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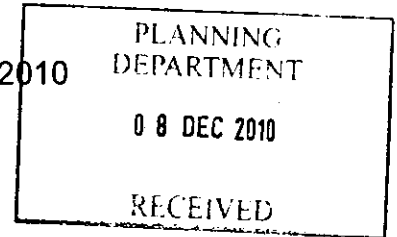
ENGLISH HERITAGE
EAST OF ENGLAND REGION

Mr Richard Aston
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The Campus
WELWYN GARDEN CITY
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AL8 6AE

Direct Dial: [REDACTED]
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Our ref: L00094215

3 December 2010



Dear Mr Aston,

**Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009 & GDPO 1995
FORMER SHREDDED WHEAT FACTORY, BROADWATER ROAD, WELWYN
GARDEN CITY, WELWYN HATFIELD, HERTFORDSHIRE, AL8 6UG
Application No N6/2010/2060/LB**

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2010 notifying English Heritage of the above application.

Summary

Approval is sought for a hybrid planning application for detailed and outline planning permission for the redevelopment of Broadwater Road West and for listed building consent for works to the Shredded Wheat Factory, which occupies part of the site. English Heritage is concerned primarily with the works that would affect the Shredded Wheat Factory. These would comprise both substantial demolition and alteration and conversion. On the basis of the submitted documents the approach embodied in the proposals may be justified; but the implications of and justification for the detailed works to the buildings that are to be retained are not clear. Determination of the applications would be premature.

English Heritage Advice

English Heritage's remit in this case principally concerns the Shredded Wheat Factory, and we have been notified of the applications because they would entail demolition of substantial parts of the factory. Our advice concerns the question of demolition and the treatment of the reduced building.

The Shredded Wheat Factory is an important part of Welwyn Garden City, contributing



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to its social, economic and architectural history. It comprises the following: the original multi-storey food production range of 1924-26; the grain house and boiler house of the same date; the range of silos, 18 contemporary with the multi-storey building, the remainder added in 1937-39; the single-storey production hall of 1937-9; an extension to the latter hall and a range of offices of 1957-9 and a substantial warehouse of this date; and various associated buildings. The factory is listed at grade II on account of its special architectural and historic interest. More detailed consideration of the nature of that interest is set out below, in an assessment of the case for works of demolition.

The applicants propose, in broad terms, to reduce the factory to its original buildings. The multi-storey range would be preserved and converted, as would the grain and boiler houses. The silo range, comprising both phases of silos, would be preserved and its ground floor converted. The remaining buildings - the single storey production hall, the extension to it and the contemporary office range, the large warehouse and a small garage range contemporary with the original factory would be demolished.

The rationale for the proposed reduction of the factory derives in part from the applicants' aspirations for the redevelopment of the site. It is proposed, for example, to replace the single storey production hall with a new building of similar form housing a supermarket above an underground car park. They also follow from an analysis of the significance of the various parts of the factory, and consideration of this in the light of the relevant policies of PPS 5, Planning for the Historic Environment.

English Heritage broadly endorses the approach - if not the conclusions - advanced by the applicants' advisers, the Tavernor Consultancy, in their PPS 5 Statement. While all the components of the factory have some significance it is possible and appropriate to differentiate between the relative significance of the component parts. Below this is attempted with reference to the heritage values articulated in English Heritage's Conservation Principles. The Shredded Wheat Factory's interest and significance encompasses all these values in varying degrees.

- It has considerable *evidential value* on account of the evidence that it embodies and may yield about the history of food production and manufacturing technique. The multi-storey factory was built to a specification based on the analysis of the company's existing American operations; but this rational design was quickly superseded elsewhere by a shift towards single storey production, and when the factory was enlarged it was with a single storey production floor. In his article in *Industrial Archaeology* (1994) Richard Butterfield noted the factory's potential to provide further information beyond that he had discussed, and in this respect the complex as a whole may be of significant interest.



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- It has *historical value* in so far as the factory is illustrative of a type of 20th century manufacturing and of an approach to food and diet that is a part of modern culture, as well as being central to the history of Welwyn and its development as a balanced garden city. The interest is derived above all from the first phase of the factory's development, and could survive substantial alteration to the complex.
- Its *aesthetic value* is of some complexity. It derives in part from the modernist design in which its architect, Louis de Soissons, embodied the very closely defined brief to which he was required to work, and which makes the building a counterpoint to the garden city's prevailing neo-Georgian character. Its modernist character is magnified by the substantial range of silos: their form is of course purely functional, but this functionality was itself the quality that led le Corbusier to illustrate North American examples in *Towards a New Architecture*. Together the factory and silos form a dramatic and monumental mass of building - all the more monumental as a consequence of the enlargement of the range of silos. The original composition of factory and silos seen through the Folly Arch across the recreation ground, emblematic of the ideals of the garden city, was lost as the factory was progressively enlarged. The additions of 1957-9 that form the northern and eastern frontages of the factory are decent and well-mannered but not of high intrinsic interest.
- Finally the factory has *communal value* on account of its place in the history of Welwyn, on account of its role as a monument within the town and on account of the place the factory has played in the life of those who have worked here.

