

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
4 JUNE 2003
REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING AND
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER

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PART 1
ITEM NO
FOR DECISION
CPEHO

N6/2003/0349 DEMOLITION OF EXISTING CAMPUS AND ERECTION OF 23
DWELLINGS, WITH ASSOCIATED ACCESS, PARKING AND LANDSCAPING
LAND AT, LEMS福德 LANE, WELWYN GARDEN CITY

APPLICANT: JS Bloor (Northampton) Limited

(Handside)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The site comprises the Lemsford Lane Campus of Oaklands College which is 0.43 hectares in area and allocated as housing site HS 18 of Policy HS1 within the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Review. The Campus is surplus to educational requirements and was identified in the Deposit Plan following an approach from the College.
- 1.2 The area of land itself is some 40 metres by 80 metres roughly rectangular in shape and lies between Lemsford Lane Workshops and Stanfield Childrens Home. There is a distinctive tree lined Welwyn Garden City "boulevard" type frontage to Lemsford Lane and the site backs on to the accommodation for the Air Training Corps to the rear. The largest building on the site is of significant mass and scale providing frontage to Lemsford Lane and is located adjacent to the South East boundary of the site. This was the main campus building and in foot print alone occupies almost half of the site. There are a number of other permanent and temporary buildings on the site, a number of which have now fallen into a state of disrepair.
- 1.3 The existing campus is visible from the public domain, naturally from the front but also from the sides where there is firstly a southern side access track to the Air Training Corps accommodation to the rear and to the north a public footpath that links Stanborough Park with Lemsford Lane. The boundaries mainly comprise the brick walls of the existing structures on the site and chain link fencing elsewhere. The site is screened from Stanborough Park by a substantial tree belt within the park.
- 1.4 Drawings have been submitted with the application to demonstrate the slight change in levels through the site where the land to the rear is approximately a metre lower than the land at the front of site. There are no significant trees on the site itself and therefore none are required to be felled to facilitate the proposal.

- 1.5 Outside of the site the area is characterised mainly by residential property with a generally spacious character set back from the road behind soft boundary treatments.

2.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 There is no recent planning history at the site.

3.0 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The proposal envisages the formation of a formal “close” perpendicular to Lemsford Lane with a new central access created between the existing street trees. The development is to provide 14 three bedroom houses, 7 two bedroom apartments and 2 one bedroom apartments. The site is below the threshold for the provision of affordable housing in terms of the site area and the number of units.
- 3.2 The Lemsford Lane frontage is proposed to be faced by two pairs of semi detached dwellings both linked to an adjacent property by a recessed first floor level element under which vehicles will park and gain access to garage to the rear. Amended plans have altered the pairs of dwellings so that the innermost dwellings would have access from the flank to replicate other house types commonly found in Welwyn Garden City. The dwellings to the front are designed to frame the layout of the formal close to be found to the rear and incorporate front gardens echoing those found elsewhere at dwellings in Lemsford Lane.
- 3.3 The sides of the close are formed by terraces of three dwellings. These houses are proposed some 9.8 metres to the ridge with accommodation provided in the roof facilitated by lead chequered and lead roofed dormer windows to the front and rear of each dwelling. The gardens of these dwellings are in excess of 9 metres deep.
- 3.4 The final element of the proposed development comprises of the apartment buildings flanked to either side by a three bed roomed house. The central apartment buildings are formally arranged at the end of the close to terminate the view from Lemsford Lane. The highest ridge height of this element of the scheme is proposed to be some 10.4 metres.
- 3.5 The design of the scheme incorporates architectural features consistent with Welwyn Garden City and proposes materials commonly found in the area.
- 3.6 42 Car parking spaces are to be provided either within the curtilages of the properties or in small allocated parking areas and reasonable verges are provided for the majority of the site

4.0 MAIN RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 4.1 The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations Number 1, 1998

Policy BEV5 Welwyn Garden City
Associated GEN and RES criteria.

- 4.2 The Welwyn Hatfield District plan Review Revised Deposit Version June 2002
Policy D1, D2, H1, H6 and H8
Supplementary Design Guidance

