

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL
DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION No:	<u>N6/2007/137/OP</u>
LOCATION:	<u>Land at Bridge Road East and Bessemer Road,</u> <u>WGC</u>
PROPOSAL:	<u>Outline Application for Mixed Use Development,</u> <u>Including Employment (B1) and Hotel and</u> <u>Conference Centre (C1)</u>

NOTATION:

The site is located within a Designated Employment Area (EMP1) as designated by the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE: The application site occupies a prominent position on the corner of Bridge Road East and Bessemer Road in the Welwyn Garden City Industrial Area, which is designated as an Employment Area in Policy EMP1 of the ADP. The site is currently in employment use and the current access into the site is via Bridge Road East to the South and Bessemer Road to the North West.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL: A previous application was submitted for a similar development in 2006 pursuant to N6/2006/440/OP. That planning application proposed the demolition of the existing Class B1 premises (7,433sqm) and its replacement with 2092sqm of B1 Office floor space, a 120-bedroom hotel and a conference centre. Parking was proposed at ground and basement level under the proposed hotel and conference centre in the form of 251 parking spaces, 30 at ground floor level and 12 of which will be disabled parking spaces. All matters were reserved apart from Siting and Means of Access.

The current proposal details the demolition of the existing Class B1 premises (7,433sqm) and its replacement with 2092sqm of office floor space, a conference centre of 1,675sqm and a 64 bed hotel. Parking would be in the form 56 parking spaces at surface level and 226 parking bays provided in the basement including 12 disabled spaces. Again, all matters are reserved apart from siting and means of access (effectively layout and access under the changes to Articles 1 and 3 of the GDPO as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

PLANNING HISTORY: N6/2006/440/OP - Demolition of the existing Class B1 premises (7,433sqm) and its replacement with 2092sqm of B1 Office floor space, a 120-bedroom hotel and a conference centre. Parking was proposed at ground and basement level under the proposed hotel and conference centre in the form of 251 parking spaces, refused 2007.

N6/2007/391/FP – Creation of B1/B2 and/or B8 with ancillary trade counter and/or showroom, approved 2007

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES:

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991 – 2011:

Policy 25 – Car Parking

Policy 29 – Traffic and road safety implications of development proposals

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005:

GBSP2 – Towns and Specified Settlements

EMP1 – Employment Areas

EMP2 – Acceptable Uses in Employment Areas

R2 – Contaminated Land

M1 – Integrating Transport and Land Use

M2 – Transport Assessments

M14 – Parking Standards for New Development

D1, D2, D5

Supplementary Design Guidance

CLT6 – Hotels

EMP13 – Design Criteria for Employment Development

CONSULTATIONS:

HCC Transportation Planning and Policy - The proposal is for outline permission for a mixed use development, including employment (B1) hotel and conference centre (C1) and associated parking. Means of access are to be determined at outline stage. A previous application for a similar mixed use on the site was refused. The original highway reasons for that refusal were as follows:

1. The applicant has failed to address and mitigate against capacity issues at the Bessemer Road/Bridge Road East signalised junction.
2. The access arrangements into the development are likely to have a detrimental impact upon the free and safe flow of traffic along Bessemer Road.
3. The application fails to demonstrate adequate promotion of sustainable modes of transport. This failure is exacerbated by proposed parking provision of 40% of the max-parking standard. The parking standard for this zone is 50-75%.

This new proposal is for a 64 bedroom hotel, a conference centre totalling 1,675sq m and business units of 2,092 sqm(B1). A transport statement has been submitted by Savell Bird and Axon in support of the application and to try and address some of the highway issues raised by the previous application. It is proposed that access to the site will be taken from Bessemer Road, the A1000 which is a principal road, at the north of the site via a new priority junction. An exit will be provided onto Bridge Road East. Parking is to be provided partly on the surface and in an undercroft.

