

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 5 DECEMBER 2013  
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT)

N6/2013/1938/MA

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL, CAMPUS EAST, WELWYN GARDEN  
CITY, AL8 6AE

ERECTION OF THREE STOREY INFILL EXTENSION AND SINGLE STOREY  
EXTENSION ON EASTERN (REAR) ELEVATION TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL OFFICE  
ACCOMMODATION (INCLUDING COUNCIL CHAMBER) AND ASSOCIATED  
ACCESS AND LANDSCAPING ALTERATIONS

APPLICANT: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, Finance and Operations Directorate

(Handside)

**1 Site Description**

- 1.1 The site is wholly occupied by existing Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council offices and car parking (formed by the Cherry Tree car park). The site is located at the junction of the B159 Bridge Road and The Campus, with the main entrance facing onto The Campus. To the north of the site lies the recently completed McCarthy and Stone development. To the east, Waitrose supermarket and the northern part of the town centre lies directly to the south.

**2 The Proposal**

- 2.1 The proposal is to infill the rear courtyard of the existing building with a three storey extension, accommodating the proposed new Council Chamber at ground floor with two storeys of office accommodation above, designed to accommodate approximately 120 people within the first and second floor offices to accommodate 60 persons on each level. The courtyard between the two existing blocks will accommodate a single storey extension of approximately 220sqm, constructed in brickwork to match the existing building and a flat parapet roof. The erection of this extension will result in the loss of the existing London Plane tree within the courtyard and in total the proposals will result in the removal of six trees (one relocation).
- 2.2 The additional accommodation is required due to the expiry of the lease at the Council's Bridge Road East Offices and accordingly, the Council has decided to centralise its staff resources in one single location. Furthermore, additional accommodation is required because of the decision taken to redevelop the Campus West facility. Accordingly, existing employees will be relocated to the main offices along with the re-provision of existing office accommodation. This essentially requires that the amount of floorspace is increased at Campus East.

- 2.3 The proposed three storey extension will infill the existing courtyard and link into the existing building on all three sides to connect into and match the existing floor levels. As a result, the extension will have only one principle elevation facing onto the Cherry Tree Car Park. The original proposals featured a central glazed element over three storeys, framed with a stone surround that 'leaned' forward from above ground level. On either side of the extension, an artificial cladding material was proposed to link the extension to the existing building. The roof was shown as being copper panels.
- 2.4 The single storey extension will be constructed from brickwork with a parapet wall and a conventional flat roof that incorporates roof lights to provide light to the newly created office accommodation at ground floor. The extension will also provide a staff entrance and shower facilities for cyclists and the existing cycle stores will be relocated.
- 2.5 As part of the overall works, improvements are also planned to the public realm areas immediately outside the two extensions and incorporate new street furniture, paving and landscaping.
- 2.6 Revised plans were received on 1 November 2013 following further discussions with officers and following the comments that were received during the original consultation and notification period. The changes can be summarised as follows.
- 1) The two flank walls either side of the feature glazing have been amended to show matching brickwork with windows to match the existing including a tiled mansard roof.
  - 2) The inclined plane of the glazing and stone surround has been revised to be vertical to reduce the dominance of the central feature.
  - 3) The profile of the stone surround to the glazed feature has been tapered to produce a thinner face.
  - 4) The stone surround to the chamber entrance has been altered to resemble the stone work to the existing entrance facing The Campus.
  - 5) Addition of a bin store and screening.
  - 6) Addition of cycle hoops and screening.
  - 7) Updates of tree positions and further discussions/revisions in relation to the use of hard and soft landscaping within the public realm.

### **3 Planning History**

- 3.1 None of relevance

### **4 Planning Policy**

- 4.1 National Planning Policy Framework  
PPS10: Planning for Sustainable Waste Management  
Circular 03/09: Costs Awards in Appeals and Other Planning Proceedings
- 4.2 Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005  
SD1: Sustainable Development  
GBSP2: Towns and Specified Settlements

R3: Energy Efficiency  
R5: Waste Management  
M14: Parking Standards for New Developments  
D1: Quality of Design  
D2: Character and Context  
D3: Continuity and Enclosure  
D4: Quality of the Public Realm  
D5: Design for Movement  
D6: Legibility  
D7: Safety by Design  
D8: Landscaping  
D9: Access and Design for People with Disabilities  
TCR13: Transport Infrastructure in Welwyn Garden City Town Centre  
TCR5: Campus East Development Site  
M4: Developer Contributions  
IM2: Planning Obligations

- 4.3 Supplementary Design Guidance, February 2005
- 4.4 Supplementary Planning Guidance, Parking Standards, January 2004
- 4.5 Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area Appraisal, September 2007
- 4.6 Planning Obligations, Supplementary Planning Document, February 2012

## **5 Constraints**

- 5.1 The site lies within the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and town centre boundary of Welwyn Garden City as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005. The existing Cherry Tree car park is also identified as part of a wider redevelopment site designated as Campus East under Policy TCR5 of the District Plan.

## **6 Representations Received**

- 6.1 This application has been advertised by site notice, newspaper notice and neighbour notifications. The period for this notification period ended on 9 October 2013. A total of 173 representations have been received as well as representations from the Twentieth Century Society, Welwyn Garden City Society, Cllr Cowan and Welwyn Hatfield Access Group.
- 6.2 The representations were received from residents of Ravenfield Road, Coneydale, Mannicotts, Cedar Walk, Katescroft, Parkway, Meadow Green, Valley Road, Peartree, Corners, Heronswood Road, Springfields, The Old Drive, Marsden Road, Witchford, Holly Walk, Walnut Grove, Bridge Road, West Riding, Melbourne Court, Elms Gardens, Cornmeal, Pitsfield, Wellington Drive, Stonemead, Templewood, Turmore Dale, Oakdale, Handside Lane, Peel Court, Valley Green, Russellcroft Road, Fordwich Road, Elmwood, Knightsfield, Woodland Rise, Reddings, Templewood, Brockswood Lane, Kirklands, Blakemere Road, Dellcott Close, Walden Place, Dognell Green, The Quadrangle, Polayn Garth, Mitchell Close, Brockett Close, Redwoods, Little Youngs, Pentley Park, Ingles, Nut Grove, Crossway, Honeycroft, Crawford Road, Sherradspark Road, Pitsfield, Broomhills, Cypress Avenue, Rosedale, Ravenfield Road, Hurstlings, Hardings, Monks Rise, Longcroft Lane, Hall Grove, Warren Way, Westcott, Daniells, Parkfields, Knella Road, Stanborough Green, Moorside, The

Vineyard, Applecroft Road, Uplands, St John's Close, Turpins Chase, Oaklands Court in Welwyn. Harmer Green Lane, Digswell and a resident of Watton at Stone, Hertfordshire.

6.3 The comments are summarised as follows:

#### Planning related

- The majority of objections that have been received relate to the external appearance of the extension given its location within the conservation area. Nearly all of the representations consider that it is out of keeping with the character of the conservation area and that the materials should match the existing building.
- Concerns that the building's design will set a precedent within the town for inappropriate modern designs that are not in keeping with the garden city vernacular.
- The building is an award winning building and should be treated as such.
- The Garden City is not in the city centre of Birmingham or Leeds where such an architectural gimmick might be acceptable.
- The approach is entirely at odds with the Council's approach to materials and extensions within the conservation area which are required to be subservient and match existing materials, detailing and appearance.
- The proposal will result in high energy consumption and running costs.
- Alternative architectural designs need to be considered.
- There are issues with the local highway network which mean that very few members of staff will cycle and accordingly, this won't be a practical option for staff.
- Placing such a major feature which forms the civic entrance onto the rear of the building effectively spins the building so it faces onto an unpleasant car park and the flank wall of the Waitrose supermarket. This area will be dominated by a curtain wall of glass. This scheme misses the opportunity to enhance this area, producing an attractive landscaped link for pedestrians and cyclists

#### None Planning related

- The internal layout is not fit for purpose with inadequate space for employees and storage of documents. How will the Council accommodate additional staff in future if required?
- Support the objections made in full by the Welwyn Garden City Society.
- Concerns that there is no need for the proposed accommodation and that the scheme is a waste of taxpayers money.

