

# **Former Nabisco Shredded Wheat Factory**

Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire

## **Heritage Statement**

November 2020

Consultancy for the  
Historic Built Environment

**KMH**Heritage

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to support the applications for planning permission for the site of the former Shredded Wheat Factory, Bridge Road, Welwyn Garden City.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to set out the history and heritage significance of the site, and to assess the impact of the development proposals. The report should be read in conjunction with the other documents that make up this application.
- 1.3 The drafting of this statement was undertaken by Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC. Nick has been a Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas in the London Region of English Heritage. Most recently he was a Director of Conservation at Alan Baxter & Associates. Nick has extensive experience in dealing with proposals that affect the historic environment and also has a background in research, in policy analysis and in understanding historic buildings and places.
- 1.4 Historical research for this report was undertaken by Dr Ann Robey FSA, a conservation and heritage professional with over twenty years experience. She has worked for leading national bodies as well as smaller local organizations and charities. She is a researcher and writer specialising in architectural, social and economic history, with a publication record that includes books, articles, exhibitions and collaborative research.
- 1.5 The buildings form part of a larger, partly vacant site, to the east of the main north-south railway line that runs through Welwyn Garden City. The site is located in close proximity to the rail overbridge that provides pedestrian access to the railway station and on to the town centre.  
  
Notes on research, analysis and sources
- 1.6 It should be noted that in common with many historic buildings and sites, it is not always possible to provide a truly comprehensive analysis of the historic development of a building. The research and analysis set out in this report is as thorough as possible given the type and number of archival resources available.
- 1.7 This desk-based and archival research has been combined with a visual assessment and appraisal of the building. Further sources and evidence that add to our knowledge and understanding of the building and its history may become available at a future date. The report has also been informed

by the Historic Building Recording Report carried out by  
Archaeological Solutions Ltd in April 2014.

## **2 Site Location & Description**

- 2.1 The site lies within Welwyn Garden City in the centre of Hertfordshire. It occupies a central position, to the east of the A1 (M) motorway and main railway line bounded by Broadwater Road, Bridge Road and Hyde Way and land adjoining the railway.
- 2.2 Elements of the original factory complex were demolished in 2018 with earlier consents which created a largely cleared site.
- 2.3 The site is rectangular in plan and the topography is mainly flat. Until 2018 much of the site was developed, with the original factory complex facing the railway line.
- 2.4 The complex is built in a predominantly functional architecture of painted concrete/rendered walls and metal windows. The most important, original, element of the site was previously largely enclosed in views from Broadwater Road and Bridge Road by the more mediocre additions to the complex in the 1930s and 1950s. Between 1937 and 1939 a new single storey production hall and an additional 27 silos were added. In the 1950s there were further extensions to the production facilities and office accommodation added fronting Bridge Road.
- 2.5 The term 'designations' relates to the level of statutory protection that applies to a site or building. A designated heritage asset can be a listed building or a conservation area. The extent of a designated conservation area is straightforward to determine given that the boundary is set at the date of designation or later extension. The extent of a listed building can be less clear as listing often applies to other lesser elements that are attached to a listed building or form part of its curtilage. Determining whether other structures form part of the listing involves consideration of whether structures are fixed, whether these are ancillary to the main building and whether these formed part of the land before 1 July 1948.

### **Designations**

- 2.6 The grade II listed former factory forms one element of a wider site, currently occupying roughly its northern half. The factory building was listed in 1981. As a listed building, consent may be required in order to undertake certain works to the building which could affect the building's architectural or historic interest.
- 2.7 The full list description for the complex reads as follows:

*1925. Architect Louis de Soissons. Two concrete ranges, at right angles with links. Southern range consists of giant range of cylindrical concrete drums 15 bays long with flat oversailing capping with railings right over the whole top. Behind this is a plain attic storey with 28 plain windows with plain capping over. On one end elevation is a 3 bay projecting tower rising just above the main roof level.*

*At the west end of the range is a 2 bay wing with large windows, the southern bay of 3 storeys and the northern of 4. Flatroofs. Adjacent is a 7 bay, 4 storey block, with large windows divided by narrow piers and small scale structural divisions between the storeys, making it almost wholly glass. Flat oversailing capping at roof level.*

- 2.8 The list description is intended to provide sufficient detail for identification purposes only. It does not for example provide the history of the building or identify any particular features as having a greater or lesser significance.
- 2.9 The site is not situated within a conservation area but is in close proximity to the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. This conservation area covers a large area of the town centre to the west of the site and its residential hinterlands. Whilst the impact of the scheme on its character and appearance will be considered within this report, as far as this site is concerned, there is both a physical and visual barrier between the site and the conservation area caused by the breadth of the railway lines and siding and the Howard Centre to the west.
- 2.10 In March 2019 the Peartree Conservation Area was designated by the Council. Situated in the south east of the town and to the south east of the site), Peartree comprises of residential and retail areas, largely built to the designs of the city architect Louis de Soissons.
- 2.11 The closest listed building to the site is located to the south of the Shredded Wheat Factory (figure 1). This is the grade II listed former office block to the Roche Factory (now demolished). This building was constructed in the late 1930s.



Figure 1: Plan showing listed buildings within close proximity to the site. The blue triangles indicate a listed building.

### 3 Historical Development

- 3.1 The following section provides an overview of the historic development of the former Shredded Wheat Factory Site.

#### Overview

- 3.2 For almost ninety years the distinctive white silos of the Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat Factory have been a prominent landmark to rail travellers passing the station in Welwyn Garden City. The factory was designed by Canadian-born Louis de Soissons (1890-1962), the principal architect of Welwyn – the country's second Garden City, which was established on agricultural land just twenty-one miles from London by planning pioneer Ebenezer Howard in 1919-20. In April 1920, Welwyn Garden City Limited was formally established as the owner and developer of the 2,378 acre estate, as a new garden city for 40-50,000 inhabitants. Louis de Soissons was appointed as the principal architect and planner in April 1920 and he presented a 'master plan' for the new 'city' in June of the same year (figures 2&3)<sup>1</sup>. It was the first major commission of the Louis de Soissons Partnership, the practice he had set up with George Grey Wornum. Louis de Soissons and the partnership were actively involved in Welwyn's planning, architectural design and growth for over 60 years.
- 3.3 The development company – Welwyn Garden City Limited – allocated land for industrial and business purposes, as well as for privately owned houses, granting leases with restrictive covenants<sup>2</sup>. De Soissons had total control of the plan of Welwyn Garden City – all plans of buildings had to be submitted to him under the provisions of the *Building and Other Regulations in Force on the Welwyn Garden City Estate* of 1923. Welwyn Garden City Limited successfully controlled the appearance of the town, and built about 40% of the buildings themselves.
- 3.4 The new Garden City was to be self-sufficient; it was to be a carefully planned settlement combining industry and agriculture into a distinct whole, a self-contained community with an industrial area providing jobs in 'clean' manufacturing industries. This was to prevent the town becoming merely a dormitory town for London. The limits on its growth were

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<sup>1</sup> Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area Appraisal, Conservation Architecture & Planning Ltd. (2006)

<sup>2</sup> J. Tyrwhitt, *Life and Works in Welwyn*, (1939), p.2



ultimately set by the surrounding green-belt and any trees already in the landscape were retained in the initial plan. A follower of garden city philosophy wrote in 1911 'The object of a Garden City is to draw away from overcrowded localities or to intercept the ever-increasing flow from the country by establishing new industrial towns in the country: towns which shall always stand in their belt of agricultural land'<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 2: OS Map of 1898 showing the site of the future Welwyn Garden City

- 3.5 To the west and north of the town centre were residential districts, and to the east of the railway line were areas reserved for industry and business, beyond which were further areas of housing. (Figure 4). The industrial area was beside the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) and the branch line to Hertford which swept north-eastwards (now closed). This fairly level land close to the railway was recognised as the best site for industry. Most of the factories were eventually located off Broadwater Road, which ran in a north-south axis (figures 5,6 & 7).

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Ralph Neville, 'Garden City and Garden Suburb', in *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, n.s. Vol. 1, No. 1 (1911)

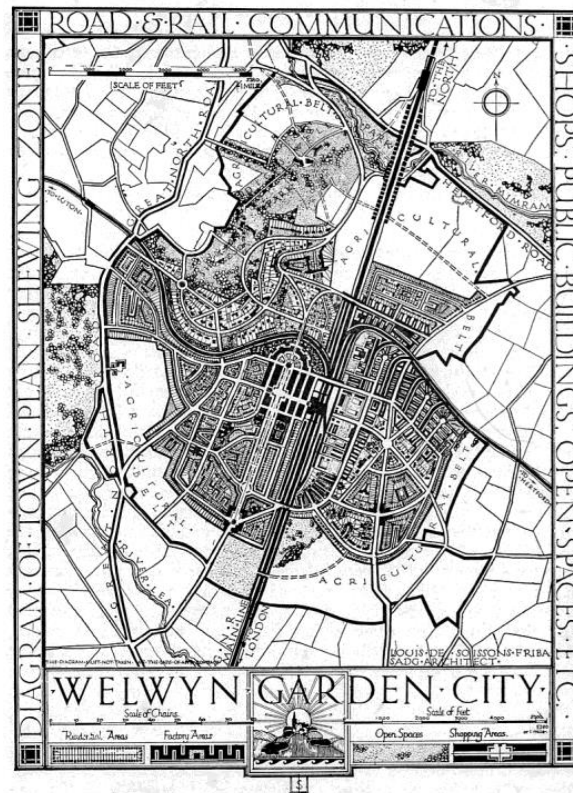


Figure 3: Louis de Soissons' Master Plan of June 1920

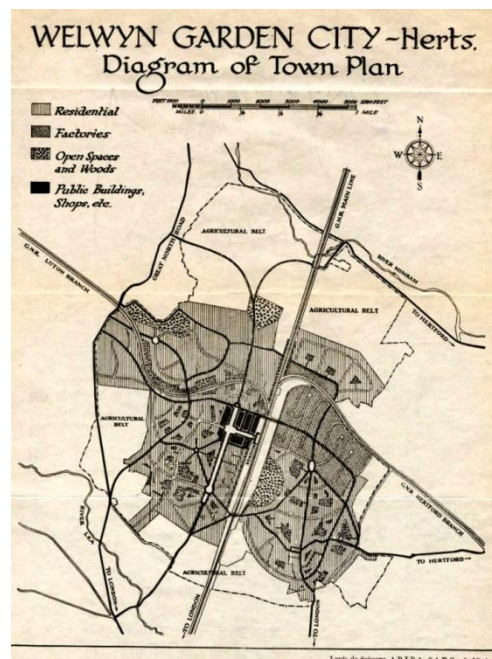


Figure 4: A town plan by de Soissons dating from 1921

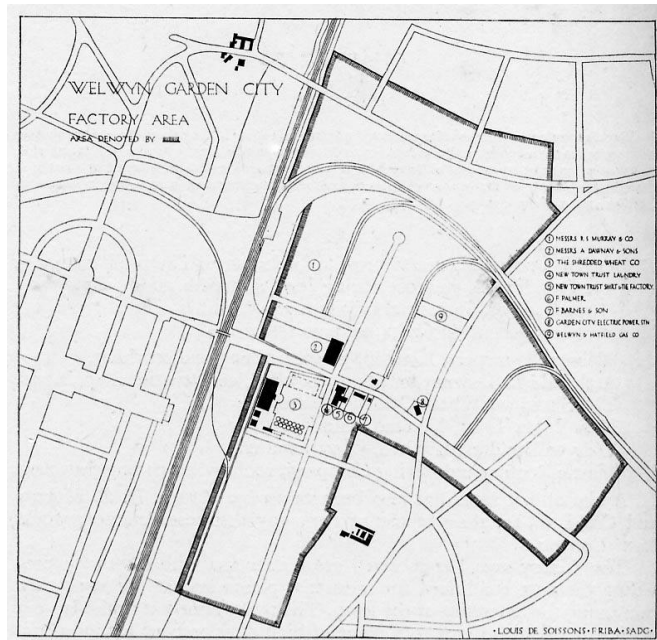


Figure 5: Plan by Louis de Soissons of the Factory Area in 1925

### Shredded Wheat

- 3.6 The first firm to occupy a site in the new Factory Area at Welwyn was Archibald D. Dawney & Sons Ltd, constructional engineers and structural steel fabricators who took a site near Hunter's Bridge which crossed the railway (No.2 on figure 5). They were quickly followed by the American company Shredded Wheat which leased seven acres just to the south in an excellent position right by the railway line<sup>4</sup> (No.3 on figure 5). Shredded Wheat was attracted to the town for several reasons – the close proximity to London, but without the 'smoke, grime and fog, that London is apt to indulge in'; the convenience of getting 'suitable railway siding accommodation for receiving goods to other parts of the country'<sup>5</sup>. But of equal importance was the prospect of having a factory in a new healthy environment where the workforce could profit from all the social and economic benefits of 'the happy Shredded Wheat Family'<sup>6</sup>. The company believed that 'all food for human consumption should be manufactured under the most rigid sanitary conditions and amidst surroundings that are cleanly, healthy and pleasant'. Welwyn Garden City was chosen as 'more nearly conforming to these ideals than any of the other sites offered'<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.7 De Soissons drew up plans for the new Shredded Wheat factory between March and July 1924 and construction work on the factory started in May in the same year<sup>8</sup>. The Shredded Wheat Company of America was established in the 1890s by Henry Perky, a health food enthusiast and the inventor of Shredded Wheat.

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice de Soissons, *Welwyn Garden City: A town designed for healthy living* (1988), p.58

<sup>5</sup> Hertford Local Studies Library, *Industry Moves Out* (n/d), p.19

<sup>6</sup> Shredded Wheat publicity brochure on Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website

<sup>7</sup> *Industry Moves Out*, (n/d), p.19

<sup>8</sup> Herts Archives & Local Studies UDC/21/77/130; UDC/21/77 132 (1&)



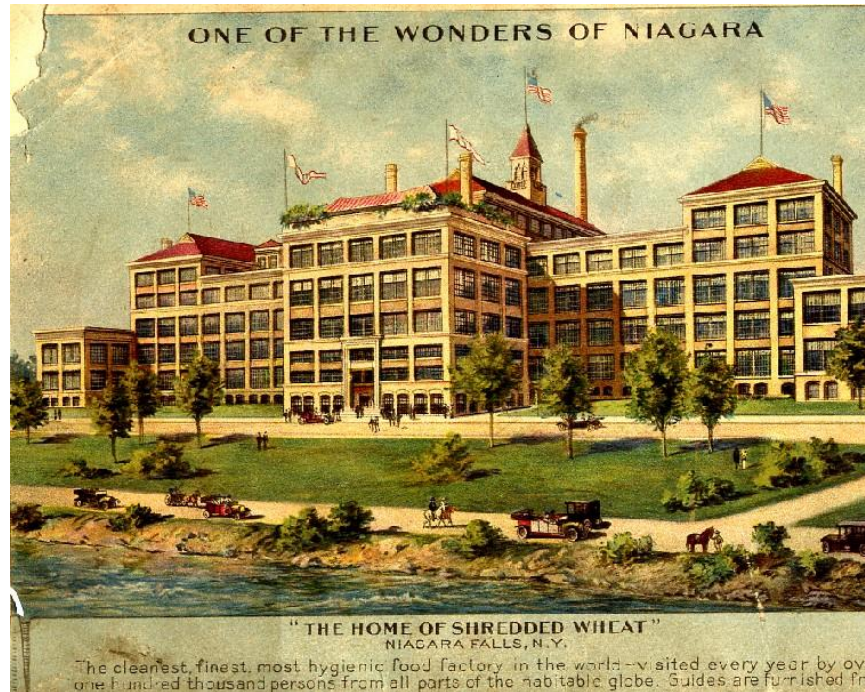


Figure 6: Shredded Wheat Factory in Buffalo, close to Niagara Falls, (demolished in the 1950s)

- 3.8 Perky's bright, ultra-modern factory, opened in Niagara Falls in 1901, and was an exemplar in architecture of the healthy lifestyle promoted by its product and was regarded as a model factory.
- 3.9 Much was made about the cleanliness of the factory and manufacturing process and the factory was built there to take advantage of the hydroelectric power supplied by the Niagara River. The five-storey factory was called the 'Palace of Light' because of the vast numbers of windows and because it was clean and modern (figure 6). Over 100,000 tourists a year visited the factory to admire its hygienic operations, its employee showers and reading rooms, the fine recreational and social facilities offered to staff and to sample the product. The tour demonstrated 'both the wonders of technology and the benefits of enlightened management'<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> William Irwin, *The New Niagara: Tourism, Technology and the Landscape of Niagara Falls 1776-1917*, (1996), p.181; The employees, who were mainly female, received four breaks during the day and were the first known recipients of 'coffee-breaks'.

