overall character and it is hoped that there will be further engagement on this detail, with natural stone desirable where practical. Planit's landscape masterplan for phase 1 gives some confidence of a palette suitable for later phases but there is confusion in the key about the vehicular surface treatment around the entrance, which will call for more detail.

There are a number of concerns about Building B, especially unconvincing reasons for alterations of the attractive western end a very disappointing treatment of a new gable and adjoining open space. Fenestration adjoining the Brougham Road footpath will also be critical to the nature of interaction and legibility of the activity within. The ground floor of East Mill also lacks interest and activity: the final design solution may only become clear under the later phase but this phase should not limit the scope.

Security, servicing and storage

The application is disappointingly silent on crucial aspects of fire access, servicing and refuse storage/collection for later phases: some consideration is required now so that later phases are not compromised nor subject to interim fire-risk.

Heritage, conservation and interpretation

The quality of heritage appraisal is not as thorough as hoped for, leaving gaps in justification for some of the demolition, although the final decisions on retention are generally sound. What remains thin is a dependable record of heritage elements lost and a lucid narrative in the design detail. There are opportunities for this to be remedied within the details yet to come, for instance the new public space could incorporate some rescued artefacts and an interesting narrative of the site's part played in Marsden's textile history.

Town centre context

The Town Centre Statement places emphasis on the sequence test and "Town Centres First" policy and proceeds to argue that the uses proposed for West Mill cannot be accommodated within the existing town centre, as currently designated, but will be

'edge of centre'. The community's view is subtly different in that the current designation does not constitute a satisfactory whole. The Peel Street 'corridor' is subject to immense pressure and feels needlessly narrow as a centre: a more healthy, amended designation for a centre serving a population of around 4000 would include West Mill and the car-parking envisaged. It is assumed that Kirklees Council have the option of rethinking the morphology of Marsden in that way. Doing so would also add even greater weight to the expectation of a link over the river to and from Warehouse Hill.

Environment Agency objection

It has been noted that EA have recommended refusal on grounds relating mainly to flood risk associated with de-culverting the river. This is profoundly unhelpful and the financial implications of all that EA seek would surely sink the whole project viability, which would inflict irreparable harm on the village. We see two possible ways of resolving such an impasse:

- A. Establish simply through flood risk assessment whether de-culverting the river will increase or decrease the risk: if it increases go to B, if it decreases accept the benefit with no further action.
- B. Acknowledge the joint working nature of this project between developer, Kirklees Council and Levelling Up Fund by adjusting the level of Government funding to pay for all the enhancements that do not contribute to the value of the development.

Opening the river channel offers Marsden a major amenity uplift, which would only be further enhanced by additional work to naturalise the margins, but we cannot support demands that benefit the environment and community at such cost to the developer that nothing happens at all unless the public purse contributes a fair proportion. These issues relate closely to the need for a pedestrian link over the river from Warehouse Hill, so they should be considered as a combined package. Notwithstanding this strategic ambition the current application needs to be more explicit, and perhaps conditioned, in the detail of how the river channel will be finished and stabilised.

Conclusion

Marsden cannot afford to miss the opportunity to secure a future for this irreplaceable component of the village's historic character and reason for existence. The resulting economic boost that can result from the Mills' revival is equally vital. The immense difficulties associated with delivering all phases can only be overcome by all parties pulling in the same direction, so we urge the Planning Committee to support the principle of this development and to explore funding avenues that address viability shortfalls in what is envisaged by both this developer and the exciting Marsden Blueprint. The community wishes to remain at the design interface for all of this so the comments set out here must only be the first in an ongoing dialogue as the barriers are tackled and overcome.