



Historic England

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Our ref: L00870170

1 May 2018

Dear Mr Ansell

### **Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2015**

#### **FORMER SHREDDED WHEAT FACTORY, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, AL8 6UN Application No. 6/2018/0960/LB**

Thank you for your letter of 19 April 2018 regarding the above application for listed building consent. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

#### **Historic England Advice**

Consent is sought for the repair, restoration, extension and conversion of the retained original 1920s silos, Production Hall, Grain Store and Boiler House to provide 5,096sq m of flexible business space, 265sq m Combined Heat and Power, 2,494 sq m International Arts Centre, 1,226sq m gymnasium, 1,576 sq.m of restaurant/coffee shop/bar and creche/day nursery of 644 sq.m.

Welwyn Garden City was the second new town to be developed in accordance with the principles laid down by Ebenezer Howard, but the vision for the town was largely provided by Louis de Soissons, who not only provided the overall masterplan but also was architect for a significant number of buildings within the town. His masterplan envisaged a civic and commercial centre for the town on the west side of the East Coast Mainline balanced by a factory area on the east side of the railway, and the whole enclosed by a ring of residential development. The American Shredded Wheat Company was attracted to the town for several reasons, including close proximity to London and the convenience of railway sidings accommodation for receiving goods from other parts of the country; together with a healthy environment for the factory workers to benefit from the ethos of the *'happy Shredded Wheat family'* where *'all food for human consumption should be manufactured under the most rigid sanitary conditions and amidst surroundings that are clean, healthy and pleasant.'*

The original factory building, by Louis de Soissons, dates from 1925 and forms one element of the wider site. There are two concrete ranges, at right angles with links. The southern range consists of giant cylindrical concrete drums 18 bays long with flat



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oversailing capping with right over the entire top. Behind this is a plain attic storey with 28 plain windows with plain capping over. On one end elevation there is a three-bay projecting tower rising just above the main roof level. At the west end of the range is a two bay wing with large windows; the southern bay of three storeys and the northern of four storeys, both with flat roofs. Adjacent is a seven bay, four storey block with large windows divided by narrow piers and small scale structural divisions between the storeys, making it almost wholly glass. The building was described as a model factory, enhanced by the use of white ceramic tiles that encased the building like ivory. Inside, the white-painted reinforced concrete workrooms were flooded with sunlight. It is listed at grade II in recognition of its architectural and historic importance.

In 2015 the then owners of the site obtained planning permission for the scheme that is currently being implemented for the overall site, following acquisition in 2016 by Plutus Estates (WGC) Limited and Metropolitan Housing Trust. A development brief was subsequently produced that sought to increase the density of residential use in specific areas. The resultant changes produced an increase in the proposed residential population of 29% above the consented scheme and the height and massing of the proposed buildings along the western and eastern boundaries of the site has increased by one storey over the corresponding blocks in the consented scheme. North of the listed factory building the proposed building heights are now lower and additional articulation has been introduced on the blocks on the south site, which have more variation in height than the blocks in the consented scheme. Historic England were consulted on the proposed changes to the approved scheme in February 2018 and in our response we stated that the revised proposals would not cause a level of harm to the significance of remaining designated assets within and adjacent to the site over and above the degree of harm we identified when considering the original proposals which were approved in 2015 and are currently being implemented.

Regarding the listed Shredded Wheat Factory building the current proposals seek, with minor amendments, to expand on the extant listed building consent. Externally, it is proposed to install a ramp and stair along Reiss Walk to create a main entrance into the new central atrium on the west elevation. The proposed works to the three-storey Production Hall will restore the original fabric and convert it for a range of commercial, community and leisure uses by creating a central atrium to facilitate division of the building both vertically and laterally. The atrium will contain a feature staircase comprising glass treads and metal runners and lift core that will provide panoramic views when moving up through the building. All elevations of the building will be restored and/or reinstated and internally, white-painted insulation will line the walls to improve thermal efficiency. The proposed glass bridge link between the Grain Store and Factory building is inspired by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and its function is to enable the Arts Centre to expand from one building to another. The Grain House and silos are to be converted into an Art/Museum Hub with multidisciplinary indoor and outdoor space. The remaining existing machinery will be



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renovated and cleaned and retained to evoke the building industrial past. The silos will be repaired, restored and opened up at base level to enable them to be used for art installations. The building above the silos will be converted to a restaurant/bar. The structure between the Grain House and silos will now be retained, providing the entrance to the Arts Centre. A new Energy Centre within the footprint of the building previously known as the Garages will involve the re-use of the existing chimney in the former Boiler House, the mechanics of which are to be displayed behind glass. The existing consent granted approval for the removal of internal partitions and structures in the Grain House, Boiler House and silos. Consent was also granted for the reduction in the number of silos to the original total of 18 and for demolition of all other buildings on the site, which has now been carried out.

There is a statutory requirement to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving a building and its setting and preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, ss 16 and 72. At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This requires economic, social and environmental gains to be sought jointly and simultaneously (paragraphs 7, 8 & 14). The conservation of the historic environment is one of the 12 core principles identified (paragraph 17). The historic environment section sets out the desirability of preserving and enhancing heritage assets and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (paragraph 131). Great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets and any harm requires clear and convincing justification (paragraph 132). Where an application would result in harm this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (paragraph 134).

Having considered the comprehensive documentation submitted with the application, Historic England are satisfied that whilst the current proposals for the grade II listed factory building involve a high level of intervention with the original fabric that will inevitably alter its character and appearance and cause harm to its significance, there is clear and convincing justification for the level of intervention proposed and we are of the view, in this specific instance, that the public benefits of the proposals will outweigh the harm incurred.

### **Recommendation**

Historic England have no objections to the application on heritage grounds.

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 126, 131, 132 and 134.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any



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features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

**Sheila Stones**

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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