
EIA Screening Request

Campus East Car Park, Welwyn Garden City

May 2022

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1. Introduction

The Applicant

- 1.1. This Screening Request has been prepared by Savills on behalf of Bellway Homes (North London) Limited concerning a proposed residential development at Campus East Car Park, College Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL8.
- 1.2. The proposed development would involve the demolition of the existing structures followed by the construction of residential buildings containing 292 dwellings with associated open space, highways, drainage infrastructure and associated works.
- 1.3. The proposed development will be subject to a full planning application. This Screening Request provides the relevant information that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will require in order to provide a 'Screening Opinion' in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

Purpose of Screening

- 1.4. The purpose of screening a development is to establish whether or not a development is likely to have **significant effects** upon the environment, and whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required. If a proposal falls within the list of projects at Schedule 1 of the 2017 Regulations, an EIA will be required.
- 1.5. If the proposal is listed in the first column in Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations and exceeds the relevant thresholds set out in the second column the proposal needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.
- 1.6. Under Schedule 2 the proposal is an urban development project (10)(b) which includes more than 150 dwellings (ii) therefore it exceeds the relevant thresholds and must be screened. The site is not located within any of the sensitive areas as defined in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.
- 1.7. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) indicates that projects involving the construction of more than 1,000 dwellings are more likely to require an EIA than those which fall below this threshold.

This Screening Request

- 1.8. This screening request provides details of the site and its surroundings. Information is provided in respect of the proposed development, the planning policy context and a summary of the technical assessments that have been carried out to date. The extent of the site to which the screening request relates is shown at Appendix 1.

2. The Site

Site Description

- 2.1. The site measures 2.2ha and is an existing surface level car park with a decked level above. It is located to the north-east of The Campus. The site provides car parking for nearby buildings, including the council offices. The deck level is roughly the same height as College Way and is accessed via the spur road from the College Way mini-roundabout. Beneath the decked level, the level of the remainder of the site falls away towards the railway lines which flank the entire eastern boundary of the site.
- 2.2. To the north of the site there is a low-rise residential area focussed around Gresley Close which features two-storey residential dwelling houses. Beyond the site's western boundary are various Oaklands College buildings, Peel Court (assisted living accommodation), the Council offices, and a Waitrose supermarket with associated car parking. The surrounding land uses are therefore a mix of residential, educational, office and retail, with high levels of car parking provided.
- 2.3. The site is sustainably located within walking distance of the town centre area and within close proximity to Welwyn Garden City railway station. The railway station is located approximately 450m to the south of the site. This station provides access to Thameslink and Great Northern services linking London and Cambridge. The closest bus stops to the site are located on Bridge Road and The Campus, all within approximately 150m. These stops provide access to a wide range of services to surrounding settlements.

3. Planning Policy Context

- 3.1. The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan was adopted by the Council in April 2005. The District Plan provides a framework for planning decisions within the District. The District Plan was automatically saved for three years after its adoption. Following this, a request was made to the Secretary of State to save some policies beyond this period. This request was agreed in April 2008 and the District Plan 'saved policies' continue to be part of the Development Plan.
- 3.2. Under the District Plan the entire site is located within the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Area and the western half of the site falls within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The site is identified for new housing development (Ref. HS22) and as a development site (Ref. TCR5).
- 3.3. The Council has prepared a new Local Plan which sets out the planning framework for the Borough up to 2032 and which will replace the 2005 District Plan once adopted. The new Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public in May 2017. The site has been included within the list of sites allocated for residential development via the proposed Main Modifications, with an indicative capacity of 250 dwellings.
- 3.4. In 2020 the Council adopted a Strategic Planning Framework covering five key opportunity sites within Welwyn Garden City Town Centre (including the Campus East Car Park site) collectively known as WGC 2021. Within the document the Campus East Car Park site is identified for development to deliver approximately 280 new homes.

4. Proposed Development

- 4.1. The proposed development involves the demolition of the existing structures and the construction of new buildings spread across the site providing 292 dwellings. The pattern of development would be consistent with the rest of the urban town centre in which the site is located. The buildings will range in height but none would exceed 5 storeys from ground level.
- 4.2. The development will provide a range of different size dwellings including one-bed properties, two-bed properties and three-bed properties. The mix will predominantly focus on one and two-bed properties owing to the site's sustainable location and the requirement to optimise the site's development capacity. The development will include 30% affordable housing in line with council policy.
- 4.3. The development will include car parking at a reduced ratio owing to the site's accessibility and location close to the town centre shops and services and train station. Cycle parking will be provided and the use of public transport will be encouraged via a Travel Plan, to reduce the reliance on private motor vehicles.
- 4.4. The development will include open space for recreation in the form of a central green 'spine' and publicly accessible pedestrian and cycle routes will be provided through the site connecting Gresley Close to the north with the town centre area to the south.

