



Illustrative layout of initial scheme

11 Planning consultation and scheme development

The Redevelopment has evolved in discussions with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC), English Heritage (EH), CABE, our interpretation of the SPD and public consultation with residents and community groups. The following pages outline six stages in the development of the current scheme that formed part of this public and planning consultation.

Option 1 (presented to WHBC on 17th April 2009)

The first scheme presented to WHBC had three distinct areas around a new civic square at the base of the railway bridge: a residential zone to the south, a commercial campus to the north-west and a supermarket hall wrapped with residential units to the north-east. The civic square formed the focus of the development surrounded by public uses such as a leisure centre, swimming pool, heritage center, YMCA facility, the listed silos and original supporting structures. A central park to the south of the Civic Square linked the silo structures to the Roche Factory. The central park also provided the setting for the residential area which was based on a robust perimeter block structure as envisaged within the SPD. It comprised approximately 800 units, predominantly apartments.

Comments from WHBC:

The officers and consultees raised concern about the proposed design of open space in relation to the development proposed. It was requested that quantities and distribution of public open,

private and communal space should be examined more carefully. It was also questioned how the proposed development reflected the aspirations in relation to the massing, scale and design anticipated in the SPD. Further work also needed to be done to engage with the SPD vision for the Site which seeks to bring the garden city philosophy into the 21st century and promotes a sustainable exemplar development for this Site. It was agreed that the energy centre listed within the accommodation schedule would be an integral part of it, but would need to be integrated more sensitively into the masterplan. It was also noted that the scheme should be more integrated with the adjoining development by Taylor Wimpey.

Our response:

We reduced the proposed footprint within the commercial area in the north western corner of the Site to increase the area of public open space and provide a more even distribution and sequence of spaces across the Site.

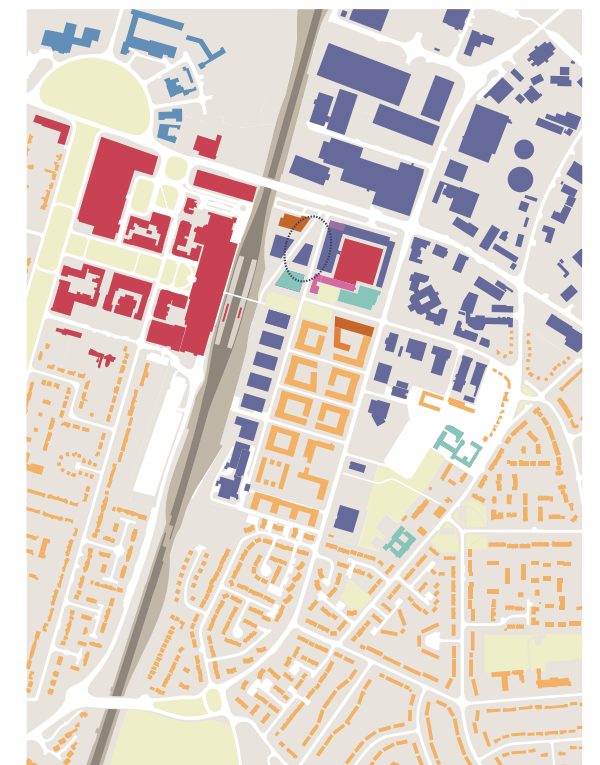
With regard to scale and massing we carefully re-distributed heights across the Site in order to reflect the SPD principle that height should decrease southwards.

The location of the energy centre was clearly identified within the masterplan as being housed in the existing factory building.

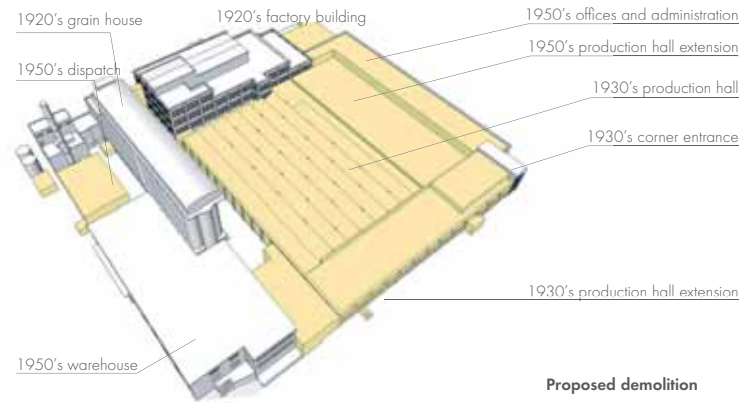
Through discussion with Taylor Wimpey we developed a design that creates a more direct pedestrian link and crossing from the residential park to the civic heart in their scheme, and reached joint agreement for the proposal of the southern access road.



