



FAO: Planning Department,  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Ref: 6/2021/0181/MAJ  
Date: 11/04/2021

## HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION ADVICE

Dear Sir / Madam,

**RE: Former Shredded Wheat Factory, Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 1RR**

The application is a hybrid planning application comprising: Detailed Planning Application for 399 Private Rented Sector (PRS) dwellings and 153 dwellings (Class C3), 250 units of residential care accommodation for the elderly (Use Class C2) with associated communal facilities, 15,247m<sup>2</sup> of community and commercial hub (Use Classes E and F1) with associated cycling hub, car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure; and Outline Planning Application for up to 418 dwellings (Class C3) with all matters reserved except access.

As detailed within section 1.4 of the Design and Access Statement (DAS), this application follows two previous and still extant permissions on the site (including the southern element currently subject to a separate planning application), the most recent being granted in February 2019 (6/2018/0171/MAJ). As such, the proposed works are discussed in relation to the revisions to the previously approved scheme, rather than the overall principle. Pre-application advice has also been provided on a previous iteration of the scheme (6/2020/0764/PA) and the responses summarised in section 3.3 of the DAS.

The Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat Factory (silos and production hall) is located in the centre of the site. To the west of the site is the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. Approximately 4km to the south of the site are Hatfield House (Grade I listed) and its associated parkland (Hatfield Park Registered Park and Garden, Grade I) which also includes the Old Palace (Grade I listed) and St Etheldreda's Church (Grade I listed).

There are no proposed works to the former Shredded Wheat Factory listed building. The works to this building have already been granted listed building consent (6/2019/0826/LB).

The approved scheme (6/2018/0171/MAJ) was considered to result in 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the former Shredded Wheat Factory and the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The letter dated 13/04/2018 from Hannah Rae stated: *It is considered that the proposed development would detract from the appreciation of the significance of the listed building and the conservation area and would compromise the pre-eminence of the listed building. As such,*



*and as identified in relation to the previously consented scheme, it is considered that the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the setting of the heritage assets and would cause harm to the significance of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area.*

Considering the previously approved scheme and the changes now proposed to it, it is still considered that the proposed scheme will result in 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the listed former factory building and the Conservation Area. The proposed scheme includes an increase in density and in height with the tallest elements at 10 storeys rather than the approved 9, and the eastern and western edges generally rising at least one storey in height in comparison to the approved scheme.

The silos of the former factory are a landmark feature within the Garden City and in long distance views towards the Garden City. The prominence of the silos, and the views afforded by their height, are considered to be important aspects of their setting permitting an appreciation of the scale of the former factory at the core of the Garden City's original industrial area. They are unique feature acting as a landmark and contributing to local distinctiveness.

The tallest proposed buildings are 10 storeys in height with plant above and the DAS (page 65) states that the silos are approximately 11 residential storeys in height. There are concerns that the proposed scheme will introduce competing tall buildings at a similar height to the silos and in doing so the experience of the building as a historic landmark will be altered due to the presence of surrounding tall buildings. However, the creation of a new, enhanced public space with the listed building as the focal point is considered to be of some benefit despite the over all loss of the pre-eminence of the former factory and silos, as is the creation of new vistas towards the listed building through the new development.

In regards to the Conservation Area the harm identified is specifically in relation to Viewpoint 7 which is taken looking east down Howardsgate, a key element in the Garden City layout. From Howardsgate, the skyline of the Conservation Area is formed by the roofscape of the existing buildings, which are of a more domestic scale, contributing to the feeling of open skies and spaciousness within the commercial core of the Garden City. This element of the area's character contributes to its architectural interest, from which it derives significance. Taller buildings intruding into the skyline are considered detrimental to this characteristic.

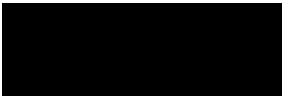
The site in its current form is neutral to the setting of the Conservation Area, other than the listed building itself which is a positive feature in permitting an understanding of the historic development of the Garden City with the industrial area located beyond the railway line. The Historic England Good Practice Advice Note on the Setting of Heritage Assets (2017) indicates that the setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which the asset is experienced and "*where that experience is capable of being affected by a proposed development (in any way) then the proposed development can be said to affect the setting of that asset*" (para. 20). The proposal impacts the experience of the Conservation Area by introducing tall buildings into the skyline where there currently are none (other than the top of the listed building which shares a historic connection with the Conservation Area). Viewpoint 7 permits an appreciation of the formal, planned layout of the commercial centre of the Garden City and its unifying neo-Georgian architecture with glimpses of the listed silos and chimney beyond. Whilst the Howard Centre is not part of the original design of this part of the Garden City, it forms the backdrop of the view from Parkway along Howardsgate and there is an attempt in its design to terminate the view with a central, symmetrical portico-style feature and glazed atrium, although this already undermined by existing taller structures to the south. It is also

compatible with the scale of the surrounding buildings and respects the existing roofscape. The introduction of tall buildings protruding above the Howard Centre will have an adverse impact on this view. They will be intrusive to the backdrop beyond the conservation area boundary to the east. As this impact is specific to Viewpoint 7, it is considered to be at the lowest end of 'less than substantial' harm.

Viewpoints 19a, 19b and 19c are taken from Hatfield House and Park and the wirelines demonstrate that the proposal will not be intrusive in these views. There will be an increase in built form, however, it will form part of the wider townscape of the Garden City in views from Hatfield House and Park. Therefore, it is considered that there is no harm caused to the significance of these heritage assets.

In summary it is considered that the proposals, as per the approved scheme, will result in 'less than substantial' harm to the Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat Factory and the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The harm to the listed building is low and the harm to the Conservation Area is at the lowest end of the scale because it is identified specifically in relation to Viewpoint 7. Paragraph 196 of the NPPF is relevant under which the harm should be weighed against any public benefits arising from the scheme, as is paragraph 193 which affords great weight to the conservation of heritage assets. Increasing public interaction with the listed building, securing its long term use at the centre of a new development and providing a well-designed area of public realm around the building are considered to be heritage benefits arising from the scheme and these should be considered as part of the paragraph 196 balance.

Yours sincerely



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*Note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter*