

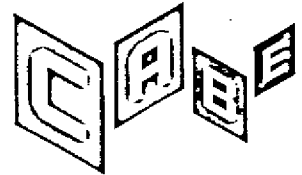
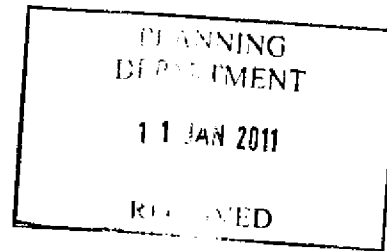
Ack.

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7 January 2011

Richard Aston
Principal Development Control Officer
Welwyn Hatfield District Council
Council Offices
Welwyn Garden City
AL8 6AE



Our ref: CSE-12065D2977070

Dear Richard Aston

**Welwyn Hatfield District Council: Broadwater Road West (Allies & Morrison),
Welwyn Garden City
Planning application reference: N6/2010/2055/MA & N6/2010/2060/LB**

Thank you for consulting the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) about this proposal. Following a site visit, a meeting with the design team and two previous reviews, the planning application information was considered at an internal review meeting on the 13 December 2010 chaired by Piers Gough, with panel member, Neil Deely, and design review staff. CABE's views, which supersede all views that may have been expressed previously, are set out below. This is our formal response to the planning application.

Summary

We are pleased to comment on this proposal which will be a significant development within Welwyn and an opportunity to enhance its status as a garden city. The development presents a strong commitment to making the best use of the industrial heritage buildings. The scheme has a structured layout, introduces a number of green spaces and proposes a good mix of uses close to the railway station. However, we are concerned about the arrangement of the principle public spaces within the scheme, the pedestrian routes that connect these spaces and how these spaces are defined by the adjacent buildings.

Layout of the development

For the most part, the layout of the site is logical with a sequence of spaces that help to make sense of the site as well as provide a setting to the buildings. The least successful areas of the layout, however, are the civic square, the leisure centre car

Commission for Architecture
and the Built Environment

The government's advisor
on architecture, urban design
and public space

park, the station drop off and the connection between the station and the supermarket.

While it appears obvious for the civic square to be in the centre of the site, we remain unconvinced that it will have the feel of a piazza as envisaged. The space is poorly defined by the adjoining buildings, has multiple routes leading off it, some particularly wide, and is not demarcated as a purposeful place for public activities. We are concerned that the square will be difficult to animate and will lack bustle and life. We think greater clues should be taken from the squares within Welwyn Garden City that have a much greater presence. Moving vehicles could help to enliven this space and street furniture could play a role in suggesting ways that the civic square could be used.



We think that views and permeability into the site from Braodwater Road are good. However we feel that the pedestrian route between the station and the supermarket is rather convoluted, not helped by the proximity of building E and F to each other which obscures the entrance to the store. The design of this sequence of spaces and the arrangement of the buildings surrounding them should be reconsidered to create a route with greater legibility; that increases the visibility of the supermarket entrance and the prominence of the route between the footbridge and the Civic Square. The Local planning Authority should also ensure that an early commitment is made to the works required to improve the access over the railway, down into the site, in both the long and short term.

We think the idea to locate the supermarket in place of the original production hall is good. We are concerned, however, that if the connections between the station (and therefore the town) and the store are not strong, customers will be encouraged to drive to and away from the supermarket without participating any further in the site and its activities. We also feel that there is an overprovision of car parking for the store which reinforces our concern that most people will drive to the site. As well as strengthening the pedestrian connections from the station, we suggest that a green travel plan that encourages customers to leave the car at home should be agreed by the developers and the local planning authority.

While we support the introduction of a large recreation ground within the north-west corner of the site, we think that separating it from the leisure centre by a car park is unsuccessful. We recommend that the recreation ground and leisure centre are better connected, perhaps helped by a redistribution of the car parking. We also think that the location of the station drop off and the route of the vehicular access to it should be reconsidered. The vehicle access and egress to the drop of point is rather convoluted, having to circle the residential area, turn around through the leisure centre car park and back track through the residential area again. This part of the site

is likely to become very congested at peak travel times and it is possible that commuters will use the access road to the supermarket car park as a drop off point instead.

Supermarket

We welcome the effort that has been made to integrate the supermarket into the development. We think the architectural treatment of the supermarket responds well to its context and helps to enliven potentially blank walls that could create dead frontages. The office space on the north-east corner of the store will also help to create some activity onto the adjoining roads.



Residential

We think the suggested outline layout of the residential quarter is successful in integrating the dwellings with the structured landscape proposed. We also welcome the mix of tenures proposed and the different ways in which car parking could be accommodated on the site. We would be pleased to have the opportunity to comment in more detail on the quality of the residential environment as and when a more detailed application for this part of the site comes forward.

Sustainability

We welcome the intention to install an energy centre to supply a district energy system for the entire development and we support the work being done to produce an energy strategy in support of the proposal. It will be important, as the scheme moves forward, for benchmarks of sustainability to be set through the planning process and the technical and economic feasibility of the site-wide strategy to be investigated during the next phase of design work.

Please keep CABE in touch with the progress of this scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone me.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Faye Tomlinson.

Faye Tomlinson
Design review advisor

A solid black rectangular box redacting the contact information for Faye Tomlinson.

cc Nicola Zech Allies and Morrison Architects
John Neale English Heritage

Declaration of interest

Liz Peace is a CABE commissioner and is also chief executive of the British Property Federation. In this role, she does not have direct involvement in development schemes proposed by Federation members.

Public scheme

As this scheme is the subject of a planning application, we will publish our views on our website, www.cabe.org.uk

Affiliated panels

CABE is affiliated with independent design review panels which commits them all to shared values of service, the foundation of which are the 10 key principles for design review. Further information on affiliation can be found by visiting our website: www.cabe.org.uk/design-review/regional