Notice is given under article 10 of the Town and County Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 that the Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority recommends that permission be refused as the applicant has failed to provide sufficient information to demonstrate the effect of the proposal the Bessemer Road/Bridge Road East signalised junction. In addition, because the application fails to demonstrate adequate promotion of sustainable modes of transport and the applicant has failed to demonstrate that parking to the appropriate

standards has been provided. Without such information, it is not possible to determine the likely impact on the adjacent highway network.

N.B – Further information was sought from the applicant in an attempt to resolve the highway issues. The latest information received shows that the proposed traffic generated by the development will be much greater than that estimated in the Traffic Assessment and will have a material impact on the flow on Bessemer Road and that the movements in and out of the new junction (180 vehicle movements in and out in the am peak) will interfere with the flow of traffic on Bessemer Road and therefore the same concerns apply. In addition to this, the proposed exit onto Bridge Road East has been re-assessed and it is not clear from the plans submitted how this exit will work with the existing access to the adjoining property, this is a potential point of conflict between vehicles using this exit and those entering the adjoining property. Although the exit has been put at an angle to the existing carriageway it would also be possible for smaller vehicles to try and turn right here, which would occur due to the delays that would be experienced exiting onto Bessemer Road.

HCC Passenger Transport Unit Bus and Rail Services - The site is well located in terms of accessibility to bus services and within the 400 metre catchments area. There are seven frequent bus routes which provide over 10 departures per hour Monday to Saturday each way from the local stops. Welwyn Garden City station is approximately 550 metres from the site and the local bus interchange is approximately 600 metres where further services may be accessed. Local bus route 301 (and 724 which serves the bus station) have been identified for corridor improvements as these have a good opportunity to generate additional passenger numbers helping towards meeting LTP targets. There is also a sufficient flow of low floor buses over these routes to justify undertaking highway and passenger measures to ensure that DDA standards for accessibility can be met. As part of the proposal additional pedestrian crossing facilities are indicated to be included at the junction with Bessemer and Bridge Roads. With this proposal, it is paramount that no additional effect on the present running time of services due to additional queuing is created through reduced capacity of the junction. From the rail station at Welwyn Garden City, trains are available to London for major interchanges and northwards to Stevenage for connections onwards to the north of England/Scotland. Bus Infrastructure/Interchange There are existing bus stops located along Bridge Road and at the Welwyn Garden City interchange which would benefit from improvement to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Disability and Discrimination Act (DDA). Presently, the existing interchange and local stops do not meet current accessibility requirements for which a review is being undertaken as to the various options. The local bus operator has shown commitment to these corridors and is in the process of (fully) introducing low floor vehicles for the 301 and coupled with this the County Council is now desirous that accessibility and publicity improvements along this corridor are now undertaken. Therefore, in terms of accessibility to services it would be appropriate to seek a contribution towards these improvements and help with promotion of existing service provisions in the locality. In general, it would be appropriate to seek a contribution towards sustainable transportation measures and accessibility improvements towards passenger transport which would include the following: Shelters Hard standing improvements New Posts, timetable information, etc. Real Time Kassel kerbing Bus Cage Markings (as appropriate) Recommendation If a pedestrian phase is to be introduced at the Bessemer/Bridge Road signal controlled junction it is extremely important that additional delay is not created for buses turning into and from Bridge Road. That as part of the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes, improvements towards sustainable transport should be secured. These should be primarily focused around the Bridge Road and/or the interchange area and be directed towards improvements

in sustainable passenger transport infrastructure and passenger information to ensure that DDA requirements are met. Ideally, a contribution towards the two local stops of £25,000 would be appropriate to complete improvements but any amount would be gratefully received towards accessibility improvements.

HCC Archaeology – The proposed development is unlikely to have an impact on significant archaeological deposits, structures or features. No objections.

Environment Agency – No objection in principle subject to conditions relating to site investigation, drainage in addition to standard informatives relating to environmental management efficient use of water.

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS: Not applicable

REPRESENTATIONS:

This application has been advertised and one representation has been received. Period expired.

Summary – Any proposal promoting hotel and conference facilities on the application site would prejudice the desires of the previous Local Plan Inquiry Inspector who recommended that Policy EMP3 be adopted solely for the Broadwater Road West site and accordingly it is strongly urged that the application be refused.

DISCUSSION:

The main issues are

- 1) **Whether the proposal is an appropriate use within the Employment Area in accordance with EMP1, EMP2 and Policy CLT6.**
- 2) **Whether the siting of the proposed buildings is acceptable with regard to the impact on the character and appearance of the streetscene, in accordance with Policies D1, D2 and SPG.**
- 3) **Whether the proposed access has an impact on highway and public safety and whether the proposed parking provision is appropriate**
- 4) **Other material planning considerations.**

1) The application site occupies a prominent location within the Welwyn Garden City Industrial Area. The current proposal details the demolition of the existing Class B1 premises (7,433sqm) and its replacement with 2092sqm of office floor space, a conference centre of 1,675sqm and a 64 bed hotel. Parking would be in the form 56 parking spaces at surface level and 226 parking bays provided in the basement including 12 disabled spaces. Again, all matters are reserved apart from siting and means of access (effectively layout and access under the changes to Articles 1 and 3 of the GDPO as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Following the previous reason for refusal on the grounds of the sites location in a designated Employment Area the applicant has commissioned research on the supply and demand of floor space in Welwyn Garden City. The report apparently demonstrates that there is a lack of demand for employment floor space within the town and that this is supported by the fact that a number of employment sites are currently being considered for redevelopment.

District Plan Policy EMP2 – Acceptable Uses in Employment Areas states that proposals in designated Employment Areas for uses other than Classes B1, B2 or B8 should generally be resisted, and will only be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that the existing land or premises are no longer required to meet future employment requirements and business and community needs.

The emphasis of the strategy and objectives in the Employment chapter of the District Plan Review is on husbanding reserves of employment land to ensure that there continues to be enough land and floor space in the district, in the right locations and of the right quality, to provide jobs for local people, maintain a diversity of employment uses and accommodate the requirements of local businesses and firms seeking to locate in the area. Clearly, the proposed development runs counter to this because it would result in a net loss of Class B employment land, floor space and jobs. However, the policy does allow for non-Class B development where it can be clearly demonstrated that the existing land or buildings are no longer required to meet future employment requirements. In their supporting statement, Barton Willmore states *‘Our client has identified an immediate need for a hotel in and around Welwyn Garden City. We consider that a hotel in this location is easily accessible to the town centre and major business users within the town. There is clearly a surplus of employment land in the town with a number of sites being unoccupied or vacant, and for which little or no demand exists’*. In addition the most recent supporting letter from Stimpsons Chartered Surveyors states that *‘there is a lack of demand for employment floor space within the town and this is supported by the fact that a number of sites previously in employment use are being considered for redevelopment to alternative uses’*. This is little more than an assumption, no statistics or data have been submitted with the application to substantiate the claim that there is a surplus of land, however the London Arc Hertfordshire Employment Land Review has been completed and does show that there is to a degree a surplus demand of floor space within the town going forward to 2021. In the context of the proposed designation of Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City as a key centre for development and change in the Proposed Changes to the draft East of England Plan and the higher housing numbers proposed there are a number of major strategic options which the Council will have to consider:

- The borough could continue to provide more jobs than workers, continuing at job density of about 1.15 (job density is defined as the number of filled jobs in an area divided by the working-age population resident in that area); (meaning relatively limited releases of employment land)
 - We could increase job growth further to accommodate our own needs and those of neighbouring districts (perhaps meaning no releases or even an increase in allocated employment land); or
 - We could move to greater alignment between jobs and housing by releasing land from employment to accommodate some of the housing growth (meaning relatively major releases of employment land).
1. These strategic options would need to be put to the public through the Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation and a preferred option arrived at thereafter. The mechanism for releasing areas of designated employment land could only take place through the Site Allocations DPD which, again, would be subject to Issues & Options Consultation and reaching a preferred option. Even if the Council concluded substantial releases were appropriate, it would not necessarily be appropriate to release the application site. For example, it could be concluded that it is so well located in relation to public

