



CAMPUS WEST, WELYWN GARDEN CITY, AL8 6BX

TOWNSCAPE, HERITAGE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

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1.

INTRODUCTION

3

2.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

5

3.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

7

4.

SITE AND SURROUNDING TOWNSCAPE

9

5.

SUMMARY OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WGC CA

13

6.

TOWNSCAPE ASSESSMENT

14

7.

EFFECTS ON HERITAGE ASSETS

25

8.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

27

APPENDIX A: HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE

APPENDIX B: TECHNICAL AVR METHODOLOGY

Cover image: View from The Campus green space toward the Site.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This Heritage, Townscape and Visual Assessment ('HTVA') has been prepared by Bridges Associates Architects ('BA'). It supports the proposed decked car park at Campus West in Welwyn Garden City by Brightspace Architects in respect of its architectural and townscape qualities and its acceptable effects on the designated heritage assets.

1.2. The proposed development is: Expansion and adaptation of the existing car park, including construction of new single suspended level parking deck, to provide additional capacity, reorganisation of road and pavement arrangement, introduction of additional cycle parking, junction improvements and associated landscaping improvements.

Proposed development

1.3. The proposed development includes the construction of a decked car park on the existing site, increasing car parking spaces within the red line boundary from 334 to 490 (an uplift of 156). In addition, the development will consist of improvements to the public realm, increased cycle parking and improved landscaping following the removal of some low-quality trees.

1.4. The proposed development has evolved through pre-application discussions with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council ('WHBC') with a meeting held in March 2021. The proposed scheme has been consulted with Historic England and Place Services (Welwyn Hatfield Council's heritage advisors). Formal consultation response from Historic England was received on 25th March 2021 (see Appendix A). Their feedback on the scheme has been incorporated into the current proposal.

Site context

1.5. The existing Campus West Car Park is publicly owned by WHBC and currently offers approximately 302 (including 8 disabled bays) spaces on a surface car park with tarmac surface. The car park serves The Campus West Leisure & Library facilities and the Town Centre for Shoppers and workers.