- Criticism in relation to errors in the submitted documents referring to St Albans and the former Police station being in situ.
- One rule for everyone else, one rule for the Council.
- The entire project appears to have been managed outside of the public's view and is now being pursued without adequate time for consultation.
- On the face of it, it will not achieve its apparent objectives.
- The project appears to be running late even before any building work is undertaken.
- It is being rushed through and stands every likelihood of being yet another project fiasco.
- Those driving the project have not gone to consultation, despite being 'mandated' to do so.
- The proposal breaks the rules in relation to the Estate Management Scheme.
- It is incomprehensible that the Council is willing to spend £4m of public money on the extensions.
- The whole project needs complete review and further public consultation.
- The application was received and validated on the same day and this is unfair given the normal service provided by the Council's Planning Department.

6.4 Welwyn Hatfield Access Group – A considered approach has been taken in relation to access issues, does raise some questions regarding accessibility of toilets by disabled users during meetings.

6.5 Welwyn Garden City Society – For the purposes of this report, the comments have been reiterated in full.

*'This proposal is within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and raise serious questions about the Council's own set of values. The Council's Planning Department requires any extension to respect the materials and setting and to be subservient to the existing building. This proposal is bold and assertive.*

*Significant pressure is placed on both residents, large and small businesses alike to accord with the ethos of the town in their own buildings and extensions. It is, therefore, inappropriate for the Council to ignore these standards when it comes to its own buildings. Its position in seeking to enforce the rules within the Conservation Area will be severely compromised in the future and we do not think this is in the town's best interests.*

*The proposed design is typical of the currently fashionable, bland, commercial and corporate style produced by certain multi-national architectural practices.*

*The exterior design of the proposed extension is inappropriate both in the context of the site and shows little consideration of, or for, the context, materials, proportions, or scale of the original building. The adoption of a new style, forcing it onto a traditional building form, lacks imagination and flair. It shows little respect or understanding of a singular, award winning and much admired building. The entire concept is out of context and sympathy with the original. The Society would welcome a sympathetic design that moves the architecture of the town forward. The Society does not consider that this proposal does that.*

*The Society is not advocating that the existing building design should be copied as a bland pastiche of the original, far from it. There is plenty of opportunity for a modern approach but the design should blend in with the existing building, as the recent winner of the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize for architecture, Astley Castle, clearly shows.*

*The original Council Offices were an award winning design by Cecil Elsom, a little known architect at the time (1936). He won the competition for the new town hall in Welwyn Garden City while still studying architecture at night school at the age of twenty. He went on to found his own practice and became one of the country's leading architects. The proposed slab of glass picks up none of the key features evident on the original building and its subsequent extension, so it sits as an alien insertion without any merit, and fails to complement or enhance any of the existing building or its surroundings.*

*The proposed facade slopes inward from top to bottom, suggesting slightly larger floors as the building rises. In this case, form and function do not go hand in hand, as the second floor cannot accommodate any more people than on the first floor. The Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall extension (built 1978) to the side of the original building is, by comparison, a masterpiece of the understated, the result was a building that is worthy of the town and to which ill-conceived additions will appear all the more incongruous.*

*Whether intended or not, this latest addition, even with the caption over the door of the Council Chamber Entrance', has all the pretensions of being the principal facade and thus the entrance to the council offices. However, it is in fact a Staff Entrance / Exit at the rear of the building, and a public entrance only for the Council Chamber space. Therefore, the proposal creates two, likely to be confused, front entrances. The proposed landscaping only reinforces this with its tree and shrub-lined, paved, area up to doors that are set in a Stonehenge type frame; and completed with, an again currently fashionable, cantilevered glass canopy.*

*The proposed glazed facade faces approximately south east and will be exposed to the low sun penetration for a six month period from autumn through to spring, the steps being taken to counter this could be difficult to control. Reliance on controlling it with solar control glass will require more reliance on air conditioning and lighting. The rear of the current building faces on to the council staff car park. In the context of any future council plans, it is unclear what use this car park space might be given and, therefore, it is unclear how any new facade would fit into its surroundings.*

*The internal planning that justifies this exercise this is of poor quality. The major part of the proposal involves infilling the large courtyard between the present north and south wings of the council offices for a three storey height. This creates very deep internal floors and, despite a light well inside the building to the first and second floors, the light levels at certain times will be far too bright for those close to the window and at other times too dark for those far away. Little consideration has been given to the working conditions and environment and thus productivity of the staff. There is insufficient accommodation for the current staff numbers to be relocated from other buildings.*

*Comfort levels in the building will depend entirely on artificial light and ventilation, with the resulting high energy consumption and running costs. This runs counter to the requirement for sustainability into the future. The space created shows a very high density solution without any flair or imagination in the layout. The occupancy levels seem to suggest a density of 4.2m<sup>2</sup> to 4.7m<sup>2</sup> per person. The British Council for Offices (BCO) categorises 4-6m<sup>2</sup> as trading or call centre densities. The space afforded to the 67 people on first and second floors will be so dense that no provision has been made for filing cabinets.*

*The rows of desks are oriented to the windows contrary to HSE recommendations. Overall, the layout shows no awareness or consideration for current research into effective office interiors and the working environments. The designer appears to rely on the development of a totally paperless office (there are only four low filing cabinets shown and these would be used for printing supplies for the printers placed on top).*

*The ground floor of the single storey extension shows Building Control; buried 8m to 9m behind small windows looking into a space without access to direct daylight. Again, the BCO recommends the maximum distance to a window from a workstation to be 5m to 7.5m. The council chamber is itself split between a higher area for Councillors and officials. There are currently 48 councillors, whereas there is seating for only 27 on and the stage; area. Splitting elected councillors up to further enforce a hierarchy is old fashioned and unnecessary in this egalitarian age.*

*In these days of the need for greater transparency and public engagement, it is unfortunate that the interior council chamber will look more like a court room, with the councillors emerging at a higher level from the rear of the chamber, thus limiting the opportunity for any contact with the electorate. If the councillors are sitting on a raised area in the council chamber at any time, there would be an appearance of lording it over residents below. This concept may restrict the use of this public area for wider meetings.'*

- 6.6 Twentieth Century Society – Objects to the application on the grounds that the extension fails to preserve or enhance the conservation area as it neither complements or takes its cue from the original building and the applicants have failed to consider the importance of the heritage of its surroundings. The application should be refused
- 6.7 Cllr M Cowan – “Objects to the extension on the grounds that the design is not only, not in keeping but over dominant when it should be subservient, with justifications that will make the future work move the team more difficult e.g. impossible to match the bricks and misunderstanding the need for extensions not to diminish the Conservation Area.”

## Amended Plans

- 6.8 The plans have been amended during the statutory determination period and a further consultation/representation period has taken place and ended on 22 November 2013. As a result of these amendments, 39 further representations have been received which can be summarised as follows:
- Original objections in design and principle still stand.
  - The amended design is not an improvement on the original, is unimaginative and crude.
  - The council chamber entrance is pompous and banal.
  - The plans are uglier.
  - This is becoming the main entrance to the offices. The cramped accommodation could be relieved by extending into the car park.
  - There are no council officers who worked with anyone from the earlier days of the design. How can the appointment of new staff's skill, historic knowledge be guaranteed.
  - The facade is more suitable for a leisure centre.
  - The reputation of a hardworking Council will take a big knock if this out of character extension is approved.
  - Still no real public consultation and the changes are purely cosmetic. The building will still be unfit for purpose.
  - The Council should be more sensitive on design matters.
  - Councillors are elected to and accountable to the electorate of the Borough. Election does not give the council an unlimited mandate to implement controversial actions.
  - The Council's planners are very stringent and quite rightly so. This sets a dangerous precedent.
  - I can only hope the Council planners will think again before ruining further the appearance of the Garden City centre.
- 6.9 Welwyn Garden City Society – The WGCS reiterates the objections that were made to on the original plans.
- 6.10 Cllr M Cowan – I note the modest changes to the exterior, but reiterate my objection on design grounds inter alia. I don't think you would take kindly to this on a 3 storey home in a prominent elevation in the Conservation Area.