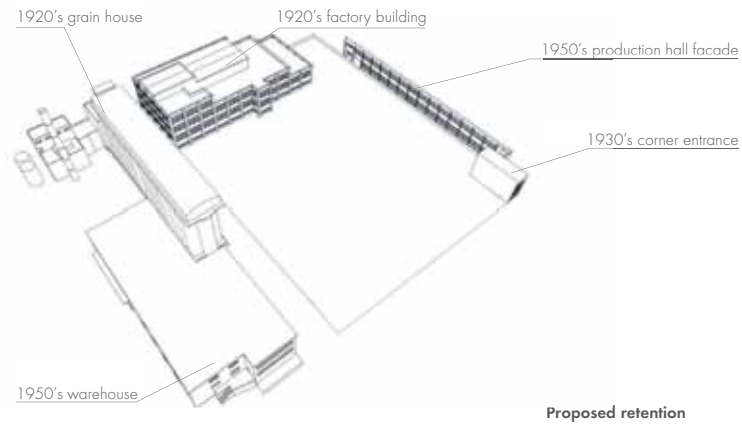
Proposed open space network



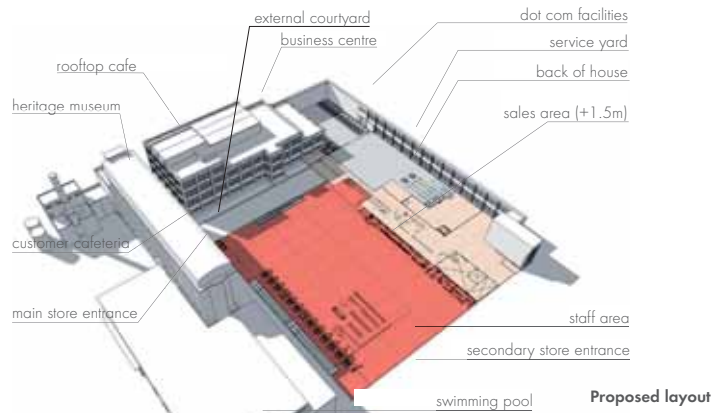
Proposed landuses



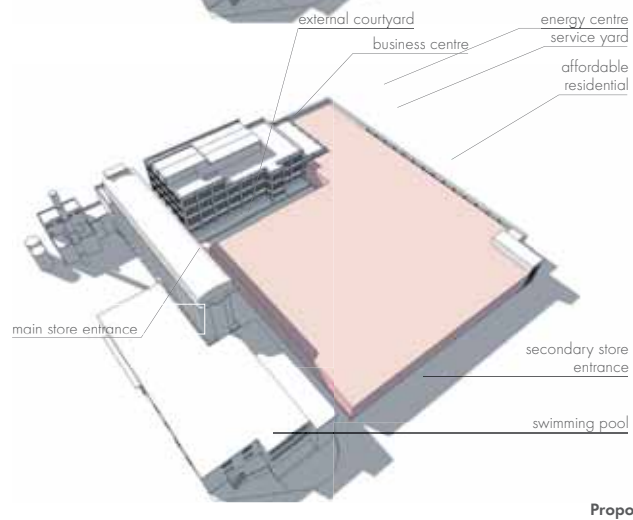
Proposed demolition



Proposed retention



Proposed layout



Proposed massing

Option 2 (Presented to English Heritage in March 2009)

The scheme presented to English Heritage illustrated the integration and setting of the listed buildings within the masterplan. It also gave a summary of the historical development of the building complex - the original buildings, expansion and development phases - thereby distinguishing between the most significant elements of the 1920s and the later extensions attached to it.

