

Christopher Dale
Head of Planning

Joseph Daniels
Savills
33 Margaret Street
London
W1G 0JD

Reply To: address as below
Direct Tel: 01707357000
Email: planning@welhat.gov.uk

Date: 01 June 2022

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)
REGULATIONS 2017

Dear Mr Daniels,

Application Reference: 6/2022/1105/EIA

Proposal: Request for screening opinion for demolition of the existing structures and the redevelopment to provide residential buildings containing 292 dwellings with associated open space, highways, drainage infrastructure and associated works.

Location: Campus East Car Park, College Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL8

I am writing further to your request for a formal screening opinion in respect to the above proposal which was received on 12th May 2022.

“Screening” is a procedure used to determine whether a proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. The purpose of this 'screening is to establish whether the proposal is EIA Development for which any planning application would need to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES), in the form prescribed by the EIA Regulations.

The EIA Regulations define “EIA Development” as being development which is either “Schedule 1 development” or “Schedule 2 development” likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as nature, size or location.

The proposed development is not contained within Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the Regulations).

The development does however fall under 10b (urban development project) of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the Regulations).

Under Schedule 2 of the EIA regulations, an urban development project needs to be screened by the Local Planning Authority to determine whether significant environmental effects are likely and hence whether an assessment is required, if it exceeds the following thresholds or criteria:

- (i) The development includes more than 1 hectare of urban development which is not dwelling house development; or
- (ii) The development includes more than 150 dwellings; or
- (iii) The overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares.

The proposed development is for the erection of approximately 292 residential dwellings on a site which is approximately 2.2 hectares. The development is therefore Schedule 2 development within the meaning of the EIA Regulations. However, as outlined in the National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) not all Schedule 2 Development has an impact or impacts that require an EIA to be undertaken and each case should be considered on its own merits in a balanced way.

In order to determine whether a Schedule 2 Development will have a significant impact(s) it is necessary to refer to the Selection criteria for Schedule 2 Development set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the Regulations). The criteria falls under 3 headings; characteristic of development, location of development and types and characteristics of the potential impact.

Where it is determined that the proposed development is not Environmental Impact Assessment development, the authority must state any features of the proposed development and measures envisaged to avoid, or prevent what might otherwise have been, significant adverse effects on the environment. Local planning authorities will need to consider carefully how such measures are secured. This will usually be through planning conditions or planning obligations, enforceable by the local planning authority which has powers to take direct action to ensure compliance.

Characteristics of development

The characteristics of development must be considered with particular regard to—

- a) the size and design of the whole development;
- b) cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development;
- c) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;
- d) the production of waste;
- e) pollution and nuisances;
- f) the risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge;
- g) the risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution).

The Site measures approximately 2.2 hectares (ha) and is located to the north-east of The Campus. The site currently provides approximately 584 car parking spaces for nearby buildings, including the council offices. There are two existing vehicular access points from College Way.

The proposal comprises the following key elements:

- Demolition of existing structures;
- Up to 292 residential units;
- Buildings ranging up to 5 storeys;
- Open space with publicly accessible pedestrian and cycle routes
- Car parking spaces (up to 0.7 space to 1 unit ratio);
- Cycle parking space
- Landscaping; and

- Refuse storage.

The Site is delineated by College Way to the west and on the opposite side of this road is the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council offices and Peel Court. A Waitrose store with associated surface level and decked car park is located adjacent to the south of the application site. To the north of the site there are low-rise residential dwellings and the Oaklands College buildings. The site is bounded by railway lines to the east. The wider surrounding area has a mix of uses, including shops, retail, restaurants and offices/other commercial uses within the Town Centre.

Planning Practice Guidance advises that that each application (or request for a screening opinion) should be considered on its own merits. There are occasions, however, when other existing or approved development may be relevant in determining whether significant effects are likely as a consequence of a proposed development. The local planning authorities should always have regard to the possible cumulative effects arising from any existing or approved development.

Approximately 150m to the south-east of the Site, at the former Shredded Wheat Factory site, planning permission has been granted for the creation of a mixed-use quarter comprising the erection of up to 1,340 residential 114 extra care homes (Use Class C2); the erection of a civic building comprising, retail, office and community uses as well as associated car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure (application number 6/2018/0171/MAJ). There are also two applications currently under consideration (application references 6/2021/0181/MAJ & 6/2021/0671/MAJ) which seek to provide new design proposals and an uplift in residential units to the previously approved consent.