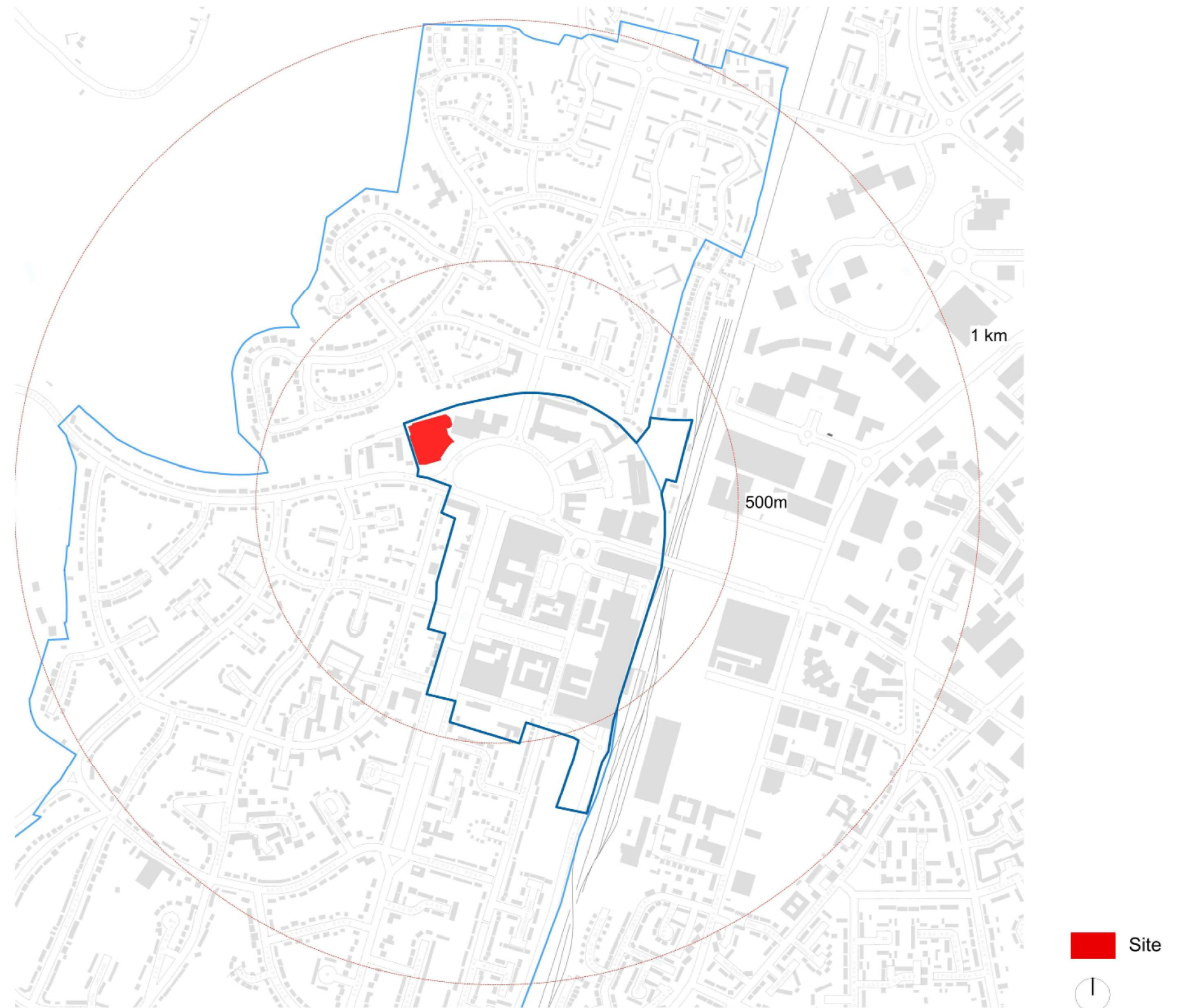


Figure 1. Location map (Bridges Associates, April 2021)

1.6. To the east of the car park is The Campus West Council Cinema, Roller Skating and Library complex. To the west is Woodside House, a Sheltered Housing development. The Campus green space forms the immediate context to the site. Its shape is centred on the axis of Parkway which connects to the south. . Both the northern and southern edges of the Site are defined by a belt of mature trees. The woodland to the north forms part of Ayot Greenway, a key pedestrian and cycling route between Ayot St. Peter and Wheathampstead. The mature trees are remnants of Sherrardspark Wood which now remains a compact woodland to the north-west of the Town Centre.

Designations

1.7. The site lies within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area ('WGCCA') and therefore relevant national and local policies apply (Figure 2). It is a statutory requirement that development on Campus West must preserve or enhance the CA and its setting.

Structure of the report

1.8. The report will firstly briefly outline the history of this part of the WGC and then outline its key positive townscape qualities before defining aspects of character and appearance that contribute toward the significance of the CA. The assessment of proposals includes the assessment of effects from the proposal on the CA and has been determined through site visits and reference to Accurate Visual Representations ('AVRs') by Future Reality Studios.

Illustrations of the proposed development

1.9. 5 viewpoint locations (Figure 3) were identified through the process of scoping and pre-application discussions to test the visibility of proposals in the surroundings. The scale, mass and location of the proposals have been illustrated through AVRs inserted into existing photographs, to convey reliable visual information about the proposed development and to assist the process of visual assessment and analysis of impact. The methodology is based on current guidance and best practice and informed by the legislative and policy context. The technical methodology for the AVRs is in an appendix at the end of this document (Appendix B).