5. Environmental Information

- 5.1. As discussed the proposal is an urban development project which includes more than 150 dwellings therefore it exceeds the relevant thresholds set by Schedule 2 of the 2017 EIA Regulations and must be screened. However the site is not located within a sensitive area as defined in Schedule 3 of the 2017 EIA Regulations.
- 5.2. The proposed development will not result in significant adverse effects upon the environment that would warrant the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment. As the National Planning Practice Guidance states, only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Landscape and Visual Effects

- 5.3. The proposed development would be visible from the residential dwellings to the north of the site, from the railway line to the east and beyond, and from the roads to the west and south of the site. Due to the proposed heights of the development in this location, it is not considered that visual effects will arise from wider locations. The site is within the town centre area, which, to the south of the site, is characterised by larger buildings. The site's location in the urban area means that built development is expected visually, and therefore the site is not considered to be sensitive from a landscape perspective.
- 5.4. The proposals will include screening to the site boundaries, including the retention of both existing and proposed new trees which will serve to screen the development in local views. The development site will be comprehensively landscaped with both soft and hard landscaping materials, thereby improving the visual appearance of the site compared to its present state. A Landscape Strategy will be submitted with the planning application, therefore an EIA is not required.

Water Environment

- 5.5. The site is located within Flood Risk Zone 1 and benefits from less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding. The planning application will be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy which will assess the site's risk of flooding and causing flooding elsewhere. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) will be incorporated within the proposed development in order to attenuate and reduce the flow rates of surface water run-off. Engagement with Thames Water will establish the capacity of the local public sewer network and connecting to this. In summary, the development will not have an impact on the water environment such that an EIA is required.

Ground Contamination

- 5.6. A Phase 1 & Phase 2 Contamination Risk Assessment has been undertaken and will be submitted with the planning application. Historically the site previously contained railway lines running through the site and there is evidence of potential ground workings within the central and northern parts of the site. Nearby land uses which pose a risk to soil and groundwater have been identified. Boreholes have been dug and laboratory analysis found shallow soils across the site to be chemically suitable for the proposed end use.

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- 5.7. No further works or risk assessment has been recommended with regards to contamination, providing that some standard health and safety precautions are followed during the redevelopment process. It is not anticipated that any significant issues will emerge that cannot be addressed through suitably worded planning conditions, therefore an EIA will not be required.

Traffic and Transport

- 5.8. The site is an existing car park containing approximately 584 car parking spaces. There are two existing vehicular accesses both from College Way. The northern-most access is to the lower car park, the southern-most is to the upper car park. As part of the proposed development, the northern-most access will be removed, leaving the southern access in place to serve the development. The development will contain a circular vehicle route with no onward route meaning that only residents and their visitors will access the site, alongside necessary servicing vehicles such as refuse collection.
- 5.9. Resident car parking for the proposed 292 dwellings will be provided at a reduced ratio of 0.70, therefore there will be marked reduction from the existing number of vehicle parking spaces. Parking will be provided for residents and their visitors only, and this will be enforced by the management company. A Parking Management Plan will be secured by condition or legal agreement. The capacity of the site to attract vehicles, and the potential vehicle movements associated with the site, will therefore reduce accordingly from the existing scenario.
- 5.10. As previously stated, the site is located within the town centre area with its nearby shops and services, close to the railway station. There are several bus stops within close proximity of the site on The Campus and Bridge Road offering access to several different bus services. Additionally, the bus and coach station at Osbourn Way is close by. All are within 150m. In addition to restricting resident's car parking levels, the availability of these public transport options will encourage the use of public transport. The availability of these public transport options will also be highlighted within the resident's Travel Plan, which can be secured by planning condition or legal agreement.
- 5.11. In summary, the proposed development would not have an impact upon the highway network to the extent that an EIA is required. A Transport Assessment will accompany the planning application in any event.

Noise Environment

- 5.12. The residential use of the site once the proposed residential buildings are occupied is not likely to generate noise that would be adverse to the surrounding environment. Regardless, noise surveys will be undertaken to measure and establish the background noise environment at the site. During construction, best practice measures will be implemented to reduce noisy construction activities and ensure that there will not be an adverse effect on neighbours. These controls can be secured via the planning application process. An EIA is not required therefore.

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Air Quality

- 5.13. The Council publishes an Air Quality Annual Status Report yearly. The most recent version was published in 2021. The conclusion of that report was that there are currently no air quality action areas declared within the borough and the air quality levels are good. During the 2020 monitoring period, no exceedances were noted or recorded, and the significant trends show an overall reduction of pollution levels for all monitoring locations and pollutants. The proposed development will benefit from the existing good air quality levels.
- 5.14. The use of vehicles by the future occupiers of the proposed development is unlikely to result in an adverse effect, given the reduction in parking spaces and vehicle numbers. Vehicle emission requirements are increasingly restrictive and the popularity of electric vehicles is rising. The proposed development will contain EV charging points. As stated the site is in a sustainable location where use of public transport options will be encouraged. The development will not have an impact that means an EIA is required.