## **7 Consultations Received**

7.1 The consultations below are from the original consultation period which ran from 18 September 2013 to 9 October 2013.

7.2 **Hertfordshire County Council Transport Programmes and Strategy (HCCTPS)** – No objections subject to conditions relating to submission of Green Travel Plan, provision of cycle parking, Construction Method Statement and planning obligations for sustainable transport measures.

7.3 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Environmental Health Department (EH)** – No objections or comments to make.

7.4 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Landscaping and Ecology Department** - The hard landscape plan shows the existing trees around the building, however there are a couple of anomalies that should be addressed including trees which aren't in place.

The main issue is in terms of impact on the landscape is the removal of the London Plane tree. This tree is located within the smaller courtyard and is shown for removal to facilitate the single storey extension. This tree is a semi-mature tree approximately 13m tall and is in good health and condition. Despite being set back within the courtyard the tree has significant amenity value. In addition with the greater use of the rear car park and entrance into the building the tree will have greater importance. Given the significant amenity value its loss would have a detrimental impact on the amenity value and it should be considered a constraint to development in this area. Within the larger courtyard there is semi-mature *Parrotia persica*. This tree cannot be retained but given that this is fine specimen tree we would like to see it moved to a location of our choice rather than felled. Recommends that the tree's retention should be prioritised and that it could be feasible to design an extension around the tree. Makes additional advisory comments in relation to soft landscaping, bins, paving and seating areas in addition to planting of hedges and trees and requests that if approved a Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Method Statement is conditioned.

7.5 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Building Control** – Means of escape will be checked at Building regulations stage, otherwise no adverse comments.

7.6 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Client Services** – No adverse comments.

7.7 **Thames Water (TW)** – Makes advisory standard comments relating to sewerage waste and water.

7.8 **Natural England** – No objections.

7.9 **EDF** – No comments received.

7.10 **Transco** – No comments received.

## Amended Plans

The consultation responses below are from the revised consultation period which ran from 1 November 2013 to 22 November 2013.

### 7.11 **BEAMS** – For the purposes of this report, the comments have been reiterated in full.

*‘There are, as almost always with any historic building located within a conservation area, many different possible approaches to provide the sought-after accommodation as an extension to these offices. These range from a discreet, contextual design, harmonising & reflecting, & perhaps even imaginatively re-interpreting, the neo-Georgian language & vocabulary, of Elsom, to more bold, & clearly contrasting, contemporary architecture, following current styles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that demonstrates the evolution of the building over a period of some 80 years.*

*In considering the principles of appropriate architectural design for this building, there is no clearly right or wrong design approach. Conservation good practice is concerned with ensuring that, generally, extensions should retain & conserve the significance, character, appearance & architectural & historic interest of the building. Extensions should not dominate the existing historic building or its setting, in either scale, materials of construction or situation. Extensions should be constructed in materials of clear high quality that either refer to the historic materials previously used or create an acceptable contrast or juxtaposition to highlight & emphasise the change & sequence of additions over time.*

*In choosing this relatively bold & obviously quite different appearance for the design of the proposed extensions to Elsom’s 1935 building, it is critical that development does not fundamentally harm (in terms of the National Planning policy Framework paragraph 134) the undesignated heritage asset (i.e. the existing building) or have a detrimental impact on the character & appearance of the conservation area (a designated heritage asset).*

*The principal elevation of the original building is the west frontage to The Campus- as noted above. The key feature of the plain rear elevation is the campanile. Neither are significantly affected by the proposed extension. The rear east elevation has far less significance than the key west frontage to The Campus in the perception of the identity of the conservation area. The rear east frontage is facing the side of the nearby supermarket.*

*The scale of the proposed stone edged framing to the structural glass screen wall (now, in this amended proposal, vertical rather than inclined & with a slimmer, more refined, moulded cross-section) is a bold feature of the extension, which projects through the eaves line of the existing office building- but is, importantly, lower than the ridge of that roof. The side infill walls are in brick with windows of classical proportions. The proposed entrance is emphasised as the focal point of the east elevation, which helps to reduce the perception of an out of scale glazed screen. That screen is sub-divided into vertical glass panels, cut by horizontals of the floor bands, which helps, to some extent, in referring to the proportions of the earlier building.*

*The materials of the proposed extension are high quality structural glass with stainless steel connections & structural support & a stone surround, set in front of the plane of the glazed screen to form a distinct shadow line, adding somewhat to the richness of this proposed new façade of the extension.*

*Whilst a building of local architectural & historic interest- the 1935 Elsom building is not a listed building. Though a prominent building in the conservation area, the main significance of the building- the frontage to The Campus- is not harmed by the proposed rear extension. At the rear elevation, the principal feature- the campanile- is retained.*

*The façade of the proposed east elevation extension is certainly a bold statement, expressing the difference of this part of the building, as a clear contrast to the original neo-Georgian building style. The amendments to the framing of the glazed screen has, it is considered, reduced the assertiveness of the appearance of the earlier proposed extension, to some extent, & increased the refinement of the architectural detailing. The height of the framing does not exceed the ridge of the roof.*

*On balance, with close attention to the selection of materials of clear high quality & to detail (such as lighting & external views looking into the new extension), the proposed extension would be a functional & striking contemporary addition, which could provide a further layer of interest to this comparatively tucked away part of the conservation area, to the rear of the 1935 offices.'*

- 7.12 **Hertfordshire County Council Transport Programmes and Strategy (HCCTPS)** – The comments of the highway authority are unchanged by the revised drawings.
- 7.13 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Environmental Health Department (EH)** – No further comments received.
- 7.14 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Landscaping and Ecology Department** – No objections to the revised proposals but also makes further comments in relation to planting locations, management issues and proposed shrub planting species.
- 7.15 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Building Control** – No further comments received.
- 7.16 **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Client Services** – No further comments received.
- 7.17 **Thames Water (TW)** – Makes advisory standard comments relating to sewerage waste and water.
- 7.18 **Natural England** – No further comments received.
- 7.19 **EDF** – No comments received.
- 7.20 **Transco** – No comments received.

## 8 **Discussion**

8.1 This application is presented to the Development Management Committee because Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is the applicant.

8.2 The main issues to be considered are:

1. **The principle of development**
2. **The impacts of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and whether, in the light of any harm which might be identified there are any public benefits from the proposal which would outweigh that harm.**
3. **Whether the proposal provides appropriate car parking provision given its town centre location and has any impact(s) on the local highway network**
4. **Other Material Planning Considerations relevant to the determination of the application**

### **1. The principle of development**

8.3 For the avoidance of doubt, offices are a main town centre use and therefore, subject to compliance with other policies within the District Plan, the principle of development is acceptable and no sequential test is required to identify alternative sites. Whilst a number of letters of representation have questioned the rationale and need for the application, this is not a relevant consideration in planning terms that needs to be addressed by this report. Part of the site (Cherry Tree Car Park) lies within the Campus East redevelopment site identified under District Plan policy TCR5. This policy is criteria based and is worded to cover the comprehensive redevelopment of this site during the District Plan period. Because this area will remain as car parking, there is no change of use and because this policy covers the wider redevelopment proposals it has minimal weight and relevance to the determination of this application.

### **2. The impacts of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and whether, in the light of any harm which might be identified there are any public benefits from the proposal which would outweigh that harm.**

8.4 In terms of legislative requirements, the site is located within the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. Section 72 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act (1990) states that "*special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.*" It is now accepted case law that preserving the character or appearance of a conservation area can be achieved not only by a positive contribution to preservation, but also by development which leaves the character or appearance of the area unharmed.

8.5 In terms of the national planning policy approach, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Chapter 12 is concerned with the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment, paragraph 131 of the NPPF (March, 2012) states,

*'In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness'*

8.6 The NPPF goes on to guide that *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be'*. It is therefore clear that the objective of the policies is to maintain and manage change to heritage assets in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance. That significance is the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest, which may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. This significance may derive not only from its physical presence but also from its setting and this means that the wider implications of development within the wider conservation area has to be taken into account.