A general approach to demolition and retention was explained which included:

- The retention of all main 1920s factory buildings
- The external form and massing of the 1920s multi-storey factory building, retention of the grain and the boiler house, and retention of the exposed ceilings and mushroom columns as important features during the internal fit out of the 1920s factory building.
- The demolition and rebuilding of the 1930s production hall, if viable re-use cannot be found.
- The demolition of the 1950s production hall and office range to the north if viable re-use cannot be found.

Comments from English Heritage:

EH accepted the general approach to demolition, retention and restoration, but requested justification for the parts to be demolished. EH supported the idea to reuse the multi-storey production hall as offices, to preserve the silos in part as a monument with the spaces below converted to new use, and replacement of the single-storey production floor with a supermarket and office space to the north.

Two aspects in particular required further examination: firstly, the scale of the proposed multi-storey addition beside the main 1920s production hall; secondly, the nature and size of the space that would be left between the proposed supermarket and the original production hall.

Our response:

We have sought additional reuse options for the 1930s and 1950s extensions and tested their economic viability and monumental and historical value. We revised the massing proposal for the replacement of the 1930s production hall and created a less bulky, filigree structure.



Illustrative layout of scheme presented in May 2009

Option 3 (presented to CABE in May 2009)

The scheme presented to CABE in May 2009 started to explore the context of the listed building structures in more detail, adopting the format of the existing structures as a layout for the new retail store. The Civic Square now gave more emphasis to the Shredded Wheat silos while a denser development of offices supported by leisure facilities was proposed on the north west corner adjacent to the railway lines. The residential district to the south is divided into six relatively equal courtyard blocks with raised gardens over a parking deck.

Comments from CABE:

CABE welcomed the redevelopment of the Site, the commitment to redevelop the industrial heritage buildings and the proposal to locate a supermarket close to the railway station and Welwyn town centre. However, it was felt that a more distinctive urban character might be created through the development of a stronger urban vision reflecting the form of the original Garden City. It was queried whether there should be any vehicular access across the central square, and it was suggested that further work needed to be undertaken on the following areas:

- the layout of the development and character of key spaces, in particular the Civic Square
- the Tesco supermarket design

