



GRAVESEND, CHURCHILL RETIREMENT LIVING STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT APRIL 2022



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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This Report has been prepared by DevComms in review of the public engagement undertaken in support of a planning application by Churchill Retirement Living (CRL) for the proposed redevelopment for the long-term vacant former police station, 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend, DA12 1DB.

The former police station building was demolished in 2016, but the site has been vacant for over a decade, since 2008, when the £30 million North Kent Police headquarters opened. Several previous planning proposals for the site have been proposed for housing but have not been delivered owing to viability and deliverability issues. Churchill Retirement Living's proposals are viable and subject to planning permission, would be developed in the short term.

Given the nature of the proposals and the location of the site, Churchill Retirement Living are committed to undertaking widespread engagement with all key stakeholders prior to submitting a planning application.

A comprehensive engagement programme was developed by DevComms, which utilised a range of methods to engage with the local community stakeholders, in particular the residents close to the development site.

DevComms is a dedicated property communications consultancy which specialises in public engagement on new development proposals. DevComms has undertaken community and stakeholder engagement on behalf of Churchill Retirement Living.



2. POLICY BACKGROUND AND CONSULTATION

2.1 National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recommends that developers engage with local communities during the pre-application stage, referred to as 'frontloading'. Paragraph 39 of the NPPF states: "Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community".

Local Planning Authorities are to encourage developers to engage with the local community, even when not required by law, before submitting applications (NPPF paragraph 40). Early pre-application consultation with statutory consultees is also supported in the NPPF (paragraph 41).

2.2 Local Policy

Gravesham Borough Council's (GBC) adopted their current Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in October 2019.

The SCI states that the NPPF encourages pre-submission consultation with the local community and further states that:

"The Council strongly encourages applicants to undertake public pre-application consultation with potentially interested / affected parties to identify and resolve issues in advance of submission. Such front-loading should be seen as an opportunity to overcome delays within the planning process, reducing the risk of refusal or the need to deal with such issues at the application stage"

"Such early consultation should be as open as possible and provide a genuine opportunity for the local community to influence the design and form of the development proposed. The extent of consultation will depend on the nature of the proposal itself and its likely impact – including impact on the local highway network and demands that may be placed on local services. Factors such as scale, location, prominence, proximity and sensitivity of adjoining development are all likely to be relevant."

"Under certain circumstances, the Council will also encourage developers to enter into a Planning Performance Agreement. Such agreements provide a project plan and bespoke timetable for the determination of any associated application. It also makes sure that the Council has the necessary resources to make a timely and informed decision on any application whilst ensuring that Councillors, stakeholders and local communities are involved in any proposals. Such agreements should also help with the submission of higher quality applications that are capable of delivering the sustainable forms of development needed in our area."



“For all proposals, sharing information can help overcome potential objections and may provide an opportunity for improvements to the design and layout of schemes. Applicants are therefore advised to show what consultation has taken place during the preparation of their schemes.

2.3 Best Practice

In addition to the requirements and advice in the NPPF and the Council's SCI, DevComms and Churchill have sought to ensure all materials prepared to reflect the following best practice principles:

- Prepare 'plain English' clear, concise and understandable briefing material
- Make information and material accessible to the local community
- Publicise the proposals and online consultation
- Contact local community and individuals likely to have most interest in the proposals - to explain the approach to consultation, provide a briefing on the proposals and seek their feedback

2.4 Data Protection

A disclaimer was included on the online feedback forms which detailed how collected data would be used. This detailed that in undertaking public engagement with the local community, Development Communications Limited is a registered Data Controller under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

At all times, processing of personal data is carried out in accordance with GDPR regulations, with the feedback form providing an 'opt-in' and 'opt-out' option and information on respondents rights under GDPR.

Only data required for the purposes of the consultation was requested on the feedback form.

The feedback collated during the engagement exercise is held by DevComms and will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research on the proposals. The feedback received is detailed in this Report on Community Engagement submitted to Gravesham Borough Council.

Consultation respondents will only be contacted again in the future in relation to the application proposals if they have explicitly stated that they would like to be kept updated.



3. OVERVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT

Given the nature of the proposals and the location of the site, Churchill was committed to undertaking engagement with all key stakeholders prior to submitting a planning application.

A comprehensive engagement programme was developed by DevComms, which utilised a range of methods to engage with all key political and community stakeholders including:

- Gravesham Borough Council Officers through the Council's pre-application process
- Local politicians & Council Leaders – Key Gravesham Borough Councillors, including:
 - Ward Councillors for Pelham (Site ward)
 - Chair of the Planning Committee
 - Cabinet member for Housing
 - Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration)
- Local community – residents and businesses situated close to the site.

3.1 Pre-application engagement with Council Officers

In order to ensure the proposed plans conform with local policy and market requirements as far as possible, it was considered important to undertake a series of pre-application engagement meetings with Planning Officers at Gravesham Borough Council.

Churchill Retirement Living submitted a pre-application on 23rd November 2021. A meeting was held with Gravesham Borough Council Officers and representatives from Churchill Retirement Living on the 20th January. A formal written response was received on the 17th March 2022.

3.2 Local Politicians & Council Leaders

It was considered appropriate to brief the ward members for Pelham ward, in which the site is located.

Phone calls and emails were issued to the relevant politicians providing them with an overview of the proposals and announcing the online public consultation. The emails also offered the opportunity to provide further information if required.

Representatives of Churchill Retirement Living attended a meeting with the two of the three ward Councillors for Pelham ward on 10th March. A Council officer attended and the purpose of the meeting was to give an overview of the proposals. Churchill will continue to keep Councillors updated as matters progress.

Representatives of Churchill Retirement Living attended a meeting with the Assistant Director of Strategic Regeneration on the 18th March 2022. The purpose of the meeting was similarly to provide an overview of the site and to facilitate a site visit. Again, further information and updates will be provided as the application progresses.



3.3 Local Community

A crucial part of the pre-submission consultation was ensuring that residents situated around the site were notified of the proposals and provided with an opportunity to comment on the scheme.

Consultation Invite Mailing

Letters were issued on 10 March 2022 to circa. 479 residential addresses bordering and within close proximity to the site in the Pelham Ward. The letter provided an overview of the proposals and invited residents to submit their comments on the proposal via the project website.

In addition, an advert was placed in the Gravesend Messenger on 14th March 2022 which is circulated to 2,067 people on a weekly basis. The advert publicised the online consultation to residents located within the wider area.

A sample copy of the invite is included in Appendix A.

A sample copy of the advert placed in the Gravesend Messenger on 14th March 2022 is included in Appendix B.

A sample copy of the leaflet issued to local properties and businesses is included in Appendix C.

Project website

An effective means of providing detailed information to a large number of people is through a dedicated, project-specific website.

Details of the website were included in the letter to residents. The CRL Gravesend website can be accessed at <https://consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend> and included details of the proposals alongside an interactive sliders displaying the plans for the site and including downloads of key documents.

The website also included an interactive comments form, which can be used to provide feedback, asking a series of multiple choice and free form questions.

In addition, the website included a virtual reality public exhibition with downloadable exhibition boards.

Contact details were also provided on the website so members of the community can contact the team to ask questions and provide comments.



The website also provided background information on retirement living communities and Churchill Retirement Living as a leading provider of such communities.

Between the 14 March and 21 March, the project website received 98 views from 54 users.

A sample copy of the exhibition boards are provided at Appendix D.

Screenshots of the project website are provided at Appendix E.

Gravesham Borough Council



4. FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS RECEIVED

The online consultation took place from 14th March – 21st March 2022.

In total, to date 3 feedback forms have been submitted via the project website during the consultation period thus far.

Whilst the level of feedback submitted was relatively low, the proposals were well advertised locally via a Royal Mail letter delivery to 479 local addresses; the hand deliver of approximately 100 glossy leaflets; and, an advert in the Gravesend Messenger which has a circulation of 2,067 people on a weekly basis.

It is also interesting to note that during the consultation, between the 14th March 21st March, the project website received 98 views from 54 users.

Given the level of interaction with the website, it is considered that the majority of local residents either liked the proposals, had no concerns over the proposals or were apathetic to the proposals having viewed the website.

