

**WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)**

**DELEGATED APPLICATION**

**Application No:** 6/2024/2170/FULL  
**Location:** Telephone Exchange Wigmores North Welwyn Garden City AL8 6PH  
**Proposal:** Installation of an aluminium louvre following removal of 2x window panes on the first-floor east elevation  
**Officer:** Mr Raymond Lee  
**Recommendation:** Refused

6/2024/2170/FULL

<b>Context</b>	
<b>Site and Application description</b>	<p>The application site is situated in Wigmores North, in close proximity to Howardsgate within the town centre and conservation area. The application site comprise the telephone exchange building which runs from 36-54 Wigmores North with access to the rooftop adjacent to the access road serving the rear of buildings in the vicinity.</p> <p>The application seeks planning permission for the installation of an aluminium louvre following removal of 2x window panes on the first-floor east elevation. It was stated that the purpose of the proposal is to provide additional ventilation as part of the broadband and landline upgrades occurring within the telephone exchange building.</p>
<b>Constraints</b>	<p>CA - Conservation Area: WGC1; - Distance: 0            SAG - 0 - Distance: 0            PRC - Primary Retail Core (Primary Retail Core) - Distance: 0            Town - Welwyn Garden City Town Centre - Distance: 0            Wards - Handside - Distance: 0            FM10 - Flood Zone Surface Water 100mm (2711305) - Distance: 0            FM10 - Flood Zone Surface Water 100mm (2711381) - Distance: 0            FM00 - Flood Zone Surface Water 1000mm (7566833) - Distance: 0            FM00 - Flood Zone Surface Water 1000mm (7566684) - Distance: 0            FM00 - Flood Zone Surface Water 1000mm (7566713) - Distance: 0            MIX - Mixed Use Frontages - Distance: 0            HEN - No known habitats present (medium priority for habitat creation) - Distance: 0            SAGB - Sand and Gravel Belt - Distance: 0            GCN - GCN District Level Licensing - Green Zone - Distance: 0            NAWT - NATS Safeguarding Area Wind Turbines - Distance: 0            LLA - LLA Aerodrome Safeguarding Area - Distance: 0</p>
<b>Relevant planning history</b>	<p>Application Number: N6/1998/1119/FP            Decision: Granted            Decision Date: 17 May 1999            Proposal: Formation of telecommunications base station including three cross polar antennas, four dish antennas and an equipment housing</p>

	<p>Application Number: N6/1999/0742/DT Decision: Granted Decision Date: 20 September 1999 Proposal: Installation of one radio equipment midi cabin</p> <p>Application Number: N6/2004/0957/FP Decision: Granted Decision Date: 29 September 2004 Proposal: Installation of 3 louvre windows on second floor.</p> <p>Application Number: N6/2007/1462/FP Decision: Granted Decision Date: 27 November 2007 Proposal: Rooftop installation of three additional pole mounted antennas, radio equipment housing and repositioning of existing equipment</p> <p>Application Number: 6/2016/2416/PN15 Decision: Prior Approval Required and Granted Decision Date: 10 January 2017 Proposal: Prior approval for the installation of 3 antennas, 3 remote radio units (RRU) and 3 BOBs boxes together with associated support bracketry, feeder cables and ancillary development.</p> <p>Application Number: 6/2023/0908/FULL Decision: Withdrawn Decision Date: 03 May 2023 Proposal: Installation of 1 no. 0.3m dish. Associated ancillary upgrades</p> <p>Application Number: 6/2024/2137/FULL Decision: Granted Decision Date: 03 January 2025 Proposal: Installation of 6 no. antenna, 1 no. GPS Module and ancillary radio equipment onto new and existing steelwork along with ancillary development thereto following the removal of 3 no. antenna</p>		
<b>Consultations</b>			
<b>Neighbour representations</b>	Support: 0	Object: 1	Other: 0
<b>Publicity</b>	<p>Site Notice Display Date: 9 December 2024</p> <p>Site Notice Expiry Date: 2 January 2025</p> <p>Press Advert Display Date: 11 December 2024</p> <p>Press Advert Expiry Date: 4 January 2025</p> <p>Neighbour consultation letters</p>		
<b>Summary of neighbour responses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Together for WGC 6 Lytton Gardens - Comment: <i>'This application is for significant changes to a building in a central part of the west side Conservation Area where high standards of design should be advanced. What is proposed is however, a non-symmetrical removal (3rd and 4th out of 5) of two very large windows - c. 2m high - and their replacement by louvres which the applicant has not even illustrated properly to allow a proper consideration of the design. The change would be highly visible to all users of Wigmores North, introducing a highly discordant element. The</i></li> </ul>		