8.7 In terms of the District Plan, policies GBSP2, D1 and D2 of the adopted Welwyn Hatfield District Plan apply which seek to provide a good standard of design in all new development and require that all new development respects and relates to the character and context of the area in which it is to be sited. Accordingly, this report assesses the significance of the heritage asset, i.e. the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area before assessing the impact of the proposals on this asset.

#### Assessment of significance

8.8 In planning the town, Ebenezer Howard's basic concern was social reform, yet in calling his town "Garden City" he was also setting an aesthetic standard. As Raymond Unwin, architect at Letchworth Garden City put it, *"The idea of the promoters of the Garden City was not to build an artistic town. We must first see that our citizens are decently housed."* However because previous standards have been set, changes that are perceived to be 'outside the norm' can be seen as significant or even threatening. In many respects the aesthetic significance of the conservation area has changed over time whether through the use of modern materials such as UPVC, glazed shop fronts and variations in building form, scale and designs ranging from the dominant form of the Howard Centre through to the contemporary/traditional hybrid that is the recently constructed Sainsbury's supermarket.

8.9 The original designation boundaries of the Conservation Area (1968) appear to have been drawn to largely embrace the area of the pre-war Garden City west of the railway line; the intent being to preserve the architectural unity of the town. The more recent Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) ('CAA') seeks to define the historic importance of Welwyn Garden City. It concludes that the town's principal significance lies in the associated spatial interrelationships which are at the heart of its planned layout and the way in which this expresses the visionary ideals of the Garden City Movement, rather than in its architecture and its global interest in this respect are acknowledged. The significance of this unity is best described in the CAA *"...the outstanding hallmark of Welwyn Garden City is the spectacular*

*layout of the town centre with the spacious Parkway and Howardsgate.....and the vista from the White Bridge”, the latter vista being across and encompassing the Campus.*

- 8.10 The CAA also states that *‘The institutional and civic buildings around the north side of The Campus display a variety of styles, ranging from the Modernist Campus West building (1973-5), to the 1935 neo-Georgian Garden City style of the Council Offices building located at the south east corner. Between the two buildings lie the c. 1958 Oaklands College campus and the Police Station of c. 1965. Although the architectural styles vary, the use of materials sympathetic to the theme of traditional Garden City architecture, together with the well treed and spacious settings of the buildings, integrates well with the surroundings. Their role as interface between the commercial architecture of the town centre and the residential areas to the north, is well conceived and generally effective’.* Although Sir Nikolaus Pevsner was somewhat more critical of the area stating *‘the Campus...was intended to have important public buildings. They have been built at different dates, and the result is somewhat lopsided.’* The appraisal also goes on to conclude that the original element of the Council Offices is a key building and should be considered as buildings that potentially could be locally listed which essentially is to try and raise awareness of buildings that are of a ‘higher than average’ importance. The original building was not recommended for a statutory listing. It is important to clarify that neither its presence on a local list nor a statutory listing would have prevented the consideration of a different form and appearance of extension.
- 8.11 The Council Offices were designed by the young architect CH (Cecil Harry) Elsom (1912- 2006), who won the competition in 1933 and are distinctly characteristic of the Garden City language of the neo-Georgian style, though with a dash of neo-vernacular and Arts and Craft influence. As set out in the comments from BEAMS, *‘The symmetrical 7-bay, 2 ½ storey principal west elevation frontage of the 1935 building to The Campus is classically understated and somewhat bland in appearance, though relieved with a strong central vertical axis, emphasising the subtly designed stone surround to the entrance and formal doors to the shallow balcony above, culminating in the focal point of the rather quirky domed clock tower, placed on a zig-zag base, set on the ridge of the roof. Five dormer windows, above the parapet line and string course, follow the vertical proportions and rhythm of the neo-Georgian fenestration below. The other elevations of the building are sub-ordinate but follow the same neo-Georgian principles and proportions for the most part. The main feature of the rear (east) elevation is the elegant, slim campanile, to approximately the same height as the clock tower. The integrity of the 1935 building has, to some extent, been retained, despite what is considered to be a rather awkward, 20<sup>th</sup> Century side extension to the north, by articulating it as a linked addition. None-the-less, the original building remains as the key architectural reference for any future development or extension, being attuned to the low-key, discreet Garden City design approach that seeks to harmonise with the formal commercial buildings to the south.*
- 8.12 The remainder of The Campus is a rather untypical mix with the more dominant and modernist Campus West building set against the pared down two storey ‘homely modernist’ design that forms the Oakland’s College Campus. The formal layout for the area north of the Campus embodied in de Soissons’ master plan did not come to fruition. Apart from the original Council Offices building this has been replaced by an evolving and less formal arrangement of civic type activities.

Nonetheless, while broadly speaking the architectural quality of the buildings largely fail to match that of the earlier neo-Georgian style, the essential spatial framework and unity of the master plan remains readily apparent. Further with the possible exception of the taller structure at Campus West, the buildings are sufficiently low-key and horizontal in form to satisfactorily integrate with the well treed and spacious setting of their surroundings, especially in the more important views from the Campus and that part of the town centre to the south. This broad arrangement accords with and complements the earlier stages of the master plan and as noted in the CAA provides an effective interface between the town centre and the residential area to the north.

- 8.13 The appearance of the existing public entrance to the building is in marked contrast to the appearance of the rear of the building which addresses the existing Cherry Tree car park and has poor legibility in urban design terms (i.e. the ability to recognise where you are and where you can go in a development). This rear elevation has a number of design influences with flat roofs, mansards, parapet walls and towers but also has a weak sense of place even though it is regularly used by visitors to the offices, members and officers. There are also additional extensions on the rear of the building that unfortunately have not integrated well due to poor form and materials. The already 'lopsided' architectural vernacular within The Campus, has also been altered further by the recent Peel Court development, which is a 'watered down' 'pick and mix' interpretation of the traditional Neo-Georgian approach with non Georgian window proportions/detailing and shallow pyramid roof elements. This was allowed on appeal in 2011.
- 8.14 Setting aside the opinion as to whether this proposal should or should not be taking place in principle, the main issue here is not to do with the values and ideals of the founding fathers of the garden city which was based on a much wider radical blueprint for socio-economic reform, It is essentially a subjective aesthetic judgement as to whether this extension is appropriate in its context. The changes in the appearance of the town have been heavily influenced by three factors, social reform, the prevailing economic climate and associated changes in aesthetic appearance. Aesthetic deviations within the town have effectively been brought about due to issues of resources, state intervention, increasing densities and the advent of the motor car. The town contains a variety of different styles and designs and it is unfortunate that the Neo-Georgian aesthetic has become the main focus at the expense of other, seemingly less fashionable, but equally important styles such as that used in the 'New Towns Housing' and industrial phases. In many respects the Neo-Georgian approach is by no means exceptional, merely a very safe approach to twentieth century architecture. As such, it is entirely appropriate that on commercial, retail and other buildings within the town centre that a contemporary approach can be used as per Sainsbury's. Put simply, the overarching significance of the town goes far beyond any individual buildings or architectural achievements. Ultimately, a different design solution on the rear elevation of the building that does not directly face The Campus, should, in the opinion of officers not be automatically discounted in favour of a more 'traditional' approach, unless there would be an unacceptable relationship with its surroundings.

