



FAO: Planning Department,  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Ref: 6/2022/2801/MAJ  
Date: 09/02/2023

## HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION ADVICE

Dear Sir / Madam,

**RE: *Campus East Car Park, College Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6DG***

The application is for the demolition of all existing buildings and structures followed by the erection of five buildings to provide 313 residential units (Use Class C3); car and cycle parking, cycle and refuse storage, hard and soft landscaping, external lighting, drainage, infrastructure and all associated works.

The western part of the site is located within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, the boundary of which in this location approximately follows the line of the former branch railway line. To the south of the site are the non-designated heritage assets of the Council Offices and the former Cherry Tree Restaurant building (now incorporated into the Waitrose supermarket). To the south west is the former Welwyn Stores building (now John Lewis) which is also considered to be a non-designated heritage asset, and further to the south east is the Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat factory and silos. The Campus itself is a key component of the designed Garden City being a focal point at the northern end of Parkway and forming a key public green space with the Garden City's principle institutional, municipal and leisure buildings radiating from it. The site, particularly the western side, is therefore a sensitive location within the Garden City.

The existing single deck car park with garages below is not considered to contribute positively to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. There are no objections to its demolition. As discussed at pre-application stage, due to the unattractive 'back-land' nature of the car park structure and surrounding surface car park there is an opportunity to at least preserve and potentially enhance the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area through the sensitive redevelopment of the site. Whilst the proposed design and scale across the site as a whole is important, proposed Blocks A, B and H are particularly important from a heritage perspective when considering the impact of the proposal on the significance of the Conservation Area as these will be the most visually prominent elements viewed from The Campus and College Way.

During pre-application discussions it was noted that the redevelopment of the site was not necessarily harmful in principle and that there was an opportunity to potentially enhance this part of the Conservation Area through good design. In general, the simplified Garden City vernacular design



approach was supported – adopting the neo-Georgian proportions and use of red brick could allow the proposed buildings to harmonise with the existing architecture without creating a pastiche. The retention of the trees on College Way is fully supported as this is a remnant of Sherrardspark Wood and the trees are of historic interest as well as amenity value. The importance of terminating the view along College Way (location of proposed Block H) was highlighted as buildings or landscape features terminating long vistas is a key design feature of the Garden City.

It is considered that the design of the proposed scheme could be further refined. As proposed, it is not considered to be the high quality design expected within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, especially on such a key site on the edge of The Campus. In regards to the impact of the proposed design on the Conservation Area, the below points are of concern:

- The frontage of proposed Block H needs to be reconsidered. This is the building terminating the view along College Way and should be a well-designed and well-detailed elevation to terminate the vista. The proposed elevation is asymmetrical with projecting balconies on one half, whereas symmetry is a key component of the neo-Georgian Garden City vernacular. Furthermore, projecting balconies can encourage domestic storage/paraphernalia which would undermine the appearance of this elevation.
- Also considering the view along College Way, Blocks A and B have proposed projecting balconies which encroach on the view through to Block H and create a more cramped appearance to the development., as well as raising the same concerns about domestic paraphernalia. The position, design and number of projecting balconies should be reconsidered, particularly as they are bolt-on features.
- The western elevations of proposed Blocks A and B face into the Conservation Area and are key gateway buildings into the development. Page 41 of the Design and Access Statement provides images of feature corner buildings within the Garden City town centre, including those flanking Howardsgate. However, the proposed corner/key buildings do not successfully reference the examples given. They lack symmetry due to projecting balconies and differing fenestration design, the roof height remains the same as the adjacent block and the stone plinth band is a minor point of difference.
- The proposed mansard dormers, whilst not adding to the overall height of the buildings, increase the visual prominence of the mansard roof which should not be a prominent feature, especially on the taller blocks. The heights of Blocks A and B need to be appropriate to the Conservation Area and the creation of another floor with the addition of the dormers is not considered to be sympathetic as the Blocks appear out of scale with the Conservation Area.
- In regards to fenestration, there are concerns that the proposed bronze colour will appear out of keeping. White is the prevalent colour for window frames within the Garden City although it is acknowledged that this may not be the most appropriate colour choice for buildings with a more contemporary neo-Georgian character. Some of the precedent images in the Design and Access Statement (or example fig. 45) show black which may be a more appropriate colour. Fig. 45 also shows a neater detail for Juliette balconies which are accommodated in deeper window reveals rather than applied to the elevation – this detail would further refine the design.
- Grey roof tiles are proposed but the prevailing characteristic of the Garden City's roofscape is the use of clay plain or pantiles. This should be reconsidered.
- The choice of red brick and the brickwork detailing are fundamental components to the success of this scheme. The Design and Access Statement front cover features a GCI with white buildings which is misleading. Further detail on the proposed brick and improved CGI images would be beneficial.

The viewpoints within the Heritage Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) were agreed as per the plan at figure 7.1. Viewpoint 2 has been taken at an angle looking down College Way from

the crossing point on The Campus and so it does not fully take in the long view from The Campus down College Way to the development site. It is understood that in townscape terms the viewpoints are taken from positions where people will more commonly view the development, however, heritage considerations can differ from townscape considerations. In heritage terms the radial layout of The Campus and the views of the buildings around the edge of The Campus resulting from its radial layout is an important consideration. It is appreciated that there is no footpath on The Campus directly at the end of College Way looking towards the site, however, this view straight down College Way with the Council Offices to the right is considered to be significant in heritage terms and it would be beneficial to have a viewpoint from here to better understand the proposed scale of the buildings alongside the existing buildings on College Way. It was also suggested at pre-application stage that consideration was given to a CGI of this view rather than a wireline to fully understand the appearance of the proposed buildings from within the Conservation Area.

Viewpoint 1 within the HTVIA raises some concerns as the wireline shows how the proposed buildings will partially infill the sky gaps between the houses on Blakemere Road. The verdant character of streets within the residential areas of the Garden City contributes positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Sky gaps between buildings is part of this verdant, spacious character and the Viewpoint 1 wireline shows how the proposed development will impact this element of the streetscene here. In my opinion, this will result in some harm to the significance of the Conservation Area and the proposal will not enhance the visual amenity in this view.

Considering the concerns raised above, the scheme as proposed is considered to result in some 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the Conservation Area and paragraph 202 of the NPPF is relevant. Consideration should also be given to paragraph 206 as opportunities should be sought for new development within Conservation Areas to enhance or better reveal their significance. The proposal is not considered to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area contrary to Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

With amendments and further information there is potential to overcome these concerns.

Yours sincerely

Maria Kitts BA (Hons) MA PGCert  
Principal Built Heritage Consultant  
Place Services

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