

PLANNING APPLICATION 6/2020/1837/FULL

It is clear that the application has been guided by many thoughtful proposals and we have only a few minor concerns over the bulk of the design. There remain, however, a number of key planning issues and one objection relating specifically to the heritage of the site.

- We do not accept the presumption of the applicant that the previous grant of consent for a different proposal should automatically lead to a positive result for this application. The consent on which so much weight has been placed is now more than six years old and attitudes towards, what is effectively a 'back fill development' within a long and narrow garden, have hardened considerably during that time. While this type of development may be acceptable in large urban conurbations we do not believe it is appropriate within the conservation area of one of the iconic garden cities envisioned by Sir Ebenezer Howard and designed by Louis de Soissons.
- We consider the system of back filling large gardens to be totally unacceptable, within the Conservation Area of Welwyn Garden City. The town plan, as defined by Louis de Soissons in 1920, provided that each dwelling should have a garden big enough for residents to grow fruit and vegetables if they wished and to have sufficient space for children to play. The latter element has been particularly important during the Covid pandemic that appears likely to remain a major factor for the foreseeable future. We therefore reject any proposal for infilling existing gardens in WGC other than in exceptional circumstances.
- We dispute the assertion that this is appropriate use of land in that it sets a dangerous precedent for similar parcels of land behind numbers 50 and 48. In 2004/5 a planning application to demolish 48 – 54 Bridge Road, every one of which predates WGC, was withdrawn at the last minute following a major campaign locally to ensure the heritage of the original Handside settlement was protected. Approving this application would offer a precedent for use by future developers.
- We also wish to record our objection on heritage grounds. The 'Railway Cottages' as they are incorrectly attributed were built for workers on the Panshanger estate owned by the Desborough family. They, along with the neighbouring pair of white cottages and the 1609 cottage opposite were part of the land purchased by Ebenezer Howard that formed the basis of WGC as we know it today. To make such a drastic addition to the land on which 54 stands we believe is inappropriate for this site and bordering on 'vandalism of our heritage'.
- Finally we note the observation relating to this proposed development providing funds to allow the owner to refurbish his 'home'. This is misleading in that at no time do we believe the owner of 54 actually lived in the property so to describe it as his 'home' is factually inaccurate, it is a development property like the proposed back fill residence. In any case this is completely irrelevant as raising funds for personal gain is not a factor in deciding a planning application.