## Assessment of impact

- 8.15 Sympathetic contemporary design using high quality materials can enhance and enliven an area. Often there are development opportunities within conservation areas and here it is essential that new buildings respect the local context in terms of scale, mass or volume, footprint and site layout. The existing urban grain in relation to street pattern, plot size, rhythm, silhouette, materials and local details also needs to be fully understood. If local character and distinctiveness are ignored then new development tends to reflect only the marketing policies or corporate identities of companies and organisations, or it may just be a standard product of the building industry or the latest 'fashion'. However, as the Council's own Supplementary Design Guidance states, *'....this is not to say that new development must mirror the local character, rather that it must be sensitive to it and not detrimentally affect the townscape and landscape. By taking an informed and creative approach, the quality of a new building can complement its neighbours regardless of whether it is of contemporary or more traditional design.'*
- 8.16 The applicant's intention is to provide a new extension, centred on a new Council Chamber, with flexible modern office space above to create sufficient space to accommodate the required number of staff. Accordingly, it makes sense to infill the whole of the courtyard and utilise this area to expand the building's footprint. This creates a single sided elevation which creates a deep plan for office accommodation that has only one elevation from which natural light needs to be provided. Whilst the applicant considered options such as the use of roof lights, this was only a realistic solution in the upper floor and therefore at the early stages of the planning process it became clear that the key architectural feature had to include a large expanse of glazing in order to provide as much natural light as possible. This requirement for natural light and space fixed the plan form of the proposal and this is the reason why the applicant has not chosen to simply replicate the existing scale, form and appearance of the existing elevation.
- 8.17 The applicant put forward number of different options during the pre-application stage, including a totally glazed facade, a glazed facade with a glazed mansard roof, various different cladding and roof options including copper, copper substitutes, lead and other forms of tile use and roof arrangements. However, even though other design solutions were being considered the original proposal applicant concluded that the original proposal was the most appropriate to submit. Because the glazed element is the principal feature of the elevation, the challenge has been how best to blend this feature into the existing building.
- 8.18 The applicant has made a decision to not entirely replicate the existing neo Georgian appearance of the existing building and instead to frame a more modern contemporary facade. The original submission was criticised for being too bold in its approach and paying no attention to the existing architectural detailing of the form of the building. Further discussions have taken place during the course of the application given the comments that have been made in the representations received and therefore the consideration of the design of various elements of the extension has been amended.



8.19 The amendments to the original proposal can be summarised as follows:-

1. The two flank walls either side of the feature glazing have been amended to show matching brickwork with windows to match the existing including a tiled mansard roof.
2. The inclined plane of the glazing and stone surround has been revised to be vertical to reduce the dominance of the central feature.
3. The profile of the stone surround to the glazed feature has been tapered to produce a thinner face, again to visually reduce the impact of the feature.
4. The stone surround to the chamber entrance has been altered to resemble the stone work to the existing entrance facing The Campus.
5. Addition of a bin store and screening.
6. Addition of cycle hoops and screening.
7. Updates of tree positions and further discussions/revisions in relation to the use of hard and soft landscaping within the public realm.

8.20 The revisions now proposed to the elevation of the proposed extension will replace the cladding previously proposed in the recesses either side of the extension with a brick finish instead. Although a close colour match to the existing brickwork and mortar will be provided the size of the bricks will be to metric modern standards so will not directly resemble the existing brickwork, this was one of the reasons why cladding was proposed in the initial scheme. However as it will be seen in the recess and not a prominent feature or over a large area the use of brick is considered to be the most appropriate solution that pays respect to the existing building and enables a transition between the modern and traditional elements.

8.21 The surround would extend only marginally past the existing elevation and the extension is designed to match the height of the existing buildings to which they are attached, although the width and length is dictated by the space that it needs to fill. The overall scale is somewhat prominent in the immediate context of the site but this does not automatically equate to it being unacceptable and in many respects, the scale of the proposal has been directly influenced by the proportions of the existing building. The plans have been amended further to create a more appropriate profile for the main surround which reduces the amount of the flat surface on the top of the surround and therefore its prominence. The offices are a public building and the rear entrance has little sense of place. Whilst the extension would result in a more prominent structure in close proximity to the periphery of the site and visible from Bridge Road, within the spaciousness of its setting there would not be an over bearing effect upon the adjoining public realm or nearby buildings and this helps create a distinctive identity for the rear of the building whilst respecting local character through the use of the brickwork on either side of the extension and pays respect to the appearance of the existing building. This (along with improvements to the public realm) will improve the overall legibility of the site (i.e. the ability to recognise where you are and where you can go in a development).

- 8.22 The use of a 'Planar' glazing system with the glass being tinted for solar control will provide a sleek and contemporary finish and avoid the requirement for heavy framing which would otherwise detract from its appearance. Re-articulating the stone surround so that it provides a tapered finish that presents a thinner edge and reduces visual prominence is an improvement over the original designs. This tapering will ensure that the stone feature appears more subservient to the main building's design, with the chamfer of the stone surround now appearing in shadow. The entrance doorway has also been revised so that it more closely resembles the stonework of the existing entrance that faces The Campus, whilst the inclined plane of the glazing and stone surround has been revised to be vertical to reduce its overall dominance.
- 8.23 The use of roof tiles to match existing along with the use of a mansard roof will closely reflect the existing buildings roof form and appearance. The re-constituted stone detailing to window cills at first floor within the brickwork and the replication of the existing stone banding detail between the first and second floor will also aid in blending the new walls either side of the glazed feature into the existing building.
- 8.24 The building would not result in a loss of openness and sense of space and place in College Way or from the south. The essential and distinctive features of significance in this part of the civic area would be conserved and the overall quality of the townscape enhanced. The scheme is of high quality design and would make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It would not lead to any harm to the significance of the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and therefore the tests in the NPPF that require any development that leads to less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset to be weighed against the public benefits is not engaged. Notwithstanding this, although ultimately its long term impact cannot be assessed it is clear that the new extension would not have a negative impact on economic vitality. The changes to Campus West to improve the town's leisure facilities, which in part necessitate the requirement for this extension, would only improve the vitality and viability of the town which is consistent with the thrust of the Government's Planning for Growth strategy and the drive to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs.
- 8.25 It is considered that the changes in the amended plans are significant enough when compared with the original proposal to result in a form of extension that, whilst not entirely in keeping with the views expressed in some of the representations that all development within the town centre should be of a red brick, neo Georgian appearance pays sufficient respect to the detailing and materials used in the existing building.
- 8.26 As part of the accommodation additional roof plant will also be required. This will take the form of additional roof plant on the single storey extension and a screened area for roof mounted plant set back to the rear of the three storey extension's roof. The main roof plant will be screened by a brickwork 'look-a-like' screen. Real bricks can't be used due to ventilation requirements but on the most visible elevations, the difference will not be discernible. The plant screen will be visible from the wider area but will also be similar in appearance and scale to the existing plant areas and equipment that are currently housed on this part of the building.

## Single Storey Extension

- 8.27 Turning to the single storey extension, this is a more traditional brick infill with parapet detailing and a flat roof. Again, the entrance feature would be re-constituted stone cladding with a glazed entrance canopy and the stonework would reflect the proposed entrance on the three storey element to give continuity on the rear elevation. Two new windows would be constructed on either side of the glazed entrance doors and designed to incorporate Georgian glazing bars. The final detail of which is not shown on the submitted drawings as the final design will be agreed by condition if approved. This extension is an entirely subservient addition to the building and has been designed to be in keeping with the appearance of existing and is flanked on both sides by existing buildings. Whilst the construction of this extension will inevitably result in the loss of the existing mature London Plane Tree, whilst this is unfortunate given the overall aims and objectives of the redevelopment proposal is not considered to be sufficient to warrant refusal on these grounds alone.
- 8.28 Overall, the proposals would make a positive contribution to the townscape quality of the civic area without undermining those attributes which the Conservation Area Appraisal highlights as being important. In planning terms, the significance of the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset would therefore be sustained and enhanced. The proposals are therefore acceptable in relation to the requirements of Policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan and the NPPF.