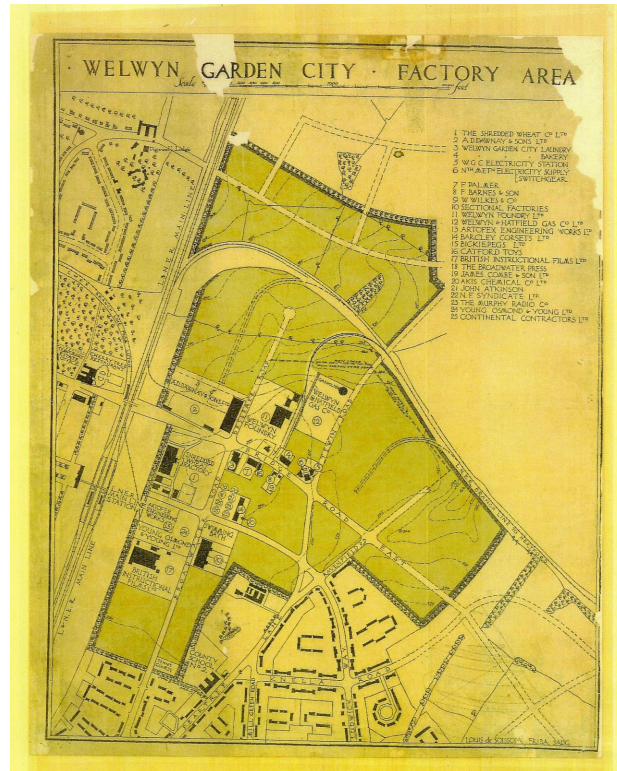


Figure 7: Plan of Factory Area in 1929

- 3.10 The growth in demand for 'cereal-based' breakfast foods in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the company expand to England, setting up offices in Aldwych, London in 1908. After looking at many locations, they chose to build their first European factory in Welwyn Garden City<sup>10</sup> because the company wished to come to a new town in order to provide ideal working and living conditions for their employees<sup>11</sup>.
- 3.11 From the very start Welwyn Garden City did all it could to attract industrial manufacturers to the town, placing adverts in 1920 in magazines such as Punch and in the daily newspapers, and covering huge hoardings with adverts. An undated promotional brochure produced by Welwyn Garden City Ltd. Entitled *Industry Moves Out* stated 'factory sites in Welwyn Garden City must appeal strongly to firms who want their products made in the healthiest and cleanest atmosphere right away from the smoke and fog, by workers living under conditions which make for both well-being and contentment'<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 28 Jun 1924

<sup>11</sup> Maurice de Soissons, *Welwyn Garden City: A town designed for healthy living* (1988), p.58

<sup>12</sup> *Industry Moves Out*, (n/d), p.17

In fact the Shredded Wheat Company stated that ‘we expect both our office and factory staff to live in Welwyn Garden City, so that they and their families may have the benefit of the new and ideal housing conditions in the town, and also that the cost of transportation to and from work should be minimised<sup>13</sup>.

- 3.12 Work began on the original three-storey Production Hall block fronting the railway line of the Shredded Wheat Factory in May 1924<sup>14</sup>. There was a boiler house, garage and wheat elevator, all designed by de Soissons (see plan of 1924 in figure 8). De Soissons submitted the official building application for the factory on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924<sup>15</sup>. The foundation, footings, external party and cross walls were all built in reinforced concrete with a damp course of Bituminous felt (figure 9)<sup>16</sup>. The flat roof was covered in Asphalt. The factory was built by the flat-slab construction method, a technique that had been developed in Europe and America which had flat floor plates resting on columns without any down stand beams, its structural behaviour depending upon the arrangement of reinforcing within the slab. American clients in Britain were amongst the first to accept this construction method in the mid-1920s. The Shredded Wheat Factory was amongst the first buildings to use it, the work being undertaken by the Trussed Concrete Steel Company, who at the same time were working for Wallis Gilbert and Partner on the Wrigley Factory at Wembley<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Industry Moves Out*, (n/d) p.19

<sup>14</sup> Roger Fuller, *A History of Welwyn Garden City*, (1986), p.130

<sup>15</sup> Herts Archives, UDC/21/77/132 (1)

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> David Yeomans, *Owen Williams*, (2001), p.88

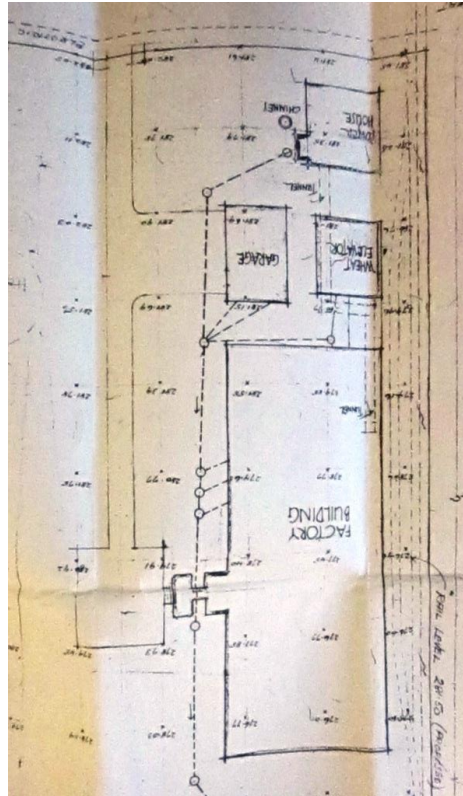


Figure 8: Plan of new Shredded Wheat Factory in 1924 [© Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies]

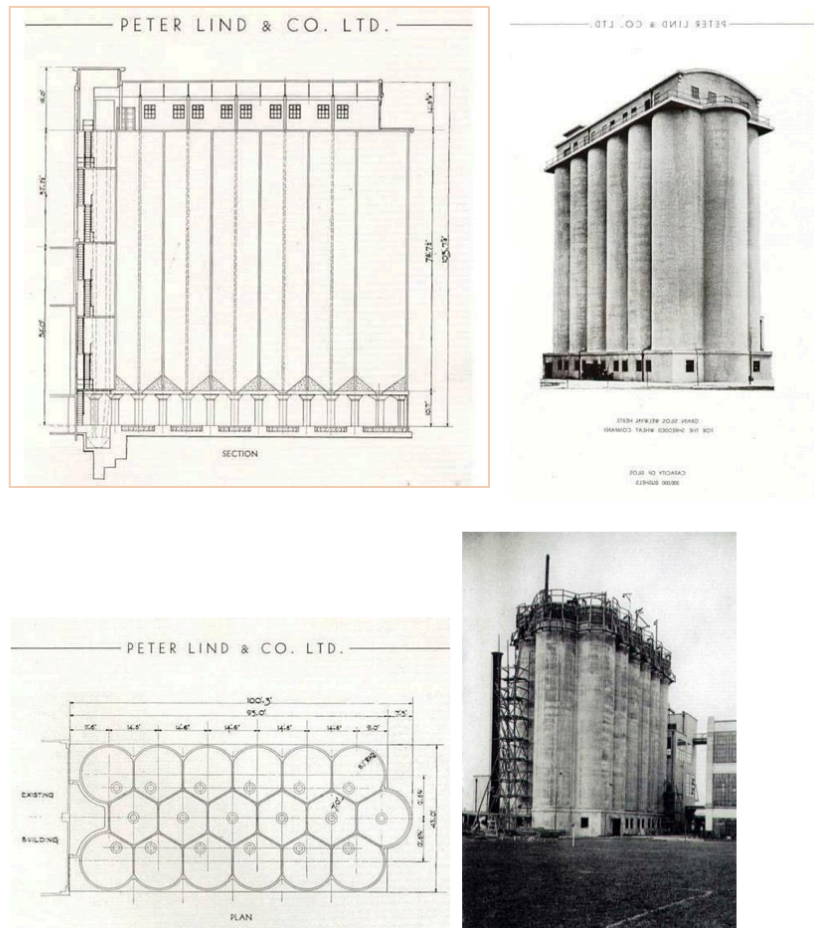


Figure 9: Showing the construction of the reinforced concrete Shredded Wheat Factory c.1924 [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

- 3.13 The Shredded Wheat Factory became almost a symbol of Welwyn, being one of the first new factories built there in a



modern style – a dramatic contrast to the neo-Georgian that de Soissons used for the design of housing and civic buildings elsewhere in Welwyn<sup>18</sup>. De Soissons showed that he could work in a Modernist idiom with the Shredded Wheat Factory<sup>19</sup>.



Figures 10-13: The silos under construction and the design by Peter Lind & Co. Ltd. [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

- 3.14 Much of the machinery such as shredding machines were housed on the first floor, including the heavy ovens that were located at the northern end (see figures 14 & 15) – and probably accounts for the extra thickness of floor slab at this end of the building.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Fuller, *A History of Welwyn Garden City*, (1986), p.127

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere in Welwyn, there were a few architect-designed homes in the Moderne style including properties in Coneydale and Pentley Park by Eugene Kauffman and Paul Mauger.

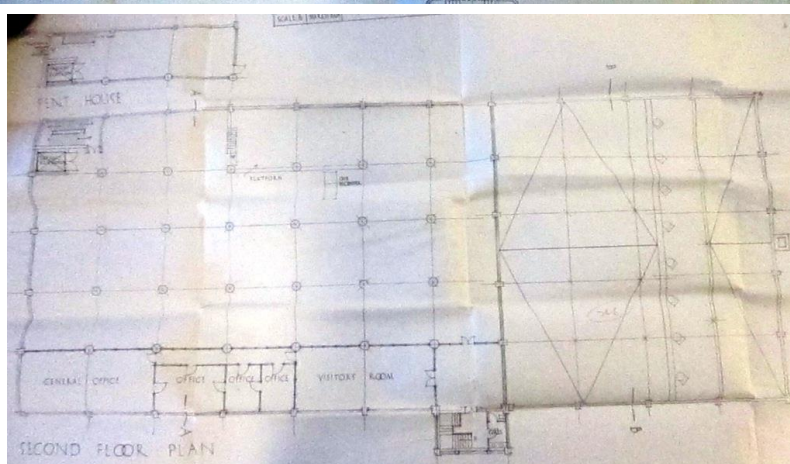
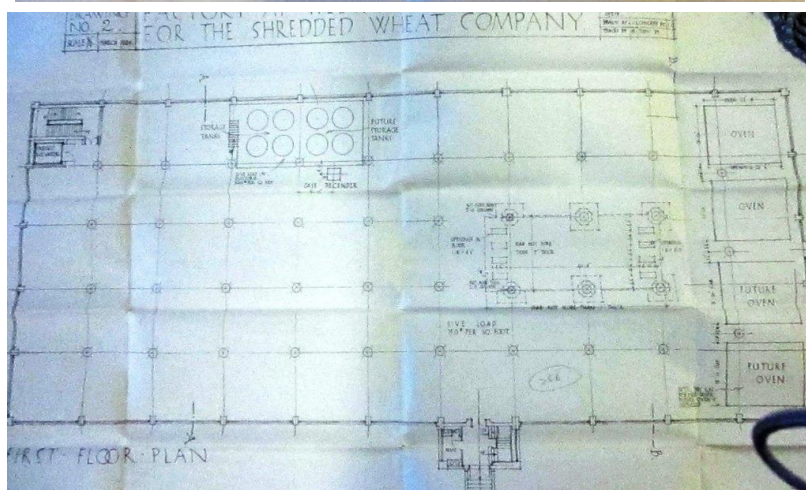
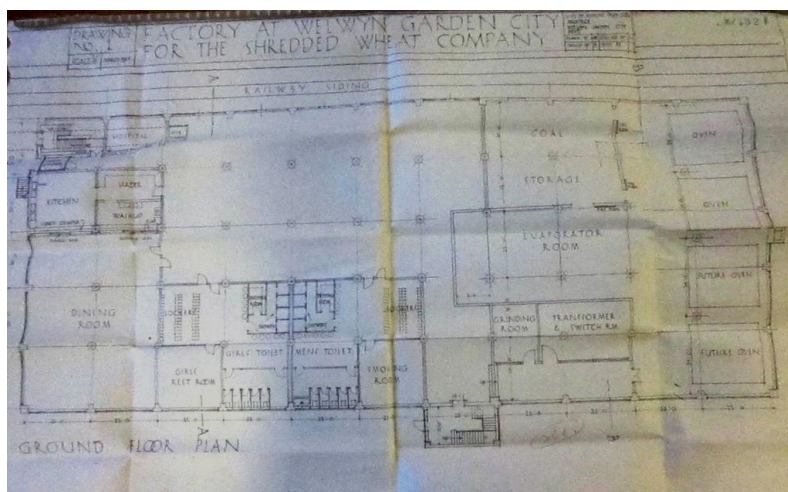


Figure 14 and 15: Ground and first floor plan of the original factory building. Figure 16: Second floor plan of the original factory building.

3.15 The opening ceremony brochure stated that ‘the factory has been constructed by Messrs. F.P. Henderson, Ltd, the well-

known building contractors of London, from plans and under the direction of the architect Mr. Louis de Soissons, OBE, FRIBA of Welwyn Garden City, assisted by Mr. Arthur Kenyon, FRIBA, of 22 Surrey Street, Strand'<sup>20</sup>. The 18 grain silos were designed and built by Peter Lind & Co. of London (figures 10,11,12,13).

- 3.16 The building was described as a 'model factory' with a clean healthy image, enhanced by the use of the white ceramic tiles in which the building was encased 'like ivory' and the vast clear windows that sparkled like 'clusters of diamonds' (see figure 17). Inside, the white-painted reinforced concrete workrooms and offices were flooded with sunlight and it was said that it 'was impossible to imagine workrooms more airy, bright and pleasant'<sup>21</sup>.

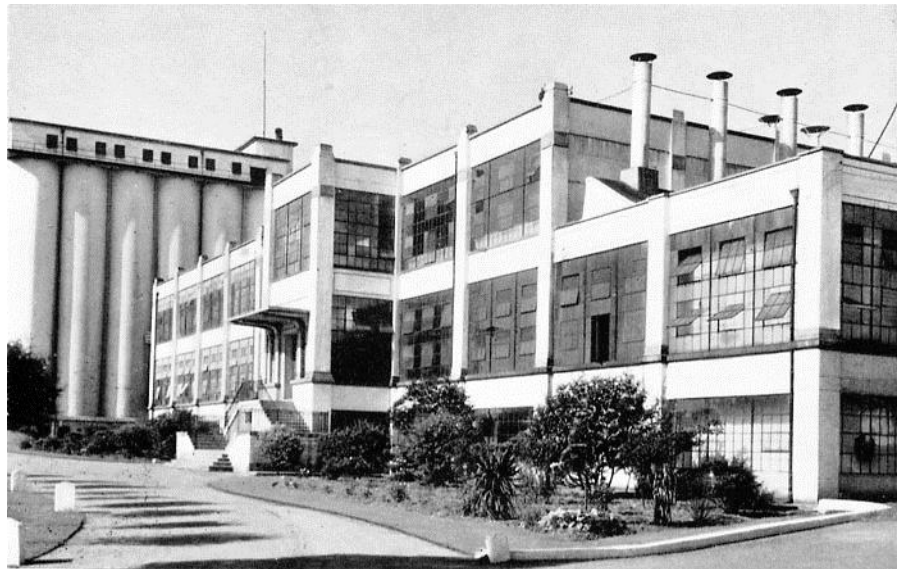


Figure 17: Shredded Wheat Factory showing the original factory with projecting main entrance and canopied entrance, with the silos beyond [© Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website]

- 3.17 The new factory began production in 1926. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting of Welwyn Garden City Ltd, it was reported that 'the factory of the Shredded Wheat Co., with its extraordinary efficient equipment will be brought into operation as their first European plant'<sup>22</sup>. It was officially opened by Lord Salisbury on 12 March 1926.<sup>23</sup> So striking and modern was the new building, that the company used an image of the factory on every packet

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<sup>20</sup> Shredded Wheat Factory Opening Souvenir Brochure (1925) on Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust website

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 20 June 1925

<sup>23</sup> *The Times* 13 Mar 1926

of the cereal, on their delivery vans and in all their printed publicity and advertisements.

- 3.18 The design of the Shredded Wheat Factory was so unashamedly modern (especially with the white concrete silos) that it was perhaps the most avant-garde building in Britain at the time of its completion in 1925. The influence of American design at the factory was clear. The mammoth reinforced concrete elevators or silos were first built in Buffalo (the home of Shredded Wheat) in 1906. Architect Walter Gropius wrote in his 1913 essay *The Development of Industrial Design*, that 'The grain elevators of Canada and South America...are almost as impressive in their monumental power as the buildings of ancient Egypt'.<sup>24</sup> Gillian Darley's book *Factory* states that the nearest English replication of the monumental silos of Buffalo was Welwyn Garden City's Shredded Wheat Factory with its concrete, white-rendered simple geometry.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.19 When building the grain silos, Peter Lind & Co. Ltd had to use innovative methods of construction. They used sliding shutters that enabled concreting to go on continuously day and night until the work was finished. Night shifts worked under floodlights, and the operation called for a high degree of organization and supervision. Shredded Wheat had a 5,700 tons capacity silo, with eighteen storage bins that towered above the factory. Which at a total height of over one hundred feet, was a dramatic sight.
- 3.20 In 1928 the Shredded Wheat Co. Ltd. became associated with the National Biscuit Company of America (Nabisco) which produced not only Shredded Wheat but also numerous varieties of branded biscuits and wrapped bread.

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<sup>24</sup> Early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects were mesmerised by concrete silos both in America and in Europe. Concrete had been used to construct grain silos in Europe as early as the 1890s and the Belgian reinforced concrete pioneer Francois Hennebique was well known for his silos. In 1927, le Corbusier called "American grain elevators and factories, the magnificent first-fruits of the new age", in *Towards a New Architecture* and praised the engineers that built them and admired the concrete structures that combined form and function.

<sup>25</sup> Gillian Darley, *Factory*, (2004)



Figure 18: The factory in its recreation grounds

- 3.21 Extensions took place to the factory between 1937 and 1939. These included a new single storey production hall fixed to the east of the multi-storey original production hall and an increase in the number of silos from 18 to 45. The additional 27 storage bins were designed by Louis Wirsching Jnr (the Nabisco company architect) and constructed by Peter Lind & Co. Ltd. The capacity increased by 8,500 tons. The new silos, whilst at first glance appearing to be fully integrated to the original ones are actually separate, independent, structures that simply 'butt up against' the originals. A conveyor system was also introduced. In 1937 a penthouse was added to the top of the main building in reinforced concrete.
- 3.22 1941 to 1947 were difficult business years, because, under the Government zoning scheme, the Shredded Wheat Company was excluded from selling in certain areas where sales were strongly established. Zoning came to an end early in 1947 and from then onwards the company steadily increased its share of the cereal market. In the early 1950s there was a large extension towards Broadwater Road that increased production facilities, but reduced the recreation ground. Another extension in 1957 improved production and increased administrative facilities. The factory was extended again in 1959 and these extensions covered the whole site with buildings and obscured the silos from the view of the road that passes the factory.
- 3.23 In 1960 the company bought a further 5.5 acres and Cromac House was built for the research, sales development and warehousing departments.<sup>26</sup> In 1961 Charles W Fox FRIBA drew

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<sup>26</sup> Roger Fuller, *A History of Welwyn Garden City*, (1986), p.133



plans for renovations to the west elevation of the original factory building. This work involved the addition of Seaporcel panels (green). The columns that originally rose above the roof were cut down to be level with the top of a new parapet.

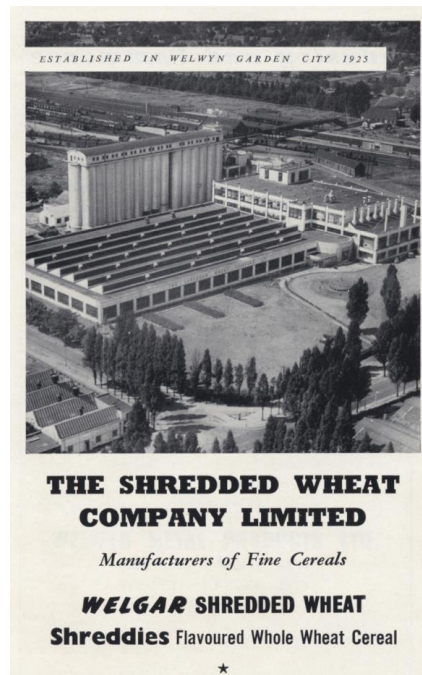


Figure 19: The factory as shown in the Welwyn Garden City – The official handbook & Directory 1953/54



Figure 20: The Folly Arch – the entrance to the 'Home of Shredded Wheat'

### The Site Today

- 3.24 Production at the site stopped in 2008 and since then the factory complex has been shut.

- 3.25 Some of the original process flows for the production of Shredded Wheat and other products may be discerned in the existing layout and minor components of redundant plant remain, but essentially the northern half of the complex is largely derelict. The southern half is a cleared site.
- 3.26 The northern site today comprises the accumulation of the three main phases of development, with the majority of the land now filled with buildings. Much of the original factory was hidden behind the later, less interesting buildings, including the 1930s production hall and the 1950s range of administrative offices along Bridge Road.
- 3.27 In 2015, Spen Hill Developments Ltd (then the owner of the site) submitted a planning application for the redevelopment of the site. The scheme, which was consented, comprised:
- New build and change of use to include up to 850 dwellings, workspace, a healthcare facility, a hotel, Class A1, A3 and A4 units and a community building;
  - The demolition of non-original silos and factory and the refurbishment and change of use of the original silos, Production Building, Grain Store and Boiler House.
  - The provision of landscaping to include a linear park, a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), allotments, green walls and a neighbourhood square; and
  - Highways works, to include the widening of footway and the provision of cycleways to Broadwater Road, and Bridge Road, together with works to Hyde Way and the erection of a new footbridge from Bridge Road leading directly into the scheme.
- 3.28 Consent was granted for the demolition of all other buildings on the site – and this has now taken place.
- 3.29 In February 2019 application 6/2018/0171/MAJ was approved by the Council for the following:
- 3.30 'Creation of a mixed-use quarter comprising the erection of up to 1,340 residential dwellings including 414 affordable dwellings; 114 extra care homes; the erection of a civic building comprising health, community, office and retail uses; alterations, additional and change of use of Grade II listed building and retained silos to provide flexible business floorspace; Combined heat and Power, International Art Centre, Gymnasium, creche/nursery as well as a network Rail TOC Building, plus associated car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure.

- 3.31 Subsequent planning permission has been granted in 2020 for extensions and improvements to the retained original 1920s silos, production hall, grain store and boiler house to enable the creation of an International Art centre, including enhanced connectivity and access, and flexible uses within Block 4 and Block 5.



## 4 Assessment of Significance

- 4.1 Assessing 'significance' is the means by which the cultural importance of a place and its component parts are identified and compared, both absolutely and relatively. This is essential for effective conservation and management. The identification of areas and aspects of higher and lower significance, based on a thorough understanding of a heritage asset, enables policies and proposals to be developed which protect, respect and, where possible, enhance its character and cultural values.

The relevant heritage assets

- 4.2 In terms of the assessment of the proposals for the site, the heritage assets most relevant to considering the effect of the scheme are the listed building itself, other nearby listed buildings and the setting of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. The effect of the proposed scheme on these assets will be first and foremost on the special architectural and historic interest of the building itself, and then secondly on the setting of other listed buildings and conservation area. The site is not located within a Site of Archaeological Importance, nor an Archaeological Priority Area

Assessing heritage significance

- 4.3 The Grade II listed former Shredded Wheat factory, the listed buildings nearby and the Acton Town Centre Conservation Area are 'designated heritage assets', as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF). Other buildings and structures that make a positive contribution to the conservation area can be considered as 'undesigned heritage assets'.
- 4.4 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic'. The Historic England 'Planning for the Historic Environment Practice Guide' puts it slightly differently – as 'the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest'.
- 4.5 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment' (Historic England, April 2008) describes a number of 'heritage values' that may be present in a 'significant place'. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

#### Archaeological Significance

- 4.6 Until the creation of Welwyn Garden City in 1920, Figure 2, an OS map of 1898, shows that the land upon which the Factory is built was farmland. The site lies between two areas designated on the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan as Areas of Archaeological Significance (AAS). These include AAS 26, (centred on Church Road) and AAS 30 (Salisbury Gardens/Shotlands Green). Both designated due to potential for evidence relating to Iron Age/Roman occupation. This site is not in a designated area, it is therefore unlikely that there will be any evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation lying below the site.