Having considered the cumulative effects of the proposed development with other existing, emerging and approved development in the area, it is considered that cumulative development within the area would not result in a cumulative effect on the townscape, as effects would be neutral due to distance and the presence of intervening built form. However, the proposed development would result in an extension to the existing residential built form within the Town Centre. Views of the site would be partially visible and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be submitted at planning application stage to address the impact of the development on wider views and the townscape. Through appropriate design and mitigation measures within the planning application stage, the impact of the cumulative development within the area upon the characteristic of the development site would be considered negligible.

The Covering Letter submitted in support of this screening opinion outlines other characteristics of the proposal, as follows:

- 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
- The proposed development will incorporate, through it's design and technologies, measures to help achieve the Council's climate change objectives
- Phase 1 & Phase 2 Contamination Risk Assessments have been undertaken and 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.
- 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.

The proposal would result in a marked reduction in the number of existing parking spaces on the site. It is therefore likely that the capacity of the site to attract vehicles, and the potential vehicle movements associated with the site would reduce from the existing scenario. As such, it is considered that any traffic likely to be generated would not have a significant impact on the environment or the area and through a Transport Assessment, Travel Plan and Construction Environmental Management Plan highway matters can be mitigated, controlled and addressed.

Having regard to the characteristics of the proposed development, it is also not considered that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the use of natural resources, the production of waste, or in terms of the risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned.

Location of development

The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, with particular regard, to—

- a) the existing and approved land use;
- b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground;
- c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas—
 - i. wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths;
 - ii. coastal zones and the marine environment;
 - iii. mountain and forest areas;
 - iv. nature reserves and parks;
 - v. European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation;
 - vi. areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure;
 - vii. densely populated areas;
 - viii. landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance.

The site is not located in a sensitive area as defined by the 2017 EIA Regulations. It is also not designated or protected under international or national or local legislation for its ecological, landscape or cultural value. However, a portion of the site is located within the designated Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Conservation area and there are various heritage assets in the vicinity. 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).

The Environment Agency (EA) Flood Map identifies the entire Site to be located in Flood Zone 1 ("Low Probability") which refers to land assessed as having a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding (<0.1%) = lowest risk. A Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy will be submitted to support the planning application.

Having regard to the above, it is considered that the proposal would not affect the absorption capacity of the natural environment.

Types and characteristics of the potential impact

The likely significant effects of the development on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 above, with regard to the impact of the development on the factors specified in regulation 4(2), taking into account—

- a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- b) the nature of the impact;
- c) the transboundary nature of the impact;
- d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;
- e) the probability of the impact;
- f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
- g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development;
- h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

As previously mentioned, the key issues to consider in the case of urban development projects, as advised by the indicative screening thresholds, is the physical scale of such developments, potential increase in traffic, emissions and noise. Other potential significant effects in this case also include: air quality, ecology, heritage and visual impact, hydrology and flood risk, land contamination and socio-economics.

The clearance of the site and its redevelopment will inevitably result in a change in the built form, resulting in new buildings which would be taller than the existing structure. At 5 storey's, the proposed new residential buildings would also be of a greater scale than some adjacent built form. However, although this is a notable development in physical scale with regard to buildings within the local context, through careful attention to layout, scale and massing, it is considered that spatial impacts of the proposal would be localised and distant views would be limited. Therefore, it is not considered that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the physical changes that residential development, on the scale proposed, would represent.

The existing car park provides approximately 584 car parking spaces. Resident car parking for the proposed 292 dwellings will be provided at a reduced ration of 0.70 resulting in a marked reduction from the existing number of parking spaces on-site. The proposal would likely result in an increase in servicing demands (deliveries and waste collection) relative to the existing use as a car park, however, it is considered that such effect would not be significant.

In terms of transport mitigation, the application will be supported by a Transport Assessment (TA), which will provide an analysis of the net change in trips generated by the proposal. The application is also located within the Town Centre and is therefore within an accessible location close to shops, services and various public transport alternatives. Subject to satisfactory mitigation measures that can be addressed through the planning application process and through planning conditions, it is not considered that the size or cumulative impact of the proposed development or the traffic likely to be generated would have a significant impact on the environment or the area.