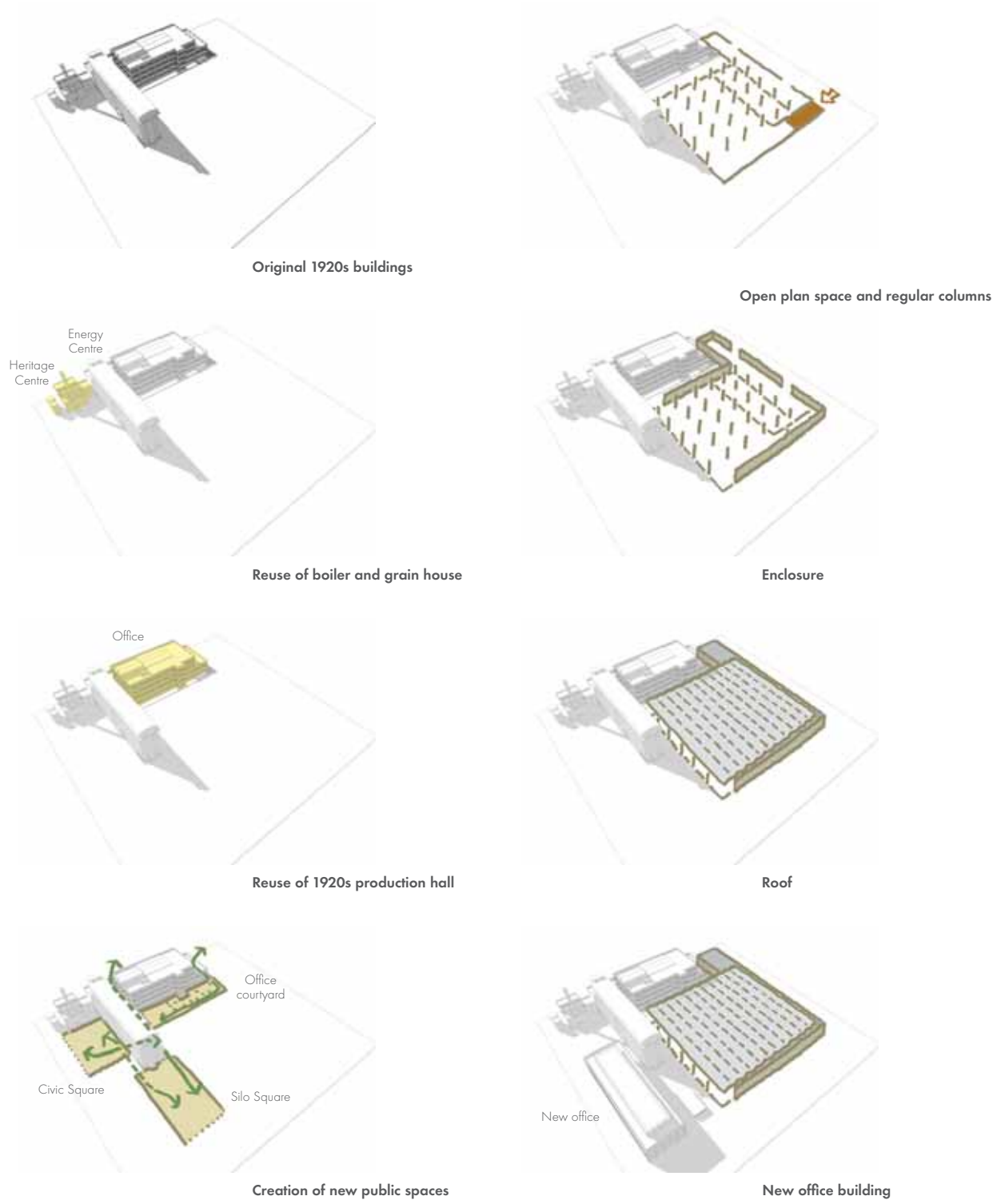
- the housing design and sustainability

Our response:

In our revised scheme we developed a proposal reflecting the principles of the original garden city vision not only through the overall layout and network of spaces – which create a distinctive overall character - but also by giving a defined landscaped character to individual spaces themselves. In particular, we refined the design and character of the Civic Square and ensured that we not only provided general active frontage to the surrounding buildings with planned spaces for café seating, but we also offered a variety of attractive uses for the community, such as small retail units, cafes and restaurants, a doctor's surgery, and a heritage museum. We also removed the main vehicular access route across the square and provided an entrance/egress route for store customers only on Hydeway terminating at the Square. A separate vehicular route from the southern access road was also proposed, with an internal boulevard to the residential area, community/office car park and station drop off and an additional vehicular route from Bridge Road to serve the hotel, YMCA facility and store back of house.



Physical model of the scheme looking towards the town centre



Option 4 (presented to WHBC and English Heritage in August 2009)

The scheme presented to WHBC and English Heritage in August 2009 developed from option 3 in a number of ways: the two buildings south of the silos were combined into a single office building; the store building became disconnected from the existing production hall at the north end improving the setting of the listed buildings; and, the office building at the western edge of the Site was removed and the heritage centre was moved from a pavilion within the civic square to the boiler house. A more detailed elaboration of the elevation proposals for the store, offices and listed buildings was presented.

Comments from WHBC:

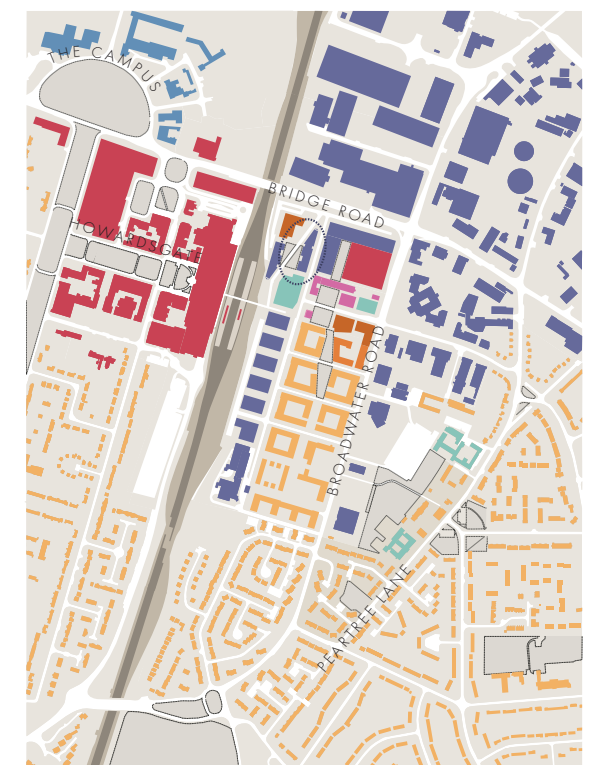
Comments requested more elaboration of the nature and scale of the public spaces within the scheme. Some concern was raised about public security within the enclosed garden between the store and the production hall. Further justification for the demolition of the listed buildings was sought.

Our Response:

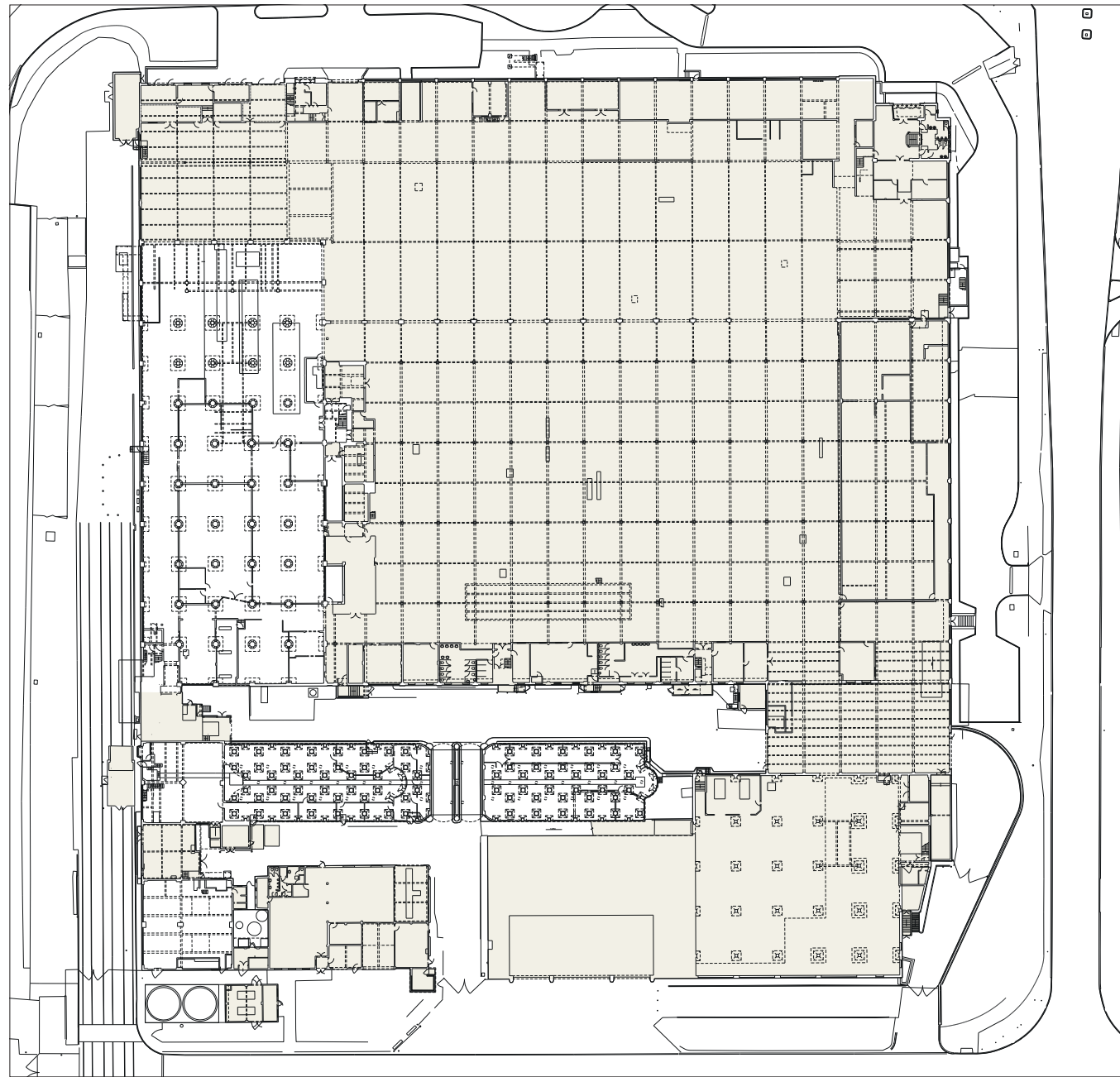
We examined the nature of the spaces in more detail and commissioned Miller Hare to produce a series of verified views. The garden was closed to public use and was designed for use of the adjacent office building. Tavernor Consultancy were commissioned to examine the scheme for the listed buildings and to provide evidence to justify demolition.



