

Gerry Ansell

From: Cragg Diane <Diane.Cragg@networkrail.co.uk>
Sent: 19 July 2018 17:13
To: Gerry Ansell; Chris Carter
Cc: Stringer Tim; Starke Rosy; Broome Sharon; Hind Stephen; jeremy@zmlc.co.uk; robert@masonsproperty.co.uk
Subject: Planning Application 6/2018/0171/MAJ Former Shredded Wheat Factory AL8 6UN

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Hello Gerry/Chris,

Thank you for meeting with myself, Rosy Starke and Tim Stringer last week about the railway station footbridge proposals which form part of the wider application for development of the Shredded Wheat factory site adjacent to Welwyn Garden City, Welwyn.

You will be aware from our discussions that we wish to understand how improvements to the footbridge will be secured through the planning application and how the liabilities that the proposals for the bridge will create will be managed by the developer and the Council in the longer term.

Footbridge Rights & Liability

We are aware that the footbridge is well used. Network Rail has a requirement to provide a Station Access under our obligations to the Train Operating Company, however we must point out there are no public rights existing over the footbridge. For clarity, the British Transport Commission Act 1949 contains a provision to protect station accesses from acquiring Public Right of Ways; there are no private rights over the bridge for the benefit of adjoining landowners.

Further, Network Rail has the ability, should it wish and subject to the necessary planning approvals, to reduce the length of the footbridge, restricting the footprint to our ownership but still providing a Station Access facility. Given this would substantially reduce our ongoing liability it would form part of our considerations in determining what course of work should be undertaken in future years with the allocated funding available within Control Period 6 (starting April 2019).

As it stands, the development proposals would significantly add to Network Rail's ongoing liability and through the granting of private rights, put us in a position where we are no longer able to reduce our liability. As a publicly funded body with obligations surrounding public money we need to ensure we are not acquiring an inherent liability for the gain of private developers. There are also obligations placed on the landowner that in the event they wish to alter that part of the footbridge that sits on their land, then an alternative must be provided at their cost entirely. We cannot overlook this point in our assessments.

In addition to our concerns over long term liability – both financial and management of the footbridge in practice - Network Rail has a clear policy on Shared Value and we need to show we have given consideration to any Shared Value position.

Relevant Policy and the Planning Application

The current proposal is for 1340 dwellings and other office, retail and community uses together with open space areas and improved footpath links including new stair case and passenger lift to the existing footbridge access to the station. There are two applications the main scheme proposals are supported by a Transport Statement which sets out the traffic generation anticipated as a result of the development including measures to mitigate the use of the

car. Part of the mitigation strategy to support the reduction in the use of the car is to design a scheme that prioritises the use of pedestrian and cycle facilities. In this respect we note the following paragraphs of the Transport Statement:

Paragraph 5.2 acknowledges that the site is accessible to the town centre and surrounding areas and facilities through an extensive footway network; which includes the footbridge linking Hydeway to the railway station. The town centre and railway station are both within approximately 200m from the site, which is within the desirable walking distance for commuting and shopping.

Paragraph 5.7 says that the footbridge which provides access to the railway station has a width of approximately 3m and is currently accessed on the site-side via a flight of steps, restricting access for wheelchair users and, making access for those with pushchairs difficult.

Paragraph 5.13 says that within the proposed development site, there is currently secure cycle parking for approximately 90 cycles along Hydeway. These stands are heavily utilised by commuters who park on Hydeway and then use the footbridge to access the railway station and Welwyn Garden City town centre.

Paragraph 5.23 acknowledges the part the footbridge plays in providing access from the site to the station facilities and the quality of commuter trains links which are accessibly placed.

Paragraph 6.13 and 6.14 says the site currently takes access from Hydeway. The junction will remain a priority crossroads but will become a raised table junction. Within the site Hydeway will be completely remodelled to include a turning area with drop-off facilities for the station, 'echelon' parking along both sides, central parking/waiting suitable for taxis, a tree lined footway along the northern side and a tree lined cycleway along the southern side. The paragraph goes on to say that it has been agreed with the highway authority that existing public highway rights will be extinguished from Hydeway so that it becomes a private road, but that the footway/cycleway along the southern side is retained as a public right of way between Broadwater Road and the railway footbridge.

Paragraph 7.44 refers to cycle parking provision focused round the footbridge it says that in addition to the long-stay spaces a total of 180 short-stay spaces will be provided across the development. Of these 100 spaces will be provided to serve the function of the existing Hydeway cycle parking. Around 20 of these will be provided on Hydeway itself as Sheffield loop stands and a further 80 will be provided beneath the new steps up to the footbridge. These will be in a variety of formats including lockers and stands.