transport links and the town centre that it is a valuable employment land resource that should be retained. It is therefore considered that although additional evidence has been submitted and the Employment Land Review completed, there is still insufficient justification to allow this land for non employment related uses. The site lies within a designated Employment Area and the applicant has failed to provide evidence to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, that the existing land and premises are no longer required to meet future employment requirements and business and community needs. The proposal if granted without this information would pre-empt policies in the future Welwyn Hatfield Core Strategy Development Plan Document and Site Allocation Development Plan Document which will be informed by the London Arc Hertfordshire Employment Land Review and the East of England Plan. The proposal, by virtue of the inclusion Hotel and Conference Centre and the lack of sufficient justification for such uses is therefore unacceptable and contrary to the aims and objectives of Policy EMP2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005, PPS12 and PPG4.

In relation to the hotel use, policy CLT6 – Hotels applies a sequential test to the location of hotels stating that the preferred location for them is in town centres or, where there are no suitable sites in town centres, in edge of centre locations, at district centre locations, at district centre or neighbourhood centres or in areas with high accessibility by public transport. The application site is not in Welwyn Garden City town centre or on the edge of it, but it is close to the railway station (about 600 metres' walk), the bus station (about 500 metres) and local bus stops. If the principle of development for non B Class uses was accepted on this site then in principle it may be considered to be an appropriate site for a hotel subject to parts (i), (ii) and (iii) of CLT6, in particular in respect of (ii) which considers the impact of the Hotel on the character of the area although in reality it is likely that any future hotel will be located on Broadwater Road West.

2) With regards to the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the street scene the main issue to consider is the layout of the proposed development in relation to that of adjoining buildings, topography and public views and vistas. It is acknowledged that the proposal is in outline, however the applicant has requested that means of access and siting be considered at this stage. The previous application was submitted prior to the changes to the outline planning process as stipulated in Circular 01/2006. The applicant has requested again for this application that Siting (Layout) and Means of Access (Access) are considered at this stage and that the other reserved matters are scale, appearance and landscaping. Information has also been submitted detailing the use, amount of development, scale parameters, indicative access points and an indicative layout (although this is not indicated as being such on the submitted plans).

The site occupies a prominent location on the major transitional junction between the WGC Town Centre and the Industrial Area and is visible on the approach from all directions, in particular on the approach from the town centre to the industrial area. In association with the re-development of Broadwater Road West, this will become a key focal point within the locality and because of this; a high standard of design needs to be incorporated into any re-development proposals for not only this site, but also other similar sites within close proximity.

The siting of the office block to the rear would relate to the adjoining industrial uses and is therefore consistent with the general pattern and layout of development within

the industrial area, which apart from industrial estates is somewhat piecemeal. Whilst it is acknowledged that the existing arrangement of built form on the site is visually weak with regards to its contributions to views/vistas to this site, the conference centre and hotel brings the built form on the site into a more prominent location on the corner of the junction. Previously, the arrangement of the block on the corner and in particular its mass and height at six storeys (24m) was considered to be inappropriate and visually weak as it did not utilise its position on the corner of the junction and would have appeared in marked contrast to the proposed conference centre, which is only approximately 6.5m in height.

Notwithstanding the revised design and indicative scale of the hotel (which would be dealt with at reserved matters stage) the 'Malmaison' approach as opposed to the six storey Travelodge that was shown last time this is an attempt to reduce concerns regarding the quality of design on this corner. It is also an attempt to provide a focal point for the site, yet its close proximity to the highway, its shape and form, coupled with the marked difference in the heights of the surrounding buildings results in a layout that fails to turn the corner and therefore from a design perspective fails to utilise the sites prominent location. This is further emphasised by the lack of continuity in scale between the hotel/office and the conference centre. Whilst the scale of the proposal and appearance would be dealt with at reserved matters, it is clear from the submitted drawings that the conference facility would be two storeys to a height of approximately 7m, whilst set behind the facility the office block is indicated as being approximately 16m in height with the hotel at the same height (16m).