	<i>result would be a significant degradation of the existing elevation of a large building in a very public position to the detriment of the streetscene and leaving open future changes on the grounds that the original design had already been badly damaged. Alternative approaches to dealing with the claimed future overheating appear not to have been explored e.g siphoning of the heat to other spaces in the building.'</i>
<b>Consultees and responses</b>	Conservation - Objection
<b>Relevant Policies and Guidance</b>	
<b>National Planning Policy Framework</b>	
<b>The Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan 2016-2036:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP1 Delivering Sustainable Development</li> <li>• SADM2 Highway Network and Safety</li> <li>• SADM4 Development in Designated Centres</li> <li>• SP9 Place-making and High Quality Design</li> <li>• SADM11 Amenity and Layout</li> <li>• SADM12 Parking, Servicing and Refuse</li> <li>• SADM15 Heritage</li> <li>• SADM16 Ecology and Landscape</li> <li>• SP15 The Historic Environment of Welwyn Garden City</li> </ul>	
<b>Planning Guidance:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplementary Design Guidance 2005</li> <li>• Supplementary Planning Guidance Parking Standards 2004</li> <li>• Interim Policy for Car Parking Standards and Garage Sizes 2014</li> <li>• Planning Practice Guidance</li> <li>• National Design Guide</li> </ul>	
<b>Others:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework 2012</li> <li>• Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (2018 – 2031) 2018</li> <li>• Manual for Streets</li> </ul>	
<b>Main Issues</b>	
<b>Design (form, size, scale, siting) and Character (appearance within the streetscene)</b>	<p>Section 72 of the Listed Buildings and Conservations Areas Act (1990) states that 'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or the appearance of that area'. Section 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' is broadly consistent with Policy SADM15 'Heritage' of the Local Plan. Also of relevance, and consistent with the NPPF, is Policy SP1 which states the need to deliver sustainable development whilst ensuring development is built to high design standards reflecting local character. Policy SP9 emphasizes this need to deliver a high-quality design that fosters a positive sense of place, responding to the character and context of the surrounding area.</p> <p>Paragraph 203 of the NPPF states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;</li> <li>e) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that</li> </ul>

- conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- f) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- g) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Paragraph 212 of the NPPF outlines that, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, 'great weight' should be given to the asset's conservation.

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Paragraph 219 of the NPPF notes that Local Planning Authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

Local Plan Policy SADM15 is consistent with the NPPF but adds that where successive small-scale changes that lead to a cumulative loss or harm to the significance of the asset or historic environment should be avoided.

The property is located in the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The proposal involves the replacement of two first floor window panes on the east facing front elevation of the building with metal louvres that each measure 1m in width by 2.35m in height. The submitted D&A statement suggests that the aluminium louvres would be of a mill aluminium finish to match existing louvres already installed in the building and they would be installed to the existing metal window frames.

The Council's conservation officer was consulted on the application and it was advised that the proposed installation of the louvres would disrupt the very regular and consistent fenestration pattern of the property and introduce an atypical feature to the first floor opening. The uniformity of the fenestration pattern and appearance is a key architectural feature of the Neo-Georgian buildings within the Conservation Area. Although the windows are located in a later extension of the building, this part still follows the uniform frontages seen within the original Welwyn Garden City buildings, preserving the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. However, the proposal would erode this key design principle.