The following provides a detailed breakdown of the feedback provided by those residents who chose to respond to the consultation:

Question 1

Purpose-built homes for older people are shown to significantly reduce the risk of health challenges and contribute savings to the NHS of approximately £3,500 pa. How important a consideration is this?

Response	Count
Very Important	1
Important	2
Undecided	0
Not Important	0
Not Important at all	0

Of those giving a view on question 1, all 3 respondents (100%) felt that the significant benefits arising from purpose-built homes for older people to local health services and the NHS were important or very important.



Question 2

In response to question 2: **“Research published by Homes For Later Living has shown that retirement communities can generate £550,000 of local spending per year, £347,000 of which is spent on the local high street, directly contributing to local shops and jobs. How important a consideration is this?”**

Response	Count
Very Important	1
Important	1
Undecided	1
Not Important	0
Not Important at all	0

2 respondents (67%) felt that the benefits for local businesses in terms of local expenditure increases arising from purpose-built homes for older people were either an important or very important consideration. 1 respondent remained undecided on this consideration. No respondents answered negatively.

Question 3

In response to question 3: **“To what extent do you support the principle of redeveloping this site, which has remained vacant since 2008, for retirement housing?”**

Response	Count
Supportive	2
Tend to Support	1
Undecided	0
Tend to Oppose	0
Oppose	0



Of those giving a view on question 3, the feedback shows that 100% of the respondents were supportive in principle of the redevelopment of this site, which has been vacant since 2008, for retirement housing. No respondents answered negatively.

Question 4

In response to question 4: **“To what extent do you support the design of the proposed retirement living proposals?”**

Response	Count
Supportive	1
Tend to Support	1
Undecided	0
Tend to Oppose	0
Oppose	1

In response to question 4, 2 respondents (67%) support the proposed design and that 1 respondent (33%) had concerns regarding the design of the retirement proposals.

The main points of comments raised in the freeform sections in response to the design of the scheme were:

Comment	Count
Design doesn't reflect the local vernacular	1
General Supportive comment	1
Supportive comment regarding design	1
Insufficient parking	1

Overall, the feedback showed that all respondents recognised the importance of the benefits that the scheme could provide in terms of health and social care provision locally and in terms of significant increases in expenditure at local businesses.



All respondents were also supportive of the principle of providing purpose-built homes for older people in this location and no negative comments were received in this regard.

Finally, residents raised comments regarding the design of the development, suggesting the current design does not reflect the local vernacular. The proposed design of the building and this has been addressed in the planning application.

Gravesham Borough Council



5. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS RAISED

As outlined above, all comments received were collated and analysed in order to understand the main areas of interest arising from the consultation.

Responses covering the key planning related and most frequently raised issues are provided below.

Further detail can also be found in the technical reports submitted in support of the planning application.

5.1 Design:

Design doesn't reflect the local vernacular

The proposed development has been designed to reflect the character of the properties located on Windmill Street.

5.2 Traffic Impact:

Parking

Given the site's town centre location, residents of the development will be able to easily access a wide range of local shops and amenities by foot. Therefore, the proposed car parking is intended for resident use only, which is often commonplace for Churchill Retirement Communities. Staff and visitors to all of Churchill's developments are encouraged to utilise public transport and walking / cycle routes to the site.

A full Transport Statement has been submitted with the planning application.

The decision to purchase a Retirement Living home is predominantly needs based and often rooted in changing circumstances and abilities. The typical resident currently moving into Churchill Retirement communities is around 80 years old and a widow/ widower and more typically female. Generally, 50% of residents also come from within a 5-mile radius of the location.

Given the above, many residents of Churchill communities tend to not have cars. It is also generally found that those who do have cars tend to give them up soon after moving into a lodge as they find they no longer need it given the sustainable and accessible location.

The research undertaken across several existing Churchill Retirement Developments was undertaken to better understand the operational demands of the developments to inform the design of future developments. The research identified an average car parking demand at existing sites of 0.28 spaces per apartment. It is therefore generally found that occupant give up their cars soon after moving into a lodge as they find they no longer need it.



