



DIGSWELL ARTS TRUST

The Forge
Hertford Road
Digswell, Welwyn
Herts. AL6 0BU

13 May 2018

The Chief Planning Officer
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
AL8 6AE

Dear Sir,

The Wheat Quarter Development (6/2018/0171/MAJ)

I am writing on behalf of Digswell Arts Trust Board in support of the Wheat Quarter development. Digswell Arts Trust is a charity with a 60 year history of working in the Welwyn area with its heritage and current objects derived very much from its local origins.

Digswell Arts Trust was set up at Digswell House in the Knightsfield area of Welwyn Garden City, it then moved to the Attimore Hall barn in 1984 and then to the Forge at Digswell. The Trust is seeking to expand its provision for artists and makers based on its distinctive WGC origin and legacy working in collaboration with the Wheat Quarter development.

DAT is a studio provider for emergent artists and creative individuals, as well as fostering cultural development in education for young people and wider community groups through provision of open studios, workshops and other projects having a strong impact in developing careers as well as the local area.

Digswell's studios have, over many years, fostered the professional development of artists and other creatives through providing a cultural community and training for the artists themselves. This successfully helps to generate a focus for the area with economic and cultural benefits, as artists undertake the Open Studio events, working and helping set up galleries and places to sell and exhibit, going out into schools and working with wider community groups. Fenners building in Letchworth has become such a focus, adding value to the area through its lively events, collaboration with other local cultural and educational providers, supporting the local cultural economy.

The creative and cultural industries make an enormous contribution to the UK with over 3 million people employed in these activities (Creative Industries.com 2016 figures) £91.8 billion generated a year to the UK economy. Very often the picture is of these as focused and accessible mainly in the

larger cities with the regions often missing out, exacerbated by some decline in local authority support for cultural institutions and communities, and decreasing investment in creative activity within schools.

The Wheat Quarter development has the potential to make a substantive difference on a number of fronts which include preserving and enhancing the heritage and identity of the area, creating a strong sense of place and developing a lively arts and community focus at the core of the business and housing development.

On this basis the Trust is writing in support of the Wheat Quarter plans and the principles behind the development which seek to create a strong sense of place and community with facilities for the arts, creative businesses and community activities. Spaces for creative and cultural activities, particularly in the visual arts, are currently under-represented in WGC. The Trust has been in discussions regarding having studio facilities in the Wheat Quarter and has been supporting the arts projects with young people which have been underway. Additional studios would further develop the DAT support for artists, makers and creatives in the area. Overall the Wheat Quarter has great potential for expanding both access to culture and visual arts of national and international quality, as well as other community and public engagement. We support the ideas in the design plan which would have a benefit for artists and creatives - extending the important heritage, identity and cultural life of Welwyn Garden City as a living entity alongside using high quality design standards and fostering the creative economy of the area.

Yours sincerely