Natural Environment

- 5.15. The site is predominantly hardstanding and formed of built structures. The exception to this is two significant tree groves comprising a mix of CAT A & B trees located at the entrance to the site. Within the car park itself, there are further CAT B trees. Aside from these trees and hedges, the site is considered to be of limited ecological value. Preliminary ecological surveys have been undertaken which confirm that the on-site habitats are unlikely to pose a significant constraint to development subject to the retention of the majority of hedgerows.
- 5.16. Further recommendations are provided and the necessary surveys will be submitted with the planning application. These will assess the potential impact of the proposed development on protected species and local habitats. Any mitigation required can be secured via the planning application process. The proposal will not have an impact on the natural environment which would necessitate an EIA. On the contrary there are numerous opportunities for ecological enhancements to achieve a Biodiversity Net Gain.

Historic Environment

- 5.17. There are no statutorily listed buildings either within the site or within the immediate vicinity of the site. The nearest listed buildings are located to the north (Digswell Lodge, Digswell Rise, Grade II), the south-west (The Old Cottage, 39 Bridge Road, Grade II) and across the railway line to the south-east, (The Shredded Wheat Factory, Grade II). Given the distance of these buildings from the site, the in-between built form and the lack of intervisibility, it is considered their settings are local and unlikely to be affected by the proposed development.
- 5.18. There are two non-designated heritage assets located to the immediate south-west of the site. The southern portion of the site also falls within the designated Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Conservation Area. An appraisal of the significance of all the heritage identified above, and an assessment of the scheme's potential impact upon the significance of the assets, including their settings, and an assessment on any townscape impacts, will be provided at planning application stage in the form of a Heritage Assessment. An Archaeological Assessment will also be submitted.
- 5.19. Therefore it is considered that these matters can be addressed via the planning application process in the usual way, and an EIA will not be required.

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Socio-Economics

- 5.20. The proposed residential development will result in a positive socio-economic effect by delivering new homes and increasing the supply of housing within the Council area, which is below the required five year housing land supply figure. In addition, the results of the Housing Delivery Test (2021 measurement) demonstrate that over the past three years, housing supply has been less than the required.
- 5.21. The proposed development will include areas of green space for recreation and landscaped publicly accessible pedestrian and cycle routes, which are all of benefit. The proposed development will result in the creation of new jobs, both during the construction and operational phases, and associated new spending within local shops and services. Additional economic benefits arising will include Council Tax Income receipts, New Homes Bonus income, and Stamp Duty Land Tax.
- 5.22. The need for additional infrastructure, whether physical or social, to serve the needs of the residents of the proposed development will be assessed via the planning application process and any necessary mitigations required are able to be secured via condition or legal agreement. Therefore no EIA is required for this reason.

Climate Change

- 5.23. The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has published a Climate Change Strategy. The purpose is to focus on the practical steps that the council and its partners plan to make at a county and borough level in order to support international efforts to combat global warming. In addition the Council published an Action Plan in February 2021, the aim of which is to achieve carbon neutrality within the Council area by 2030.
- 5.24. The proposed development will incorporate, through it's design and technologies, measures to help achieve the Council's climate change objectives. For example, the development will avoid the use of gas boilers which require burning of fossil fuels, and will include renewable energy technologies in line with the Council's planning policies and modern Building Regulations. The planning application will incorporate an energy and sustainability statement demonstrating which measures are incorporated and their benefits.
- 5.25. Measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions arising from the development during the construction stage, e.g. construction traffic, will be agreed through the planning application process, for example through the requirement for a detailed Construction Management Plan, and a Waste Management Plan. Where possible (due to the nature off their work) construction operatives will be encouraged to travel via public transport. The proposed development will not impact upon climate change such that an EIA is required.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The purpose of screening a development is to establish whether or not a development is likely to have **significant effects** upon the environment, and whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required.
- 6.2. The proposal is listed in the first column in Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations and exceeds the relevant thresholds set out in the second column. Therefore the proposal needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required. As previously stated the site is not located within any of the sensitive areas as defined in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.
- 6.3. The NPPG states that *“only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment. While it is not possible to formulate criteria or thresholds which will provide a universal test of whether or not an assessment is required, it is possible to offer a broad indication of the type or scale of development which is likely to require an assessment.”* The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) clarifies that projects involving the construction of more than 1,000 dwellings are more likely to require an EIA than those which fall below this threshold.
- 6.4. The site is not within any of the defined sensitive locations and the limited effects that the proposed development would have on the environment have been set out. Taking into account the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development as set out within Schedule 3 of the Regulations, the proposal is not likely to have significant effects upon the environment. Therefore, the proposal is not EIA development and an Environmental Statement will not be required to accompany the full planning application.
- 6.5. We would welcome the council’s confirmation of its agreement to this position through the issuing of a negative Screening Opinion within the required 21-day timescale as statutorily required by the Regulations.

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Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan

