Former Nabisco Shredded Wheat Factory
Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire

Heritage Statement

Mid-20th century view of Shredded Wheat factory [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

February 2015
1 Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared to support the outline application for planning permission and listed building consent for the former Shredded Wheat Factory, Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City.

1.2 The purpose of the report is to set out the history and heritage significance of the site, and to assess on the development proposals. The report should be read in conjunction with the Design & Access Statement prepared by EPR Architects and the Planning Report prepared by DLA Planning.

1.3 The proposals are being submitted in two parts – an outline application for:

_Erection of up to 850 Class C3 dwellings to potentially include up to 80 Class C2 care dwellings, Class A1 retail, Class A3/A4 restaurants/cafes/bars/pubs, Class D1 community use and healthcare and Class D2 gym/dance/exercise studio floorspace. Demolition of all buildings and structures except the original 1920's silos, production hall, grain store and boiler house. Refurbishment and change of use of the retained listed buildings to provide 2 Class C3 residential units, a Class C1 boutique/budget hotel, Class B1(a) offices, a Class A4 pub/bar, a Class D1 creche and a Class D2 gym/dance/exercise studio. Provision of external space for leisure and recreation to include a linear park, external games/play area, allotments and a skate park. Creation of internal estate roads, paths, vehicle and cycle parking. Highway works comprising the widening of footways and the provision of cycle ways to Broadwater Road and Bridge Road, works to Hyde Way, works to nearby junctions and the erection of a new footbridge from Bridge Road leading into the scheme. Phase 1 to include the highway works – no matters are reserved. Phase 2 – layout, scale and means of access are submitted for consideration._

and Listed Building application for:

_Demolition of all buildings and structures except the original 1920's silos, production hall, grain store and boiler house. Refurbishment and change of use of the retained listed buildings to provide 2 Class C3 residential units, a Class C1_
boutique/budget hotel, Class B1(a) offices, a Class A4 pub/bar, a Class D1 creche and a Class D2 gym/dance/exercise studio.

1.4 The introduction is followed by a description of the historic development of the site, the character, appearance and interest of the factory. Section 4 analyses the heritage significance of the listed building and its context. Section 5 sets out the national and local policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment that is relevant to this matter. Section 6 assesses the merits of the scheme in heritage terms.

1.5 The lead consultant and editor of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation.

1.6 The drafting of this statement was undertaken by Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC and Kate Graham MA, PG Dip Cons (AA). Nick has been a Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas in the London Region of English Heritage. Most recently he was a Director of Conservation at Alan Baxter & Associates. Kate has been an assistant Historic Buildings and Areas team leader in the London Region of English Heritage, as well as working in English Heritage’s policy team. Most recently, Kate was Conservation & Design Manager at the London Borough of Islington. She has also worked at the Architectural Heritage Fund. Both have extensive experience in dealing with proposals that affect the historic environment and also have a background in research, in policy analysis and in understanding historic buildings and places.

1.7 Historical research for this report was undertaken by Dr Ann Robey FSA, a conservation and heritage professional with over twenty years experience. She has worked for leading national bodies as well as smaller local organizations and charities. She is a researcher and writer specialising in architectural, social and economic history, with a publication record that includes books, articles, exhibitions and collaborative research.
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1.8 The buildings form part of a larger, partly vacant site, to the east of the main north-south railway line that runs through Welwyn Garden City. The site is located in close proximity to the rail overbridge that provides pedestrian access to the railway station and on to the town centre.

Note on research, analysis and sources

1.9 It should be noted that in common with many historic buildings and sites, it is not always possible to provide a truly comprehensive analysis of the historic development of a building. The research and analysis set out in this report is as thorough as possible given the type and number of archival resources available.

1.10 This desk-based and archival research has been combined with a visual assessment and appraisal of the building. Further sources and evidence that add to our knowledge and understanding of the building and its history may become available at a future date. The report has also been informed by the Historic Building Recording Report carried out by Archaeological Solutions Ltd in April 2014.
2.0 Site Location & Description

2.1 The site lies within Welwyn Garden City in the centre of Hertfordshire. It occupies a central position, to the east of the A1 (M) motorway and main railway line bounded by Broadwater Road, Bridge Road and Hyde Way and land adjoining the railway.

2.2 The site is rectangular in plan and the topography is mainly flat. The approximately half of the site is developed, with the original factory complex facing the railway line.

2.3 Other than the former grain silos, the complex does not rise to above three and a half storeys and is built in a predominantly functional architecture of painted concrete/rendered walls and Crittall metal windows. The most important, original, element of the site is now largely enclosed in views from Broadwater Road and Bridge Road by the more mediocre additions to the complex in the 1930s and 1950s. Between 1937 and 1939 a new single storey production hall and an additional 27 silos were added. In the 1950s there were further extensions to the production facilities and office accommodation added fronting Bridge Road.

Designations

2.4 The term ‘designations’ relates to the level of statutory protection that applies to a site or building. A designated heritage asset can be a listed building or a conservation area. The extent of a designated conservation area is straightforward to determine given that the boundary is set at the date of designation or later extension. The extent of a listed building can be less clear as listing often applies to other lesser elements that are attached to a listed building or form part of its curtilage. Determining whether other structures form part of the listing involves consideration of whether structures are fixed, whether these are ancillary to the main building and whether these formed part of the land before 1 July 1948.

2.5 The grade II listed former factory forms one element of a wider site, currently occupying roughly its northern half. The factory building was listed in 1981. As a listed building, consent may be
required in order to undertake certain works to the building which could effect the building’s architectural or historic interest.

2.6 The full list description for the complex reads as follows:

1925. Architect Louis de Soissons. Two concrete ranges, at right angles with links. Southern range consists of giant range of cylindrical concrete drums 15 bays long with flat oversailing capping with railings right over the whole top. Behind this is a plain attic storey with 28 plain windows with plain capping over. On one end elevation is a 3 bay projecting tower rising just above the main roof level.

At the west end of the range is a 2 bay wing with large windows, the southern bay of 3 storeys and the northern of 4. Flatroofs. Adjacent is a 7 bay, 4 storey block, with large windows divided by narrow piers and small scale structural divisions between the storeys, making it almost wholly glass. Flat oversailing capping at roof level.

2.7 The list description is intended to provide sufficient detail for identification purposes only. It does not for example provide the history of the building or identify any particular features as having a greater or lesser significance.

2.8 The site is not situated within a conservation area but is in close proximity to the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. This conservation area covers a large area of the town centre to the west of the site and its residential hinterlands. Whilst the impact of the scheme on its character and appearance will be considered within this report, as far as this site is concerned, there is something of a barrier between the site and the conservation area caused by the breadth of the railway lines and siding and the Howard Centre to the west.

2.9 The closest listed building to the site is located to the south of the Shredded Wheat Factory (figure 1). This is the grade II listed former office block to the Roche Factory (now demolished). This building was constructed in the late 1930s.
Figure 1: Plan showing listed buildings within close proximity to the site. The blue triangles indicate a listed building.
3 Historic development

3.1 The following section provides an overview of the historic development of the former Shredded Wheat Factory Site.

Overview

3.2 For almost ninety years the distinctive white silos of the Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat Factory have been a prominent landmark to rail travellers passing the station in Welwyn Garden City. The factory was designed by Canadian-born Louis de Soissons (1890-1962), the principal architect of Welwyn – the country’s second Garden City, which was established on agricultural land just twenty-one miles from London by planning pioneer Ebenezer Howard in 1919-20. In April 1920, Welwyn Garden City Limited was formally established as the owner and developer of the 2,378 acre estate, as a new garden city for 40-50,000 inhabitants. Louis de Soissons was appointed as the principal architect and planner in April 1920 and he presented a ‘master plan’ for the new ‘city’ in June of the same year (figures 2&3). It was the first major commission of the Louis de Soissons Partnership, the practice he had set up with George Grey Wornum. Louis de Soissons and the partnership were actively involved in Welwyn’s planning, architectural design and growth for over 60 years.

3.3 The development company – Welwyn Garden City Limited – allocated land for industrial and business purposes, as well as for privately owned houses, granting leases with restrictive covenants. De Soissons had total control of the plan of Welwyn Garden City – all plans of buildings had to be submitted to him under the provisions of the Building and Other Regulations in Force on the Welwyn Garden City Estate of 1923. Welwyn Garden City Limited successfully controlled the appearance of the town, and built about 40% of the buildings themselves.

3.4 The new Garden City was to be self-sufficient; it was to be a carefully planned settlement combining industry and agriculture into a distinct whole, a self-contained community with an industrial area providing jobs in ‘clean’ manufacturing industries. This was to prevent the town becoming merely a dormitory town.

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1 Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area Appraisal, Conservation Architecture & Planning Ltd. (2006)
2 J. Tyrwhitt, Life and Works in Welwyn, (1939), p.2
for London. The limits on its growth were ultimately set by the surrounding green-belt and any trees already in the landscape were retained in the initial plan. A follower of garden city philosophy wrote in 1911 ‘The object of a Garden City is to draw away from over crowded localities or to intercept the ever-increasing flow from the country by establishing new industrial towns in the country: towns which shall always stand in their belt of agricultural land’.

3 To the west and north of the town centre were residential districts, and to the east of the railway line were areas reserved for industry and business, beyond which were further areas of housing. (Figure 4). The industrial area was beside the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) and the branch line to Hertford which swept north-eastwards (now closed). This fairly level land close to the railway was recognised as the best site for industry. Most of the factories were eventually located off Broadwater Road, which ran in a north-south axis (figures 5,6 & 7).

3 Sir Ralph Neville, ‘Garden City and Garden Suburb’, in Garden Cities and Town Planning, n.s. Vol. 1, No. 1 (1911)
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Figure 3: Louis de Soissons’ Master Plan of June 1920

Figure 4: A town plan by de Soissons dating from 1921

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Figure 5: Plan by Louis de Soissons of the Factory Area in 1925

Shredded Wheat

3.6 The first firm to occupy a site in the new Factory Area at Welwyn was Archibald D. Dawnay & Sons Ltd, constructional engineers and structural steel fabricators who took a site near Hunter’s Bridge which crossed the railway (No.2 on figure 5). They were quickly followed by the American company Shredded Wheat which leased seven acres just to the south in an excellent position right by the railway line\(^4\) (No.3 on figure 5). Shredded Wheat was attracted to the town for several reasons – the close proximity to London, but without the ‘smoke, grime and fog, that London is apt to indulge in’; the convenience of getting ‘suitable railway siding accommodation for receiving goods to other parts of the country’\(^5\). But of equal importance was the prospect of

\(^5\) Hertford Local Studies Library, *Industry Moves Out* (n/d), p.19
having a factory in a new healthy environment where the workforce could profit from all the social and economic benefits of ‘the happy Shredded Wheat Family’6. The company believed that ‘all food for human consumption should be manufactured under the most rigid sanitary conditions and amidst surroundings that are cleanly, healthy and pleasant’. Welwyn Garden City was chosen as ‘more nearly conforming to these ideals than any of the other sites offered’7.

3.7 De Soissons drew up plans for the new Shredded Wheat factory between March and July 1924 and construction work on the factory started in May in the same year8. The Shredded Wheat Company of America was established in the 1890s by Henry Perky, a health food enthusiast and the inventor of Shredded Wheat.

![Shredded Wheat Factory in Buffalo](image)

Figure 6: Shredded Wheat Factory in Buffalo, close to Niagara Falls, (demolished in the 1950s)

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6 Shredded Wheat publicity brochure on Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website
7 Industry Moves Out, (n/d), p.19
8 Herts Archives & Local Studies UDC/21/77/130; UDC/21/77 132 (1&)

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Perky’s bright, ultra-modern factory, opened in Niagara Falls in 1901, and was an exemplar in architecture of the healthy lifestyle promoted by its product and was regarded as a model factory.

3.8 Much was made about the cleanliness of the factory and manufacturing process and the factory was built there to take advantage of the hydroelectric power supplied by the Niagara River. The five-storey factory was called the ‘Palace of Light’ because of the vast numbers of windows and because it was clean and modern (figure 6). Over 100,000 tourists a year visited the factory to admire its hygienic operations, its employee showers and reading rooms, the fine recreational and social facilities offered to staff and to sample the product. The tour demonstrated ‘both the wonders of technology and the benefits of enlightened management’.

Figure 7: Plan of Factory Area in 1929

9 William Irwin, *The New Niagara: Tourism, Technology and the Landscape of Niagara Falls 1776-1917*, (1996), p.181; The employees, who were mainly female, received four breaks during the day and were the first known recipients of ‘coffee-breaks’.
3.9 The growth in demand for ‘cereal-based’ breakfast foods in the early 20th century saw the company expand to England, setting up offices in Aldwych, London in 1908. After looking at many locations, they chose to build their first European factory in Welwyn Garden City10 because the company wished to come to a new town in order to provide ideal working and living conditions for their employees11.

3.10 From the very start Welwyn Garden City did all it could to attract industrial manufacturers to the town, placing adverts in 1920 in magazines such as Punch and in the daily newspapers, and covering huge hoardings with adverts. An undated promotional brochure produced by Welwyn Garden City Ltd. Entitled Industry Moves Out stated ‘factory sites in Welwyn Garden City must appeal strongly to firms who want their products made in the healthiest and cleanest atmosphere right away from the smoke and fog, by workers living under conditions which make for both well-being and contentment’12. In fact the Shredded Wheat Company stated that ‘we expect both our office and factory staff to live in Welwyn Garden City, so that they and their families may have the benefit of the new and ideal housing conditions in the town, and also that the cost of transportation to and from work should be minimised13.

3.11 Work began on the original three-storey Production Hall block fronting the railway line of the Shredded Wheat Factory in May 192414. There was a boiler house, garage and wheat elevator, all designed by de Soissons (see plan of 1924 in figure 8). De Soissons submitted the official building application for the factory on 28th July 192415. The foundation, footings, external party and cross walls were all built in reinforced concrete with a damp course of Bituminous felt (figure 9)16. The flat roof was covered in Asphalt. The factory was built by the flat-slab construction method, a technique that had been developed in Europe and America which had flat floor plates resting on columns without any down stand beams, its structural behavior depending upon the arrangement of reinforcing within the slab. American clients in Britain were amongst the first to accept this construction method in the mid-1920s. The Shredded Wheat

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10 The Times, 28 Jun 1924
12 Industry Moves Out, (n/d), p.17
13 Industry Moves Out, (n/d) p.19
14 Roger Fuller, A History of Welwyn Garden City, (1986), p.130
15 Herts Archives, UDC/21/77/132 (1)
16 ibid
Factory was amongst the first buildings to use it, the work being undertaken by the Trussed Concrete Steel Company, who at the same time were working for Wallis Gilbert and Partner on the Wrigley Factory at Wembley.\(^{17}\)

Figure 8: Plan of new Shredded Wheat Factory in 1924 [© Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies]

Figure 9: Showing the construction of the reinforced concrete Shredded Wheat Factory c.1924 [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

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\(^{17}\) David Yeomans, *Owen Williams*, (2001), p.88
3.12 The Shredded Wheat Factory became almost a symbol of Welwyn, being one of the first new factories built there in a modern style – a dramatic contrast to the neo-Georgian that de Soissons used for the design of housing and civic buildings elsewhere in Welwyn. De Soissons showed that he could work in a Modernist idiom with the Shredded Wheat Factory.

Figures 10-13: The silos under construction and the design by Peter Lind & Co. Ltd. [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

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19 Elsewhere in Welwyn, there were a few architect-designed homes in the Moderne style including properties in Coneydale and Pentley Park by Eugene Kauffman and Paul Mauger.
3.13 Much of the machinery such as shredding machines were housed on the first floor, including the heavy ovens that were located at the northern end (see figures 14 & 15) – and probably accounts for the extra thickness of floor slab at this end of the building.

Figure 14 and 15: Ground and first floor plan of the original factory building.
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3.14 The opening ceremony brochure stated that ‘the factory has been constructed by Messrs. F.P. Henderson, Ltd, the well-known building contractors of London, from plans and under the direction of the architect Mr. Louis de Soissons, OBE, FRIBA of Welwyn Garden City, assisted by Mr. Arthur Kenyon, FRIBA, of 22 Surrey Street, Strand’\textsuperscript{20}. The 18 grain silos were designed and built by Peter Lind & Co. of London (figures 10,11,12,13).

3.15 The building was described as a ‘model factory’ with a clean healthy image, enhanced by the use of the white ceramic tiles in which the building was encased ‘like ivory’ and the vast clear windows that sparkled like ‘clusters of diamonds’ (see figure 17). Inside, the white-painted reinforced concrete workrooms and offices were flooded with sunlight and it was said that it ‘was impossible to imagine workrooms more airy, bright and pleasant’\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{20} Shredded Wheat Factory Opening Souvenir Brochure (1925) on Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid}

Figure 16: Second floor plan of the original factory building.
The new factory began production in 1926. At the 5th Ordinary Meeting of Welwyn Garden City Ltd, it was reported that ‘the factory of the Shredded Wheat Co., with its extraordinary efficient equipment will be brought into operation as their first European plant’. It was officially opened by Lord Salisbury on 12 March 1926. So striking and modern was the new building, that the company used an image of the factory on every packet of the cereal, on their delivery vans and in all their printed publicity and advertisements.

The design of the Shredded Wheat Factory was so unashamedly modern (especially with the white concrete silos) that it was perhaps the most avant-garde building in Britain at the time of its completion in 1925. The influence of American design at the factory was clear. The mammoth reinforced concrete elevators or silos were first built in Buffalo (the home of Shredded Wheat) in 1906. Architect Walter Gropius wrote in his 1913 essay *The Development of Industrial Design*, that ‘The grain elevators of Canada and South America...are almost as impressive in their monumental power as the buildings of ancient Egypt’. Early 20th century architects were mesmerised by concrete silos both in America and in Europe. Concrete had been used to construct grain silos in Europe as early as the 1890s and the Belgian reinforced concrete pioneer Francois Hennebique was well known for his silos. In 1927, Le Corbusier called “American grain elevators and factories, the magnificent first-fruits of the new age”, in *Towards a New Architecture* and praised the
Darley’s book *Factory* states that the nearest English replication of the monumental silos of Buffalo was Welwyn Garden City’s Shredded Wheat Factory with its concrete, white-rendered simple geometry.\(^{25}\)

3.18 When building the grain silos, Peter Lind & Co. Ltd had to use innovative methods of construction. They used sliding shutters that enabled concreting to go on continuously day and night until the work was finished. Night shifts worked under floodlights, and the operation called for a high degree of organization and supervision. Shredded Wheat had a 5,700 tons capacity silo, with eighteen storage bins that towered above the factory. Which at a total height of over one hundred feet, was a dramatic sight.

3.19 In 1928 the Shredded Wheat Co. Ltd. became associated with the National Biscuit Company of America (Nabisco) which produced not only Shredded Wheat but also numerous varieties of branded biscuits and wrapped bread.

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Figure 18: The factory in its recreation grounds

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3.20 Extensions took place to the factory between 1937 and 1939. These included a new single storey production hall fixed to the east of the multi-storey original production hall and an increase in the number of silos from 18 to 45. The additional 27 storage bins were designed by Louis Wirsching Jnr (the Nabisco company architect) and constructed by Peter Lind & Co. Ltd. The capacity increased by 8,500 tons. The new silos, whilst at first glance appearing to be fully integrated to the original ones are actually separate, independent, structures that simply ‘butt up against’ the originals. A conveyor system was also introduced. In 1937 a penthouse was added to the top of the main building in reinforced concrete.

3.21 1941 to 1947 were difficult business years, because, under the Government zoning scheme, the Shredded Wheat Company was excluded from selling in certain areas where sales were strongly established. Zoning came to an end early in 1947 and from then onwards the company steadily increased its share of the cereal market. In the early 1950s there was a large extension towards Broadwater Road that increased production facilities, but reduced the recreation ground. Another extension in 1957 improved production and increased administrative facilities. The factory was extended again in 1959 and these extensions covered the whole site with buildings and obscured the silos from the view of the road that passes the factory.

3.22 In 1960 the company bought a further 5.5 acres and Cromac House was built for the research, sales development and warehousing departments.26 In 1961 Charles W Fox FRIBA drew plans for renovations to the west elevation of the original factory building. This work involved the addition of Seaporcel panels (green). The columns that originally rose above the roof were cut down to be level with the top of a new parapet.

26 Roger Fuller, A History of Welwyn Garden City, (1986), p.133
Figure 19: The factory as shown in the Welwyn Garden City – The official handbook & Directory 1953/54

Figure 20: The Folly Arch – the entrance to the ‘Home of Shredded Wheat’
The Site Today

3.23 Production at the site stopped in 2008 and since then the factory complex has been shut.

3.24 Some of the original process flows for the production of Shredded Wheat and other products may be discerned in the existing layout and minor components of redundant plant remain, but essentially the northern half of the complex is largely derelict. The southern half is a cleared site.

3.25 The northern site today comprises the accumulation of the three main phases of development, with the majority of the land now filled with buildings. Much of the original factory is hidden behind the later, less interesting buildings, including the 1930s production hall and the 1950s range of administrative offices along Bridge Road.
4 Assessment of significance

4.1 Assessing ‘significance’ is the means by which the cultural importance of a place and its component parts are identified and compared, both absolutely and relatively. This is essential for effective conservation and management. The identification of areas and aspects of higher and lower significance, based on a thorough understanding of a heritage asset, enables policies and proposals to be developed which protect, respect and, where possible, enhance its character and cultural values.

4.2 Significance is a concept rightly embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework, where it is defined as ‘the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting’. (NPPF, Annex 2: Glossary)

4.3 Statutory designation is the legal mechanism by which we as a society, through the actions of the state, identify significant historic places in order to protect these. However, listing and conservation area designations do not describe in detail the various aspects which contribute to significance, nor do these identify any features which may not contribute to it, or may even detract from it. It is necessary to go beyond these designations in order to arrive at a more detailed and broader understanding of significance that considers more than matters archaeological and architectural-historical.

This is achieved by using the terminology and criteria from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This document, adopted in March 2012, places the concept of significance at the heart of the planning process.

4.4 Annex 2 of the NPPF defines significance as:

*The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.*

English Heritage’s Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008) includes a methodology for assessing significance by considering ‘heritage values’. Ultimately, the
The difference between this and the NPPF amounts to one of terminology – the intellectual approach used to analyse and understand significance is the same. The NPPF terms are used here but the equivalent heritage values are given in brackets for reference.

4.5 Annex 2 of NPPF defines **archaeological interest [‘evidential value’]** in the following way: *There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially may hold, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them.*

4.6 Commonly used terms for the other types of interest are:

- **Architectural and Artistic Interest [‘aesthetic value’]**: These are the interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.

- **Historic Interest [‘historical value’]**: An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation’s history, but can also provide an emotional meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity [‘communal value’].

Designations

4.7 As a Grade II listed building, the former Shredded Wheat Factory is recognised to be of national importance and of special architectural and historic interest.

The site is not located within a Conservation Area, however it is adjacent to the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. It is also not located within a Site of Archaeological Importance, nor an Archaeological Priority Area.
Archaeological Significance

4.8 Until the creation of Welwyn Garden City in 1920, Figure 2, an OS map of 1898, shows that the land upon which the Factory is built was farmland. The site lies between two areas designated on the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan as Areas of Archaeological Significance (AAS). These include AAS 26, (centred on Church Road) and AAS 30 (Salisbury Gardens/Shotlands Green). Both designated due to potential for evidence relating to Iron Age/Roman occupation. This site is not in a designated area, it is therefore unlikely that there will be any evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation lying below the site.

Architectural & Artistic (Aesthetic) Interest

4.9 The complete site as found today has developed piecemeal throughout much of the middle of the 20th century. However, each new additional development has left the previous phase remarkably intact. There is no longer any plant remaining in any of the buildings and the site is now largely derelict.

4.10 The original part of the Factory complex, designed by Louis de Soissons and built between 1924-1926 remains largely as built – including the main factory, boilerhouse, and first 18 wheat elevators (silos). Architecturally this element of the complex is regarded as being of the highest significance.

• Designed by an architect of note, and particularly associated with Welwyn Garden City, Louis de Soissons showed with this factory, that he could design in the Moderne as well as neo-Georgian styles.

• Most of the original 1920s buildings remain largely complete, including details such as staircases, railings, and the silo ‘shoots’.

• The factory was built using a pioneering flat-slab construction method with American clients such as Shredded Wheat and Wrigley being the first to accept and use it in Britain from the mid 1920s.
• The architecture and materials reflected the clean and hygenic principles of the Shredded Wheat Company – regarded at the time as a ‘model factory’. The sense of bright, light and airy spaces remains today within the original factory building.

• The monumental nature and form of the first 18 silos made these an instant landmark and required an innovative construction approach by Peter Lind & Co.

4.11 By virtue of the architectural style, the internal finishes, where these remain, are utilitarian and simple. Those that do remain, however are of significance – such as the staircases. As all of the buildings have been stripped of their content and machinery, where elements do remain these are significant as evidence of the former use of the buildings however their interest is lessened by their ‘unconnected’ nature.

4.12 In places alterations and additions have taken place which have lessened the significance of these original buildings. Most noticeably where the later single storey production hall addition was built directly against what was, originally, the front elevation of the factory building. This led to the blocking of some windows and the loss of the formal entrance. The staircase, internally, however still remains. There is an opportunity in the future to better reveal the significance of the building by the removal of elements of lesser significance.

4.13 Of some significance architecturally, but less so than the original factory, the later additions to the factory continue the ‘moderne’ theme, with an emphasis on clean lines and light.

• Whilst the additional 27 silos, added again by Peter Lind & Co. making a total of 45 silos, replicate the original silos almost exactly, these are of lesser significance as these did not require any innovative or pioneering construction techniques to be erected.

• Likewise, the later additions to the factory buildings are recognised as being of minor interest as these maintain the architectural style of the original buildings, and the production hall, in part has a fine range of ‘northern lights’. However, by the 1930s-1950s the architectural style was no longer new or innovative and the buildings are standard, mediocre examples
of their type and therefore of much lesser significance than the original.

Historical Interest

4.14 As one of the first factories to be built in Welwyn Garden City, the former Shredded Wheat factory is historically important. The original 1924-1926 factory complex is of especially high significance historically:

- The factory was one of the first to be built in the newly designated ‘industrial zone’ in Welwyn Garden City.

- As well as locational benefits, Welwyn was chosen because the principles of the Garden City Movement matched those of the Shredded Wheat Company. The Company believed that food should be produced in an environment that was ‘clean, healthy and pleasant’ and it was felt that the new Garden City conformed to these ideals.

- The factory was built of historically pioneering construction methods as previously mentioned.

4.15 The later parts of the factory complex are still acknowledged as being of interest as evidence of the changing manufacturing processes, and the development of the Shredded Wheat production business in Britain throughout the 20th Century. However, as with their architectural interest, the later buildings’ significance is lessened as it lacks the pioneering links with new thinking and social attitudes.

Communal & Social Interest

4.16 The Shredded Wheat factory complex has played a significant part in the physical and employment life of Welwyn Garden City since its inception in the 1920s. This significance is derived from a number of key factors:

- One of the first factories, and therefore large scale employers in the newly created Welwyn Garden City
• Built in a new and ‘avant-garde’ architectural style, deemed so ‘modern’ that the factory appeared on cereal packets, delivery vans and printed publicity.

• The company encouraged staff to live healthily in a healthy environment – hence the original provision for open space and gardens around the factory. This was not lost totally until the 1950s.

• The silos are a local landmark visible for many miles.

• The factory complex has been part of architectural landscape of Welwyn Garden City for nearly 90 years, located as it is, directly next one of the principal link routes from east to west across the railway and next to the station.

4.17 As mentioned above, the later phases of development subsumed the former recreation ground, which had been an important element of the original concept. These more recent parts of the complex have therefore weakened the communal and social significance of both Shredded Wheat and Louis de Soissons’ vision.
5.0 Planning Policy Context

Historic Environment Policies

5.1 As the former Shredded Wheat Factory is Grade II listed, any works that might affect the building’s significance are subject to statutory controls and Government Guidance, notably the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). In local policy, the saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council District Plan are of relevance as well as the pertinent Supplementary Planning Documents.


5.2 The overarching legislation governing the consideration of applications for planning consent that affect heritage assets is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Act require local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

5.3 Section 72 of the Act requires local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant planning permission with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

National Policy: National Planning Policy Framework

5.4 The NPPF was adopted in March 2012. Section 12, entitled Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, contains guidance on heritage assets, which include listed buildings and conservation areas. Paragraphs 128-134 are relevant to this project:

- Paragraph 128 requires an applicant to give a summary of significance of the building or area affected, proportionate to its importance.
• Paragraph 129 advises local authorities to take account of that significance in assessing proposals to avoid or minimise conflict between the proposals and conservation of the asset.

• Paragraph 131 and 132 emphasise the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of individual assets and wider, local distinctiveness, and the desirability of viable and fitting uses for a building being found or continued.

• Paragraphs 133 and 134 continue the explanation of how significance can be harmed, and what tests are required to demonstrate that the harm can be justified (whether that be substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm).

Additional guidance to help local authorities implement the NPPF is set out in the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide. This was prepared in relation to previous planning policy but remains valid where it does not contradict the NPPF. The National Planning Practice Guidance (updated April 2014) also provides guidance under the paragraphs relating to ‘Conserving and enhancing the historic environment’.

Local Policy: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council


5.6 A Local Plan is currently being prepared, which will replace the District Plan and will set out the planning framework for the Borough for the period up to 2031.

5.7 The saved Polices of the District Plan of relevance include:
R27 Demolition of Listed Buildings: Listed Building Consent for the complete or partial demolition of any building of special architectural or historic interest will not be granted other than in the following exceptional circumstances:

i) Clear and convincing evidence has been provided that it is not practicable to continue to use the building for its present or previous use and that no viable alternative uses can be found, and that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible; ii) The physical condition of the building has deteriorated, to a point that it can be demonstrated that demolition is essential in the interests of public safety. A comprehensive structural report will be required to support this criterion; iii) demolition or major alteration will not be considered without acceptable detailed plans for the site’s development. Conditions will be imposed in order to ensure a contractual obligation has been entered into for the construction of the replacement building(s) and/or the landscaping of the site prior to the commencement of demolition; and (iv) where, exceptionally, consent is granted for the demolition or major alteration to a listed building, before any demolition or major alteration takes place, applicants will be required to record details of the building by measured drawings, text and photographs, and this should be submitted to and agreed by the Council.

D1 Quality of Design: The Council will require the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality. The design of new development should incorporate the design principles and policies in the Plan and the Guidance contained in the Supplementary Design Guidance

D2 Character & Context: The Council will require all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible enhance or improve the character of the existing area.

D4 Quality of the Public Realm: The Council will expect new development where appropriate to either create or enhance public areas and the public realm.
6.0 The proposed scheme and its effect

6.1 This section of the report briefly describes the proposed scheme and its effect on the heritage significance described earlier. The proposed scheme is illustrated in the drawings prepared by EPR Architects.

6.2 The proposed scheme is for the demolition of the remaining buildings standing south of Hyde Way as well as those buildings not part of the first phase of development of the former Shredded Wheat factory complex. The buildings to be retained are the original 1920s production hall, the original 1920s silos, grain house and boiler house (but not the later added easternmost silos). The retained buildings will be put to new uses and the remainder of the site redeveloped for a mix of uses including residential, community uses, a hotel, workspace, creche, a small food store, pubs and restaurants, and central landscaped space.

6.3 The original 1924-26 complex is of the highest significance, architecturally, historically and communally. It was designed in a 'moderne' architectural style, using pioneering methods of construction that embodied a new way of thinking in terms of light, hygiene and worker's environment. It has been a local landmark for nearly 90 years.

6.4 The subsequent additions in the 1930s and 1950s have not lessened the significance of the original buildings historically, however these have lessened the architectural integrity of de Soissons' composition and main elevation. Whilst harmoniously continuing the architectural style of the original, these lack its innovative and pioneering thrust. These also filled the land originally identified as important for recreation and space.

The proposals – Production Hall, Silos, Grain House, Boiler House and associated buildings

6.5 The careful removal of later additions offers the opportunity to enhance the architectural significance of the original complex, and allow the re-instatement of some of the historical and social aspects that made the original vision so important and unique at the time – such as the surrounding open space. It will also enable
the opening up of views towards elements of the building hidden for a long time.

6.6 The remaining buildings have fallen into considerable disrepair since the building ceased in its production use. Also, as is often the case with industrial buildings, many of the changes made since the 1920s have been practical and functional rather than aesthetically sympathetic. This includes the introduction of Seaporcel green panels to the Production Hall, replacement of the original Crittall windows with uPVC or metal with irregular mullions and the bricking up of some windows.

6.7 The approach being taken with these buildings is principally one of re-instating the original design aesthetic as conceived by de Soissons. This includes the repair and restoration of much of the structure – both internally and externally – as described below.

The Production Hall

6.8 Externally, the eastern elevation will be carefully restored with the reinstatement of the original grand entrance stair - a major benefit to the building’s character and integrity. This will be reinforced by the landscaping to the east of the building, which will give it the space and dignity the new elevation requires.

6.9 The main concrete structure – a key element of the building’s significance – will be repaired, restored and redecorated. This will include reinstating the original glazed tiles and painted brick work. Around the whole building the 1960s Seaporcel green panels will be removed and the original glazed tiles and painted brick work reinstated. The existing mix-and-match of windows will be replaced with new uniform metal units to the original proportions. This will also provide an opportunity to considerably improve the sustainability of a building with such a large amount of glazing with the introduction of double-glazed glass. Extraneous and redundant industrial equipment that still remains on the external elevations will be removed and the external fire escape to the north will also be taken down – returning the building to its simple original modernist form.

6.10 The second floor already sits asymmetrically to the rest of the building. It is proposed that the eastern wall will be moved out to the east to enable the insertion of the new circulation lightwell whilst visually retaining the same asymmetric nature of the
building. The plant to service the building will be consolidated and located above this, set back from the edge of the building and hidden by a simple metal plant screen designed so as not to be visible or detract from the architectural form of the building.

6.11 Internally in the Production Hall building, an open plan layout will be created or reinstated on all floors with the demolition of more recent partitions and sub-divisions. The existing south west internal staircase will be retained. The original main entrance to the building will be re-instated on the eastern side of the building and the existing staircase retained and restored. These works will enable the open plan nature of de Soissons building, and in particular the architectural columns holding up each floor, to be better revealed and appreciated.

6.12 The principal internal intervention will be the insertion of a new circulation core – providing access to all floors and light to the centre of the building. A new stair will also be added at the western side of the building to provide access from the west and necessary circulation and fire escape routes.

6.13 The effect of the proposed works to the Production Hall will be to restore and better reveal the most important elements of the building, whilst providing services, circulation and modern accommodation that will give the building a viable long term future.

Grain House, Boiler House & Silos

6.14 In heritage terms, the proposals for the Grain House, Boiler House and Silos follows a similar approach of repair and restoration, with the removal of elements that relate to redundant specific industrial process, rather than the elements identified as being of significance and part of de Soisson’s original complex.

6.15 The main structures of the Grain House and Boiler House are to be retained. Internal partitions and structures relating specifically to now-redundant processes will be removed to give the spaces viable future uses that enable their volumes to be appreciated and used. Windows will be replaced in line with the proposals for the Production Hall – to reinstate the original uniform appearance. The single storey connection between the Grain House and Production Hall will be removed as well as extraneous external pipework, railings and ducts.
6.16 The Boiler House will be maintained as a single volume and access will be adjacent to the retained boiler flue – enabling the original function of the building to be recognised and appreciated.

6.17 The single storey garage block is to be replaced with a building of similar size. The existing building is not of any quality – either architecturally or structurally - and its replacement enables a building to be constructed that can best utilise its location in one of the key new public spaces proposed.

6.18 Clearly the silos are of interest and a unique element of the complex, however, potentially these are also the most functional element in industrial terms. These were built for a very specific use that relates directly to the now-redundant purpose of the factory making their practical re-use particularly difficult.

6.19 It is proposed that the silos are reduced in number to the original eighteen. In terms of importance, it is felt that these original silos are the most significant - being of pioneering construction and part of the original de Soisson’s factory complex. With the proposed removal of other later additions to the factory complex (see paras 6.17-19), these remaining silos will continue to dominate the factory composition with their giant vertical cylindrical walls in contrast to the horizontality of the Production Hall – particularly when viewed from the west. The reduction in number will also be more proportionate to the remaining factory complex – as originally designed.

6.20 The importance of the dominance of the silos has been recognised in the wider proposals for the site with new buildings being located so to give selected views of the silos from strategic and carefully considered points around the site. Their pre-eminence will be fully respected.

6.21 Externally, the painted concrete structure will be restored and repaired. The silos will be given an innovative new use as a hotel which, with the insertion of floors, will enable the unique silo structures to be retained and appreciated both internally and externally. Windows, in metal, will be restricted to the recesses between each silo enabling the solid verticality of each silo to be fully appreciated. It is recognised that these works will lead to some change to the internal structure of the silos, but this has been kept to a minimum to give the structures a meaningful future use. The top floor will be converted to residential use with
the structure stripped back to its concrete frame to enable the insertion of glazing.

The 1930s Production Hall and facilities and 1950s Bridge Road offices

6.22 Whilst these elements of the factory complex are acknowledged as being of minor interest as evidence of the changing manufacturing processes and the development of the Shredded Wheat production business on the site, these do not display either special architectural or historical interest or significance on a similar level to the original 1920s factory buildings.

6.23 The removal of these buildings will enable the better revealing of the most important element of the complex – both historically and architecturally. It will allow the re-instatement of the main entrance to the original factory, and the revealing of the eastern elevation of the building. As well as architecturally restoring the integrity of the original building, this will also enable the re-instatement of the windows - and necessary natural light - to the eastern side of the building enabling it to have a practical and sustainable future use.

6.24 The proposals reinstate a formal open space to the eastern side of the factory, providing a suitable setting for the reinstated grand entrance to the listed building – as first conceived by the architect.

The wider proposals

6.25 In heritage terms, the wider proposals have been designed to ensure that the remaining listed structures are better revealed both architecturally and in terms of use and ensuring that they become a key focal point of the masterplan. The spaces around the listed buildings have been designed to give visitors, users and occupiers a better appreciation of the complex and the use of these spaces designed to create activity and vibrancy. This is an important benefit with the scheme, as much of the communal significance of the complex relates to the ‘healthy living’ approach promoted both by the founders of Shredded Wheat and the Garden City.

6.26 The proposed new Goodman Square adjacent to the Boiler House/Grain House and silos will be a key public space linking the east and west of the town, with the listed structures forming
the principal backdrop. The De Soissons Gardens to the eastern front of the Production Hall will reinstate a formal open space providing a suitable setting for the reinstated grand entrance to the building and restoring the integrity of the ‘front’ of the building back to its original place.

6.27 The design rationale articulated in the Design & Access Statement demonstrates how the architecture has drawn from the historic Garden City principles. The heights of the buildings have been carefully considered to ensure the dominance of the listed factory complex and opened up views not experienced since the 1930s. The heights of the buildings have been re-configured and in many cases reduced since previous iterations of the scheme better revealing both the silos and Production Hall building.

6.28 The wider scheme offers huge community benefits to the town. As an integral part of this wider proposal these benefits are symbiotic for the listed complex – with the buildings playing a part in providing the mix of uses and facilities that contribute to additional community facilities – such as the creche and workspace – and also benefiting from a restoration and repair of its modernist architecture and a long term sustainable and viable use.

6.29 The visibility of the proposals from Grade I listed Hatfield House have been investigated and it has been concluded that the primary element of the scheme that is visible are the already standing silos. It is therefore felt that the proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the views from the House.

6.30 In terms of the impact on the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, the proposals will be negligible and will not affect the special character of the area. The railway line provides (and always has done) a very definite divide from east to west, and the back of the Howard Centre creates a dominant ‘back’ to the town centre. Just as the proposed development has been designed to respect the setting of the listed buildings from the site itself, this approach was key when considering how it will be seen from glimpsed views from the conservation area.
7.0 Compliance with policy and guidance

7.1 This report has provided a detailed description and analysis of the significance of the former Shredded Wheat factory site and its heritage context as required by Paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report also describes in Section 6 how the proposed scheme will affect that heritage significance.

The level of ‘harm’ caused by the proposed scheme

7.2 As outlined in Section 5, the NPPF identifies two levels of potential ‘harm’ that might be caused to a heritage asset by a development: ‘substantial harm…or total loss of significance’ or ‘less than substantial’. Both levels of harm must be caused to a designated heritage asset – in this instance, the listed former Shredded Wheat Factory and the conservation area, and its setting.

7.3 The proposed scheme, in our considered view, preserves the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and thus complies with s.66(1) and s.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It does not lead to ‘substantial’ harm to the listed building. The changes to the listed building, individually or cumulatively, do not reach the threshold of harm that would cause the scheme to fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building or conservation area.

The balance of ‘harm’ versus benefit

7.4 It is recognised that the proposals require the loss of later phases of the Shredded Wheat factory, all of which form part of the listed complex, however due to the lesser overall significance of these later phases, it is regarded that these proposals cause less than substantial harm. It is also of regard that the scheme provides substantial public benefits – not just to the remaining listed buildings but to the wider community in Welwyn Garden City. Those pertaining to the listed building are identified in the previous section and those relating to the wider community are discussed in the Planning Report and Design & Access Statement.
7.5 These benefits outweigh any perceived ‘harm’ caused by the proposals to the designated heritage asset. The core special architectural and historic interest of the listed complex remains intact and restored in the proposal.

The National Planning Policy Framework

7.6 In respect of Paragraph 131 of the NPPF, the proposed scheme can be described as ‘sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting these to viable uses consistent with their conservation’.

7.7 The proposed scheme complies with Paragraph 133 of the NPPF – it does not lead to ‘substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset’. It also complies with Paragraph 134 for the reasons given earlier in this report. Any ‘less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset’ that can be ascribed to the scheme is outweighed by the restoration, re-use and better revealing of the original elements of the complex and the substantial public benefits of the wider scheme of which this forms an integral part.

7.8 The interventions – individually and taken as a whole – help secure the ‘optimum viable use’ of the listed building. The scheme very definitely strikes the balance suggested by Paragraph 134 of the NPPF – it intervenes in the listed complex in a manner commensurate to its significance as a listed building.

Local Policy: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

7.9 In positively addressing the requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework, the works should also meet the policy requirements of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

7.10 In addressing Policy R27, the elements of the listed building that make up its special architectural or historic interest have been clearly identified. These proposals aim to retain and adapt these elements of the complex for new sustainable future uses. The factory complex has now been redundant for many years. The proposals represent alternative uses that will give the most significant elements of the site a viable and sustainable future. The physical condition of the buildings has deteriorated considerably and the proposals offer the opportunity to repair and restore the main elements of the retained buildings.
7.11 The proposals for the listed buildings can be seen in the context of the wider development proposals for new buildings and landscaping and a full recording of all of the buildings to be demolished will be undertaken.
8.0 Conclusions

8.1 The proposed scheme will repair, restore and help secure the future of the most significant parts of the former Shredded Wheat complex in sustainable and viable uses, and this represents a great benefit in heritage terms. The proposal overall will deliver substantial public benefits to the community and the works to the listed buildings are an integral part of that. The scheme will re-stitch this derelict part of the town centre back into full use, joining the two halves of the town back again.

8.2 The proposed development will not harm the character or appearance or the setting of the adjacent Conservation Area, which very clearly ‘turns its back’ on the site with the Howard Centre development and railway line. Where there are glimpsed views of the site from within the conservation area, no harm to its setting will be caused by the proposals.

8.3 It is recognised that the removal of much of the ‘later’ factory buildings will not affect the special interest of the listed complex but that the demolition of the later silos will cause some harm to its significance. However it is agreed that this is ‘less than substantial’ harm and that this harm is outweighed by the substantial benefits offered. These benefits relate not just to giving the remaining factory complex a future use and better revealing its significance, but also the wider public benefits to be delivered by the whole scheme.

8.4 Overall, the scheme offers a unique opportunity to re-invigorate the site and better reveal the significance of the original buildings. For this and the reasons given in the report, the proposed scheme complies with the law, and national and local policy and guidance for listed buildings and conservation areas.