5.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

- 5.1 The application has been advertised by means of direct notification of neighbours by letter and by the display of site and press notices.
- 5.2 In response to the consultation process no letters of objection have been received. At the time of writing this report the consultation period for comments requested on the amended drawings has not expired. Any comments received before the meeting will be copied to members in the usual fashion.
- 5.3 The Environment Agency has no objections to the scheme.
- 5.4 Thames Water has no objection
- 5.5 Herts County Council as the Local Highway Authority have requested that any permission which the planning Authority may give shall include a section 106 Planning Agreement to secure a Section 278 Highway Agreement in order to construct a speed table at the proposed new junction replacing the existing speed hump currently sited at that location on Lemsford Lane.
- 5.6 Welwyn Hatfield Access group usual representations
- 5.7 The Welwyn Garden City Society has objected to the application for a number of reasons. The Society have cited reasons such as an over dense number of dwellings, poor use and design of fenestration. The Society have labelled the application as a tight cramped scheme lacking highway verges and an inadequate frontage depths. The Society considers that the 2 ½ storey dwellings are far too dominant and that the buildings are over-articulated and the changes in ridge height all contribute a poorly conceived scheme. As mentioned earlier the application has been revised by the submission of amended plans. At the time of writing this report the further comments of the Welwyn Garden City Society have not been received but any additional comments will be reported to members prior to the meeting in the normal fashion.
- 5.8 The County Archaeologist has commented that the Archaeological monitoring of the site would be both reasonable and necessary and suggested the application of a suitable planning condition should members be minded to approve the scheme.
- 5.9 The Council's Leisure Department have been consulted on the scheme and have requested that a commuted sum of £25,000 be obtained from the developer for the provision of improved play area provision within the adjacent Stanborough Park

6.0 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 Given that the Oakland's College Campus is sited within the urban area of Welwyn Garden City and allocated as a Housing Site within the emerging District plan there is no objection in principle to the site being redeveloped for residential purposes.
- 6.2 Given that the principle of residential development is acceptable on this site my considerations must now turn to the issues of the appropriateness of the physical form of the proposal in terms of the character and appearance of the area, the impact on neighbouring properties and the compatibility of the proposals with the policies and standards of the planning framework provided by the local Development Plans.
- 6.3 The nearest residential property is the Stanfield children's home that lies to the Northern flank of the development site. This is a complex of flat roofed two storey buildings and would be separated by some 12 metres at its closest point from the flank of the nearest new dwelling. The public footpath to Stanborough Park also separates Stanfield and the proposal site. Given these distances and the existence of the footpath believe that the separation distances, location and orientation of the new dwellings will not adversely affect the residents of Stanfield. There are no other nearby residential dwellings.
- 6.4 To the rear of the site between Stanborough Park and the proposed units that front the end of the courtyard there are number of huts that are currently occupied by the Welwyn Garden City Air Training Corps. Given the nature of the occupation and the occasional use of these huts I consider that the development would be compatible with this neighbour. To the southern flank lie the Workshops and Sea Cadets Hut site that has been identified as Housing Site HS18 in the District Plan Review. The proposal site and the workshops site are separated by the width of the access track to the Air Training Corps Hut, the workshops are largely unoccupied and are likely to be redeveloped for housing in the near future.
- 6.5 I will now turn to the issue of the appropriateness of the physical form of the development and would comment as follows.
- 6.6 Policies H6 and H8 of the District Plan Review outline that development would be expected to be at a density that would be an economic use of the land and incorporate a mixture of dwelling type tenure. The proposal is for 23 units of both houses and apartments and I therefore believe that the policy requirements of H6 and H8 of the Deposit Plan are fulfilled by the proposed scheme.
- 6.7 Taking the basic number and mix of the scheme to be acceptable I would now turn to the actual physical design of the proposal. Policy BEV 5 of the Adopted District Plan makes clear the requirement that within Welwyn Garden City, all proposals for development will be required to reflect the established character of the built environment, in terms of its generous standards of landscaping and space, lower building densities, the formality of its layout and orderly grouping of buildings, and the uniformity of its architecture. RES Criteria 4 and 5 of the Adopted District Plan also reiterates more precise design guidance relating to the design and layout of estates and further guidance regarding design issues in Welwyn Garden City. The Deposit Plan review echoes these policies through Policies D1 and D2 and also the Supplementary Design Guidance.

- 6.8 The policies of the District Plans exhibit the tensions between the requirement of delivering development at densities that make an economic use of land as required by local and national planning guidance and the further provisos that any proposal must also comply with the design requirements of the Adopted and District Plan Review documents as mentioned above. In this case I believe that the design and layout of the proposal can ensure that a reasonable density and number of units is achieved but in a proposal that is designed to be compatible within the character and context provided by the surrounding area.
- 6.9 The proposal is considered to reflect attributes of the existing street scene and contains formality and symmetry typical of Welwyn Garden City coupled with properly integrated landscaping in accordance with the requirements of District Plan Policy. The proposal achieves a ready sense of what is public and private space in a manner that is sympathetic to the sites location. The front gardens of the houses fronting Lemsford Lane are proposed to be demarcated by hedges to provide a soft boundary to the existing street scene. In this case “permitted development rights” can be removed to attempt to ensure that fencing and hard standings are properly controlled within the planning laws rather than relying on the less enforceable requirements of the Estate Management Scheme as would be the case elsewhere for residential properties on Lemsford Lane.
- 6.10 The site is currently bounded by some of the walls of the existing structures but where chain link fencing is used the site does not have a hard visually impermeable boundary. The drawings submitted indicate the use of railings rather than fencing to the south western end of the site which would both retain some outward surveillance of the footpath and other areas around the site and prevent the creation of a tunnel effect to the flanks of the footpath. The retention and maintenance of this form of boundary treatment can be secured by the use of appropriately worded conditions. The proposal provides for bin and cycle storage to meet the requirements of District Plan Policy and also envisages a lockable side gate to allow residents to access the footpath to Stanborough Park.
- 6.11 The houses and apartments have been carefully designed and arranged to echo the details and layout of the area in which they are located. The dwellings fronting Lemsford Lane have been designed to be of a simple design with detailing, size and materials to match others found nearby in the locality. The fenestrations all the houses and apartments has been carefully considered in terms of the hierarchy of windows and the form and design of bays and dormers. Materials and architectural detail such as canopies, door surrounds, chimneys and have been selected to be sympathetic to the context and character provided by the surrounding area. It is noted that the existing campus building is a substantial structure and the proposal should reduce the sheer bulk currently fronting Lemsford Lane and break down the massing of structures through the site. The impact of the two and half storey dwellings proposed to the rear of the site is mitigated by the slightly reduced ground levels as one moves from North to South on the site and the dwellings would be screened from Stanborough Park by the existing substantial tree belt.
- 6.12 I understand the concerns of the Welwyn Garden City Society and have carefully considered the points raised and note that some of the fears of the Garden City Society may have been overcome by the submission of the amended drawings on which I have invited further comments. As mentioned earlier any further