## Public Realm

- 8.29 In relation to the works to the public realm, how Local Planning Authorities manage their streets and public realm can have a significant impact on the appearance of a conservation area and this is particularly pertinent in an urban context and much can be done to reduce the impact of traffic and clutter in road signage, improve street furniture and make use of traditional paving. The quality of the existing public realm is poor and provides no sense of place or attractive environment for users of the building. Regardless of the view of some residents that this should be a secondary entrance this will be the main entrance that will be used for Council and public meetings and the quality of the public realm needs to be improved and steps taken to minimise the impact of 'back of house' requirements such as bin and waste storage and lighting. The importance of this area is increased given the overall plans for the redevelopment of the Campus and Town Centre North which results in this area being an important link between the two.
- 8.30 The proposals will result in the removal of six trees (one relocation) which given the location of the extensions is unavoidable. Only two of the trees provide any real amenity value, both of which are located within the existing internal courtyards. The proposals detail the laying of a new paved apron to the entrance, retention of the existing paving in front of the single storey extension and the laying of new paving slabs directly in front of the principle extension. Further public realm improvements are proposed in the form of additional tree and shrub planting, benches and new lighting columns which will all tie in with the overall strategy for the public realm in the town centre. Further landscaping is included in areas that are currently laid to grass and a sustainable hardwood timber screen is proposed to screen the existing bin stores. The resultant landscaping consists of the re-siting of the existing tree in the courtyard, two more formal trees planted

to the front of the entrance and the use of additional shrub planting. This will overtime result in an enhanced landscaped public realm with more appropriate tree specimens more appropriately located. Whilst only three additional trees would be planted the overall landscaping would be improved which helps the building to be viewed within the soft landscape context that is a key element of garden city layout and design. Agreement to the details of the landscaping have been ongoing during the determination period and given that the exact details of the planting specification and hard surfacing are still to be finalised, it is suggested that it is acceptable for this element to be dealt with by the use of an appropriate landscaping condition. Subject to this condition, the soft and hard landscaping works to the public realm will be an enhancement to the area.

### **3. Whether the proposal provides appropriate car parking provision given its town centre location and has any impact(s) on the local highway network**

- 8.31 The extensions will provide an additional 1,180 sqm of B1 office floor space to accommodate the 140 staff being relocated from offices in Bridge Road East. Currently there are 240 staff working at Campus East which has an existing floor area of 5237 sqm. Based on the adopted standards an overall maximum parking provision of 174 spaces is required.
- 8.32 Currently staff based at the offices have use of three car parks, Campus East Upper car park (148 spaces), Cherry Tree car park to the rear of the building (48 spaces) and 25 spaces in Hunters Bridge Car park approximately 160m south of the site. The 48 spaces in Cherry Tree car park include 5 spaces for visitors, 8 for cabinet members and 3 disabled bays. This is a total of 221 spaces.
- 8.33 The Transport Statement gives results of surveys carried out in June 2013 to assess the current level of usage. The results indicate that the maximum parking accumulation in the Campus East Car Park was 106 spaces and in Cherry Tree was 30 vehicles. The use of the parking spaces available by Council staff at the Hunters Bridge car park was not separately assessed, but a car park survey of the whole car park which is used by the public and has 638 spaces shows that generally there is spare capacity.
- 8.34 The current levels of car parking provision for the building results in an overprovision of car parking in what is one of the most sustainable locations within the Borough, well located for trips by public transport, walking and cycling. The total number of spaces (221) results in a provision of 1 space per 24m<sup>2</sup> opposed to the adopted standard of 1 space per 30m<sup>2</sup>. Using this adopted parking standard, the maximum parking requirement for the existing office floor space of 5237 sqm would be 175 spaces so at present there is an oversupply of 46 parking spaces.
- 8.35 The proposed extension of 1180sqm would require a maximum 40 spaces giving a total maximum requirement of 215 spaces. Therefore there will be an overprovision of 6 spaces (221-215). The Transport Statement also sets out that the current peak accumulation of vehicles to the Campus East and Cherry tree Car parks would amount to 69% of the capacity. Essentially, the additional demand, which has been calculated using the national recognised 'TRICS' database, shows that the additional parking demand from the extension can be accommodated within these two car parks without the use of any additional spaces in Hunters Bridge which include 25 spaces that will be allocated for staff.

- 8.36 However, the approach to simply demonstrate that the existing car parks can accommodate the additional demand is not strictly accordance with government policy given the sites sustainable location and the fact that the Council's car parks should remain primarily for town centre uses.
- 8.37 One of the core planning principles of the NPPF states that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable. Decisions should take account of whether the opportunities for sustainable transport modes have been taken up depending on the nature and location of the site, to reduce the need of major transport infrastructure. Decisions should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised.
- 8.38 The adopted parking standards allow for a reduction in numbers depending on the site's location and ease of accessibility to facilities and public transport. The offices are located in Zone 1 which is the most accessible zone and would allow for a reduction in numbers to between 0 and 25% of the maximum. The existing level of provision is 221 which is greater than the maximum requirement even with the proposed extension. Ultimately, given the highly sustainable location of the site a robust and effective Green Travel Plan is key to managing parking demand and reducing travel modes used by staff to travel to and from work to a level that is appropriate given the sites location.
- 8.39 A Travel Plan will be a key tool to protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people. A Travel Plan has been prepared to support this application which is an update of the existing Travel Plan for the offices. The applicant is currently in detailed discussions to put into place a more robust Travel Plan aimed at reducing car use to a reasonable level for a site in such an accessible location.
- 8.40 The current Travel Plan submitted as part of the application sets a target to reduce the proportion of staff driving to the Council offices alone by car by 10% within 5 years but this is not considered to be a very onerous target for offices in this location. The Transport Statement concludes that there is the possibility of securing additional allocated parking spaces in Hunters Bridge Car Park should the Travel Plan monitoring indicate that actual parking demands exceeds the forecasts. However if parking demand exceeds the forecast, it demonstrates that the measures in the Travel Plan are not being effective and the Travel Plan should be reassessed to identify effective methods of modal shift (i.e. the travel methods used by staff to get to and from work).
- 8.41 Discussions surrounding the effectiveness and implementation of the plan have been ongoing and are continuing at the time of writing this report. Ultimately, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as Highway Authority and officers are confident that the existing plan has been significantly improved and provides a framework to ensure that the plan is successful. Further surveys are necessary in order to inform the final plan and detailed advice has been taken from HCC in relation to these matters. Officers consider that this application provides an ideal opportunity to update and improve the existing travel plan so that it is fit for purpose in relation to this proposal. Given the timescales involved, a condition relating to the submission of an acceptable Travel Plan, no later than 2 months

prior to occupation is recommended and has been agreed with HCC as an appropriate approach as used in other planning applications.

- 8.42 In relation to the impact on the surrounding highway network, the site is located on The Campus. The Campus forms one of the main routes into Welwyn Garden City town centre and is a classified road, B195 and is designated as a secondary distributor road subject to a speed limit of 30mph. The Transport Statement considers the potential trip generation from the extension using the TRICS database. This analysis has been checked by the Highway Authority and is considered robust. The TRICS analysis indicates that during the AM peak 08:00-09:00 the site will generate an additional 33 vehicular trips, 8 additional trips on foot and 7 by public transport. During the PM peak 16:00-17:00 the site will generate 31 vehicle trips, 6 additional pedestrian trips and 8 by public transport. Most of these car trips would be from The Campus to College Way which provides access to the car parks. The Highway Authority considers that these additional trips can be accommodated on the highway without having a severe impact and officers agree with this conclusion. During the Construction phase part or all of the Cherry Tree Car Park will be used as the site compound. The displaced parking can be accommodated with Campus East Upper Car Park and the management of this will form part of the Construction Management Plan.
- 8.43 The access arrangements to Campus East will remain unchanged and servicing will be restricted to refuse vehicles and vehicles delivering supplies via the existing service arrangements, accessing the site from College Way into the north of the Cherry Tree Car Park. The existing cycle stands will have to be relocated as part of this development and the landscaping plan does provide for new cycle stands and stores. It is suggested that details of this could be agreed by condition, prior to commencement of the development.
- 8.44 It is HCC's policy, approved by their Cabinet in January 2008, to seek a planning obligation in respect of Sustainable Transport including, but not limited to, highway and rights of way improvements, for all developments. The NPPF promotes accessibility by sustainable means including bus, cycling and walking, and the provisions of S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act allows that planning obligations may be used to mitigate the impact of development. The Council has not adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy and the requirement is therefore that any planning obligations must meet the following requirements;
- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning;
  - Directly related to the development;
  - Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 8.45 Regulation 123 introduces further limitations and these relate to the use of planning obligations for the purpose of infrastructure. Where a local authority has a published list for infrastructure projects, the authority may not seek contributions through a legal agreement through section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (S106). In this case, the authority does not have a published list and therefore it is appropriate to seek contributions through a S106 legal agreement. This would be in accordance with policies M4 and IM2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

- 8.46 For clarity and ease, HCC have implemented standard charges for non residential developments, these charges are tiered reflecting the accessibility of different sites across Hertfordshire. The charge for non residential developments is £500 per parking space or £1000 per peak hour two way trip. The Transport Statement demonstrates that the proposal will lead to an additional 33 peak hour trips and the parking requirement is 30 spaces. There are no proposals to reduce parking provision due to the town centre location and the Transport Statement refers to providing additional parking if necessary. The Highway Authority therefore considers that a sustainable transport contribution of £15,000 towards cycling and walking infrastructure to encourage the use of alternative modes and support the aims of the Travel Plan meets the three tests of the regulations.
- 8.47 The Travel Plan aims to promote walking and cycling. Cycling would be a viable alternative for these trips and should be encouraged. Recent improvements to cycle routes along Black Fan Road and Broadwater Road have improved access from the residential areas to the east and south of Welwyn Garden City towards the town centre. Currently the missing link is cycle provision along Bridge Road. These east -west links were identified in the Welwyn Garden City Urban Transport Plan, 2008. A contribution towards this link would assist in ensuring that cycling is seen as a feasible alternative to the car.