Notwithstanding this, the overall siting, scale and final design of the hotel and conference centre would undoubtedly be subject to some change and negotiation at the reserved matters stage as it is unclear whether the applicant intends to develop the site or to sell the site on. It is also unclear as to who the end occupier of the hotel would be and although it is indicated as being a Malmaison hotel this is purely indicative and there is no way of ensuring the same design approach that is showed on the plans is implemented. In design terms the siting of the buildings as shown on the submitted plans fails to take account of its corner location, it is reasonable to consider that the scale and design of the building would be subject to change and accordingly it is considered that because of this and because the reserved matters now cover Scale, Appearance and Landscaping, it would be unreasonable to refuse the application on character/visual amenity grounds.

3) Access and Parking

The new access onto Bessemer Road is approximately 85m from the signal controlled junction of Bessemer Road and Bridge Road. According to the transport statement queue, lengths of up to 15 vehicles were observed during the morning peak. These queues could extend up to the proposed access and the applicant has failed to demonstrate any measures proposed to ensure that this access is kept free so that any traffic trying to turn right into the site from the south does not delay traffic on Bessemer Road. In addition, HCC have expressed concerns regarding the proposed layout as it could have an impact on the surrounding highway network. The entrance to the undercroft car park is close to the new junction from Bessemer Road. Cars queuing to exit the site onto Bessemer Road will block the access to this car park, and this could result in cars not be able to enter the site from Bessemer Road thus affecting the flow of traffic on Bessemer Road.

The latest information received shows that the proposed traffic generated by the development will be much greater than that estimated in the Traffic Assessment and will have a material impact on the flow on Bessemer Road and that the movements in and out of the new junction (180 vehicle movements in and out in the am peak) will interfere with the flow of traffic on Bessemer Road and therefore the same concerns apply. In addition to this, the proposed exit onto Bridge Road East has been re-assessed and it is not clear from the plans submitted how this exit will work with the existing access to the adjoining property, this is a potential point of conflict between vehicles using this exit and those entering the adjoining property. Although the exit has been put at an angle to the existing carriageway it would also be possible for smaller vehicles to try and turn right here, which would occur due to the delays that would be experienced exiting onto Bessemer Road. Accordingly, the traffic arising from the proposed development would be likely to interfere with the free and safe flow of traffic on the highway network and the slowing and turning of vehicles associated with the use of the access would lead to conflict and interference with the free flow of traffic on the highway and be detrimental to highway safety. In this respect, the proposal fails to overcome the previous reason for refusal and would have a detrimental impact on the safe and efficient operation of the highway.

Parking

Turning to the proposed car parking provision It is proposed to provide 56 car parking spaces for the office element on the surface level and 226 spaces in the undercroft for the hotel and conference centre giving a total of 282 spaces. The submitted Transport Statement indicates that a maximum of 582 spaces would be required under the adopted standards.

However, this must relate to the previous development as the floor space of the accommodation has been reduced significantly and under the adopted parking standards the requirement for the office part of the development would be a maximum of 70 spaces (based on one spaces per 30sqm gfa). The conference centre is classed as a D1 use and at 1675sqm; it would require 1 space per 9sqm or 1 space per three fixed seats. As the number of seats are not know it is reasonable to use the sqm and therefore the conference centre requires a maximum of 186 spaces plus three spaces for every four staff members. In addition, the hotel element requires approximately 64 spaces for the bedrooms in addition to spaces for the dining area, bar area and 2 spaces per 3 members of staff. Although these details are unknown, the plans indicate that there is 353sqm 'front of house' area with probably half of that being for a dining/bar area, resulting in a requirement for a further 40 spaces for this element alone under the ADP. Given the end user of the hotel is not know, it is difficult to calculate the exact requirements.

