

## Planning Application: 6/2022/2801/MAJ - Objection

### Objection Reasons

[REDACTED]  
20 Walden Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7PF  
[REDACTED]

I write to object for a number of reasons, not to stop the development, as the site offers a great opportunity to sympathetically add high quality buildings to the conservation area of the world renowned Garden City model.

The Design and Access statements recognise this and specifically call out the overarching WGC 2120 strategy objectives to which the proposals must be aligned, if they are to be approved by the council.

#### 2.2 WGC 2120 FRAMEWORK

##### WGC 2120 Objectives

The overarching strategy for this area of the town has been informed by a series of objectives, these include:

- To preserve and enhance the character of the Garden City;
- Create high quality new residential buildings and public realm that respect the history of the town, contribute positively to the townscape and make the town centre area a more attractive and safer place to visit and spend time;

*Figure 1-WGC 2120 Objectives from DAS Part 1*

The proposals however don't meet these objectives

They also don't meet the first design consideration stated in the Design and Access Statement (DAS),

Proposals should preserve or enhance the setting of the Conservation Area;

Specific Objections are :

#### Height

The buildings are too high. The Proposal in Design Access statement itself says :

The scale of the buildings within the Town Centre is relatively low being predominately 2 or 3 storeys with landmark buildings such as the John Lewis Store being 5 storeys. The subtle differences in the heights are characteristic to the hierarchy of uses and help to distinguish buildings in a subtle fashion.

Contrary to that the buildings are almost consistently 5 or 6 stories high, have no subtle differences in height and are to all intents and purposes serried rows of indistinguishable buildings. See figure 2



Figure 2- Uniform buildings or 5-6 stores - Ref : Scale & Massing - 8375 Campus East\_DAS\_Part7

To “preserve and enhance the character of the Garden City” the buildings should be in keeping with the rest of the town centre and be relatively low with differences in height. There is no justification for being more than 5 storeys and minimal justification for even being 5 storeys as that is reserved for the ‘landmark’ building of John Lewis and not residential flats on the outskirts. The buildings should have noticeable differences in height. Putting a Mansard roof here and there is not a subtle difference. So a number of buildings should be 2 or 3 stories high

In practice circa 2 storeys should be taken off all buildings reducing the number of properties if retained as flats in the same proportions from circa 300 to circa 200. That would be more in keeping with the rest of the town centre and help other metrics

The reason that this hasn’t been done, because that model of 3-4 storey building flows logically from the primary DAS analysis, can only be speculated on. However developer profit at the expense of Welwyn Garden City’s conservation area is quite likely to be the over riding objective

To conclude I object because the buildings are too high, they aren’t in line with the WGC 2120 strategy or the first stated DAS design consideration. None should be more than 5 storeys and based on my analysis above, on average 2 storeys should be taken off all buildings.

### Car Parking

With the excess of properties the ratio of parking to property is 0.58, with affordable homes only having 0.37 per property.

Nearby properties have an average of 1.2 per property with 0.78 having a car. (ref census)

A sensible target would be circa 0.9-1.0 space per property. People are not commuting as much so the tenants are less likely to be using the train as primary transport. Then as soon as couples have families, given the only school within walking distance, Templewood , cant expand due to its architectural status, the families will need to drive to the next nearest schools. Parking will get out of control, people will park on the grass , double park and tensions within the community will rise.

Much better again to take 2 storeys off all buildings, to have circa 2/3 the number of properties and achieve a higher ratio – circa 0.9 and have a happy harmonious estate with sensible amounts of parking and cars .

To conclude I object that the car parking percentage is too low at 0.58. To be consistent with census ratios and achieve a harmonious estate it should be 0.9 to 1.0

## Other options not evidenced and an £18m agreement between developers and the council

We have been presented one option without evidence of other options. Then as I have heard that there is an agreement subject to contract or planning approval, that the developers will be pay the council £18m for the long term lease. It looks like the primary consideration has been to squeeze as many properties into the scheme as possible and then more to try and recoup the developers investment and to allow the council to maximise its revenue at the expense of Welwyn Garden Town Centre and risk an unharmonious unhappy estate.

I did a simple analysis laying out houses on the Gresley Close pattern and that allowed for 40-50 houses on the development which would sell for circa £30-£36m at recent prices.