Proposed open space network



Proposed landuses



Proposed demolition plan

Option 5 (presented to WHBC and English Heritage in July 2010)

The scheme presented to WHBC and English Heritage in July 2010 improved on option 4 in several ways: the setting of the production hall and the pedestrian connection between the railway bridge and the civic square were all improved by re-routing the basement egress ramp onto Hyde Way. The YMCA was moved further west, as was the hotel, opening up and enclosing the recreation gardens. This prompted the repositioning of the production hall entrance from the south-east corner to face the park on the west side, allowing the eastern garden to become a private space. The production hall stair pavilion now retains its original external steps.

Further improvements to the public realm were made by moving the store customer entrance to a more open position off the small square on Broadwater Road and reducing the service access points from two to one. The small retail pavilion in the square was removed opening up views to the store and silos.

The locations of the heritage centre and the CHP were inverted, with the heritage centre now occupying the grain house and the CHP occupying the boiler house. The existing link building between the grain and boiler houses was now proposed for demolition to increase permeability of the public realm. The crèche which occupied the east silos ground floor was replaced by a café and the restaurant was removed from the roof.

The leisure centre had evolved from the previous scheme and was now proposed as more compact with its parking at ground level.

Comments from English Heritage:

English Heritage were in agreement that the scheme, though eroding the significance of the factory to some degree, would not inflict substantial harm. They were concerned, however, that the proposals be carefully justified, and that it be demonstrated how the future of the remaining elements of the factory site would be ensured.

In detail they had specific concerns about the following:

- The external thickening of the production hall columns due to the applied insulation and the frames of new double glazed windows.
- The design of future internal sub-divisions within the multi-storey production hall.
- The lack of use for the silos' top floor leading to potential future maintenance problems.
- The demolition of the single storey production hall without further justification as to why it could not accommodate a supermarket.
- The demolition of the original garage block and the 1950's entrance and office range.

Our response:

In response to the comments we have removed the insulation from the exterior of the production hall and returned the columns to their original widths. We will provide maintenance guidance relating to the future upkeep of the silos and will produce documentation outlining the design of future internal divisions within the multi storey production hall. The lack of use for the silos top floor will be fully justified with supporting evidence and the justification for demolition is supported by evidence in section 5.5 of this report.



View from the junction of Bridge Road and Broadwater Road



View from the junction Hyde Way and Broadwater Road



Illustrative landscape plan of scheme presented to CABE in August 2010

Option 6 (presented to CABE in August 2010)

The scheme presented to CABE in August 2010 was similar to Option 5 but with minor alterations. It also responded to all the concerns that were raised by the CABE design officers in the previous meeting.

This revised scheme included changes in the layout of the development, the Tesco supermarket design, the proposed Civic square and sustainability.