This results in a total of approximately 350-400 spaces plus, dependant on staff numbers for both the hotel and conference centre and the hotel's bar room areas and dining areas.

The site falls within Zone 3 where a reduction to 50-75% of the maximum can be applied. This zonal approach applies to urban areas only and it is appropriate to restrict car parking in town centre locations where there are opportunities to walk to shops and other services and the work location is within acceptable distance of a range of transport facilities. Using this zonal approach, it could be considered that approximately 175 – 260 spaces are required if 350 spaces is considered appropriate and if 400 spaces, 200 – 300 spaces are required. However, although they provision is within the 50-75% range, it has not been proven to the satisfaction of the local

planning authority and highway authority that the proposed car parking provision is acceptable at this outline stage and would not result in a level of on street car parking that would not be detrimental to highway safety.

It is noted that servicing arrangements for the conference centre involve using nine parking bays. The transport statement expects these deliveries to be infrequent and that these bays would be temporarily suspended. However, the report also states that these bays are for use by the business units rather than by the conference centre so there may be a conflict of interest over the use of these bays for servicing.

4) There are no other material considerations which warrant a decision other than that given below.

CONCLUSION: The applicant has failed to provide sufficient justification or evidence to the satisfaction of the local planning authority that the land is no longer required to meet future employment requirements and business and community needs. This revised proposal is for a mixed-use scheme incorporating B1 office space, a 64-bed hotel (C1) and a conference centre (D1) and the principle of the proposal is contrary to the provisions of Policy EMP2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 in addition to PPG4 and PPS12. The traffic arising from the proposed development would be likely to interfere with the free and safe flow of traffic on the highway network and the slowing and turning of vehicles associated with the use of the access would lead to conflict and interference with the free flow of traffic on the highway and be detrimental to highway safety. In this respect, the proposal fails to overcome the previous reason for refusal and would have a detrimental impact on the safe and efficient operation of the highway. With regard to the proposed car parking provision, the applicant has stated that the site should provide approximately 582 spaces, although this is clearly based on the previous proposal. The reduction in the number of bedrooms of the hotel and the reduction in the floor space of the conference centre brings this provision down to approximately 175 – 300 spaces plus although exact details are not known at this stage because the end user of the hotel is unknown. The maximum reduction is 50% that could be allowed under the adopted standards and the current provision of 256 spaces does appear appropriate although the highway authority retains concerns over the appropriateness of the layout.

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSAL REASON (S)

1. The site lies within a designated Employment Area and the applicant has failed to provide evidence to the satisfaction of the local planning authority, that the existing land and premises are no longer required to meet future employment requirements and business and community needs. The proposal if granted without this information would pre-empt policies in the future Welwyn Hatfield Core Strategy Development Plan Document and Site Allocation Development Plan Document which will be informed by the London Arc Hertfordshire Employment Land Review and the East of England Plan. The proposal, by virtue of the inclusion Hotel and Conference Centre and the lack of sufficient justification for such uses is therefore unacceptable and contrary to the aims and objectives of Policy EMP2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005, PPS12 and PPG4.

2. The applicant has failed to demonstrate within the application how the proposals would safeguard the free and safe flow of traffic on the highway network. In particular the development if permitted would interfere with the free and safe flow of traffic on the surrounding highway network and the proposed means of access and car parking layout would result in the slowing and turning of vehicles using the access on to the A1000 (Bessemer Road) to such an extent that this would have a detrimental impact on the free and safe flow of traffic and highway safety. The proposal is therefore contrary to the aims and objectives of Policies EMP13, M2, M1, M14 D5 and D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005 and PPG13.

CONDITIONS: Not applicable

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION: Not applicable

INFORMATIVES: Not applicable

DRAWING NUMBERS: SK 007 REV D, SK 005, SK021 REV D, SK020 REV D, SK004, SK051 REV A, SK010 REV C, SK 100, SK002 REV D, SK101, SK001 REV D, SK003 REV E

Signature of author..... Date.....