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From: [Redacted]
Sent: 02 November 2010 20:06
To: Planning
Subject: Welwyn Hatfield Council Online Planning - Comment

PLANNING
DEPARTMENT
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Application Number: N6/2010/2055/MA
Name: J [Redacted]
Address: 11 Elmwood
Welwyn Garden City
AL8 6LD
Comment Type: Object
Comment: Comments on planning applications N6/2010/2060/LB N6/2010/2055/MA

Former Shredded Wheat Factory Complex and Land Adjoining at Broadwater Road West WELWYN GARDEN CITY Hertfordshire AL7 3AY

1. In the present uncertain times, it is premature for the Council to consider this application.

It is uncertain what publicly funded resources will be available to fund the necessary infrastructure support in terms of public transport; highways; cycle paths and footpaths; electricity supply; gas supply; telecommunications; and water and sewerage. There will also be additional demands on education, police and fire brigade resources because of the nature of the proposed development: it is not clear if these can be funded.

Furthermore, it is uncertain whether any private sector body will, in practice, in the difficult economic environment be assured to be able to complete the development as proposed and to the specification promised. There is a risk that the town could be left with partly completed and unfinished buildings.

All of these matters need to be considered properly taking all relevant factors into account and with full public consultation as part of the formulation of an up to date Local Development Framework Core Strategy. This would fulfil the Council's statutory duty to involve its citizens and enable it to produce a credible Statement of Community Involvement.

At the same time the Supplementary Planning Document needs to be reconsidered. I understand that the proposals are in any event contrary to the Council's agreed policy which was consulted upon.

2. There has been inadequate consultation with citizens.

It is important that the Council considers the views of its citizens and electors. This proposal has not been well publicised and there has been little opportunity for consultation with citizens and for debate. It would not be reasonable for the Council to overturn its existing policies to permit this development without having undertaken a comprehensive consultation on the implications.

3. There is no proven need for more retail space on the periphery of the centre of the Garden City

There is already a large development of extra retail space under way in the town centre. Yet at the same time, many shops are either empty or filled with charity tenants that pay no rates. This chronic lack of demand indicates that any future expansion of supply will reduce rents and lead to greater shop vacancies in the town centre. There is a risk of a downward spiral of decay with major retailers and companies abandoning the town centre.

The development will also harm local shopping centres upon which the most vulnerable in society often disproportionately depend. It is a proposal that favours the affluent over the poor.

There already three large supermarkets within fifteen minutes drive of the town centre and another in Hatfield town centre. These four include all the leading supermarket chains in the UK. Any further provision will be duplicative of one of these and will lead to increased concentration of supply, possibly leading to anti-competitive results.

4. The proposed development is contrary to the Council's key priority of Maintaining and Enhancing a Cleaner and Greener Environment; (Business Plan 2010)

A new large retail space on the periphery of the town centre will overload the local transport network and significantly increase congestion and carbon emissions. People will drive to the shopping centre and deliveries by HGVs will be made to it by road. In the very congested roads CO2 will increase. This will move the town even further from its sustainability targets.

Furthermore, the destruction of neighbourhood shopping centres will require people to travel further to shop and this will also increase emissions and reduce sustainability.

5. The proposed development is not sympathetic to the vision and ethos of a garden city.

The garden city movement and Welwyn Garden City are known throughout the world as planned cities. The consistency of architectural style has been broadly maintained (despite a few mistakes in the 60's and 70's) and this contributes to the well being of the citizens and the coherence of society.

The proposed development on the periphery of the town centre with its emphasis on travel by motor vehicle and its high density and lack of greenery is not sympathetic to its surroundings or to the well being and prosperity of the town's citizens.

6. There is a risk to the economy and jobs in Welwyn Garden City contrary to the policy objective of encouraging prosperity;

There will undoubtedly be some low wage jobs created in the retail development but many more will be lost as shops in the town centre and neighbourhood centres close.

Furthermore, an area which was once a centre for productive manufacturing will have been lost. In the longer term this will tend to make more people commute to adjacent communities for work, increasing the load on transport networks and being increasingly environmentally destructive.