Given that the development is located on the principal elevation of the building, it would be very visible within the public realm and appear as a discordant feature. It is acknowledged that there are existing louvers on the building, however these are small in size and are discretely located. Furthermore, one of the existing louvers to the upper floor window is set behind a frame that mimics the pattern of the window glazing bars which lessens its visual impact upon the streetscene. The proposed louvers would occupy a much larger opening, in a more visually prominent location. As such the proposed development would result in an uncharacteristic and unsympathetic design by reason of the inappropriate materials, design and scale.

	<p>Accordingly, the proposal represents a poor standard of design and fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, contrary to Policies SP9 and SADM15 of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan, the Council's Supplementary Design Guidance 2005, Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and the National Planning Policy Framework.</p>
<b>Impact on neighbours</b>	<p>The NPPF is clear that planning should be a means of finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives. This means that authorities should always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. Policies SP9, SADM11 and SADM18 of the Local Plan seek to ensure that no new development would adversely affect the existing area either in terms of any built form or in terms of the operation of any uses from noise and vibration pollution.</p> <p>In this case, it is considered that the development would not result in any adjoining occupiers experiencing a detrimental loss of light, appear overbearing or unduly dominant. Furthermore, the proposed alteration to the openings would not afford any overlooking of the adjoining properties over and above the existing units or cause any significant harm in terms of noise and vibration.</p> <p>Consequently, the proposal would not have an adverse impact on the residential amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring buildings and as such will be in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies SADM11 and SADM18 of the Local Plan.</p>
<b>Access, car parking and highway considerations</b>	<p>In terms of the impact of the proposals upon Highway safety, the proposed development is for fenestration alteration only therefore the scheme will not detrimentally affect the operation or safety of the local highway, footway, cycleway and public transport networks. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy SADM2 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.</p>
<b>Landscaping Issues</b>	<p>None.</p>
<b>Any other considerations</b>	<p><i>Biodiversity Net Gain</i></p> <p>Paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 sets out that every planning permission granted for the development of land in England shall be deemed to have been granted subject to the 'biodiversity gain condition' requiring development to achieve a net gain of 10% of biodiversity value. This is subject to exemptions. An exemption applies in relation to planning permission for a development which is 'de-minimis' development. This means a development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 square metres (5m by 5m) of on-site habitat</li> <li>• 5 metres of on-site linear habitats such as hedgerows</li> </ul> <p>Policy SADM16 of the Local Plan is similar in this regard and notes that proposals will be expected to maintain, protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity, the structure and function of ecological networks and the ecological status of water bodies. All developments that are not otherwise</p>

	<p>exempt will be required to deliver a measurable biodiversity net gain of at least 10%.</p> <p>Applicants for planning permission are required to make a statement as to whether the biodiversity gain condition will apply if permission is granted. The applicant has confirmed on the application form that if permission is granted for the development to which this application relates, the biodiversity gain condition would not apply. It sets out that the proposal falls within the definition of de-minimis development, being a minor commercial development with fenestration alterations only and no increase in the footprint of the building, therefore this is not required. It is also noted that due to the extent of the works proposed and the commercial nature of the application site, in this case the proposal would unlikely impact any on-site habitat and would fall below the threshold.</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	
<p>In conclusion, the proposed development would result in conflict with the development plan and the NPPF. For the reasons given above it is recommended that planning permission is refused.</p>	

**Reasons for Refusal:**

1. The proposal represents a poor standard of design and fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, contrary to Policies SP9 and SADM15 of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan, the Council's Supplementary Design Guidance 2005, Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

**REFUSED DRAWING NUMBERS**

2.

Plan Number	Revision Number	Details	Received Date
124225-300		Proposed planning layout	11 November 2024
124225-302		Site Block Plan	11 November 2024
124225-301		Existing Elevations	11 November 2024

**1. POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE STATEMENT**

The decision has been made taking into account, where practicable and appropriate the requirements of paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework and material planning considerations do not justify a decision contrary to the development plan (see Officer's report which can be viewed on the Council's website or inspected at these offices).

**Determined By:**

Mr William Myers

3 January 2025