#### Architectural & Artistic (Aesthetic Interest)

- 4.7 Despite the piecemeal development of the site throughout much of the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each new additional development left the previous phase remarkably intact. There is no longer any plant remaining in any of the buildings and the site is now largely derelict.
- 4.8 The original (and remaining) part of the Factory complex, designed by Louis de Soissons and built between 1924-1926 remains largely as built – including the main factory, boilerhouse, and first 18 wheat elevators (silos). Architecturally this element of the complex is regarded as being of the highest significance.
- Designed by an architect of note, and particularly associated with Welwyn Garden City, Louis de Soissons showed with this factory, that he could design in the Moderne as well as neo-Georgian styles.
  - Most of the original 1920s buildings remain largely complete, including details such as staircases, railings, and the silo ‘shoots’.
  - The factory was built using a pioneering flat-slab construction method with American clients such as Shredded Wheat and Wrigley being the first to accept and use it in Britain from the mid 1920s.
  - The architecture and materials reflected the clean and hygienic principles of the Shredded Wheat Company – regarded at the time as a ‘model factory’. The sense of bright, light and airy spaces remains today within the original factory building.

- The monumental nature and form of the first 18 silos made these an instant landmark and required an innovative construction approach by Peter Lind & Co.
- 4.9 By virtue of the architectural style, the internal finishes, where these remain, are utilitarian and simple. Those that do remain, however are of significance – such as the staircases. As all the buildings have been stripped of their content and machinery, where elements do remain these are significant as evidence of the former use of the buildings however their interest is lessened by their ‘unconnected’ nature.
- 4.10 In places alterations and additions have taken place which have lessened the significance of these original buildings. Most noticeably where the later single storey production hall addition was built directly against what was, originally, the front elevation of the factory building. This led to the blocking of some windows and the loss of the formal entrance. The staircase, internally, however still remains. The consented scheme provides the opportunity to better reveal the significance of the building following the removal of elements of lesser significance.

#### Historical Interest

- 4.11 As one of the first factories to be built in Welwyn Garden City, the former Shredded Wheat factory is historically important. The original 1924-1926 factory complex is of especially high significance historically:
- The factory was one of the first to be built in the newly designated ‘industrial zone’ in Welwyn Garden City.
  - As well as locational benefits, Welwyn was chosen because the principles of the Garden City Movement matched those of the Shredded Wheat Company. The Company believed that food should be produced in an environment that was ‘clean, healthy and pleasant’ and it was felt that the new Garden City conformed to these ideals.
  - The factory was built of historically pioneering construction methods as previously mentioned.

#### Communal & Social Interest

- 4.12 The Shredded Wheat factory complex has played a significant part in the physical and employment life of Welwyn Garden City since its inception in the 1920s. This significance is derived from a number of key factors:

- One of the first factories, and therefore large-scale employers in the newly created Welwyn Garden City.
  - Built in a new and 'avant-garde' architectural style, deemed so 'modern' that the factory appeared on cereal packets, delivery vans and printed publicity.
  - The company encouraged staff to live healthily in a healthy environment – hence the original provision for open space and gardens around the factory. This was not lost totally until the 1950s.
  - The silos are a local landmark visible for many miles.
  - The factory complex has been part of architectural landscape of Welwyn Garden City for nearly 90 years, located as it is, directly next one of the principal link routes from east to west across the railway and next to the station.
- 4.13 As mentioned above, the later phases of (since demolished) development subsumed the former recreation ground, which had been an important element of the original concept. These more recent parts of the complex therefore weakened the communal and social significance of both Shredded Wheat and Louis de Soissons' vision over the past 80 years.
- 4.14 The Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area is located to the east of the site.
- 4.15 The Conservation Area was first designated in 1968 (with subsequent minor additions. The conservation area covers the main part of the Garden City to the east of the Mainline railway line which incorporates the main shopping centre and the important civic, cultural, leisure and community facilities as well as housing that formed part of the original plan.
- 4.16 The significance of the conservation area is articulated through its special character and appearance. This is articulated in the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal (May 2007). This is described as follows:
- 4.17 *"Maurice de Soissons said of his father Louis – and his work at Welwyn Garden City - that 'his strength lay in the character of the street scene, his sense of scale and order, and his technique of securing variety with few variables'. While the character of a place must inevitably emerge from the inter-relationship of all its parts, we consider that de Soissons' ability to see the broader picture and control its execution in large measure accounts for the overarching significance of WGC, beyond individual architectural achievements.*

- 4.18 *Although de Soissons' town plan straddles the main N-S railway line and is bounded on the west by a golf course, followed by the hard edge of the Great North Road A1(M), the conservation area covers only the land to the west of the line. Between the imperial formality of Parkway and the railway, the pattern, which includes the Town Centre is quite rectilinear. West of Park way, the residential neighbourhood roads curve gently, creating ever changing perspectives. These forms, at once deliberate, yet accommodation pre-existing roads such as Handyside Lane, demonstrate de Soissons' mastery of picturesque layout. With The Campus forming an interface of civic scaled buildings and character, between the broad divisions of Town Centre and adjoining residential sectors, individual character areas can be recognised".*
- 4.19 The part of the conservation area closest to the site is the Town Centre. Within this, Howardsgate provides a formal route towards the Howard Centre, which backs onto the railway line and the site itself.
- 4.20 *"Within the town centre the architectural emphasis is generally on horizontality of form, homogeneity and low urban density. The neo-Georgian idiom helps to stress this horizontality. The approach throughout is low-key, subtle variation within the formal framework, strongly characterised by its materials and the rhythmic patterns of Georgian style sash windows. This helps even such large buildings as Welwyn Stores (now John Lewis) to harmonise in terms of scale".*
- 4.21 Whilst many of the buildings within the conservation area and Howardsgate are identified as contributing to the character and appearance of the conservation area and of local value, in reality there is no inter-relationship between them and the site due to the position and scale of The Howard Centre.
- 4.22 The car park to the north of the shopping centre and that located on Osborne Way, behind the shopping centre are identified as making a negative contribution to the conservation area – and this further acts as a visual barrier between the town centre and the site. The Howard Centre itself is described as an example of a *'more recent building that 'fails to live up to that of the best earlier work...where lack of interest in the upper storey and crude Post-modern entrance monumentality seem misplaced'*.
- 4.23 Whilst the conservation area is clearly in close proximity to the site, in reality there is very little visual connection. The conservation area represents de Soisson's original town

centre/civic centre vision, many of the buildings and some of (but not all of) the residential quarters. The Howard Centre, associated car parks and the railway line all form a physical and visual barrier between the two and from within the conservation area provide a clear termination of the town centre to the east.

- 4.24 As a consequence the site's contribution to the setting of the conservation area is limited by the physical boundary and relates primarily to its role within the original wider Welwyn Garden City masterplan.
- 4.25 The newly designated Peartree Conservation Area is located approximately 500m to the south east of the site, beyond Broadwater Road. The special interest of the area, and therefore its significance is identified in the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal (March 2019).
- 4.26 The special interest of the area 'principally derives from its design as a planned residential area for low-income housing which is distinct from the development in the west of Welwyn Garden City in terms of density, building types and architectural details. Stylistically, the green spaces, tree-lined avenues and open boundaries found within the area contribute to its overall appearance, and apply the garden city principles of plentiful recreational and ecological space to a denser housing model'.
- 4.27 There is little intervisibility between the conservation area and the application site with considerable urban development and mature planting between the two. The site does not form part of the setting of the conservation area other than as part of the wider townscape of Welwyn Garden City.
- 4.28 The Grade II Listed former office block to the Roche Products Factory was constructed in the late 1930s. The Roche Products Factory itself is now demolished and new residential development now surrounds the building to the West and South. The land to the north has an extant permission for development which will mean there is no intervisibility between the site and the listed building and the proposals will not affect the setting of the listed building.
- 4.29 Hatfield House is a country house set in a large park, known as the Great Park, on raised land to the eastern side of Hatfield, approximately 4.2km South of the Site. Hatfield House was built in 1611 by Robert Cecil, First Earl of Salisbury and Chief Minister to King James I and it is a prime example of Jacobean architecture. Due to the importance of the landscape and the

far-reaching views from the Park, the site forms a distant part of the setting of the heritage asset.

## 5 The policy context

- 5.1 This section of the report briefly sets out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the historic built environment.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 5.2 The legislation governing listed buildings and conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act'). Section 66(1) of the Act requires decision makers to 'have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses' when determining applications which affect a listed building or its setting. Section 72(1) of the Act requires decision makers with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay 'special attention... to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.3 The revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in February 2019.

- 5.4 Chapter 12. of the National Planning Policy Framework deals with design: Achieving well-designed places. It begins:

'The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process' (paragraph 124).

- 5.5 Paragraph 127 advises that 'planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;



- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

- 5.6 Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework: 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' deals with Heritage Assets describing them as 'an irreplaceable resource' that 'should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations'.<sup>27</sup>
- Proposals affecting heritage assets
- 5.7 Paragraph 189 brings the NPPF in line with statute and case law on listed buildings and conservation areas. It says that: 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.'
- 5.8 In terms of the local authority, paragraph 190 requires that they 'identify and assess the particular significance of any

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<sup>27</sup> The policies set out in this chapter relate, as applicable, to the heritage-related consent regimes for which local planning authorities are responsible under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as well as to plan-making and decision-making.

heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.'

