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Hatfield
Herts
AL10 9NL

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Herts
AL8 6AE

26 May 2020

Dear Sirs,

Planning Application Reference 6/2020/0935/MAJ

I wish to comment on the above temporary partial change of use at Comet Hotel, AL10 9RH.

I have 2 main concerns regarding the application:

1. Parking – the existing site has approximately 85 parking spaces available for around 360 student beds. Parking space is therefore already extremely limited and local residents are face daily disruption and stress as a result of students and their friends/families parking in nearby residential streets. The issue over parking was raised during the original planning application process and various promises were made by [redacted] on this matter. Since the development of the site, [redacted] have changed their stance and have now advised local residents they have no power to stop such behaviour.

The application to allow up to 154 rooms of student accommodation to be used for serviced apartments will substantially increase this problem for residents as the new occupants are far more likely to be using their own transport on a day to day basis. I therefore believe that any change of application for temporary change of use should be rejected unless the issue of parking is satisfactorily resolved to the benefit of local residents.

2. Temporary change of use – I am concerned that [redacted] may be using the current crisis as a “back-door” means of changing the use of its rental units, not on a temporary, but on a more permanent basis, clearly in contravention with the original planning application.

The management plan submitted by [redacted] with the planning application alludes to the opportunity to “target contracts with firms who require accommodation”. I believe that the hotel space already in situ (and also in the locality) provides for such needs at the moment. It is quite likely that demand for such existing accommodation, due to Coronavirus, will reduce over the next 12 months, so I struggle to see any economic argument for increased supply in this period.

The management plan also refers to demand for accommodation including “attending conferences, exhibitions and trade shows...and include sportsmen and women and their audience when sports events are held in London or any other major local events take place”. Again, given the likely ongoing restrictions on such events, I would question whether there will be the demand to justify any need to convert 154 units into the proposed changed use.

Whilst I fully appreciate that Covid-19 has caused a significant short-term financial issue for I do not believe that there is likely to be the demand for an additional further 154 serviced apartments, while granting this application is guaranteed to cause significant additional harm to the local residents regarding parking.

I therefore ask that this application be rejected until local residents concerns regarding parking can be fully addressed and, furthermore, that the council ensure that sufficient legal restrictions are put in place to ensure that, in the event of any temporary change of use being granted, a precedent is not set to allow apply for a more permanent change in use after 12 months expires, simply to increase their profitability but to the detriment of the local community.

Yours Faithfully,

[sent by post as the website is not accepting PDF attachments].