The plans for Churchill Retirement Living's scheme for the long-term vacant former police station, 133 Windmill Street propose 75 retirement living apartment, with 25 parking spaces, providing 0.33 spaces per apartment, which is in excess of the parking demand found acceptable at existing sites.

The proposals include provision of a buggy store to accommodate flexible demand for buggies and cycles for the apartments, and storage is available within the curtilage of the cottages for secure buggy/cycle storage.



6. CONCLUSION

In order to ensure that the local community was fully briefed and provided with an opportunity to comment on the plans, a detailed public engagement was carried out.

The consultation included a consultation invite mailing to local residents and a project specific website, accessible 24/7. A project phone line and email address were also made available so that all relevant stakeholders were able to provide feedback and ask questions.

The consultation was directly advertised to 479 residential and business addresses and the Gravesend micro project website was viewed 98 times.

Feedback received during the public engagement period has been analysed and summarised as part of this report.

Overall, the feedback showed that all respondents recognised the importance of the benefits that the scheme could provide in terms of health and social care provision locally and in terms of significant increases in expenditure at local businesses.

In addition, all respondents were also supportive of the principle of providing purpose-built homes for older people in this location.

Comments were also raised regarding the design of the building that have been taken into consideration as part of the planning application.

The former police station building was demolished in 2016, but the site has been vacant for over a decade, since 2008 when the £30 million North Kent Police headquarters opened. Several previous planning proposals for the site have been proposed for housing, but have not been delivered owing to viability and deliverability issues. Churchill Retirement Living's proposals are viable and, subject to planning permission, would be developed in the short term.

Going forward Churchill Retirement Living is committed to continuing to engage with the local community and to work together to resolve concerns as far as possible.

ENDS.



APPENDIX A

SAMPLE COPY OF INVITE TO CONSULTATION ISSUED TO RESIDENTS

Gravesham Borough Council



10th March 2022

BY POST ONLY

Dear Resident,

Invite to comment on proposals for a new Retirement Living Development at the Former Police Station at 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend.

Churchill Retirement Living welcome your feedback on proposals it is currently preparing for a high quality, purpose-built retirement living development located at the long-term vacant former Police Station, at 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend.

Churchill Retirement Living's vision for the former Police Station is to bring this vacant site into positive beneficial use, as a retirement living development that meets our customer's needs and the local need for retirement apartments.

The former Police Station site has been vacant for over a decade, since 2008, with the buildings demolished in 2016. The site is an eye-sore and detracts from the setting of the historic buildings nearby and the wider Conservation Area and the proposal will sympathetically bring this long-term vacant site into a positive and beneficial use.

There have been several mixed-use, historic planning proposals for the site, which despite benefitting from planning permission, have not been brought forwards for over a decade owing to viability & deliverability issues. Churchill Retirement Living's proposals by contrast are deliverable and, subject to planning permission, they aim to be on site by early 2023.

The site is located in an extremely accessible location adjacent in Gravesend Town Centre within walking distance to many local shops and everyday facilities and is also adjacent to public transport for trips further afield. Retirement Living developments have very specific design requirements. This, along with an analysis of the site and context, has led the Churchill's Design Team to create a concept for the proposed development which is both appropriate for the site and in-keeping with its surroundings.

Churchill Retirement Living are inviting you to view the proposal plans online and provide comments on the proposed retirement living development. The plans for the development proposal will be available for you to view at your leisure at the following link:

www.consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend

P.T.O

The plans will be available online from the 14 March to 20 March 2022. Feedback can be made online using the integrated feedback form.

If you are unable to view the plans online, you can also contact DevComms, our community representatives, freephone on 0800 080 3266, or by email at churchill@devcomms.co.uk. Please make sure that the subject of the email references 'Gravesend'.

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback on our proposals and should you want further information on Churchill Retirement please visit www.churchillretirement.co.uk.

Yours Faithfully,

Planning Issues

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE COPY OF ADVERT PLACED IN GRAVESEND MESSENGER

Gravesend Borough Council



ONLINE PUBLIC CONSULTATION



Churchill Retirement Living would like your feedback on proposals it is currently preparing for a high quality, purpose-built retirement development at Former Police Station, 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend DA12 1DB.