Paragraph 15.4 acknowledges that the site is very well placed to promote sustainable travel. A wide range of employment, retail, health, education and leisure facilities can be reached within walking and cycling distance of the site. In addition, a wide range of bus routes can be reached easily from the site. Welwyn Garden City rail station is immediately to the west of the site, reached via an existing footbridge over the railway. This is a good location to reduce reliance on the private car. The provision of a comprehensive mixed-use development further supports the objective to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

Paragraph 15.10 says cycle parking is provided for every dwelling, and for all the commercial and community uses. An additional 100 public cycle parking spaces are provided between Hydeway and the footbridge. The total cycle parking provision is 1681 spaces.

Paragraphs 15.17 to 15.20 address the design immediately adjacent to the bridge - Hydeway will be completely remodelled to provide a 'kiss-and-ride' drop-off facility for car passengers heading to the station or town centre. A new taxi rank will also be provided as well as short stay parking for those collecting passengers from the station or popping to the local convenience store on their way to or from work. The footbridge over the railway will be refurbished and provided with a new, wider set of steps on the site side, together with a new passenger lift. The wide range of highways and transport improvements will mitigate the effects of the additional travel demand generated by the development and will significantly enhance the sustainable travel options for Welwyn Garden City as a whole.

The Transport Statement concludes that 'there is no reason why the proposed development should be refused on grounds of highway capacity or safety, impact on the transport network or sustainability. The provision of new

homes, employment and community facilities at the Wheat Quarter offers an opportunity to enhance this area and have a positive effect on transport. It should be positively supported by the local highway authority.'

As you will be aware the whole basis of the NPPF is to achieve sustainable development balancing economic, social and environmental concerns. The core planning principles seek to ensure that planning 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.

Section 4 'promoting sustainable transport' says Plans and 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.

The statutory development plan for Welwyn comprises the saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan adopted 2005, however the emerging local plan is at an advanced stage and therefore considerable weight may be attached to policies within this document. Policy SP1 'delivering sustainable development sets out the principles of sustainable development. In Welwyn these principles support the prioritising of previously developed land; minimising the need to travel by directing growth to those areas with good transport networks and which are well served by jobs services and facilities.

Policy SP4 'transport and travel' seeks to support both planned growth and existing development with appropriate transport infrastructure, with the emphasis on promoting the use of sustainable modes of travel and on improving safety for all highway users.

Broadwater Road West SPD was adopted in December 2008 and sets out a master plan guide to promote the comprehensive redevelopment of the Shredded wheat site. Paragraph 3.3 of the SPD acknowledges that an important pedestrian route extends across the site via Hydeway and the footbridge over the railway line. This is a significant access route which links the industrial area and nearby housing to Welwyn Garden City railway station and the town centre.

The WGC Urban Transport Plan outlines a number of proposed transport improvements for Welwyn Garden City within the context of the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan. The SPD notes at Paragraph 4.57 that it is important to have regard to the County Council's rail strategy, which notes that improvements are needed to the footbridge access to Welwyn Garden City railway station.

Further the Transport Plans say 'The opportunity exists to replace the sub-standard footbridge at the rail station to create a high quality link between the site and the town centre, without which car dependency will persist. A replacement bridge could be a high profile gateway to the town and integrate established and new land uses. This is a major opportunity to show how public transport facilities can be linked with residential sites to the benefit of the town as a whole'. The plan estimates the cost of this project to be approximately £5 million and notes that its delivery would need to be led by Network Rail and the site developers, with support from the County Council, Welwyn Hatfield Council.

The masterplanning framework says at paragraph 5.16 that a key objective in arranging the land uses on the site is to encourage social integration across the wider area and take positive steps to avoid the creation of a 'gated community'. Whilst the new community facilities should predominantly serve the new neighbourhood that is being created there is the opportunity to create links with the wider community. The replacement/enhancement of the pedestrian footbridge across the railway to the town centre is a key priority and will assist in the integration of this site.

Conclusion

Our conclusions, having reviewed the Transport Statement and the wider planning policy and application documentation, is that the footbridge link through the station forms an integral part of the Council's transport planning strategy for Welwyn and the scheme, through its design, seeks to maximise the use of the footbridge to accord with Council policy. Therefore a scheme that would be unable to secure footbridge improvements and future bridge maintenance and access arrangements would not accord with Council policy and potentially would need to be refused.

We would welcome a meeting with the Applicant and the Council to discuss how we could jointly agree a way to facilitate the improvements to the footbridge and allow the development to progress.

All the best
Diane

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