

Future Wolverton have considered the revisions that have been made to the Agora Planning application which appear to relate to three separate issues:

1. The heights of the building blocks.
2. The elevation design of the building blocks.
3. The highways junction at Church Street & Radcliffe Street and Radcliffe Street and Buckingham Street, and the revised pavement width on Radcliffe Street and Church Street.

In our opinion, the revisions made do not go far enough in resolving the many issues with the application raised by ourselves, Officers of Milton Keynes Council, MK Bus Users Group, Arriva, local businesses and local residents.

Our comments on each of the revisions made are now considered in turn.

1. Heights of the building blocks

We understand that the height of the building blocks has been reduced by 60cm throughout the development, and that the majority of the revisions submitted by the applicant relate to this height change.

Such a small reduction in height of the blocks makes little impact on our overall concern which is that the majority of the buildings in Wolverton Town Centre are 2 or 2.5 floors with the odd 3 storey building largely located on corner plots.

What is being proposed by the application is a 3-4 storey development, with over a quarter of the development being 4 storey. This is not compliant with the Agora Development Brief which specifies 2-3 storey development. There is no 2 storey proposed in the development at all.

Our concern about the heights of the buildings is supported by the additional comments from Urban Design (24.07.15) which state that “too much 4 storey development is proposed” and that although building heights can vary in a town centre location “the application does not include any 2 storey elements which is typical of the building heights in the Conservation Area of Wolverton.”

The only way to make a significant difference to the height of the development would be to reduce the building blocks by a whole floor, not by inches.

The comparison of heights on Plan A14-096-PL2-1 Rev. A is not helpful because the issue is *not* the extent to which the heights of the new development correspond with surrounding buildings, but the impact that a development which is entirely 3-4 storeys will have on the Townscape, especially on the Buckingham Street side of the site.

The Square is made up of 14 x 2-storey shops units, some with flats above, and 1 x 2.5 shop with flats above. The only 3 storey building on The Square is number 26 which is on the corner of The Square and Buckingham Street.

2. The elevation design

The applicant has explained that the changes to the floor plans and elevations relate to a slight overall contraction in the mass of the blocks to allow for additional public realm and opportunities for tree planting and future provision for green roofs.

Any additional public realm that can be created by this key town centre development is to be welcomed, as is the addition of more trees. However, it should be noted that the aspiration for generous public realm included in the Neighbourhood Plan and Development Brief should have been a fundamental design principle of the application from day one.

Whatever the changes made to the elevation design, it is Future Wolverton's view that the scale and massing of the 3-4 storey blocks will continue to detract from the surrounding Conservation Area.

Whilst effort has been made to add detailing to some of the blocks of development, overall the development does not replicate the terraced nature of Wolverton which surrounds the site.

As already highlighted by the Conservation Manager, and reinforced by Urban Design's additional comments, not enough has been done to break down the scale of the tall, four storey blocks, the elevational design of which is "less successful and comes across as rather bulky and repetitive (rather than reinforcing the fine grained character of Wolverton)."

Future Wolverton believes that as long as the four storey blocks remain as part of the planning application, the proposed development will cause harm to the Conservation Area.

The key elevational change appears to be on New Radcliffe Street (Block A) where the shop window has been extended to go further up the road. As highlighted by the additional Urban Design comments, it is not clear whether this will actually create an "active frontage" on New Radcliffe Street or will simply be an opaque shop window.

An opaque shop window – however extended - will do nothing to animate and enliven new Radcliffe Street, and give it the bustling, town centre feel envisaged in the Plan and the Brief. Certainly a shop window with no entrance/exits will not enable "spill out" activities.

3. Changes to pavement width and junctions

We had previously sought the widening of the footways on New Radcliffe Street from 1.8 to 2.5 to 3 metres plus. The applicant has increased the width of Radcliffe Street to 15.5 m at the widest point, and this has allowed for an increased pavement width which is welcomed. However, the pavement is still not as wide as the pavements in The Square which are 3 metres.

The Neighbourhood Plan and Agora Development Brief both seek to recast New Radcliffe Street as a more pedestrian/cycle friendly environment reflecting contemporary design philosophies for town centre areas. We remain concerned that this aspiration has not been met by the application.

Regarding the revised junction details, we are concerned that insufficient detail has been provided for to assess the nature of these junctions.

Will there be mini-roundabouts/cross roads/signals? Where are the pedestrian crossings? How are the visibility requirements being achieved? (we are particularly concerned about the visibility splay for new Radcliffe Street when entering The Square). We believe that the answers to all these issues should be provided by the applicant and marked up on the plans.

We accept the fact that if the road were further widened it would be at the expense of the newly widened footway on Church Street, which we believe to be crucial to facilitate bus interchange.

We remain concerned that the bus shelters are not similar to those provided by Milton Keynes Council at busy bus stop locations where they provide enclosed bus shelters to keep passengers dry. The bus shelters proposed are not fit for purpose for this busy bus terminus in Church Street. The widened footway i.e. 4.5m is still insufficiently wide to accommodate an enclosed bus shelter. The public realm area around the proposed shelters need to be widened further.

We remain concerned about issue of tracking time for buses previously identified by Highways Officers, and the impact this may have on traffic flow on Church Street.

It is not clear whether the applicant has addressed any of the other points raised by Future Wolverton's transport consultant.