



Historic England

Ms Clare Howe
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE

Direct Dial: 01223 582716

Our ref: P01376490

4 March 2021

Dear Ms Howe

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**FORMER SHREDDED WHEAT FACTORY, BROADWATER ROAD, WELWYN
GARDEN CITY, AL7 1RR
Application No. 6/2021/0181/MAJ**

Thank you for your letter of 12 February 2021 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Historic England has been involved with redevelopment proposals for the North Side site, now branded the Wheat Quarter Site, which is located adjacent to the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and close to the Peartree Conservation Area for several years.

We worked previously with applicants for the North Side site with the aim of achieving a quantum and quality of development that would respect the scale, massing and detailed design of the surviving element of the original 1925 grade II listed Lous de Soissons Shredded Wheat factory building located in the centre of the site.

We were also mindful of the need to protect views from the grade I listed Hatfield House and Gardens, approximately 5km to the south.

The current hybrid planning application comprises a detailed planning application for 552 dwellings, 250 units of residential care accommodation for the elderly with associated communal facilities, 15,247m² of community and commercial hub with associated supporting infrastructure; and an outline planning application for up to 418 dwellings with all matters reserved except access.

Having considered the comprehensive documentation submitted with the application, which proposes an overall increase in the quantum of development compared to the



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extant 2019 planning permission for the site, we are of the view that the current scheme would not significantly raise the level of harm incurred to the setting of the former factory building and would not have a noticeable impact in views from the nearby conservation areas or from Hatfield House and Garden.

We therefore have no objections to the proposals on heritage grounds.

Historic England Advice

The significance of the historic environment

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 original factory building by Louis de Soissons, which dates from 1925, was inspired by Shredded Wheat's flagship factory near Niagara Falls and forms one element of the wider development site. There are two concrete ranges, at right angles with links. The southern range consists of giant cylindrical concrete silos six bays long (following the recent demolition of nine later silos) with flat 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. 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 and was regarded as one of the most avant-garde buildings in Britain. It is listed at grade II in recognition of its special architectural and historic interest.

A standard List entry format for Hatfield House would convey neither an adequate description of the house nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. Briefly, the early 17th century country mansion is surrounded by extensive and complex gardens and park; created from the medieval parks of Hatfield.

Robert Cecil's formal, early 17th century gardens were created with input from



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designers including Thomas Chaudler and Salomon de Caus, and planted by John Tradescant the elder, at that time the head gardener. The gardens were landscaped in the 18th century, but then remodelled and extended in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The importance of the site is recognised in its grade I listing; together with reference to it by English Heritage in 2014 at the New Barnfield Planning Inquiry which concluded that 'the house, its gardens and park and the Old Palace form a place of extraordinary architectural and artistic importance and are of extraordinary significance.'

The proposals and their impact on the significance of the historic environment

The proposals involve a hybrid planning application comprising: detailed planning application for 399 Private Rented Sector dwellings and 153 dwellings (Class C3), 250 units of residential care accommodation for the elderly (Use Class C2) with associated communal facilities, 15,247m² of community and commercial hub (Use Classes E and F1) with associated cycling hub, car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure; and outline planning application for up to 418 dwellings (Class C3) with all matters reserved except access.

We were consulted in February 2018 on application 6/2028/0171/MAJ which was approved in February 2019. Those proposals were for an increase in the proposed residential population of 29% above the then consented scheme, together with an increase in the height and massing of the proposed blocks along the western and eastern boundaries of the site.

In 2015 we stated that the introduction of residential development into the original factory area would erode the clarity of de Soissons' original masterplan and thereby would result in a degree of harm. The significance of the grade II listed Shredded Wheat Factory would be harmed as a result of adverse impacts on its setting, and the proposals would also result in harm to the character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area that is adjacent to the site.

It was assumed, when that application was approved, that this harm had been considered by the Council and found to be outweighed by the wider public benefits that would be delivered by the redevelopment when the Broadwater Road West Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in 2008.

Our subsequent advice in 2018 was that the revisions proposed would not cause a level of harm to the significance of remaining designated heritage assets within the site and in the setting of the site, over and above the degree of harm we identified when providing our advice on the original 2015 proposals for the overall site which were then being implemented.

In 2018, in light of the demolition of all the buildings on the site other than the former



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factory buildings, together with the other works that were underway in relation to the consented scheme, we were satisfied that the revised scheme would not cause additional harm to the significance of the listed buildings as a result of the impact on their setting.

The current proposals differ from the consented scheme; primarily due the increase in the number of dwellings and also the significant rise in the diversity of the residential use types through the introduction of a substantial increase in residential care accommodation as well as a private rental sector operator. Also, the regeneration strategy for the community/commercial centre of the site, where the listed former factory buildings are sited has been further developed.

The impact of the scheme in its revised form would not result in a significant rise in the level of harm incurred to the setting of the former Louis de Soissons factory building and would not have a noticeable impact in views from the nearby conservation areas or from Hatfield House and Garden.

Legislation, policy and guidance

As the proposals affect the setting of listed buildings; including the Louis de Soissons former factory buildings within the application site and the wider setting of Hatfield House and Gardens, the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of a listed building (s.66(1), 1990 Act) must be taken into account by the local planning authority when making its decision.

Our advice reflects guidance in the good practice advice notes produced by Historic England on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum in GPA 2; Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment and GPA 3; The Setting of Heritage Assets. Our advice also reflects guidance in our Tall Buildings Advice Note 4.

The NPPF at paragraph 192 encourages local authorities to sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets consistent with their conservation and asks that they take into account "the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness."

It establishes that great weight should be given to an asset's conservation and the more important that asset, the greater that weight should be (paragraph 193). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Any harm to, or loss of significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification, (paragraph 194). Where a development proposal will lead to



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less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (paragraph 196).

Setting is then defined in the Framework as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset and may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral'.

Historic England's position

Having considered the comprehensive documentation submitted with the application, including the *Design and Access Statement* produced by ColladoCollins Architects and the *Environmental Statement Volume 1, Main Text*, produced by Entram, we maintain the position we held in 2018.

We are satisfied that the current proposals, whilst larger in scale and massing than the 2019 consented scheme, would not cause an even greater degree of harm to the setting of the grade II listed Louis de Soissons factory buildings; would not cause noticeable harm to views within the nearby Welwyn Garden City and Peartree Conservation Areas and would not appear in views from Hatfield House and Gardens.

Overall, the proposals would cause a less than substantial level of harm to the significance of the listed former factory buildings due to the impact on their setting.

Recommendation

Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds.

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 194 and 196.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) 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 features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

You should also bear in mind section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.





Historic England

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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