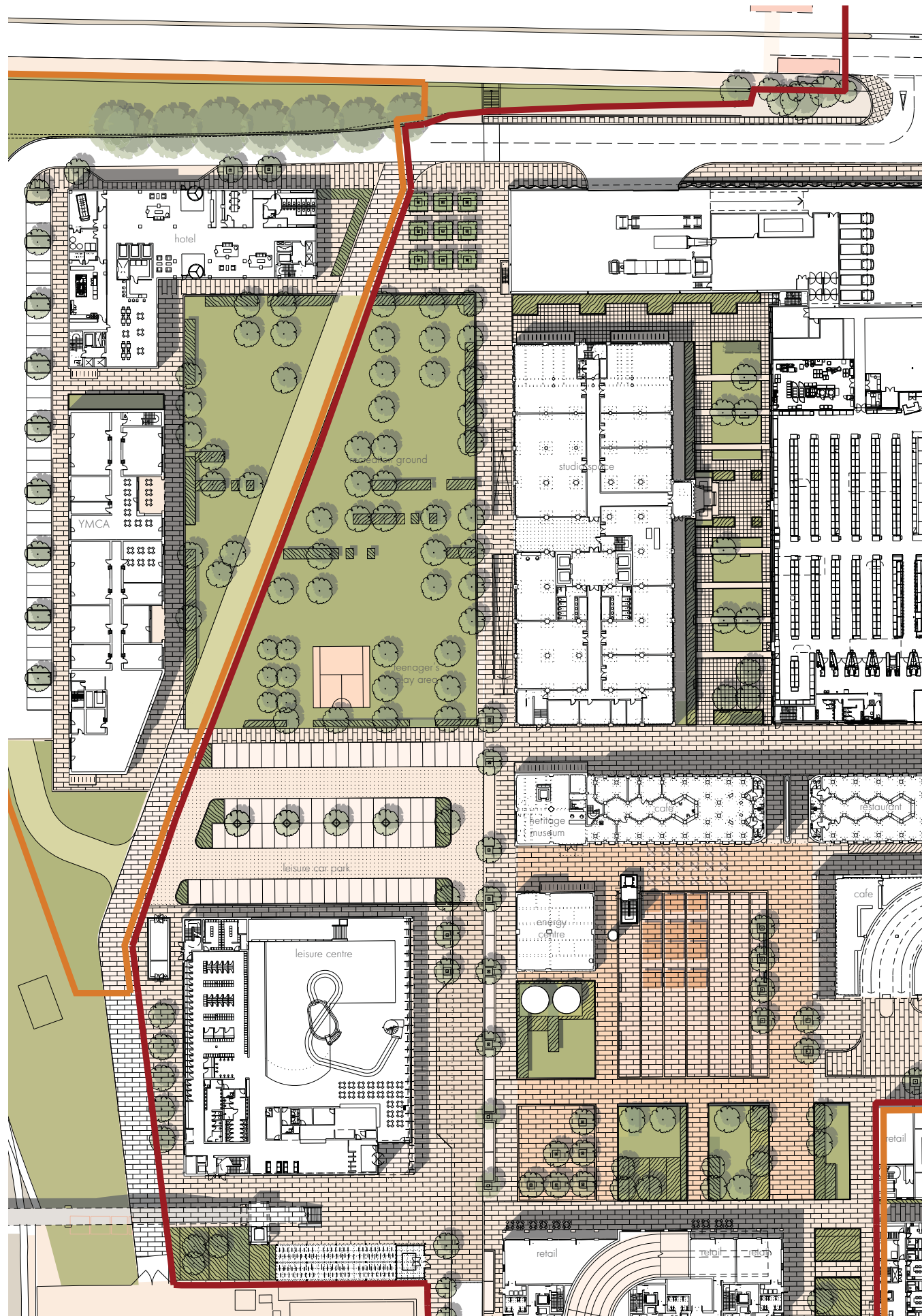
The layout of the key public spaces are now shown linked together and forming a sequence around the Civic Square. Each space within the proposal now has a defined landscape character that relates to the context of the surrounding buildings. Publicly accessible spaces are more generous, while enabling private residential spaces to focus on more discreet shared green spaces as seen in the historic structure of residential communities within the Garden City.



