



# **Campus West Decked Car Park, Welwyn Garden City Planning Statement**

7<sup>th</sup> July 2021

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# AZ URBAN STUDIO

## Campus West Decked Car Park, Welwyn Garden City

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**Status:** Submission v2  
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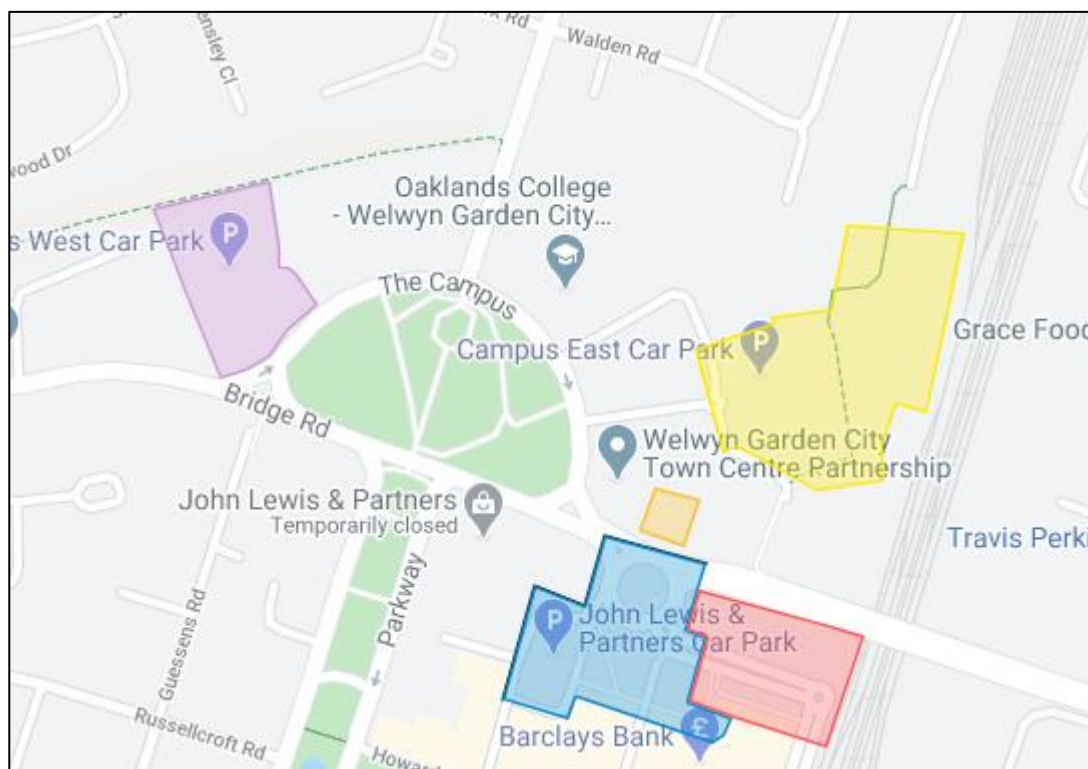
## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by AZ Urban Studio on behalf of Bourne Group (acting as design and build contractor for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council) in support of an application for the proposed redevelopment of Campus West Car Park Welwyn Garden City ('the application site').
- 1.2. 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)** 30 of the bays will be disabled spaces, 21 of the bays will be parent and child spaces, and 10 of the bays will have electric vehicle charging facilities. 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.
- 1.3. The purpose of this Statement is to assess the proposed development in the context of planning policy, as well as other relevant planning guidance and any other material considerations. The Statement explains how the proposed development is in accordance with and will deliver the objectives of such policies and therefore represents an appropriate and acceptable development for the area.
- 1.4. Following extensive pre-application engagement with the Council and other statutory consultees, it is considered that the proposed scheme has been refined to the point that it now represents a high-quality scheme that will satisfy all relevant parties, benefiting both Welwyn Garden City and the borough as a whole.
- 1.5. In addition, it is important to note that the applicant has chosen to 'front-load' the application as much as possible in terms of the amount of information that has been included as part of this submission. The intention behind this approach is to minimise the need for pre-commencement conditions to be attached to a potential consent which would thereby allow construction work to commence on Site promptly after consent is issued.

### ***Unlocking the regeneration of Welwyn Garden City***

- 1.6. The proposed application is for a standalone development and will deliver improved parking provision for the town centre. However, it should be viewed in part as a component of the Council's emerging strategies for the town centre as outlined in existing and emerging planning policy and strategy documents, assessed in later sections of this report.

- 1.7. The construction of a decked car park and the increase of parking provision at Campus West will allow the consolidation of town centre parking which will allow the partial closure of existing parking at Campus East and possible refurbishment or redevelopment at Hunters Bridge. It will also allow - at a later stage - the redevelopment of Campus East without necessitating an undue impact on car parking that serves permit holders, including Council staff and leaseholders, and without unduly impacting local businesses.



**Figure 1.** Map showing approximate boundaries of elements of wider WGC2120 area (Purple = Campus West; Yellow = Campus East; Blue = TCN SPD Area; Red = Hunters Bridge Car Park; Orange = Cherry Tree Car Park)

- 1.8. The later redevelopment of Campus East (as part of the wider WGC 2120 area) has been envisaged for several years, and the Site is identified as part of the Call for Sites in the EIP for the new Local Plan. Although at a relatively early stage, it is envisaged in the Council's Housing and Economic Land Assessment (HELAA) 2019 and other documents that the future development of this Site, as well as Hunters Bridge and others, will include:

Campus East (HELAA Reference: Han 40a)

A residential development with capacity for up to 480 dwellings (in addition to the 100 dwellings already proposed for allocation in the draft Local Plan on Site Han 40 (Land at Town Centre North)).

#### Hunters Bridge Car Park

Possible refurbishment or reconstruction to provide a new multi-storey car park.

#### Cherry Tree Car Park

Possible addition of a new commercial unit on the part of the car park providing flexible space for a range of uses.

1.9. The development of a decked car park at Campus West has several direct benefits as a standalone project as well as assisting in the broader regeneration of the town.

Direct benefits include:

- The consolidation and centralisation of parking in a highly accessible location, freeing up much-needed land for residential and mixed-use development;
- More efficient use of the land to provide more car parking on the same site area;
- Retention of retail parking close to existing levels, thereby protecting Welwyn Garden City's retail offer;
- Supporting the facilities at Campus West by offering additional parking capacity at peak times at evenings and weekends;
- Improvements to surrounding landscaping.

1.10. When viewed with the future regeneration of Campus East and the rest of the wider WGC2120 sites, the proposed developments will provide a series of public benefits for the town, residents, and visitors. These include:

#### Delivery of new homes

- Delivery of up to 480 new homes which will help to create a vibrant, mixed community in the heart of the town centre and help meet the Council's housing delivery targets.

#### Regeneration

- All potential elements of the wider project will assist in the optimisation of development potential of these important town centre sites providing new

homes and jobs in a manner that respects the existing character of Welwyn Garden City while revitalising areas that are currently underused.

- Delivering new buildings of high design quality that respond both to the existing local context and the shared ambitions of Welwyn Garden City's future as a vibrant town centre.
- Securing a mix of housing and commercial space, to the long-term social and economic benefit of the surrounding community, which contributes to the on-going promotion of Welwyn Garden City as a place to live, work and play

#### Assisting with job creation and protection

- Protection of local jobs in the town centre
- Creating new full-time equivalent jobs in retail and commercial roles in potential new retail and commercial space
- Generation of local employment through a multi-million-pound investment in construction costs

1.11. An overall net loss in car parking in the town centre is expected when all of the development plots have been completed.

#### ***Submission Material***

- 1.12. This submission includes a comprehensive suite of material including:
- Design and Access Statement (including plans and visualisations) (Brightspace Architects)
  - Scale plans (Brightspace Architects)
  - Planning Statement (AZ Urban Studio)
  - Air Quality Assessment (Ensafe)
  - Arboricultural Report and Survey (Tim Moya Associates)
  - Archaeological Desk-based Assessment (Archaeological Solutions Ltd)
  - Construction Management Plan (Bourne Group)
  - Contamination – Ground Investigation Report (WYG)
  - Contamination – Phase 1 Geo-Environmental Assessment (WYG)
  - Daylight, Sunlight and Overshadowing Assessment (BLDA)
  - Ecology Report (incl. Extended Phase 1 Habitat Assessment, Bat Scoping Assessment and Great Crested Newt HIS Survey) (TMA)
  - Energy Statement (BSP)
  - Spill Lighting Layout Drawing (Wirefield)

- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy (Conisbee)
- Noise Assessment (Hepworth Acoustics)
- Transport Statement (Arup)
- Townscape, Heritage and Visual Assessment (Bridges Associates)
- Landscape proposal (Terra Firma)
- Application forms and the appropriate fee



## 2. SITE & SURROUNDINGS / RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY OF SITE

### *The Site*

- 2.1. Campus West is a 1970s built complex located at the north-western end of Parkway in Welwyn Garden City. The building contains a restaurant, multi-screen cinema, roller rink, soft play area and a library and these services are open daily. The current car park has 334 spaces (including 12 advisory disabled bays) which are currently provided within the red line boundary.
- 2.2. The Site covers an area of approximately 1.22 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.
- 2.3. The area to the east of the Site is occupied by the Campus West Arts & Conference Centre and the Welwyn Garden City Central Library. Hardstanding parking is located to the west of the Site adjoining the access road connecting to The Campus.
- 2.4. The perimeter of the Site is defined by landscaped areas with mature trees. The landscaping is broken along the south boundary by the access road and pedestrian entrance into the Art Centre.
- 2.5. The Campus West Arts & Conference Centre and the Welwyn Garden City Central Library buildings are flat roofed brick, circa 1980 buildings up to five storeys in height.
- 2.6. There are currently 18 cycle parking spaces (9 Sheffield Stands) located in close proximity to the Site, outside of the library.

### *Surroundings*

- 2.7. The northern boundary of the Site is defined by a former rail corridor (National Route 12) which is now a public footpath (Ayot Greenway) within the original rail cutting residing at approximately 3m below the site level. The corridor is densely vegetated with both mature and semi-mature trees growing along the embankments and crest immediately adjacent to the Site. Predominantly residential areas of detached and semi-detached houses with associated gardens lie beyond the former rail corridor to the north.
- 2.8. To the east, Digswell Road forms the boundary with Welwyn Garden City Theatre and Oaklands College. A car park is situated further east.

- 2.9. The Campus (road) comprises the southern boundary and encloses a public park further to the south. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's offices are situated further to the south of the park on the south side of Bridge Road.
- 2.10. The western boundary of the Site is separated from a sheltered/retirement housing development by a hedgerow. The development comprises four storey blocks of flats and associated landscaped areas. Approximately 300 metres to the west of the Site lies the south-eastern edge of the Sherrardspark Wood SSSI.
- 2.11. Access to the car park and leisure facilities is from The Campus gyratory system. Servicing takes place from Digswell Road to the rear of the theatre complex. A small drop-off and pickup loop are situated adjacent to Campus West immediately before entering the main part of the car park.
- 2.12. In terms of public transport, the nearest bus stop is located on The Campus by the car park entrance. It is served by bus routes 215, 301, 314, 315, 366, 388, 403, W4 and W14. Welwyn Garden City Bus Station is at a 550m walking distance (a 6-minute walk). The Railway Station is located 750m away (a 10-minute walk).

### ***Relevant Planning History***

- 2.13. Based on a review of the Local Planning Authority's online planning register, the Site has little relevant planning history.
- 2.14. Planning permission was granted in 1988 (ref: C6/1988/1211/FP) for the '*Provision of additional parking spaces to public car park*'. At this time, details of this application are not available to view online.
- 2.15. The Site was redeveloped into Campus West by 1972. Prior to this, in the period between 1920-1940, there were a workmen's' camp, laundry, a sawmill and a rail siding on the Site. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Site was occupied by woodland which lay next to the existing railway line.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1. The proposed development has been designed by Bourne Group and Bright Space Architects. The description of 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”*

#### 4. PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

- 4.1. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, which both promote pre-application discussion as a process of providing a better and more integrated way of working on emerging proposals, the applicant and project team have undertaken an extensive programme of pre-application engagement with Officers from the Council, Historic England, Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and the Local Highways Authority. These constructive discussions have helped formulate the final proposals and have resulted in a scheme which both meets the requirements of the applicant whilst also addressing points raised by Officers.
- 4.2. In addition to the pre-application advice from the Officers listed, there has been extensive consultation with residents and other stakeholders: this consultation is covered in a separate section towards the end of this Statement.
- 4.3. The key milestones of the pre-application engagement process are set out in this section of the Planning Statement.

##### *Planning*

- 4.4. A detailed request for pre-application advice was made to the Council in April 2020. Since then, there have been ongoing discussions with Council officers which have informed the detailed design.

##### *Heritage*

- 4.5. An initial request for pre-application advice relating specifically to heritage was made to Historic England on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 for development of the following description: "*Construction of a three-storey multi-storey car park comprising 691 parking spaces, cycle parking, a small amount of storage and ancillary space and associated landscaping (including the removal of trees).*"
- 4.6. Historic England Officers subsequently issued a written advice note on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020. It raised a number of concerns with the nascent proposals including that the proposals would not integrate well with the verdant setting of the conservation area, that the inconsistent approach to the elevation treatment was not in keeping with the neo-Georgian architectural setting, and that the car park had the potential to be "*overly dominant*". The letter stated that Historic England "*do not advocate that the design*

*should be traditional in form and material, but it should show consistency of design across all elevations and relate to the street scene on all sides*". It concluded that *"Historic England feel strongly that the scheme as proposed would result in less than substantial harm, of a moderate level, to the character of the Welwyn Conservation Area"*. It also noted that *"this site is one that could be used for some intensified car parking"* and that future options for development could be discussed.

- 4.7. A meeting was arranged with Historic England Officers (held virtually on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021) to discuss changes to the proposed scheme. This resulted in the issuance of a second pre-application advice letter specifically relating to heritage on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021.
- 4.8. The letter noted that, as the height of the car park had been reduced by one level, *"the height of this building is now no longer a heritage concern"*. It also stated the following: *"we also note the extra attention that has been paid to the elevation facing the Ayot Greenway, which has now been better related to the more verdant environment and creates a more consistent approach to façade treatment around the whole of the building. We also note that further areas of mature planting will be placed along the Bridge Road elevation to better screen the building from view"*.
- 4.9. The letter concluded that, subject to minor alterations relating to the colour of the cladding and lighting on the top deck, Historic England Officers are *"broadly content with the proposals"* and *"consider that the scheme would cause minimal harm to the character and significance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area"*.

### *Highways*

- 4.10. Two meetings have taken place with the Local Highways Authority (Hertfordshire County Council) in relation to the proposals. The first, which took place virtually on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, related to development described as follows: *"Construction of a three-storey multi-storey car park comprising 691 parking spaces, cycle parking, a small amount of storage and ancillary space and associated landscaping (including the removal of trees)."*
- 4.11. Following this meeting, HCC Highways issued an initial written advice letter on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020. As well as providing advice concerning the information that would likely be required to support a future planning application, the letter requested more information regarding the rationale behind the proposed number of parking spaces.

- 4.12. The applicant subsequently provided additional information to HCC Highways on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020. HCC Highways issued an amended written advice letter on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020. This letter concluded that the number of parking spaces proposed at that point (691) would be acceptable in highways terms as the level of new provision would *“be in line with the Council’s Parking Standards SPG and other policies that promote a balanced approach to parking”*.
- 4.13. Comments were also made regarding the site layout, with concerns raised about the location of the cycle parking spaces, and more information was requested relating to vehicle tracking and pedestrian access and paths.
- 4.14. Following further discussions with the Local Planning Authority and Historic England Officers, the scheme was subsequently revised to comprise only a single deck car park, to provide 490 car parking spaces in total (down from 691 in the previous iteration of the proposal). The proposed car park would therefore provide a net decrease of 318 (previously 117) car parking spaces overall if both the Campus West and Campus East car parks are considered. As with the previous iteration, HCC Highways concluded in the letter that *“the new provision would be in line with the Council’s Parking Standards SPG and other policies that promote a balanced approach to parking”*.
- 4.15. HCC Highways’ letter also stated that Officers welcomed changes to the site layout: *“I welcome the widening of the new marked pedestrian paths from previous 1m to 2m. This meets the aims of LTP4 and the NPPF to design places that are safe for pedestrians and not favour motor traffic and this also applies to the MSCP design”*.
- 4.16. However, there were a number of issues which HCC Highways asked to be addressed in the final submission. These issues are listed below along with a response explaining how the design team have sought to address each of them. The amendments noted in the responses are shown on the layout plans prepared by Bourne which have been submitted as part of the application.
- **HCC Highways:** Pedestrian intervisibility at pedestrian crossings in both directions near the exit and entrance has not been marked on the plan but would need to be.  
*Response: 25m forward visibility to comply with DMRB guidelines is now shown on the plans prepared by Bourne. Low level planting will facilitate pedestrian visibility.*

- **HCC Highways:** For the first few bays located to the south on entry to the car park, please show visibility to approaching traffic from the east.
- **Response:** *These bays have been removed as part of the redesign.*
- **HCC Highways:** I would expect the path providing pedestrian access from the south to be in the form of a ramp with kerbs to both sides (or a similar physical restraint that prevents parking in this space).
- **Response:** *The path now contains kerbs to both sides.*
- **HCC Highways:** The location of the wheelchair accessible bays is still too remote (it is even further than the parent and child bays) to the nearest town centre uses.
- **Response:** *The layout has been amended to ensure that the wheelchair accessible bays are not in a remote location.*
- **HCC Highways:** Any future application would be expected to show a 1.8m wide (though 2m recommended) wheelchair accessible route between the nearest public highway and across the car park.
- **Response:** *A 2m wide wheelchair accessible route is now shown.*
- **HCC Highways:** Pedestrian access to the NCN 57 (Ayot Greenway) is still not shown on the application drawings. Please extend the pedestrian route marking from the south (wheelchair accessible bays) and from the west to the entrance of the Ayot Greenway in the north eastern corner of the car park.
- **Response:** *Pedestrian access to the Ayot Greenway is now shown on the drawings at the north east of the Site. The pedestrian access has been extended as requested.*
- **HCC Highways:** Regarding vehicle tracking, there are still concerns with access across the car park as no details of a large car used for tracking were submitted (DB32 used is outdated).
- **Response:** *Tracking including a large car is now shown on the drawings.*
- **HCC Highways:** Any future application should clearly demonstrate that all on-site parking spaces can be accessed by a vehicle and that on-site turning space is sufficient to enable all servicing vehicles to enter and exit the Site in forward gear.
- **Response:** *Tracking for large cars and fire appliances is shown on the plans.*
- **HCC Highways:** There is no information provided on how the number of cycle spaces was calculated. The full application should therefore assess the intended users of these spaces. Since the spaces will be located in an insecure area outside the car park, I would expect to see how the bicycles will be protected from theft.

**Response:** See Transport Statement for calculation. The cycle spaces will be located in a well-lit location and there will be reduced mobility hand cranked spaces at each end of the row of 15.

- **HCC Highways:** A defined cycle and pedestrian route between Ayot Greenway to the north and the highway network to the south would be required.

**Response:** This route is provided via new and existing tarmac paths.

- **HCC Highways:** The EV charging points are welcome but the percentage provision proposed at 1.4% is too low. At least 10% of total spaces would need to be provide active charging points with a further 10% (at least) offering physical conduits to support future charging points, and the reservation of electrical capacity (passive).

**Response:** Future provision for an additional 10% of bays will be made by way of suitable infrastructure and conduits. The Council have applied for a grant under the UKPN Green Recovery Fund to allow the existing sub-station to be upgraded to provide the supply for additional EV charging points.

- **HCC Highways:** It would be expected that the formal application contains a PIA assessment covering the 5-year period.

**Response:** A PIA assessment covering a five-year period is included in the Transport Statement.

- **HCC Highways:** The junction modelling work would need to include the junction of Bridge Road and the Campus and Parkway Bridge Road.

**Response:** This modelling is included in the Transport Statement.

- **HCC Highways:** A Construction Management Plan (CMP) would be required to ensure there are no impacts upon the network.

**Response:** A CMP has been included as part of this application.

4.17. HCC Highways suggested that the following draft condition (amongst others) is attached to any future consent: “The car park hereby approved shall not be made available for use until such time as the car park at Campus East is closed for use”.

4.18. It is the applicant’s view that such a condition would be acceptable in principle, but it should be noted that there is a possibility that 110 spaces may be retained on Site during the Campus East Construction period.

### *Flooding and Drainage*



- 4.19. The project team have also taken the opportunity to engage with the Lead Local Flood Authority (Hertfordshire County Council) prior to the submission of this application. A request for pre-application flooding and drainage advice was made on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The LLFA subsequently issued an advice letter on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020.
- 4.20. The advice letter commented on some of the technical aspects of the proposals and set out what the LLFA would expect to see included as part of the application in drainage terms. The technical documents submitted address the comments raised. Thames Water have also confirmed that there will be sufficient surface water capacity in their sewerage network to serve the development.

#### *Crime Prevention*

- 4.21. A meeting has also been held with the Crime Prevention Design Advisor and their comments have been taken on board to help inform the final proposals.

## 5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

### *Development Plan*

- 5.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The Statutory Development Plan for the Site comprises the saved policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (2005), the Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan (2012-2014), and the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan adopted (2007).
- 5.2. In addition, the Council's emerging Local Plan is well developed and has undergone several rounds of Examination in Public: it is therefore a material consideration for this proposed scheme.

### *Saved Policies of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (2007)*

- 5.3. Saved Policy SD1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Local Plan (Sustainable Development) states that development proposals will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the principles of sustainable development are satisfied and that they accord with the objectives and policies of the plan.
- 5.4. Saved Policy R1 (Maximising the use of previously developed land) confirms that in order to make the best use of land in the district, the Council will require development to take place on land which has been previously used or developed.
- 5.5. Saved Policy R2 (Contaminated Land) states that the Council will encourage proposals for the development and reuse of land which is or may be contaminated.
- 5.6. Saved Policy R3 (Energy Efficiency) seeks measures to maximise energy conservation through the design of buildings, site layout and provision of landscaping and incorporate the best practical environmental option for energy supply.
- 5.7. Saved Policy R7 (Protection of ground and surface water) states that planning permission will not be granted for development which poses a threat to the quality of both surface and/or groundwater. The policy also encourages the use of sustainable drainage systems, dependent on local Site and underlying groundwater considerations.

- 5.8. Saved Policy R11 (Biodiversity and Development) states that new development will be required to demonstrate how it would contribute positively to the biodiversity of the Site.
- 5.9. Saved Policy R15 (Wildlife Sites) states that planning permission will not be granted for any development which would have an adverse effect on Wildlife Sites unless suitable mitigation measures are proposed, and it can be demonstrated that the reasons for development outweigh the need to safeguard the biodiversity of the Site.
- 5.10. Saved Policy R17 (Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows) seeks the protection and retention of existing trees and hedgerows, along with the introduction of new planting with locally native species, in accordance with Policy D8 Landscaping.
- 5.11. Saved Policy R18 (Air Quality) states that the Council will have regard to the potential effects of a development on local air quality when determining planning applications. Consideration will be given to both the operational characteristics of the development and to the traffic generated by it.
- 5.12. Saved Policy R19 (Noise and Vibration Pollution) seeks to prevent development which is likely to generate unacceptable noise or vibration for other land uses.
- 5.13. Saved Policy R24 (Character Appraisals and Enhancements) states that the Council will produce a character appraisal for each of the district's Conservation Areas to guide the design of development or alterations to existing buildings.
- 5.14. Saved Policy M1 (Integrating Transport and Land Use) states that new development will be permitted only in locations with accessibility to pedestrian and cycle routes and passenger transport services, or where this can be created, and where the environment and infrastructure can accommodate the amount and type of transport movement likely to be generated.
- 5.15. Saved Policy M2 (Transport Assessments) states that developers of major new traffic generating developments will be required to submit a transport assessment/statement with the planning application. This must demonstrate the measures to be taken to minimise vehicular movements through improvements to passenger transport, pedestrian, and cycling facilities and state whether new highways works, or traffic management measures will be required.
- 5.16. Saved Policy M14 (Parking) states that the Council will require parking provision for new development to be made in accordance with the standards set out in the Council's

supplementary planning guidance on parking. The Interim Policy for Car Parking Standards (2014) states that the Council will treat all car parking standards set out in the Welwyn Hatfield Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Guidance as guidelines rather than maximums.