- 5.9 Further, 'Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision (paragraph 191).
- 5.10 Paragraph 192. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
  - b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
  - c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Considering potential impacts

- 5.11 Paragraph 193 advises local planning authorities that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
- 5.12 Paragraph 194 continues, 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:
- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;
  - b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and

II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.’<sup>28</sup>

- 5.13 In terms of proposed development that will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, paragraph 195 states that ‘local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:
- a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
  - b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
  - c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
  - d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use’.
- 5.14 It continues ‘where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use’ (paragraph 196).
- 5.15 In taking into account the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset the local authority should employ a ‘a balanced judgement’ in regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset (paragraph 197).
- 5.16 The NPPF introduces the requirement that ‘Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred (paragraph 198).
- 5.17 Where a heritage asset is to be lost, the developer will be required to ‘record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact,

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<sup>28</sup> Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.

and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible' (paragraph 199).<sup>29</sup>

- 5.18 In terms of enhancing the setting of heritage assets the NPPF states that 'local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably. (paragraph 200).
- 5.19 It goes on however that 'Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 195 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 196, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole' (paragraph 201).
- 5.20 Finally, paragraph 202 requires that the onus will be on local planning authorities to 'assess whether the benefits of a proposal for enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies'.

#### Planning Practice Guidance

- 5.21 Planning Practice Guidance provides streamlined guidance for the National Planning Policy Framework and the planning system. It includes guidance on matters relating to protecting the historic environment in the section entitled 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment'. It is subdivided into sections giving specific advice in the following areas:
- Historic Environment Policy and Legislation
  - Heritage in Local Plans
  - Decision-taking: Historic Environment
  - Designated Heritage Assets
  - Non-Designated Assets

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<sup>29</sup> Copies of evidence should be deposited with the relevant historic environment record, and any archives with a local museum or other public depository.

- Heritage Consent Processes and
- Consultation Requirements

5.22

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council: Local Policy

5.23 The current planning policies for Welwyn Hatfield are set out in the statutory development plan which comprises: saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan adopted 2005, the Hertfordshire Waste Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document adopted 2012, Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan adopted 2007, and the saved policies of the Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan adopted 1999.

5.24 A Local Plan is currently being prepared, which will replace the District Plan and will set out the planning framework for the Borough for the period up to 2031.

5.25 The saved Policies of the District Plan of relevance include:

R27 Demolition of Listed Buildings: Listed Building Consent for the complete or partial demolition of any building of special architectural or historic interest will not be granted other than in the following exceptional circumstances:

i) Clear and convincing evidence has been provided that it is not practicable to continue to use the building for its present or previous use and that no viable alternative uses can be found, and that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible; ii) The physical condition of the building has deteriorated, to a point that it can be demonstrated that demolition is essential in the interests of public safety. A comprehensive structural report will be required to support this criterion; iii) demolition or major alteration will not be considered without acceptable detailed plans for the site's development. Conditions will be imposed in order to ensure a contractual obligation has been entered into for the construction of the replacement building(s) and/or the landscaping of the site prior to the commencement of demolition; and (iv) where, exceptionally, consent is granted for the demolition or major alteration to a listed building, before any demolition or major alteration takes place, applicants will be required to record details of the building by measured drawings, text and photographs, and this should be submitted to and agreed by the Council.

D1 Quality of Design: The Council will require the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality. The

design of new development should incorporate the design principles and policies in the Plan and the Guidance contained in the Supplementary Design Guidance.

D2 Character & Context: The Council will require all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible enhance or improve the character of the existing area.

D4 Quality of the Public Realm: The Council will expect new development where appropriate to either create or enhance public areas and the public realm.

## 6 The proposed scheme and its effect on heritage significance

6.1 This section of the report should be read alongside the other documentation submitted as part of the application, in particular the Design & Access Statement prepared by Collado Collins and the Planning Statement prepared by Icení Projects.

6.2 In summary, the application is for:

Hybrid planning application comprising: Detailed Planning Application for circa 399 Class C3 Private Rented Sector (PRS) dwellings, circa 250 unit Class C2 residential care community, circa 153 C3 dwellings, a community and commercial hub comprising Use Classes E and F1 floorspace and a Cycling Hub with associated car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure; Outline Planning Application for circa 418 Class C3 dwellings.

6.3 This application does not physically affect the listed buildings on the site - the plans for which were consented under the existing wider site consent and also a further consent 6/2019/0826/LB and consideration with regards this application in heritage terms relates to their setting. The proposals do however still form an important part of the overall masterplan and strategy for the site as the proposals contained within this application are necessary to facilitate the works to the listed buildings.

6.4 In summary, the proposals are for the former Production Hall to be converted for a multitude of commercial and leisure uses by introducing a central core to the buildings which serves all floors and which facilitates flexible division of the building into several uses both laterally as well as vertically. The Boiler and Grain House are proposed to be converted into a unique Art & Museum hub with multidisciplinary indoor and outdoor space as well as a bar on the top floor of the silos.

### The Proposals

6.5 In heritage terms, the wider proposals have been designed to ensure that the remaining listed structures are better revealed both architecturally and in terms of use and ensure that they become a key focal point of the masterplan.

6.6 The site can be broadly split into three character zones with the former Shredded Wheat buildings and structures acting as the central spine and heart of the proposal. Forming the southern elevation to Goodman Square is the mixed use Louis de

Soissons building. At the northern end against Bridge Road is proposed a relatively small residential building to replace the warehouse buildings which once engulfed the original Shredded Wheat factory building.

- 6.7 East of the Production Hall, and on axis with the reinstated front door to this, are proposed two perimeter blocks which seek to retain direct views of the Production Hall from both Bridge and Broadwater Road whilst reinstating an urban edge against these thoroughfares.
- 6.8 To the west, Blocks 1,2 & 3 are bound by the raised pedestrian bridge to the south, banked Bridge Road to the north and the railway lines to the west.
- 6.9 The proposed layout is a departure from the extant consent in so far as it seeks to remove the large podium parking and generate two new streets that connect residents to Reiss Walk and the centra spine of activity. By breaking the urban block it will enable the retention of views of the factory buildings from the rail tracks and west side of the town centre.
- 6.10 The southernmost building, which generates the termination point of Hydeway on Goodman Square, has been modelled to reveal views of the Silos from the station exit on the footbridge into the town centre.
- 6.11 The two new link streets ach lead up to the two new entrances to the Listed Buildings. Namely the entrance to the proposed Art centre as well as the new entrance to the Production Hall on Reiss Walk.
- 6.12 The architectural approach to the new buildings that form Blocks 1,2 & 3 is as per the previous consent, taking its reference from the industrial nature of the Wheat Quarter site and retained listed buildings. The buildings rise in height to the outer edges of the site with 8 storeys along the edge of the railway lines and 9 storeys furthest to the south.
- 6.13 South of the footbridge is proposed a 'Bridge Building' which will incorporate commercial, civic and leisure uses as well as the cycle hub with direct access onto Goodman Square.
- 6.14 The distribution of buildings to the east of the Lois de Soissons Gardens (Blocks 6&7) is broadly similar to that within the consented scheme, however it is proposed than an additional floor, proportionate to the consented scheme is added across this part of the site.
- 6.15 The design of the buildings, similar to other blocks on the site, takes reference from the industrial heritage of the site with an



expressed grid with vertical elements sitting proud and horizontal banding running beyond - which references the production hall. The massing has been broken into smaller elements through the elevation design: different façade types and brick colours with the use of metal bands and critical windows create variation, contrast and interest yet tie the building together.