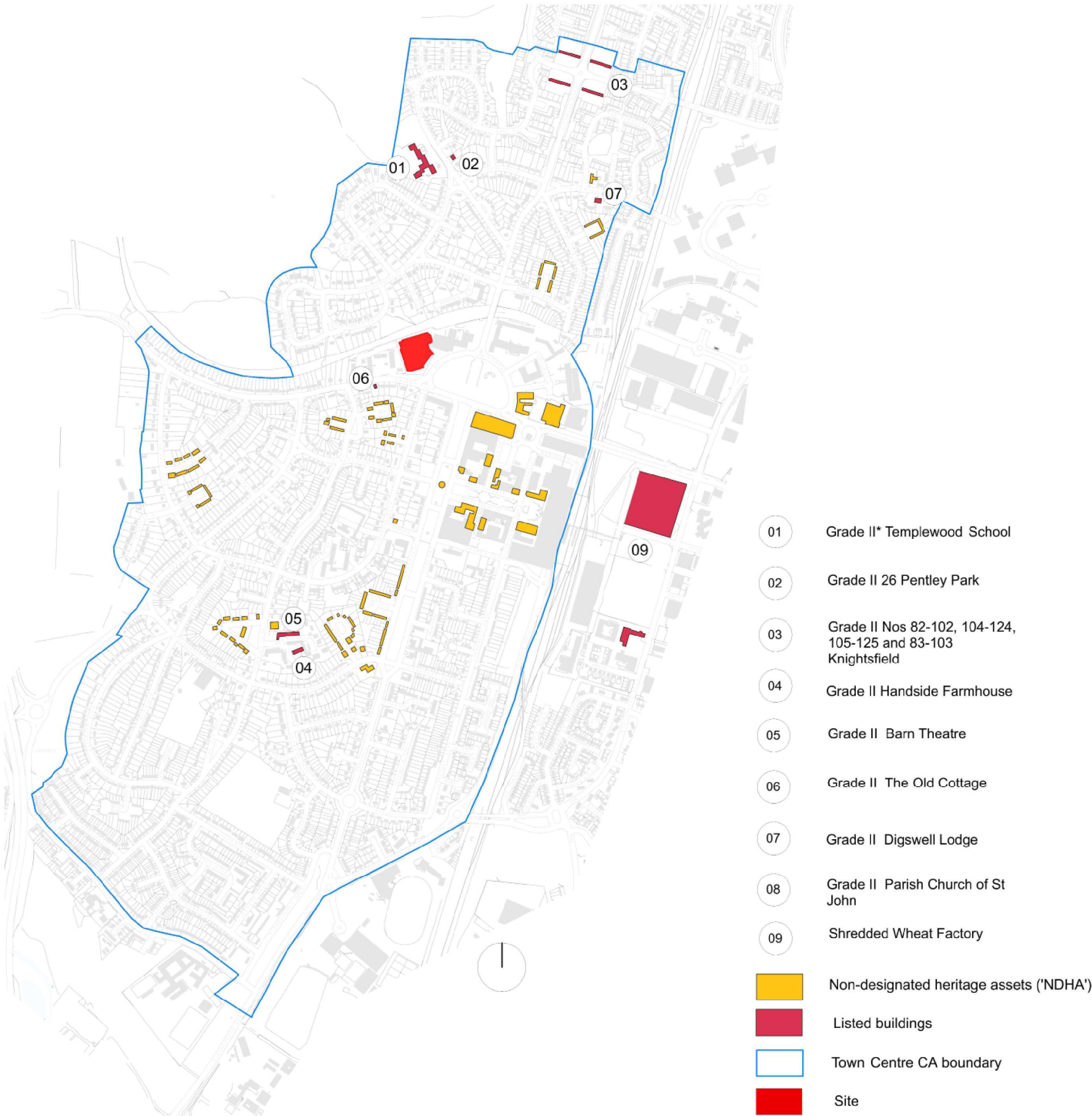


Figure 2. Heritage assets in WGC (Bridges Associates, April 2021)

2. RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Legislation

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 2.1. Section 72 of the Act sets out the statutory duties for dealing with heritage assets in planning decisions. In relation to listed buildings, all planning decisions should: “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” and, in relation to conservation areas, special attention must be paid to “the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.”
- 2.2. Firstly, the Act makes it clear that the decision makers are to consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the conservation area. Previous litigation has considered the question of whether development which does not harm the area can be said to “preserve” it. However, it might be that enhancement is desirable, not simply preservation. For example, where a site in its present condition is an eyesore, it would be eminently sensible for a planning authority to try to achieve development that positively “enhances” the area, by replacing what is there with something better. Secondly, where development neither enhances or harms it (i.e. where its effect is, in other words, neutral), it may be said to “preserve” that character and appearance.
- 2.3. Secondly, the Act makes it clear that both the character and the appearance of the CA must each be considered separately - although they may in some cases effectively mean the same thing. As to the character of the area, this is often difficult to determine with any precision. It is thus more important for planning authorities to decide what exactly they think is their character of their conservation areas. The guidance by Historic England is also of assistance in determining the character (Advice Note 1, 2019).
- 2.4. Thus, in considering the effect of a proposal on the character or appearance of a conservation area, the decision-maker

must reach one of the three possible conclusions:

- 2.5. (1) The development will either enhance or preserve (that is, in the South Lakeland case, if it will not harm) the character or appearance of the area;
- 2.6. (2) The development will simultaneously enhance the character or appearance of the area and cause some detriment (or it might enhance one conservation area and harm another); and
- 2.7. (3) The development will neither enhance nor even preserve the character or appearance of the area.
- 2.8. The first conclusion must be a major point in favour of allowing the development. In the second situation, the detriment identified is a material consideration, and the decision-maker should weigh up the enhancement against the detriment (i.e. harm). In the third case, it is almost inevitable that the development will have some detrimental (i.e. harmful) effect on that character and appearance. Such a conclusion will be consideration of considerable importance and weight; and in such a situation any presumption in favour of development is rebutted. However, that does not necessarily mean that the application should be refused; but it should only be permitted if there is some advantage or public benefit outweighing the failure to satisfy the test in s.72.

National planning policy

DCLG's National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

- 2.9. Paragraph 124 of Section 12 ('Achieving well-designed places') states the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.
- 2.10. Section 16 of the NPPF sets out how the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment and makes clear at paragraph 193 that when considering the impact of an Proposed development on a designated

heritage asset (which includes its setting), local planning authorities should give 'great weight' to conserving the asset's significance. Other relevant paragraphs considered in this Assessment include 194 ('Harm and loss of the significance of the designated heritage asset'), paragraph 195-196 ('Identifying harm on designated heritage assets') and paragraph 197 ('Identifying harm on non-designated heritage assets').

- 2.11. The NPPF para 185 advises LPAs to set out 'a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment' in their Local Plan. Emphasis (para 131) is placed on 'sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets' and recognising that (para 192) heritage assets are an 'irreplaceable resource' and should be conserved 'in a manner appropriate to their significance'.

Planning Policy and Guidance – Local Level Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (2005)

- 2.12. The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan was adopted in 2005. A number of policies have been 'saved' until it is replaced by a Local Development Framework. Together with the Structure Plan, the Waste Plan, and the Minerals Local Plan, it forms the statutory development plan for the district. The Structure Plan provides the strategic policies for the district; this Plan provides the local policies. Relevant policies include:

- **Policy R22:** Development in Conservation Areas: any proposals for new buildings or extensions and alterations to existing buildings will only be permitted where they would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, in terms of siting, form, scale, materials, detailing and landscaping.
- **Policy R23:** Demolition of Buildings in Conservation Areas: Within Conservation Areas, consent will not be granted for the demolition of any buildings or structures in the designated Conservation Areas, unless the character or appearance of the Conservation Area is thereby preserved or enhanced (whether or not such

works form part of a redevelopment scheme).

