



Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
Planning Department  
Council Offices  
The Campus  
Welwyn Garden City  
AL8 6AE

30/01/2023

FAO: Nabeel Kasmani,

**Ref: 6/2022/2801/MAJ**

Thank you for consulting us on the submitted planning application for Campus East Car Park, College Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6DG. 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 following comments are based on the Drawings, Design and Access Statement and other submitted supporting documents.

### **Policy Background**

The National Planning Policy Framework Section 12 requires that developments:

- Function well
- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate landscaping.
- Are sympathetic to local character, including the historic built character, while not preventing increased densities.
- Create a strong sense of place through definition of streets and distinctive forms.
- Optimise the potential of the site to create an appropriate amount and mix of development.
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.
- Are consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide.

In addition, locally, reference is made to the Welwyn Garden City 2120 Building Code guidance.

### **Pre application**

Throughout 2022, we attended a series of pre application meetings, discussing development principles, design and layout as well as architectural form and landscape. Our final pre submission pre application meeting was held in August 2022 in response to the updated 'Pre-Application 8' design pack and documents dated August 2022.

A summary of our final pre application response and observations is summarised below:

- It was noted that the development has been increased in total dwellings from 292no. to 308no,

- The ratio of single and dual aspect dwellings against the accommodation schedule will be needed and justified,
- The proposed block and site character plan is logical and maximises the development potential of the site which represents a positive approach to urban design principles,
- Lack of clarity on the key design cues of the proposed 'marker buildings' as indicated,
- Introduction of a central community/concierge building; the rationale and decision making behind this required further thought,
- Elevational design logical at this level of detail, but needs further explanation,
- The projecting bolt on balconies are still a concern,
- The very flat/unarticulated roofline,
- The introduction of the white ground floor plinth needs further thought/detailing,
- No detail of the carriage arch has been submitted, the design of this will be important,
- A plan indicating allocated parking spaces per apartment will be required,
- A plan indicating affordable will also be required,
- Daylight sunlight analysis for internal courtyards and green amenity spaces will be needed at the earliest opportunity,
- Active frontages; (Block E) ensuring overlooking of public route through the central green corridor,
- Balconies and private amenity space will each need to be considered as part of the wider development, elevation and aspect,
- Boundary treatments and screening; specifically Block D-C and along the railway line and Waitrose boundary will be important. A combination of fencing and landscape will be necessary,
- The inclusion of tree and planted tree podiums is positive, and we would seek assurances that these features will be delivered as shown,
- Public access through the site from the northern boundary need to be designed as a safe and attractive space. Landscape, materials and boundary treatment will help this connection seem integrated into the development,
- Materials; hard landscape materials specification for all surfacing. Permeable surfacing should be encouraged where possible,
- Allocated parking schedule will be needed to review how spaces are arranged and associated with the apartments they serve,
- The design of the parking areas also needs to be carefully considered, especially breaking up the long lengths of the parking courts to the west and east of the site with landscape,
- A waste strategy will be required to ensure access and collections are focused on recycling,
- Locations of bin stores/recycling centres needs to be set out on the updated layout plan,
- The future sustainability and climate change resilience of the development is the underlying principle that needs to be carefully considered. A sustainability strategy should begin to set out these principles in terms of design, management and functionality of the development.

The pre application layout and justifications were reviewed against comments previously made through the pre application process. From a design perspective, we welcomed a continued collaborative approach to positively progress the emerging development.

### **Submitted Planning Application**

Based on the submitted application, our comments are laid out in the following sections:

#### **Layout & Access**

The general layout of the proposed development is logical and follows the most appropriate development layout for the site. The main access route is aligned to College way, the development backs onto both the railway line and the existing surrounding residential areas.

The development provides a positive street frontage onto College Way itself, location parking areas to the rear of the residential blocks.

The evolution of the development (see earlier pre application layouts) has removed the mixed-use elements from the development. The failure to provide any community/social uses (as identified in the WGC 2120 Framework objectives) is a missed opportunity.

### Route Hierarchy

The development has evolved to prioritise pedestrian and cyclist movement through the site via a central green link. This positive approach to connections (both North-south and west to the town centre) ensures that safe and accessible routes into the connecting residential areas and town centre/station can be achieved through the site.

The route hierarchy into the site generally channels vehicle movement to the rear of the blocks, keeping the main development car free which again is positive.