#### **4. Other Material Planning Considerations relevant to the determination of the application**

- 8.48 **Energy Efficiency:** In relation to energy efficiency measures Policy ENG1 of the East of England Plan 2008, which encouraged the supply of energy from decentralised, renewable and low carbon energy sources by giving an interim target of 10% of the energy supply by these sources was revoked in January 2013. However, saved local plan policy R3 (Energy Efficiency) expects all developments to include measures to maximise energy conservation through the design of buildings, site layout and provision of landscaping and incorporate the best practical environmental option for energy supply.
- 8.49 Notwithstanding the revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), officers consider that a policy framework exists within the NPPF (Para 96) in accordance with saved local plan policies, for the local authority to seek to secure a proportion of energy through renewable or carbon offset means. Further, the research and studies used to prepare national and former regional policy provide sufficient evidence to support the implementation of local policy in the absence of a continuing regional policy framework.
- 8.50 All new community buildings have to comply with what are now elevated targets set by Part L of the Building Regulations. In many cases when the energy performance starts to be scrutinised at the construction stage it is often marginal as to what can be achieved with renewable energy sources as opposed to the (considerable) savings that can be achieved by firstly the efficient management and operation of the buildings and then simply making the buildings as energy efficient as possible. This is particularly relevant when this is contrasted with the costs and the embodied carbon element of the renewable technology.

- 8.51 The submitted Energy Strategy prioritises the reduction in energy consumption and hence CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through the building envelope design together with the use of mechanical and electrical services. Such measures include:
- High performance glazing
  - Improved building fabric
  - Low building air leakage rate, 20% above the 2010 minimum Building regulations requirement
  - Variable speed fans and pumps
  - Low energy lighting
  - Automatic lighting control with occupancy and daylight dimming controls
- 8.52 The energy statement also assesses the potential use of decentralised heating, cooling and power for the building. Combined Heat and Power generates electricity on site and recovers a proportion of the waste heat for use in heating and/or hot water generation for the building. This allows the overall efficiency to be significantly greater than the electricity generated via power stations feeding the National Grid. However, there is limited plant space to accommodate such a plant and the facility already has an extensive array of photovoltaic panels on the roof. In addition, because office accommodation has a low year round heat demand, a CHP plant is not considered to be viable. Combined Cooling, Heat and Power (CCHP) uses the same principles but the heat is used to generate cooling as well. Typically, such systems are only considered viable where they are run for at least 5,000 hours per year and because air source heat pumps provide a solution with lower carbon emissions, a CCHP plant is not considered to be viable.
- 8.53 Under Part L of the existing Building Regulations, the requirement to consider renewable energy sources would not equate to the 10% target under the RSS. However, from 9 July 2013 the applicant is required under the Building Regulations to analyse and take into account the technical, environmental and economic feasibility of using high efficiency alternative systems for decentralised energy supply systems based on energy from renewable resources, prior to construction. The government has also issued a set of consultation papers on proposed changes to the Building Regulations in 2013 and if approved the likely implementation was targeted as being October 2013. As part of these proposed changes, for new non domestic buildings a reduction of either 11% or 20% in carbon emissions above Part L of the 2010 regulations could be required.
- 8.54 The Energy Statement considers that the development has the potential to incorporate the following renewable energy technology but that they are not practical:
1. Solar water heating – Because the hot water demand is relatively low.
  2. Wind turbines – Due to only modest outputs and a corresponding low carbon dioxide reduction within urban sites and because of the potential more significant visual impact.
  3. Photovoltaic Cells – Due to overshadowing issues on both extensions further use is not considered practical.
  4. Biomass boilers – Given a lack of space for such a facility together with the demand for associated storage space, it is not considered to be a practical option.



5. Fuel Cell – Due to the high capital cost, space requirements and ongoing maintenance costs, it is not considered viable.
- 8.55 The achievement of a satisfactory energy supply is through the use of Air Source Heat Pumps. These work on the same principles as Ground Source Heat Pumps but the medium in which the heat is extracted is the external air rather than the ground. In addition, this can be reversed to provide cooling when required. The statement concludes that the use of such measures is appropriate for this development and will provide the heating and cooling requirements of all areas of the new accommodation.
- 8.56 The use of recycled rainwater/grey water systems has also been considered however such systems require sufficient space for rainwater collection tanks to be sited and in this case, there is insufficient room for such technologies. However, it has been agreed with the applicant that water saving measures will be incorporated, where appropriate within the new office accommodation.
- 8.59 In line with national planning policies and guidelines the energy strategy has adopted a hierarchical approach of using passive and low energy design technologies to reduce what is known as the 'baseline energy demand' and hence CO<sub>2</sub> emissions followed by the application of low and zero carbon technologies where appropriate. The focus is on CO<sub>2</sub> reduction by adopting a highly efficient building envelope together with high efficiency mechanical and electrical services incorporating heat recovery. The strategy is to use Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) air source heat pumps to provide the heating and cooling requirements and overall this will result in a 17.4% reduction in carbon emissions. This is considered to be an appropriate strategy towards the energy efficiency of the building and is in accordance with the thrust of national and local planning policy.
- 8.60 However, as with other applications a degree of flexibility is required because as the construction project goes through to tender and construction it may be the case that this technology cannot be implemented. The applicant would simply then end up applying to vary or remove the condition dependent on the solutions proposed by any given contractor. If planning permission is granted, it is suggested that a condition requiring a scheme of energy efficiency measures such that the scheme delivers an appropriate percentage of the development's energy from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon sources should be imposed.
- 8.61 **Protected Species:** The existing site and development is such that there is not a reasonable likelihood of EPS being present on site nor would an EPS offence be likely to occur. It is therefore not necessary to consider the Conservation Regulations 2010 or (Amendment) Regulations 2012 further.
- 8.62 **Representations:** A number of the letters of representation have related to an apparent inconsistency in approach within the Conservation Area in relation to the use of a contemporary design and that this is at odds with the approach of the department when handling applications for householder extensions and alterations. Although it is acknowledged that residents may view this as being an inconsistent approach, each case is dealt with on its own merits and the design of public and commercial buildings within the town centre is considered to be a different design issue and consideration than when dealing with extensions to residential dwellings. The proposed extensions have features which reflect those of the existing building and the use of brickwork and a mansard roof is in keeping

with the existing building. The only elements that are not necessarily in keeping are the glazed facade and the scale of the stone surround. However, for the reasons set out in this report, these elements do not harm the significance of the Conservation Area, especially when viewed in relation to other prominent buildings within the town centre such as the Howard Centre and Sainsbury's. The use of modern designs within the town's wider residential areas would not necessarily be considered automatically inappropriate, although it is difficult to see a situation whereby the overall collective significance of a residential area that is also within a Conservation Area that has an entirely uniform style would not be harmed by a modern contemporary design. The reality is that such proposals are extremely rare and would be treated on their own merits.