The characteristics of the development in relation to the risk to human health, for example due to water contamination or air pollution is a material consideration. The site is not located within or near any Air Quality Management Areas and, as such, it is considered that the local area is unlikely to be highly sensitive to changes in pollution emissions. The short to medium

effect of the development during construction phase would likely be the release of dust and PM₁₀ due to the site activities. Through good site practice and the implementation of suitable mitigation measures, the impact of dust and PM₁₀ releases may be effectively mitigated and the resultant impacts are considered to be negligible. As for the long term impact, emissions to the atmosphere from the development would also be suitably controlled under existing legislation and the risk of pollution, nuisance or accidents arising from the development is considered to be low. Similarly, due to the type and size of the development, the impact upon waste management and water contamination could be controlled and managed through mitigation measures.

The cumulative effects of new development on water resources and foul drainage provision are managed at the regional level by the appropriate water companies in consultation with statutory bodies such as the Local Planning Authorities and the Environment Agency. The cumulative effect of increases in mains water and foul drainage demand should be offset by sustainable design and water efficiency measures and infrastructure contributions for sewage treatment works, where necessary. These measures should collectively ensure that the cumulative effects on regional water resources and treatment performance are controlled to an acceptable level. The development is therefore considered not to have adverse harm upon the water environment.

The proposed use, by its nature, would have a limited impact in terms of noise. The screening request states that during construction, best practice measures will be implemented to reduce noisy construction activities and ensure that there will not be an adverse impact on neighbours. It is therefore considered that appropriate mitigation can be secured through the planning application process.

Although the site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations, Sherrards Park Wood which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), is located approximately 800m from the site. It is considered that a scheme of this nature and on this scale would not affect the designated features of any sensitive areas in the surrounding landscape to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely.

In terms of ecology/biodiversity, it is acknowledged that the existing site is predominantly hardstanding and is therefore considered to be of limited ecological value. There are however two significant tree groves comprising a mix of Category A & B trees located adjacent to the western part of the site. Within the car park itself, there are also further Category B trees. Preliminary ecological surveys have been undertaken to establish existing ecological value and ascertain potential impacts. The surveys confirm that the on-site habitats are unlikely to pose a significant constraint to development subject to the retention of the majority of hedgerows. Having regard to these findings, it is considered that no significant adverse effects would occur in terms of ecology/biodiversity. It is noted that the planning application would include a landscaping scheme as well as ecological enhancements to achieve a Biodiversity Net Gain.

In terms of hydrology and flood risk, as previously noted, the site has a low probability of flood risk. As required by local and national planning policy, a future planning application would require a site specific flood risk assessment to be submitted as well as an appropriate sustainable urban drainage scheme. Thames Water would also be consulted under a planning application. In this regard, it is considered that no significant adverse impacts would result.

In relation to the impact of the proposal on designated heritage assets and their settings within and around the site, there is the potential for harm to their settings which could affect their significance. 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. Whilst acknowledging the potential impact, it is not considered that that this proposal would lead to effects of the magnitude and complexity necessary for a significant environmental effect to be likely in this respect, that would necessitate EIA treatment.

With respect to socio-economics, full time jobs would be generated by the proposed development during the construction phase. In the short term, subject to the build out rate of the proposed development and cumulative development, there is potential for cumulative beneficial effects to occur with regards to the construction supply chain and short term employment. In the long term the development would contribute towards the housing need within the Borough. No potential cumulative effects are identified in relation to housing delivery. Notwithstanding this, where necessary, measures through planning conditions or monetary obligations would be sought to alleviate any pressure on the existing social infrastructure. The impact of the proposed development with regards to socio-economics is therefore considered likely to be of negligible significance.

It is considered that any impact from this development would be primarily within the area around the site and would be more limited in the wider geographical area. The site is not in a sensitive area and given the characteristics of the scheme, it is not considered that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the intensity and complexity of any impact. For the reasons given above, it is not considered that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of cumulation with existing and approved development.

Conclusion

Taking into account the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations (insofar as they are relevant to the proposed urban development project) as well as normal planning controls, it is considered that the proposal would not be likely to have significant environmental effects. Accordingly the proposal is not considered to be EIA Development and does not require full environmental assessment.

For the avoidance of doubt, this opinion should not be construed as the Council's agreement with any statements relating to aspects of the proposals that fall to be considered as part of a formal planning application process. An assessment of the proposal will need to be considered in the normal manner in the context of the Development Plan.

Should you require any clarification regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate in contacting the case officer on the above number and I will be pleased to advise you further.

Yours sincerely,



Nabeel Kasmani
Principal Major Development Officer