- 6.16 A pavilion building in the central courtyard to Building 7 provides residential amenity space.
- 6.17 To the north of the listed production hall, the proposed 'Art Deco Building' has been raised in height from the consented scheme to 8 storeys and the proposed footprint expanded eastwards, however, the design concept remains the same – seeking to create a form that is symmetrical, located on the main axis with the listed buildings.
- 6.18 Other than the proposed changes to the west of Reiss Walk and the proposed new Bridge Building, the building distribution in the proposed scheme is broadly similar to those of the consented scheme. Whilst there has been an increase in height across the site, this is still focussed along the edges of the site, in most cases furthest from the listed buildings.
- 6.19 The importance of the dominance of the silos continues to be recognised, with new buildings being located so as to give selected views of the silos from strategic and carefully considered points around the site. Their pre-eminence will be fully respected.
- 6.20 The spaces around the listed buildings have been designed to give visitors, users and occupiers a better appreciation of the complex and the use of these spaces designed to create activity and vibrancy. This is an important benefit with the scheme, as much of the communal significance of the complex relates to the 'healthy living' approach promoted both by the founders of Shredded Wheat and the Garden City.
- 6.21 The proposed new Goodman Square adjacent to the Boiler House/Grain House and silos at the end of Hydeway will remain a key public space linking the east and west of the town, with the listed structures forming the principal backdrop to the north.
- 6.22 The proposed Louis de Soissons Civic Building will be one of the first buildings seen by pedestrians approaching the new residential and cultural quarter from the town centre and train centre. The appointment of Louis de Soissons Architects to

design it further provides a historical link between the past and the future.

- 6.23 The De Soissons Gardens to the eastern front of the Production Hall will reinstate a formal open space providing a suitable setting for the reinstated grand entrance to the building and restoring the integrity of the 'front' of the building back to its original place as illustrated in the historical photographs in figures 17 & 20.
- 6.24 To the west of the listed former Production Hall, Reiss Walk will incorporate the historic railway lines and provide a hard landscaped access to this elevation of the listed building – appropriate to its industrial past – as well as a thoroughfare through the development.
- 6.25 The design rationale articulated in the Design & Access Statement and Landscape Strategy demonstrates how the architecture and landscape have drawn from the historic Garden City principles as well as more recent guidance and strategy and the consented scheme. Whilst raised from the previously consented scheme, the heights of the buildings have been carefully considered to ensure the continued dominance of the listed factory complex and opened up views not experienced since the 1930s. The proposals will continue to better reveal both the silos and Production Hall building.
- 6.26 The mixture of uses means that the original commercial nature of this part of the town – an element of the significance of the listed complex - is not lost whilst creating a vibrant and integrated new quarter of the town.
- 6.27 The wider scheme offers huge community benefits to the town. As an integral part of this wider proposal these benefits are symbiotic for the listed complex – with the buildings playing a part in providing the mix of uses and facilities that contribute to additional community facilities – such as the creche and workspace – and also benefiting from a restoration and repair of its modernist architecture and a long term sustainable and viable use.
- 6.28 The integration of public art throughout the site is also a considerable public benefit – increasing the cultural importance of Welywn Garden City as well as the site and historic complex.
- 6.29 In terms of the impact on the Welywn Garden City Conservation Area, the proposals will be negligible and will not affect an ability to appreciate the special character of the area. The extent of the density of mature trees across the area

means that particularly in the summer even glimpses are further reduced.

- 6.30 The railway line provides (and always has done) a very definite divide from east to west, and the back of the Howard Centre creates a dominant 'back' to the town centre. Just as the proposed development has been designed to respect the setting of the listed buildings on the site itself, this approach was key when considering how it will be seen from glimpsed views from the conservation area.
- 6.31 Similar to the consented scheme, the proposals will appear in the backdrop of the Howard Centre (a building that is identified as being a little architectural quality in the conservation area appraisal) as shown in View 7 of the TVIA, however the retained chimney to the listed factory will remain the most prominent feature on the horizon. The choice of materials and form of the proposed buildings glimpsed in this view should mean that they will sit comfortably in the backdrop and in the context of the predominantly brick buildings in the foreground.
- 6.32 The scheme will just be glimpsed in limited views from the Peartree Conservation Area, and not in a way that will affect an ability to appreciate the character and appearance of the conservation area, or its contribution to a wider understanding of the original Welwyn Garden City Masterplan. This is illustrated in View 4 of the TVIA. The proposals will appear in the far distance behind mature trees and of a lesser scale than other commercial development that already appears in the backdrop of that view.
- 6.33 The proposals will have no impact on the setting of the Grade II listed Roche Building.
- 6.34 Similar to the consented scheme, the visibility of the proposals from Grade I listed Hatfield House has been investigated and it has been concluded that the primary element of the scheme that is visible are the already standing remaining silos. It is therefore felt that the proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the views from the House.

## 7 Compliance with policy and guidance

- 7.1 This report has provided a detailed description and analysis of the significance of the former Shredded Wheat factory site and its heritage context as required by Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report also describes in Section 6 how the proposed scheme will affect that heritage significance.

The level of 'harm' caused by the proposed scheme

- 7.2 As outlined in Section 5, the NPPF identifies two levels of potential 'harm' that might be caused to a heritage asset by a development: 'substantial harm...or total loss of significance' or 'less than substantial'. Both levels of harm must be caused to a *designated* heritage asset – in this instance, the listed former Shredded Wheat Factory, the nearby conservation areas, and the setting of other nearby identified listed buildings.

- 7.3 The proposed scheme, in our considered view, preserves the special architectural and historic interest of the listed buildings and their setting and thus complies with s.66(1) and s.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The changes to the setting of the listed buildings, individually or cumulatively, do not reach the threshold of harm that would cause the scheme to fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building or conservation area.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 7.4 In respect of Paragraph 192 of the NPPF, the proposed scheme can be described as 'sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting these to viable uses consistent with their conservation'.
- 7.5 The proposed scheme complies with Paragraph 195 of the NPPF – it does not lead to 'substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset'. It also complies with Paragraph 196 for the reasons given earlier in this report. The proposals ensure that the listed former Shredded Wheat building can be fully appreciated and given a proper setting for the first time in nearly 70 years. Its setting will be further enhanced by the nature of the proposed landscaping and the careful positioning of the proposed new buildings to ensure views of the key elements of the building.
- 7.6 The mixed uses proposed for the site will provide genuine public access to the heritage asset for the first time, and re-activate it for the first time in many decades.

- 7.7 Whilst the detail of the works to the listed buildings is previously consented, the overall scheme subject to this application will facilitate the restoration of the most important remaining elements of the Shredded Wheat factory, reinstating its most important elevational features, removing utilitarian elements that detract from an appreciation of the architecture and using high quality, contextual materials.
- 7.8 The interventions – individually and taken as a whole – help secure the ‘optimum viable use’ of the listed building.
- 7.9 Whilst the proposals will be glimpsed in some limited views from within both of the local conservation areas, we do not believe that this will cause harm to their setting – the character and appearance of the conservation area will remain unaffected, and a glimpse of the wider town beyond will not alter an ability to appreciate this.
- 7.10 However, even if others were to believe that some element of harm was caused by the proposals, the scheme provides considerable public benefits - which are outlined earlier in this report and also in the planning statement – which should be considered when weighing the balance between any perceived limited harm with the considerable public benefits which the scheme delivers.
- Local Policy: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- 7.11 In positively addressing the requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework, the works should also meet the policy requirements of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- 7.12 In addressing Policy R27, the elements of the listed building that make up its special architectural or historic interest have been clearly identified. These proposals aim to retain and adapt these elements of the site for new sustainable future uses. The factory complex has now been redundant for many years. The proposals represent alternative uses that will give the most significant elements of the site a viable and sustainable future. The physical condition of the listed buildings has deteriorated considerably and the wider proposals provide the financial ability to repair and restore the main elements of the retained listed buildings.

## 8 Conclusions

- 8.1 The proposed scheme builds upon that already consented to provide a viable and considered scheme that will enable the repair, restoration and help secure the future of the most significant parts of the former Shredded Wheat complex in sustainable and viable uses, and this represents a great benefit in heritage terms. The proposal overall will still deliver substantial public benefits to the community and the works to the listed buildings are an integral part of that. The scheme will re-stitch this derelict part of the town centre back into full use, joining the two halves of the town back again.
- 8.2 The proposed development will not harm the character or appearance or the setting of the adjacent Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, which very clearly 'turns its back' on the site with the Howard Centre development and railway line. Where there are glimpsed views of the site from within the conservation area, no harm to its setting will be caused by the proposals. Similarly no harm will be caused to the setting of the Peartree Conservation Area, the Grade II listed Roche Building or the longer distance setting of Hatfield House.
- 8.3 The proposals offer substantial public benefits overall. These benefits relate not just to giving the remaining factory complex a future use and better revealing its significance, but also the wider public benefits to be delivered by the whole scheme.
- 8.4 Overall, the scheme offers a unique opportunity to re-invigorate the site and better reveal the significance of the original buildings and wider site. For this and the reasons given in the report, the proposed scheme complies with the law, and national and local policy and guidance for listed buildings and conservation areas.



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