- 5.17. Saved Policy D1 (Quality of Design) sets out that 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.
- 5.18. Saved Policy D2 (Character and Context) confirms that 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.
- 5.19. Saved Policy D4 (Quality of the Public Realm) states that the Council will expect new development to either create or enhance public areas and the public realm where appropriate.
- 5.20. Saved Policy D5 (Design for Movement) states that the Council will require all new proposed development to take account of its impact on existing and proposed movement patterns. Parking and traffic management provision must be included in new development.
- 5.21. Saved Policy D6 (Legibility) states that 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.
- 5.22. Saved Policy D7 (Safety by Design) requires the design of new development to contribute to safer communities, to help with the reduction of the fear of crime.
- 5.23. Saved Policy D8 (Landscaping) sets out that all development should include landscaping as an integral part of the overall design, which should reflect the strong tradition of urban landscape design in the district. Landscaping schemes will require the use of materials which respect the character of the area, the planting of trees, hedgerows and shrubs and details of future maintenance. On larger schemes, certain landscaped areas will be required to be designed in a manner capable of adoption.

### ***Emerging Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Policies***

- 5.24. Policy SADM 2 of the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (August 2016), states the following:

*“Highway Network and Safety Development proposals will be permitted provided:*

- i. There would be no unacceptable impacts on the local and / or strategic transport network. Development proposals which generate a significant amount of traffic movements must be accompanied by either a Transport Assessment or Transport Statement as appropriate in accordance with the criteria in the Hertfordshire County Council Highway Design Guidance;*
- ii. There would be no negative impacts on highway safety;*
- iii. They are designed to allow safe and suitable means of access and site operation; and*
- iv. They provide satisfactory and suitable levels of parking”*

- 5.25. Draft Local Plan Policy SP 9 (Place Making and High-Quality Design) states that proposals will be required to deliver a high-quality design that fosters a positive sense of place by responding to the following principles in an integrated and coherent way.

- 5.26. Policy SP 16 (Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Strategy) seeks to support the development of Welwyn Garden City town centre as the borough’s primary comparison shopping retail destination. It states that all new development with the town centre will be required to contribute positively to this strategy.

- 5.27. Policy SADM 15 (Heritage) advises that proposals which affect designated heritage assets, and the wider historic environment should respect the character, appearance and setting of the asset and historic environment in terms of design, scale, materials and impact on key views.

- 5.28. Policy SADM 11 (Amenity and Layout) sets out that all proposals will be required to create and protect a good standard of amenity for buildings and external open space. Specifically, all proposals should ensure (inter alia):

*“i. The levels of sunlight and daylight within buildings and open spaces, and garden areas in particular, are satisfactory.*

*ii. A reasonable degree of privacy to existing private living space and the main private garden area, with overlooking limited to an acceptable degree.*

*iii. New development is not overbearing upon existing buildings and open spaces.*

*iv. The outlook and visual amenity afforded from within buildings and private/communal garden areas should be satisfactory, taking account of the relationship with neighbouring buildings and the wider street scene.”*

5.29. Policy SADM 14 (Flood Risk and Surface Water Management) sets out that all major development proposals will be required to manage surface water runoff and surface water flood risk via the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems that meet a set of criteria.

5.30. Policy SADM 18 (Environmental Pollution) sets out that planning applications for proposals on land formerly used for industrial, commercial or utilities purposes, or land which is considered to be contaminated or potentially contaminated, must be accompanied by a preliminary Contaminated Land Risk Assessment. Proposals which, by their nature, risk contributing to soil and water pollution will be required to demonstrate how this risk will be avoided or mitigated to an acceptable level.

5.31. Policy SADM 20 (Acceptable uses outside the Welwyn Garden City Core Retail Zone (The Campus, Parkway and Church Road)) outlines development criteria and states that where the Site currently provides car parking which serves the needs of the town centre as a whole, this must be replaced within the development site or in an appropriate alternative location.

### ***National Planning Policy / Guidance / Requirements***

5.32. Relevant guidance is included within the following national policy documents:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2019)
- National Planning Practice Guidance

5.33. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) states the following with regard to transport at paragraph 106:

*“In town centres, local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking so that it is convenient, safe and secure...”*

5.34. It then goes on to state the following in paragraph 109:

*“Development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe”*

5.35. Chapter 12 of the NPPF (Achieving well-designed places) sets out that the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Paragraph 127 contained within this chapter sets out that planning policies and decision should ensure that developments will:

*“- 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;*  
*- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*  
*- 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);*  
*- 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;*  
*- 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*  
*- 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.”*

5.36. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF continues that *“in determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings”*

5.37. Paragraph 165 of the NPPF sets out that major developments should incorporate sustainable urban drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate. The systems used should:

*- take account of advice from the lead local flood authority;*  
*- have appropriate proposed minimum operational standards;*  
*- have maintenance arrangements in place to ensure an acceptable standard of operation for the lifetime of the development; and*  
*where possible, provide multifunctional benefits.*

- 5.38. Chapter 16 of the NPPF Conserving and enhancing the historic environment seeks to ensure that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Paragraph 190 included within chapter 16 sets out that Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any 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.
- 5.39. Paragraph 194 of the NPPF continues that 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.