### Scale and Massing

The scale and massing of the development has evolved through the pre application process. The submitted development is generally a consistent height (whether mansard or parapet roof) which creates a strong unarticulated horizontal roof line. For example, Blocks E, F, G, H (ground plus 4 storeys). Block D has a reduced scale (ground plus 3 storeys) to help limit the development impact onto the adjacent dwellings to the west of the site.

Opportunities to vary this have been restricted by the need to maximise the development potential of the site. It is noted that the development density has increased since the final preapplication meeting. The approach taken for scale and massing, combined with some of the other development compromises (dwelling mix, single/dual aspect ratios and amenity space) begin to suggest that the submitted application proposals have become over developed for the site.

### Architecture and Built Form

The principal of the proposed architectural language of the development has generally been consistent throughout the pre application process. The development references design cues from the Garden City (see DAS page 38) which is positive. However, the submitted elevational and details still need further refinement and would have benefitted from a further round of preapplication discussions. For example:

- Block H (end elevation fronting College Way) is a key building terminating the main vista into the development. This elevation lacks the architectural refinement and balance for such a key building, for example the position and design of the balconies applied to half of the frontage.
- Rear elevation of Blocks D and C could be improved, especially considering the relationship with the adjacent residential areas. The balance of fenestration pattern and solid to void seem muddled, lacking the design approach highlighted in the DAS (page 38).
- End/flank elevation of Block E (overlooking the pedestrian access route) could also be improved to provide an improved public fronting end block,
- Materials and elevations generally need further refinement; some areas are over complicated (brick patterns/alignment) with various changes in brick and window surrounds. See DAS 7.3. The design approach should ideally seek to follow a simpler yet quality approach,
- All fenestration specified should emulate a modern approach which will help improve the wider elevations and street scenes. The use of the copper/brown tone finish fails to meet or reference the local design cues set out within the DAS,

- Key Edges (DAS 4.3 page 27) are key frontages within the development. These all need further design refinement including materials, detailing, elevation arrangement and fenestration to help set them apart from the rest of the development.

### Design, Privacy, Daylight and Sunlight

Sunlight/daylight access into the core amenity space of Block A is questionable considering the scale and size of the block and relatively small area within the central core. Overlooking and private amenity will also be an issue for this block, which remains unresolved.

The percentage mix of dual and single aspect dwellings is overly weighted to the smaller single aspect apartments. The quality of the aspects/views for the single aspect apartments needs to be carefully considered against the size/scale of private amenity space.

The use of projecting balconies on key frontages (as well as within the core of the development) remains an issue. The usability of these balconies on exposed and key frontages (such as Blocks H and B) is limited and will have a negative impact when considering the end user and the potential for storage. Recessed and integrated balconies would be a preferred.

### Safety and Security

Some elevations (west facing Block E) could be improved to provide greater levels of passive surveillance onto the pedestrian route through the development. Details of the setbacks and boundary treatments to the ground floor apartments needs to be provided. For example, what are the security measures to provide setbacks, especially public fronting elevations.

Some of the details within the waste strategy need further thought. For example, the design of the communal bin storage buildings, see DAS 7.4. The lack of windows make these facilities uninviting spaces.

### Parking and Design

The location of the parking is logical; tucked behind the residential blocks, where walking and cycling can be prioritised. The design of the parking areas needs further thought; especially in addressing the long areas of parking without landscape or trees to help break these spaces up. The location of the delivery parking bay to the front of block B3 seems poorly located, dominating the space.

### Landscaping and Amenity Space

The Landscape Masterplan is muddled/confusing in places. For example, the changes in paving materials to the north pedestrian connection route, could be improved to prioritise pedestrians/cyclists over cars. The specification of paving materials needs to be consistent across the development.

The main plaza space (fronting Blocks H, A and B3) is generally positive. I would question the need for parking in this space, perhaps more tree planting could be considered to showcase this key nodal point. The space extends too far along the main access route. This would be improved by terminating the space/changes in material after the access to rear parking area.

### Conclusion

In summary, and based on the submitted plans and supporting information, the proposals have several design issues which we think should be resolved before we are able to support the application. This response indicates areas where the proposals should be reconsidered, amended and enhanced to address the design concerns raised.

If you wish to discuss any of these comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Dawson  
Built Environment Manager



N.B. This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to the particular matter.