

RE: 6/2022/2801/MAJ

Sat 14 January 2023, Welwyn Garden City

Dear sir/madam,

I'm writing to express my concerns related to the above planning application. The proposed development plans to build 313 dwellings in several multi-storey flat blocks that are of much larger scale than the surrounding buildings. The number of dwellings is too much for the allocated space and highly disruptive to the town appearance. Specifically:

- Aligned to the Local Plan, the council has provided guidance that the proposed site would be appropriate for up to 280 dwellings in the Council's WGC 2120 Framework and 250 dwellings in the Local Plan. Taking that into account, the current proposal does not seem to take that guidance seriously. The total number of dwellings proposed is 25% higher than the provided guidance (to WGC 2120 Framework; 12% to the Local Plan) and whilst this can be considered non-binding guidance, the current proposal seems to blatantly ignore it and focus on quantity rather than quality. Bellway is proposing to cramp as many dwellings into the existing space as possible, which I can only interpret as a profit focussed intent.
- Viewing the proposal in context of existing residential dwellings as well as other buildings nearby, the proposal aims to roughly double the height of buildings (up to five storeys) compared to existing surrounding buildings. This is very clearly visualised in the PDF of proposed site sections. Section A, C and E highlight the significant increase in height compared to the residential dwellings at Gresley Close, Blakemere Road and Walden Road as well as Oakland College and Waitrose. The pamphlet that Bellway sent to local residents also clearly highlights the height and size of the proposed blocks of flats. The image provides an illustration of the proposed green in the middle of the blocks of flats and it is clear from the illustration that the actual green will be overshadowed by the buildings. The size of the proposed blocks of flats seems out of proportion compared to its surroundings, will overshadow and diminish the impact of the proposed green landscaping and will be a dominant presence.
- The council has provided guidance on a suitable mix of size and type of dwellings required as quoted in the planning statement. The current proposal, however, seems to ignore this guidance and over 95% of dwellings will be 2 bed flats or smaller. This is in stark contrast to the aim of the Local Plan to establish a mix of only 37% of dwellings that are 2 bed flats or smaller. Again, this appears a focus on quantity rather than quality. The need for more housing is appreciated, but the proposal is not considerate of its surroundings and not in line with the aim of Garden Cities. Instead of creating a proportionate area of residence, the proposal is overcrowding, one of the issues that Garden Cities aimed to address!
- The sheer number of dwellings does not seem adequately supported by travel plan or parking allocation. It may be commendable to create one cycle storage space per dwelling, but highly unrealistic. I do not think that existing Welwyn Garden City flats currently have on average one cycle per dwelling and do not think this is a realistic expectation. And if this is realistic, there no provision for cycle paths in the proposal. Current drawings suggest that cyclists will share the pavement with pedestrians,

which I think it not a good way to promote cycling. Conversely, the number of parking spaces is set at 0.58 per one and two bed flat, which is proposed to be adequate compared to the quoted average of 0.42 in the surrounding area. The source of the 0.42 average is not provided, but this number does not seem to add up to data quoted by NimbleFins (<https://www.nimblefins.co.uk/cheap-car-insurance/average-cost-run-car-uk>) that the number of cars per household in the UK is estimated to at 1.18 (higher if London is excluded). Furthermore, the Welwyn Garden City Local Plan quotes that the 2011 census estimated that 79% of households in Hertfordshire have access to at least one car or van and the Local Plan also suggests that zones 1-2 in which the proposal falls could have 0.75 cars per one bed flat, 1 car per two bed flat and 1.5 cars per 3 bed flat. Acknowledging that the Local Plan does not provide a maximum or minimum, calculating the car density based on the above would suggest that up to 291 parking spaces (0.93 per dwelling) may be needed, which is 60% higher than the number accounted for in the proposal. The provision of 0.58 parking spaces per dwelling is not sufficient and reducing the number of dwellings will give a more balanced development that can deliver on a realistic travel plan.

- In the application it is mentioned that comments from planning, businesses and residents have been sought and taken into account. The planning statement refers to this, but only addresses comments from the planning office despite reference of comments from 150 residents who attended the consultation evenings. To me this suggest that comments from residents have been ignored. I think this is a very poor attitude.
- Although the current Campus East car park is underutilised, it does provide a much used route for employees of Shire Park companies and local residents to and from the town centre. The proposed plans aim to keep this, but direct pedestrians towards the Campus Green using the road in between the Council offices and the McCarthy & Stone building. This is a route that is currently not used by pedestrians. In fact, this is a main route for cars towards the Waitrose and will provide unnecessary additional road crossings. The alternative pedestrian route is directed to the rear of the Council office car park, which is also a route that is currently not utilised by pedestrians and does not have a dedicated road crossing. There is no provision in the plans to keep the pedestrian route to Waitrose, despite this being the main thoroughfare for pedestrians. Instead, different routes are presented that will involve additional road crossings without the provision of dedicated pedestrian crossings. This should be addressed and the current main thoroughfare should be maintained.

In summary, the proposed development due to the sheer number and size of the proposed flats is not considerate to the local surroundings and should not be acceptable. Noting that the surrounding residential area mainly consists of houses, more consideration to the inclusion of houses instead of purely blocks of flats should be given! Some alterations to the travel plan and pedestrian routes should also be considered.

Yours sincerely