comments received from the Welwyn Garden City Society will be reported to members in the usual fashion before the meeting.

- 6.13 The requirements of Hertfordshire County Highways regarding the provision of a speed table at the junction with Lemsford Lane and the provision of the commuted sum for improvements to play equipment at Stanborough Park can be made the subject of a Section 106 Agreement with the developer should members resolve to grant planning permission for the development.
- 6.14 The comments of the County Archaeologist have been noted and should members be minded to approve the application the concerns can be addressed by the use of an appropriately worded condition.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 As mentioned in this report the Adopted District Plan and the review of the District Plan Review both contain detailed criteria by which development proposals such as this should be assessed. The more up to date Deposit Plan contains through Policy D1 the key design principles through which new development must be assessed and then reiterates the importance of context and character through Policy D2 and the other design policies. Policy BEV 5 and Res Criteria 5 of the Adopted District Plan provide the policy background in terms of the Adopted plan. It is considered that the proposal complies with the requirements of both the Adopted and Deposit District Plans by virtue of its design, layout, massing and appearance and further that it constitutes an effective use of a previously developed site. The proposed density exceeds minimum requirements and subject to conditions can co-exist with existing commercial and residential premises.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is recommend that a resolution be passed that planning application N6/2003/0349/FP be granted planning permission subject to the completion of a satisfactory Section 106 legal agreement to secure off site highway works linked to the development and the provision of a commuted sum of £25,000 to provide improved play facilities at Stanborough park and linked to the development and the following conditions:.

1. SC 01 – Time Limit
2. SC 09 – Landscaping Scheme – Full Permission
3. SC19 – Materials – Details to be Submitted
4. SC 25 – Levels
5. SC 26 – Setting Out
6. SC 38 – Removal of Permitted Development
insert 'Part 1, Class A, B, C, D, E, F,'
insert 'Part 2 Class A'

7. Prior to first occupation of the dwellings hereby approved, each house shall have a composting unit within its garden area and a rain water butt, details of which are to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason – To assist in providing a sustainable development.

8. Notwithstanding the submitted plans hereby approved, details of bin and cycle stores shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall be provided prior to first occupation of the units that they will serve and retained thereafter, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason – In order to ensure the acceptable appearance of the development and to ensure the retention of cycle storage and refuse facilities.

9. No development shall take place within the site until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority

Reason

The site lies in close proximity to Area of Archaeological Significance No. 11 where there is a reasonable likelihood of the discovery of significant archaeological remains and to comply with BEV 18 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No 1 1998.

10. No construction work shall take place outside of the hours 07.30 – 19.00 Monday to Friday, and 08.00 – 17.00 on Saturday with no work taking place on Sundays or Public and Bank Holidays.

Reason

In order to prevent work at unsociable hours, and in order to protect the amenity of occupiers of residential property in close proximity to the application site and to comply with the requirements of Gen Criteria 3 of the adopted District Plan.

11. No development shall take place within the development site until the applicant has provided a methodology and plan indicating the arrangements to be made during the construction process for on-site parking, loading and unloading of materials, storage of materials and provision of site accommodation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan and methodology so approved shall be implemented in full during the totality of the construction process.

Reason

In order to prevent work at unsociable hours, and in order to protect the amenity of occupiers of residential property in close proximity to the application site and to comply with the requirements of Gen Criteria 3 of the adopted District Plan.

12. No development subsequent to the excavation of the foundation of each of the dwellings hereby approved shall be executed until setting out and finished floor levels of each dwelling has been inspected and agreed by the Local

Planning Authority. Subsequent to that the development shall be continued as agreed in these respects, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON

To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development, and to ensure a satisfactory relationship between features and buildings both on and off the site.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning Applications

N6/2003/0349/FP

