

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 26 July 2021 10:40

To: William Myers <w.myers@welhat.gov.uk>

Subject: Broadwater Road developments ref 2020/3420, 2021/0671, 2021/0181

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Dear Mr Myers

I have some technical difficulty on my part in attaching my Objection below to the 3 Broadwater plans referenced above. Your colleague on the duty desk this morning advised that I email you with my Objection so that you could attach as appropriate to your files.. I hope you can do that for me and confirm that it has been done.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

40 Elmwood

WGC AL8 6LE

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Objection

I object to the four current planning applications on Broadwater Road (west side) of which 3 are being reviewed and the MTV to the south is being built, with up to 8 storeys. The plans collectively are too high, at up to 11 storeys, and of an extraordinary density. They are clearly beyond the height of the previously adopted Supplementary Planning Document for Broadwater Road which limited the building of homes to no more than a five-storey height.

Background

We need to look at the development proposals holistically and with a visionary aspect as well as individually.

One hundred years ago between 1918 and 1920 as many as 250,000 people died in Britain from Spanish Flu, the last pandemic. Many of these losses were in the overcrowded areas of London. The first new homes in Welwyn Garden City became available in 1920 as an outcome of Ebenezer Howard's vision for the Garden City which, among other ambitions, was to provide healthy living for its residents by providing good homes and generous open spaces. Many of the first residents to these new homes came from overcrowded London. It is perverse that at the time we are celebrating the centenary of Welwyn Garden City, and the experiences of living with the COVID 19 pandemic, we should now have these development proposals for such high storey blocks of flats and density in Broadwater Road. Typically, in September the Metropolitan Thames Valley (MTV) sought consultation on phase 2 and 3 for a further 750 flats in towers blocks that rise to 11 storeys. There seems to be significant fluidity and confusion as to the number of homes and the number of residents the 4 sites will occupy. What are the numbers here?

It is clearly time for our Borough Council to publish the criteria and vision that the developers should be working to, so that the residents of Welwyn Garden City have an overall view of the planned housing that can be accommodated on the space available on Broadwater Road whilst maintaining the character of Welwyn Garden City and the principles of a garden city. Yes, we all agree we want more homes. But we must at all costs avoid recreating the overcrowded housing of 100 years ago that the early residents of Welwyn Garden City sought to escape. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Housing and Communities, Robert Jenrick would support that view. On the BBC's Any Questions on 9 September 2020 he said in the programme's discussion on housing that *"It's not about numbers alone. We should be building places we can be proud of now and in the years ahead and that are worthy as homes and the community. There should be access to outdoor space, tree lined streets, more beautiful homes with a sense of character."*

Concerns - for the Broadwater Road site residents and for the future vision of WGC

Of the proposals presented the underlying concerns are that the height and density of the homes are not in keeping with Welwyn Garden City and the impact these developments will have on the well-being of the residents who will live there. Aside from having a roof over their head people want homes that provide a safe haven and meet their emotional needs. Understanding the link between living in these densely built high-rise blocks of flats and mental health is crucial to protecting the well-being of the community living there. Typically, the public's response to the development proposals for Broadwater Road are overwhelmingly negative with references such as "an *urban jungle*". It is highly regrettable that Peartree ward, within which Broadwater Road lies, is currently ranked as the 19th most deprived ward in Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire's Deprivation Indices for each of the 690 wards are published every 4 years, sadly Broadwater Road at 19th is therefore amongst the 3% of the most deprived wards the county.

The key measures taken into account in the deprivation index are employment and income, education, health and disability, crime, housing services and the living environment. These measures are essential in the planning process as they provide the

opportunity to "level-up" our communities, an ambition of the current government. Perversely, in the case of Peartree we cannot add thousands more residents to the ward without destroying the living environment any more. Moreover, there will be no space for increasing the current educational and health service demands even though the deprivation index indicates they are currently inadequate; let alone provide space for the obvious additional demand there will be for these services by the developers' proposed high-rise blocks.

Research findings have identified that the height and density of buildings impact on the well-being of residents who occupy the premises. People clearly want homes that provide a safe haven with all the obvious household facilities, but more so a home that meets their emotional needs.

We have learnt more recently from COVID, how the threat of virus diseases such as flu can spread with ease where hundreds of people share public space like corridors, stairs and lifts. Residents in high rise flats have always feared fires, even more so after Grenfell. These are feelings, and phobias, that develop with time and may not be evident on taking occupation of a flat, but do so when being enclosed and reflecting on their security and safety from fires etc.

Sharing semi-public space with strangers can make residents suspicious. They fear crime, drug trafficking and threats beyond their front door which leads to isolation and loneliness. Residents in high-rise flats are usually unable to have a pet of their choice. Residents can have challenging relationships with their neighbours due to their behaviours. Sadly, early mortality is a feature of high-rise living. All of this can lead to higher incidences of depression, phobias, schizophrenia, with some individuals having suicidal feelings. We can look at the developers' glossy pictures of what they allege they offer, but they are not real. In reality without any substantial investment in the essential elements and services covered in the deprivation index the developer's ambitions for these high-rise blocks of flats will decline substantially within 20 years and Broadwater Road will become a deprived urban jungle, and ultimately a ghetto.

Conclusion

In developing Broadwater Road we should be developing a place of character that complements the rest of our town and where people can enjoy living, working and visiting. I fear that none of the current proposals reflect the concept of a garden city. Indeed, the developments on Broadwater Road should merit their place on Ebenezer Howard's master plan and be a place future generations can be proud of when they celebrate the town's bicentenary in 2120.