### **County Council Policy**

- 5.40. The County Council has various policies in relation to transport, flooding and social infrastructure.
- 5.41. Although the County Council's role is limited to determining applications related to wastes and minerals, we have been mindful of the County's recently adopted Local Transport Plan 2018-2032. This document sets out how transport can help deliver a positive future vision for Hertfordshire by having a major input into wider policies such as economic growth, meeting housing needs, improving public health and reducing environmental damage whilst also providing for safe and efficient travel.
- 5.42. Policy 2 (Including Land Use Planning), states that the County Council will encourage locations of new development in areas served by or with the potential to be served by high quality transport facilities, as an alternative to the car.
- 5.43. Policy 4 (Demand Management) seeks to reduce the use of private cars by managing demand.

*"The county council considers greater traffic demand management to be essential in the county's urban areas in the next five years to achieve modal shift and improve sustainable travel provision. This can only currently be achieved efficiently and effectively through parking restrictions and charging applied to on-street, off-street and potentially at workplace parking. The*



*county council will work with the district and borough councils and other key stakeholders to develop locally appropriate strategies”*

### **Supplementary Planning Documents / Guidance**

5.44. Further guidance is provided at the local level with adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and Planning Guidance. These currently include:

- Welwyn Garden City Town Centre North SPD (2015)
- Interim Policy for Car Parking Standards and Garage Sizes
- Planning Obligations SPD (2012)
- Supplementary Design Guidance (2005)
- Parking Standards (2004)

### **Site Designations**

5.45. The Site is subject to a number of designations in the Council’s adopted Proposals Map (2005). These designations aid in guiding and shaping development and need to be taken into consideration within any future planning application for the Site. Adopted and emerging designations include the following:

#### Adopted – District Plan 2005

Site located within:

- Welwyn Garden City Town Centre
- Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area

Site located near or adjacent to:

- Wildlife Site
- Urban Open Land (UOL56)

#### Emerging – new Local Plan

Site located within:

- Welwyn Garden City Town Centre
- Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area
- SADM20 – Welwyn Garden City Town Centre – The Campus

Site located near or adjacent to:

- Wildlife Site
- Urban Open Land (UOL61)

## **6. KEY PLANNING ISSUES**

6.1. The relevant planning policies are outlined below by policy level and theme, followed by a short evaluation of the outline proposal against these policies. For the purposes of this assessment, we have focused on key planning policy issues, which are:

- Principle of development
- Transport
- Design and townscape
- Heritage and conservation
- Arboriculture
- Neighbourly matters
- Other environmental matters (including flooding and contamination)
- Archaeology

## 7. PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The emerging Local Plan's stated vision for Welwyn Garden City is as follows:

*“To maintain and enhance the commercial, social and environmental success of the town centre, building upon its unique heritage and strengths to achieve a prosperous and vibrant centre offering a diverse range of activities in an attractive, clean and safe environment for the enjoyment of the community and visitors alike.”*

6.2 The development of the new decked car park on this Site will help to facilitate the realisation of this vision. The Site is currently used as a car park and the intensification of the existing car park use is considered to be acceptable subject to a number of factors outlined below and in the later sections of this statement.

6.3 In accordance with District and County Council policies that encourage a shift to more sustainable transport modes, the increase in parking provision at this Site is justified in relation to current and future demand and supply of parking in the town as a whole. Consideration has also been given to future changes in the existing provision across the town.

6.4 Similarly, in accordance with Policy SP 16, the proposed redevelopment of the Site is justified in relation to the Council's broader strategies and visions for the town centre as a whole. The application clearly illustrates how the proposed development supports these strategies and will not be detrimental to the successful current or future implementation of opportunities on other nearby sites, or their ability to meet the town centre vision or objectives.

6.5 Primarily, the fact that part of the town centre's future car parking provision will be consolidated at Campus West (and Hunters Bridge) will support the Council's broader town centre vision: it will facilitate the future redevelopment of the Campus East site and part of the Cherry Tree site to provide new housing and retail / commercial facilities that will contribute to the vitality of the town centre and the district as a whole.

6.6 An overall net decrease in car parking in the town centre is envisioned to have occurred once all elements of the wider development have been completed. In this way, the proposals for Campus West will contribute to the promotion of a shift to more

sustainable transport modes in the town as a whole (a priority of Policy SP4 of the emerging Local Plan).

- 6.7 However, the overall reduction in car parking will not be so great as to compromise the economic viability of the town centre. The Council's Parking Standards SPG (2004) states that car parking provision in town centre development proposals should be set at a level which balances the emphasis on reducing car parking as part of a sustainable transport strategy with the need to ensure the economic viability of the town centre. The proposal seeks to contribute to the striking of this balance.
- 6.8 It is acknowledged that both national and local planning policy seeks to give priority to more sustainable modes of transport and that Welwyn Garden City Town Centre is accessible by non-car modes of transport. However, in this case there is clear support to be found for the proposals in Policy SP16, which, whilst seeking to give priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport in the town centre, also clearly defines the need for the maintenance and optimisation of car parking provision within the town centre.
- 6.9 Existing footways and crossings currently provide pedestrians with direct routes to their destinations and no significant impact is expected for pedestrians as a result of the proposals.
- 6.10 This maintenance and optimisation is not expected to result in any unacceptable impacts on the local or strategic transport networks or on highway safety according to the Transport Statement prepared by Arup. In accordance with emerging Policy SADM 2, the proposal should therefore be supported by the Council.