- 8.63 A number of the representations have also stated that the use of a contemporary design is not in keeping with the aims and policies of the town's Estate Management Scheme which requires that extensions to residential properties are *'in keeping with the design, appearance, materials and architectural detailing used in the existing building'*. The town centre and The Campus are specifically excluded from the Estate Management Scheme and therefore the building is not subject to any of the provisions or policies.
- 8.64 Representations relating to the cost of the development to the public purse and the need for it have also been submitted. In this respect it is important to clarify that 'Material considerations' are those which are relevant to the exercise of a particular power or function in its statutory context and for the purposes for which it was granted.
- 8.65 Under Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act (As amended) an authority has a duty to determine applications, having a limited choice between granting or refusing permission and officers are not aware of any statute which requires the issue of cost to be taken into account in the 'Planning' context. Accordingly, decisions must therefore be governed by considerations material to this limited choice and based on the use or development of land. Put simply they must be 'planning related'. Ultimately, the decision to extend the Council Offices is a corporate decision that has been made by the applicant through its normal governance procedures. Accordingly, officers consider that the representations in relation to the cost of, and need for, the development should be given no weight in the determination of this proposal.
- 8.66 The representations relating to the internal layout and such things as the storage of documents are essentially related to the personal or in this case organisational circumstances and requirements of the applicant. Whilst this case is slightly different because the applicant is a local authority, these types of circumstances are rarely considered material to a planning application as they must relate to the purpose of planning. Officers consider that these considerations should therefore carry no weight in the determination of this proposal.
- 8.67 Representations have also been received relating to errors in the documents that were supported in support of the application. As is the case with any other application, where necessary these are highlighted to the applicant and amended. In this case the errors have been amended through the revised plans process.

- 8.68 Comments have also been made in relation to the validation of the application on the same day it was received. In this case the applicant entered into pre-application discussions and the validation requirements were clearly explained and set out at this stage. Accordingly, when submitted the application was able to be validated and registered without delay.

## **9 Conditions**

- 9.1 Circular 11/95 governs the use of conditions in planning and the power to impose conditions when granting planning permission is very wide. If used properly, conditions can enhance the quality of development and enable many development proposals to proceed where it would otherwise have been necessary to refuse planning permission. The objectives of planning, however, are best served when that power is exercised in such a way that conditions are clearly seen to be fair, reasonable and practicable. Conditions should only be imposed where they are both necessary and reasonable, as well as enforceable, precise and relevant both to planning and to the development to be permitted. In considering whether a particular condition is necessary, both officers and members should ask themselves whether planning permission would have to be refused if that condition were not to be imposed. If it would not, then the condition needs special and precise justification.
- 9.2 A condition to require development be carried out in accordance with approved plans is necessary for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of good planning. Details of external materials (including roof plant and roof plant screening) together with a scheme for hard and soft landscaping, including tree protection are needed to ensure the appearance of the conservation area is protected and because the final details of the public realm are still being negotiated. A construction management scheme is also necessary given the site's location and this should include details of replacement parking during construction. The implementation of a Green Travel Plan is required in the interests of achieving suitable transport measures in accordance with the District Plan. It is also necessary to impose a restrictive condition on the placing of furniture, fixtures and fittings behind the glazed facade so as to not adversely impact upon the design intentions and its appearance. Finally a condition is required to ensure that the development contributes towards meeting sustainable development and energy efficiency (including water efficiency measures) objectives embodied in national and local planning policy.

## **10 Conclusion**

- 10.1 The proposals would sustain and enhance the townscape quality of the civic area without undermining those attributes which the Conservation Area Appraisal highlights as important here i.e. the effective and distinctive integration of buildings and landscaping. The significance of the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset would therefore be sustained and enhanced, in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF and the District Plan.
- 10.2 The proposal would not have an adverse impact on the safe and efficient operation of the local highway network and the Green Travel Plan would sufficiently address the minor overprovision of car parking in this sustainable location. In relation to the Sustainable Transport Contribution, because the £15,000 contribution will need to be approved by full council, the earliest date

which this can take place is 13 January 2014. Accordingly, the recommendation that is set out below takes account of this requirement.

- 10.3 There are no material planning considerations which warrant a decision other than in accordance with the development plan and set out below.

## **11 Recommendation**

- 11.1 It is recommended that planning permission be approved subject to the completion of a satisfactory legal agreement relating to the payment of £15,000 to Hertfordshire County Council for sustainable transport measures, in addition to the following conditions:

1. C.2.1 – Time Limit
2. C.13.1 – In accordance with plans and details:

AAA5172-A-P1-035, AAA5172-A-P1-030 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-031 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-030 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-033, AAA5172-A-P1-034, AAA5172-A-P1\_LS-01 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-01 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-002 REVA, AAA5172-A-P1-03 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-04 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-05 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-06 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-07 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-08 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-17 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-18 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-021 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-022 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-023 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-024 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-025 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-027 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-012 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-013 REV A, AAA5172-A-P1-014 REV A Received and Dated 1 November 2013 and AAA5172-A-P1-032 REV B received and dated 20 November 2013.

### **Pre Development**

3. C.5.1 – Samples of materials including tiles, bricks, windows, structural glazing, stonework, roof plant and roof plant screening
4. C.4.1 – Landscaping scheme to be submitted and agreed
  - a) Planting plans, including specifications of species, sizes, planting centres, number and percentage mix; and
  - b) Bin store screen
  - c) Hard surfacing, other hard landscape features and materials.
  - d) Proposed finished levels
  - e) Existing trees to be retained and a method statement showing tree protection measures to be implemented for the duration of the construction.
  - f) Location of service runs
  - g) Management and maintenance details

REASON: The landscaping of this site is required in order to protect and enhance the existing visual character of the area and to reduce the visual and environmental impacts of the development hereby permitted in accordance with Policies GBSP2, D2 and D8 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

5. C.7.29 – Construction Method Statement to include:
  - a. Construction vehicle numbers, type, routing;
  - b. Traffic management requirements;

- c. Construction and storage compounds (including areas designated for car parking);
- d. Arrangements for car parking management of the Cherry Tree car park.
- e. Siting and details of wheel washing facilities;
- f. Cleaning of site entrances, site tracks and the adjacent public highway;
- g. Timing of construction activities and deliveries
- h. The management of crossings of the public highway and other public rights of way in the vicinity of the site;
- i. Post construction restoration/reinstatement of the working areas and any temporary access to the public highway.

REASON: In order to protect highway safety and the amenity of other users of the public highway and rights of way.

6. No development shall commence until details of energy-efficient construction materials and processes, including measures for long term energy (including lighting efficiency systems) and water efficient use of the building have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These measures should promote the use of renewable and/or low carbon sources and involve sustainable drainage, heating and power systems. The building shall be constructed in accordance with the agreed materials, processes and systems, and shall thereafter be maintained in the approved form unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority

REASON: To ensure that the development contributes towards Sustainable Development and energy efficiency in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **Pre Occupation**

7. Two months prior to the first occupation of the development the applicant shall implement a "Green Travel Plan" with the object of reducing the staff and visitors travelling to the development by private car which shall be first submitted to and approved by the Local Planning and Highway authorities. The Travel Plan shall be implemented and maintained to current Hertfordshire County Council's criteria, in full throughout the life of the development.

REASON: To promote sustainable transport measures to the development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

8. Prior to occupation of the development replacement cycle parking shall be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Review Supplementary Planning Guidance, Parking Standards 2004, details of which shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development. Subsequently the cycle parking shall be provided in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory standard of cycle parking provision in accordance with Policy M6 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **Post Development**

9. C.4.2 – Implementation of Landscaping
10. No fixtures, fittings, notices or furniture shall be placed or attached in such a position so as to obstruct light from the fenestration of the glazed facade

REASON: To ensure that sufficient natural light is available and to ensure that the glazed facade has an appropriate visual appearance, in accordance with Policy D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **Summary of reasons for grant of permission**

The decision has also been made taking into account, where practicable and appropriate the requirements of paragraphs 186-187 of the National Planning Policy Framework and material planning considerations do not justify a decision contrary to the development plan (see Officer's report which can be inspected at these offices).

**Informatives:** None

Richard Aston, (Strategy and Development)  
Date: 22 November 2013

Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