- **Policy 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 (SPD 2005).
- **Policy D2:** Character and 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, should enhance or improve the character of the existing area.
- **Policy D4:** Quality of the Public Realm: new development is expected to, where appropriate, to either create or enhance public areas and the public realm.
- **Policy D6:** Legibility: The Council will require all new development to enhance and contribute to the legibility of the development itself and of the area in which it is located.
- **Policy D8:** Landscaping: All development, other than changes of use of buildings, should include landscaping as an integral part of the overall design. This should reflect the strong tradition of urban landscape design in the district.

Supplementary Planning Documents / Guidance

Further guidance is provided at the local level with adopted Supplementary Planning.

- 2.13. Documents (SPDs) and Planning Guidance. These currently include:
- Welwyn Garden City Town Centre North SPD (2015)
 - Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area Appraisal (2007)
- 2.14. The heritage context of WGC has been extensively addressed in the Heritage, Townscape and Visual report by Bridges Associates (August 2020). This has informed the Site-Specific Guidance for Campus West Car Park Site which is included in the Strategic Planning Framework (Allies and Morrison, August 2020).

Historic England (2017) The Setting of Heritage Assets (version 2), Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3

- 2.15. The advice in this document explains the contribution of setting to the significance of a heritage asset. This is often expressed by reference to views. Views which contribute more to understanding the significance of a heritage asset include:
- Those where relationships between the asset and other historic assets or places or natural features are particularly relevant.
 - Those with historical associations, including viewing points and the topography of battlefields.
 - Those where the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design or function of the heritage asset.
 - Those between heritage assets and natural or topographic features.

- 2.16. The AVR in **Section 6** have been used to assess the effects of the proposed development on the setting of any relevant heritage assets in the vicinity.

Historic England (2015) Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment, Good Practice Advice in Planning 2

- 2.17. This Advice Note provides information on assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, recording and furthering understanding.

Historic England (2020) Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets, Historic England Advice Note 12

- 2.18. The methodology for assessment of significance has been informed by Historic England's Advice Note 12 'Statements of Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets' (October 2019). This advice note forms part of the staged approach to decision-making in which assessing significance precedes designing the proposal(s).

Landscape Institute – Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (GLVIA) (Third Edition, 2013)

- 2.19. This report draws upon best practice guidance set out in the GLVIA. The GLVIA, Third Edition has been produced jointly by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and came into force in April 2013. The industry guidance is aimed at anyone involved in landscape and visual impact assessment.

3. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

3.20. This section sets out the methodology to assess the likely effects of the proposed development on the surrounding townscape, on the significance of heritage assets and on visual amenity. It considers the statutory requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as well as national, regional/strategic and local planning policies and guidance (see also Section 2).

3.21. The assessment is based broadly on the principles set out in the third (2013) edition of 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (GLVIA), produced by the Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. However, these principles are better suited to assessing landscape than townscape, and so they only form a general guide to the method to be used.

3.22. The Landscape Institute's 'Townscape Character Assessment Technical Information Note' (TIN 05/2017, 2017) is also relevant in the context of this assessment as it explains how the principles and general approach of landscape character assessment can be applied to townscape character assessment.

Heritage assets

3.23. Heritage assets are defined in the NPPF (2019) as being 'a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest'. Heritage assets include designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets. Designated heritage assets include 'a World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation'. Non-designated heritage assets ('NDHA') include locally listed buildings and positive contributors to conservation areas or the townscape identified by the applicant or the local authority.

3.24. To identify the heritage assets within the site boundary and near the site, the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) was consulted.

Evaluating the significance of heritage assets and any contribution made by their settings

3.25. The NPPF requires the significance of heritage assets potentially affected by development, including any contribution made by their setting, to be described in sufficient detail to enable the potential impact on their significance to be fully understood as set out in paragraph 189. Significance is defined in the glossary of the NPPF as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

3.26. Historic England's (HE) Good Practice in Planning 2 Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment (2015) is designed to help decision makers and others understand and evaluate the significance of heritage assets. It, in turn, makes reference to the earlier HE document Conservation Principles (2008) which identifies four types of heritage value that an asset may hold: evidential, historical, aesthetic, communal value.