You are invited to view the proposed plans online and to give your views via the following link:

<https://consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend>

The plans will be available online from 14th to 20th March 2022. Feedback can be left online using the integrated feedback form.

Churchill
Retirement Living 

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE COPY OF LEAFLET ISSUED TO RESIDENTS

Gravesham Borough Council



Regenerating the former Police Station site at 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend



Proposed view looking north along Wrotham Road from the Prince Albert pub

Overview

Churchill Retirement Living is bringing forward exciting proposals to positively redevelop the Former Police Station site at 133 Windmill Street in Gravesend which has been vacant for over a decade since 2008 when the North Kent Police headquarters opened.

Churchill's vision is to bring this long-term vacant site into positive and beneficial use that meets the local need for retirement living. The plans would provide an attractive building to replace a vacant eyesore that has negatively contributed to the local area since the building's demolition in 2016.



For Further Information:

www.consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend

0800 080 3266 churchill@devcomms.co.uk

Regenerating the former Police Station site at 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend

Regenerating a vacant site

The former Police Station site has been vacant for over a decade with all buildings on site demolished in 2016.

Located in Gravesend Town centre, the site is easily accessible by foot to the many services, shops and facilities. The site is also within easy reach of the bus stops located on Windmill Street and Rathmore Road for trips further afield.

There have been several mixed-use, historic planning proposals for the site, but despite benefiting from planning permission, some of which have not been brought forward for over a decade, owing to viability and deliverability issues. Churchill Retirement Living's proposals by contrast are deliverable and, subject to planning permission, they aim to be on site by early 2023.

Image showing the existing vacant site



Proposed Site Plan



Images showing the existing vacant site



Delivering Benefits for Gravesend

Churchill Retirement Living's vision is to deliver a retirement living development on the site, providing high quality independent living accommodation, with a communal lounge and gardens. The proposal has been sympathetically designed and will contribute positively to the local area.

The proposals would also make a significant contribution locally in terms of social, economic and environmental benefits, including:

Regeneration of an important site – The proposals would bring a long-term vacant site, which has not been used for over a decade since 2008, into positive and beneficial use in the short term. The attractive new building and landscaped gardens will greatly improve the appearance of the local area.

Supporting local businesses – The site is well-located to shops and essential services, reducing the need to travel by car and delivering a significant uplift in local expenditure at local shops and businesses.

Recent research, published by Homes For Later Living, shows that on average people living in retirement communities generate £550,000 of local spending per year, £347,000 of which is spent on the local high street, directly contributing to creating new jobs and enabling high streets to thrive.

Reducing demands on health and social services –

Retirement communities reduce the risk of health challenges by reducing social isolation and loneliness for elderly people as well as improving safety and security.

The proposals will reduce the demand on local health and social services as studies have shown that each person living in a retirement community enjoys a reduced risk of health challenges, contributing fiscal savings to the NHS and social care services of approximately £3,500 per year, per resident (Homes for Later Living Report - September 2019).

Helping the housing market – Providing homes at the top of the housing ladder, which meet the needs and aspirations of older people, will help to free up homes for growing families and in turn free up more homes for first-time buyers further down the housing chain (Chain Reaction research report).

Meeting the needs of an aging population – By moving to a Churchill Retirement Community of like-minded people, isolation and loneliness are significantly reduced as are anxieties related to the maintenance of the home and to safety and security experienced by many older people, enabling our residents to enjoy greatly improved health and general wellbeing.

Regenerating the former Police Station site at 133 Windmill Street, Gravesend

Proposed east elevation from Windmill Street



Provide your views

You can find out more about these exciting proposals and also provide your views online at:

www.consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend

If you are unable to view the plans online, you can also contact DevComms, our community representatives, freephone on 0800 080 3266, or by email at churchill@devcomms.co.uk. Please make sure that the subject of the email references 'Gravesend'.

Thank you!



Proposed view looking south along Windmill Street toward Tivoli House

For Further Information:

www.consultwithyou.co.uk/churchill/gravesend

0800 080 3266 churchill@devcomms.co.uk