Equally if the development was as suggested above something like 200 1-2 bed flats at £200-£250k each (based on quick AL8 survey on Right Move) then income would be £40-£50m,

Building costs would also necessarily vary between options.

However simple handing of the numbers suggests there is room for other valuable options for the site which would still generate material revenue for the developers and money for the council to be invested elsewhere (and not used for operating costs) . Three hundred 1-2 bed flats would be more than likely generating excess profits for the developer. Granted they may not be able to sell them which would push the problem of managing the estate quite likely back onto the council.

Speculation

The objection is therefore that other options haven't been proposed and that a development of circa 200 flats would still generate a valuable solution for the site

## Quality of diagrams and proposals are poor and cannot be approved as they are

Of the documents I have reviewed the quality is not sufficient to be approved as a proposal

Their quality is either lazy or potentially deliberately confusing or mis leading, which could allow for changes to be introduced later on the basis that the proposal, whilst approved wasn't actually 'final'. They are also as a consequence difficult read and properly review

Examples are given below



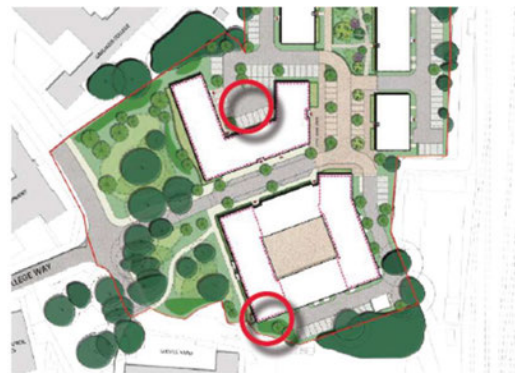
SITE LAYOUT - 11th Feb 2022  
Pre-Application 4

- Site loop road revised to maximise the extent of central green spine space;
- Minimisation of pedestrian interface with the internal road network; and
- The central shared surface public square to the southern end of the green spine refined to create a legible junction for the loop road, secondary roads and a traffic calming measure.

Figure 3- potentially random circle with no reference or link to text or vice versa

Figure 3 is confusing and there isn't an obvious link between the circles and the text. For example there is a circle over the (new) car park but no mention in the text

There is extensive mentions of Blocks A , B etc – but these aren't annotated on the plans. It assumes the reader knows somehow from a different document or more likely prior conversation. This is poor quality, isn't written for consultation or approval . Poor quality now also suggests poor quality will flow through the whole development



SITE LAYOUT - 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021  
Pre-Application 1

- The podium deck to Block B was omitted in favour of surface level parking;
- Detailed proposals for landscaping developed; and
- Massing for the larger blocks further considered with respect to façade hierarchy.

Figure 4- Text mentions Block B - but which is it ?

The worst example I have found is figure 5

## 7.2 SCALE & MASSING

The blocks have been developed with due consideration to neighbouring properties and their impact on daylight and overshadowing. Proposals seek to deliver a development which is sensitive to the context in which it sits, responding to the immediate context while considering the wider Welwyn Garden City architectural heritage. Heights and architectural detailing of important marker buildings and primary frontages have been considered to add variation and hierarchy of procession through the site.

Primary facades and marker buildings within the Town Centre Conservation Area have also been developed with mansard roofs. While outwardly these roofs reflect the WGC design principles, they are used on the scheme to screen plant from public view and /or adjacent blocks.



FIGS 36 - PROPOSED SITE SECTIONS

Figure 5- Site Sections dont match plan and aren't accurate

The proposed site sections do not match the lines on the map, they aren't annotated section A-B or similar as you would expect, and they aren't sections. The lower section is presumably meant to be a view on the lower left to right slanted line. It shows the trees, the building, but then also shows the next building in white – but the line doesn't cut through that building so it will be behind the view and be invisible.

Then the section above purports to show a bulk of Oaklands college but no section line goes that far and again in the top view no line extends to Oaklands college.

It is all generally low quality and either accidentally or deliberately confusing or even misleading.

To conclude I object to the proposal as it stands due to the quality of the diagrams and text which is at best lazily confusing or worst deliberately confusing and misleading.