Assessment of effects on heritage assets

3.27. According to the NPPF paragraphs 193-202, the assessor must establish whether the significance of heritage assets will be affected because of new development. There are two ways in which new development can affect the significance of heritage assets:

- by direct changes to the fabric of heritage assets, i.e. if the project includes the demolition or alteration of listed buildings, demolition within or changes to the character and appearance of conservation areas, development within registered parks and gardens or demolition or alterations to locally listed buildings of merit; and
- by changes to the settings of heritage assets and thereby potentially affecting their significance.

3.28. **Section 7** considers the effects of the proposed development on the significance of relevant designated heritage assets. The potential effects, aligned with national policy

terminology, are:

- To better reveal or enhance its significance;
- Cause no effect to its significance;
- Cause 'less than substantial harm' to its significance; or
- Cause 'substantial harm' or 'loss of significance'

3.29. In line with national policy, the effects on the significance of non-designated heritage assets are also assessed to allow the decision-maker to take it into account when determining the application.

Townscape and Visual Assessment

3.30. A townscape and visual assessment involves the measurement of environmental effects as experienced by people and, therefore, involves a quantitative, qualitative and perceptual measurement.

Assessment of the proposed development against policy

3.31. The final design is assessed in **Section 7** of this report, considering national, regional/strategic, and local townscape and heritage policy requirements. The material used to undertake the assessment includes the drawings prepared by Brightspace Architects, their DAS, and AVRs produced by visualisation specialists Future Reality Studios.

3.32. The AVRs represent a general spread of views which illustrate the urban relationships likely to arise between the proposal and its surroundings. Each viewpoint position was chosen to represent 'maximum exposure' of the proposed development and its 'maximum conjunction' with sensitive townscape elements within its context, including heritage assets. The AVRs were created by incorporating a computer model of the proposal accurately into surveyed photographs of the chosen views. Technical methodology for creating AVRs is included in Appendix B of this report.

3.33. The assessment commentary that accompanies the AVRs is intended to provide 'a clearly expressed and non-technical narrative argument that sets out 'what matters and why'

in terms of heritage significance and the setting of assets affected, together with the effects of the development upon them' in accordance with Historic England's recommendations in Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition, 2017).

Photography of the AVRs

3.34. To assess the visual effects of the Proposed Development, the views are presented in Section XX as follows:

- **Existing:** Daytime view of the existing surroundings and site (October 2020);
- **Proposed:** As existing view with the proposed development inserted into the view in a wireline (AVR1) format, showing the silhouette of the proposals confirming the degree of visibility with those parts occluded by existing structure and foliage, shown in dotted line.

3.35. **Figure 3** shows the locations of the viewpoints included in this report. Altogether, 5 viewpoint locations have been identified. These include a selection from the adjacent conservation area, main transport routes and surrounding residential locations. This selection is sufficient to assess the impact of the proposed scheme on the various receptors.

- **View 01:** Top of Guessens Road (AVR1)
- **View 02:** Old Cottage on Bridge Road (AVR1)
- **View 03:** Top of Parkway (AVR1)
- **View 04:** Campus West Library (AVR1)
- **View 05:** Bridge Road, John Lewis Car Park (AVR1)

4. CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE SITE AND THE SURROUNDING TOWNSCAPE

- 4.1. The Campus was originally planned to become a civic area to the north of the commercial part of the Town Centre. The history of this part of WGC has been extensively described in the Heritage, Townscape and Visual report (Bridges Associates, August 2020) and will only be briefly summarised below.