Illustrative plan of recreation ground



Mrs Howard Memorial Garden, Letchworth Garden City



Illustrative layout of revised landscape plan

Comments from CABE:

CABE commented that the scheme makes a strong commitment to making the best use of the industrial heritage buildings and proposes a good mix of uses close to the railway station. They acknowledged that that the scheme would be a significant development within Welwyn and presents an opportunity to enhance its status as a Garden City. They felt that the scheme's structured layout, its sequence of green spaces and mix of uses commits the development as an extension to Welwyn Garden City, but they expected further work to improve the scheme in the following three areas:

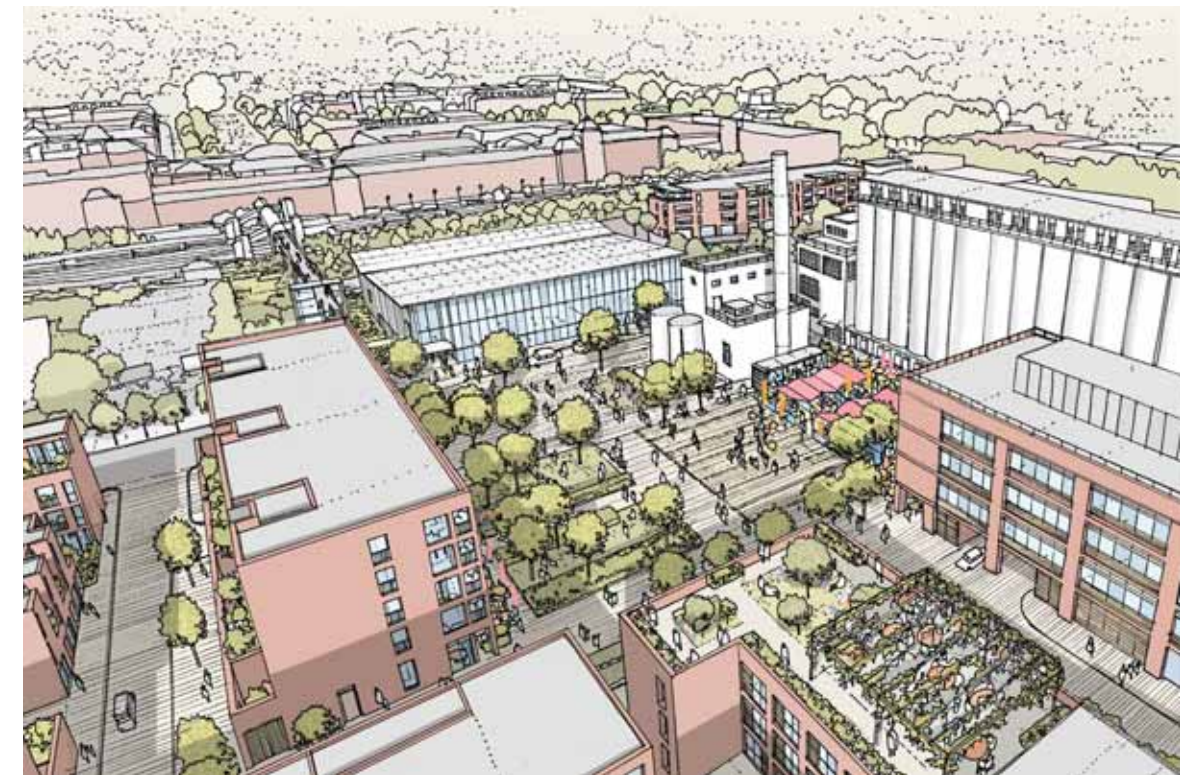
- The layout of the Civic Square
- The leisure car park
- The connection between the station and the supermarket

They felt that the Civic Square would benefit from better definition to encourage its use as a place for public activities. The introduction of a recreation ground was supported, but it's separation from the leisure centre by a large car park was felt to be unsuccessful. CABE recommended better connections between the two by redistributing the car parking. The location of a supermarket in place of the original production hall was seen as logical, but the connections between the station (and therefore the town) and the store were felt to be not strong

enough and concern was expressed that as a result customers could be encouraged to use their cars rather than walk.

Our response:

- In response to the comments we have improved:
- the definition of the Civic Square by programming its surface through demarcation of cafe spill out spaces and zones for markets and community events
 - the connections between the leisure centre and the recreation ground by reducing the car park by 33 spaces and increasing the size of the green space; and by relocating the teenager play area more south and closer to all surrounding leisure and community uses
 - the connection between the station and the supermarket by opening up more direct visual links and pedestrian routes from the bridge to the north east corner of the Civic Square



Illustrative sketch view of a farmers market taking place on the Civic Square