

11 The Links
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 7DS

13th November 2013

APPLICATION No. N6/2013/1938/MA
PROPOSED COUNCIL OFFICE EXTENSION (AMENDED PLANS)

AN OBJECTION

Sirs,

This proposal is within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The Council's Planning Department requires any extension in the Conservation Area "to respect the materials and setting, and to be subservient to the existing building". This revised proposal, like the one it supplants, remains glaringly inappropriate and aggressive, and shows scant respect for the original building. This raises serious questions about the Council's own set of values, particularly as it is the planning compliance and enforcement agency.

Significant pressure is placed by the Council on residents, and large and small businesses alike, to accord with the 'ethos' of the town in their buildings and extensions, as laid down by approved standards. It is therefore highly 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 if this planning application is accepted. This is clearly not in the town's best interests.

In September 2007 the Borough Council commissioned a "Conservation Area Appraisal" which was carried out by three very experienced individuals who were considered to be among the best in the breadth and depth of their knowledge and experience of Conservation Areas. The authors were Jack Warshaw, Oliver Bradbury and Liz Cartell.

It is interesting to note that these authors in their report suggested that the Council offices should be recommended for listing by English Heritage (vide pp 45 and 46). In consideration of the defence of Conservation Areas, it is also of some interest to read in Section 7.8 "Negative Factors" the following (para 161 on p.51):

"Negative extensions are those which detract significantly from the original form or appearance of a building or group"

That sentence summarises perfectly the plans proposed by the Borough Council for this ill-advised extension.

Although set at the rear of the existing building, the extension proposed will be visible in a broad arc of nearly 180 degrees, from College Way to locations in Bridge Road, outside the Waitrose store. This is because there is a large open area to the east of the existing Council building, i.e., the Council's own extensive car park.

In summary, the exterior design of the proposed extension is inappropriate in the context of the site which is in a Conservation Area, and shows little consideration of, or for, the context, materials, proportions, and scale of the original building. In particular the proposed central glass slab picks up none of the 'key features' evident on the original building:

I trust that the Management Development Committee, at its meeting on December 5th, will reject this application.

Yours faithfully

Dr Dennis Lewis