The Campus

- 4.2. The original civic and cultural area to the north of the commercial part of the Town Centre remains separated from the latter as Bridge Road forms a major traffic artery between these areas. The defining element of The Campus is the exedra that determines the linear Parkway to the south.
- 4.3. The development of The Campus, much like the commercial part of the Town Centre, dates from various decades throughout the 20th century. Whilst principle layout for The Campus was established in the original 1920 masterplan by de Soissons, development did not start until the 1930s with the construction of the Council Offices (NDHA) on the corner of Bridge Road and The Campus. The principle for the development of The Campus is laid out de Soissons masterplan from 1920 which sought to establish a consistent building frontage along the northern side Campus thereby forming a central green space in the middle. The area between the buildings and the old railway line was envisioned to form part of a parkland retaining trees from the ancient Sherrardswood.
- 4.4. However, in reality, the development of The Campus was much more piecemeal and today displays a variety of styles and ages that when compared to de Soissons' original vision for the area were never implemented. These range from the Modernist Campus West building (1973-5), to the 1935 neo-Georgian Garden City style of the Council Offices building located at the south east corner. Between the two buildings lie the c. 1958 Oaklands College campus and the Police Station of c. 1965. Overall, whilst the underlying layout established as per de Soissons' masterplan in 1920

survives, the individual elements somewhat detract from the underlying core principle of symmetrical harmony in the townscape as envisioned by de Soissons. The extensive car parking behind the buildings on the eastern side of The Campus has further undermined the original concept of an idyllic townscape situated in a parkland setting, and is a waste of a prime site.

- 4.5. The Campus contrasts with the more formal and ordered Town Centre commercial core where the buildings line the street frontages, focal points are positioned at corners with some buildings arranged to create open spaces in between. Instead, this part of The Campus, whilst retaining its original radial layout as established in the 1920s, has evolved in a distinctly different manner. This has resulted in a somewhat ad-hoc layout of buildings around the entire Campus where each building plot sits within an open space, with facades neither aligned to the road frontage nor on or close to the back of pavement. Each building is aligned differently, not implementing any uniformity around the entire circumference.
- 4.6. Whilst this is not what was originally envisioned by De Soissons for this part of the Town Centre, the existing open site of Campus West Car Park provides an opportunity to re-establish an edge and 'a bookend' to this north-western corner of The Campus that at present remains a 'non-space' without any clear definition or presence.

Application Site

- 4.7. The Site is located at the western edge of The Campus. The Site covers an area of approximately 2.30 hectares and is broadly rectangular in plan with the exception of the longer northern edge and the curved southern and eastern boundaries defined by The Campus.
- 4.8. The Site lies within the planned civic core of de Soissons' plan for WGC. Its location on the western edge of The Campus means it is on the boundary between the civic and residential zones. The western campus civic core consists of the leisure centre while the main route in from the west (B195) is characterised by substantial plots containing well

proportioned buildings that actively address the street scene. The style of the architecture varies across the civic zone in this area ranging from neo-Georgian to the 1958 campus college and the 1965 Police Station but, they all share a use of sympathetic materials that are in line with the traditional architecture of the rest of the Garden City.

- 4.9. A remnant of the countryside setting contributing toward the significance of the CA is the remaining mature trees within the boundary of the Site. Both the northern and southern edges of the Site are defined by a belt of historic and mature trees. The woodland to the north forms part of Ayot Greenway, a key pedestrian and cycling route between Ayot St. Peter and Wheathampstead. The mature trees are a remnant of Sherrardspark Wood which now remains a compact woodland to the north-west of the Town Centre.
- 4.10. The character of the Site is relatively inward-looking. This is due to it being surrounded by a mature belt of trees to both south and north limiting its visibility from the surrounding townscape (albeit its current use as a surface car parks can be glimpsed through trees in closer views). There is no intervisibility between the Site and key nodal points or landmarks within the Town Centre.

Building typology: Car parks

- 4.11. The original design for Welwyn Garden City did not anticipate the rapid growth in the use of cars through the twentieth century and therefore it did not provide the necessary infrastructure. This was addressed through the 1960s with a series of surface and decked car parks built around the northern edges of The Campus and the town centre. The building type is not part of the historic building typology of WGC and its function and appearance is generally uncharacteristic to all aspects of its townscape.