This analysis tends to confirm that it is in the original multi-storey factory range, grain and boiler houses, and the extended range of silos, that the principal significance of the Shredded Wheat Factory as a building lies, notwithstanding the evidential value that the complex as a whole may embody. It is in these buildings that the special architectural and historic interest of the factory may be said to reside, and it is to these buildings that reference is made in the Statutory List.

This conclusion is important when assessing proposals for the alteration of the building with reference to PPS 5. Although it is proposed to demolish a substantial part of the factory it is reasonable to conclude, as do the applicants' advisers, that this would not result in "substantial harm to or total loss of significance", the criteria that would require consideration of the scheme in the light of policy HE 9.2 of PPS 5. Instead the proposals should be assessed against policy HE 9.4, which is relevant to proposals that would have "a harmful impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset which is less than substantial harm".

Policy HE 9.4 sets out two tests against which the planning authority should assess a



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scheme. The authority should

- (i) *weigh the public benefit of the proposal (for example, that it helps to secure the optimum viable use of the heritage asset in the interests of its long term conservation) against the harm.*
- (ii) *recognise that the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for any loss.*

In this case the harm may be agreed to be modest. The relative interest of the components of the factory has been considered above. The retention of the multi-storey factory range and of the silos would ensure that the greater part of the significance of the factory would be protected. The demolition of the single-storey production hall, its extension and the attached office range, and that of the large warehouse, would erode something of the significance of the site, particularly in respect of its evidential value, by taking away from its completeness. The demolition of the 1920s garage range would erode the completeness of the original group of buildings, but its interest would seem to be minimal.

It is for your Council to assess such wider public benefit as may arise from the proposals for the Shredded Wheat Factory, and in particular the appropriateness or otherwise of the proposed new development. The proposals would secure the future of the multi-storey factory range and the grain and boiler houses, which would be repaired and converted to new uses, and this may be considered a significant public benefit in accordance with point (i) of the policy, subject to consideration of the appropriateness of the proposed repairs and alterations to the retained buildings. It is less clear that the proposals would secure the future of the silos, as although their ground floor would be converted to provide an economic use the attic would remain unused. Ideally provision should be made at least for sufficient access to the attic to make it usable (for example as a restaurant). Reference is made in the submission documents to the establishment of a maintenance fund for the silos and the provision for this needs to be closely examined to establish whether it may be considered an adequate and reliable means of securing their future maintenance.

The proposals for the repair, alteration and conversion of the multi-storey factory range, grain and boiler houses and silos are complex and difficult to understand. It is proposed that the multi-storey factory range in particular should be significantly altered, not least by the replacement of its fenestration and by the extension of the upper floor. The submission does not enable these works to be clearly understood, as the annotated drawings are not supported by any explanatory material. A brief but detailed justification should be provided to explain all of these works, to enable the effect of the scheme on the historic fabric of the building and the appropriateness of the proposed works to be assessed.



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The larger development for which outline planning permission is sought will have implications for both the setting of the Shredded Wheat factory and, perhaps, the setting of the town centre conservation area. Your Council should consider these in assessing the scheme.

Recommendation

English Heritage recommends that your Council should defer determination of these applications pending receipt of fuller information. On the basis of the information received to date we advise your Council

- (i) That the proposed demolition of substantial parts of the Shredded Wheat Factory would not entail substantial harm to its significance and should be assessed with reference to policy HE 9.4 of PPS 5.
- (ii) That the harm ensuing from the work would appear modest, unless a full assessment of the works to the buildings to be retained indicates otherwise.
- (iii) That in assessing public benefit arising from the proposals, the retention and reuse of the original buildings may be considered such a benefit, subject again to a full assessment of the works to these buildings, and also to full assessment of the proposed maintenance fund for the silo range.

Further explanatory material is needed to assess the proposed works to the buildings that it is proposed to retain.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted. If, notwithstanding our advice, you propose to approve the scheme in its present form, please advise us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

John Neale
Team Leader and Inspector of Historic Buildings

cc DP9, Hugh Sowerby



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