## 7. TRANSPORT

### *Parking*

- 7.1. A comprehensive Transport Statement has been prepared by Arup following extensive formal pre-application discussions with the County Council Highways team. It is summarised as follows.
- 7.2. The Site currently comprises surface level car parking with a total of 334 spaces provided within the red line boundary. The proposed development will add one decked level to the existing car park and will increase the provision by 156 spaces. A total of 490 spaces will be provided, including 30 disabled bays, 21 parent and child bays and 10 bays with electric vehicle charging facilities. Further passive electric charging provision is proposed. In addition, the development will include improvements to the public realm, increased cycle parking and improved landscaping.
- 7.3. There are a number of car parks provided in Welwyn Garden City. In keeping with national, regional and local policies, the strategy is to redevelop Campus East car park which is more centrally located to local amenities and public transport services. The proposal will help consolidate car parking to facilitate development and support the operation of the town centre. An overall net loss in car parking in the town centre is not expected to compromise the operation of the town centre and this approach is supported by policy.
- 7.4. The proposed car parking is intended to replace those currently in Campus East with no increase in new trips expected on the highway network.
- 7.5. The Transport Statement prepared by Arup shows in the AM peak, the proposed development is forecast to locally redistribute traffic to the Campus West site access by 189 arrival and 7 departure trips. A total of 321 vehicles is expected to arrive, which is an average of 5 to 6 vehicles per minute. This is compared to 2 vehicles per minute currently.
- 7.6. In the PM peak, the proposed development is expected to locally redistribute 114 departure trips from the Campus West site access. A total of 226 vehicles is expected to exit the priority junction which equates to 4 vehicles a minute on average. There are two lanes along The Campus and the net increase in trips represents around 10% of traffic flows at the site access junction.

- 7.7. Given the one-way nature of The Campus, and the redistributed traffic from Campus East to Campus West, it is not expected that there will be wider highway impacts. However, HCC requested junction modelling work for The Campus / Bridge Road priority junctions which is included in the Transport Statement.
- 7.8. Regarding cycle parking, the original June 2020 pre-application scheme presented to HCC proposed 22 Sheffield stands (44 spaces) within the proposed car park to help promote active travel and cycling in Welwyn Garden City. As requested during pre-application discussions, the quantum and location of the cycle parking have been reviewed. The cycle parking spaces are proposed to be short stay for the Campus West complex, to help promote and encourage sustainable travel patterns.
- 7.9. The Transport Statement demonstrates in Table 4 that a total of around 91 short stay cycle parking spaces would meet WHBC standards. The proposed cycle parking arrangement is as follows:
- There are 9 existing Sheffield stands (18 spaces) located by the library;
  - An additional 38 Sheffield stands (74 spaces) are proposed as part of the scheme:
    - 18 Sheffield stands (36 spaces) located by the entrance to the car park;
    - 19 Sheffield stands (38 spaces) located to the northeast of the site access.
- 7.10. The above will provide a total of 92 short stay spaces for the Campus West complex, which meets the number required if WHBC cycle parking standards were applied to the various land uses at Campus West. Of these spaces, the end Sheffield stands (4 spaces) will be suitable for non-standard accessible bikes, which is equivalent to 5% of the proposed cycle parking spaces.
- 7.11. The location of cycle parking is in keeping with LTN 1/20 'Cycle infrastructure design', which states that cycle parking located close to frontages will generally provide good passive surveillance.
- 7.12. There will be some localised changes to pedestrian flows around The Campus and, together with improvement works, overall the proposal will bring benefits to pedestrian facilities in the local area.

- 7.13. It is clear that the proposed new car park will facilitate the continued regeneration of The Campus site and the wider Welwyn Garden City town centre area. In addition to providing upgraded and consolidated parking that will be more convenient and safer for users, the development will allow the co-ordinated delivery of works at Campus East. In this way, it will help to improve the town centre's viability and vitality as both a retail destination and residential area.
- 7.14. The proposal will therefore comply with all relevant saved District Plan policies and all relevant emerging Local Plan policies, as well as national policies and guidance, as discussed in the preceding Principle of Development section.

### **Access**

- 7.15. Vehicular access to the car park is from The Campus at a left in / left out priority junction. The Campus operates one-way clockwise and there are two traffic lanes by the Campus West access. There is currently a drop-off area outside the Campus West building. No changes to the vehicular access to the car park are proposed, no barriers are proposed, and the drop-off area is proposed to be retained.

### **Off-site Improvements**

- 7.16. Following discussions with HCC Highways, a programme of potential off-site improvements to highways infrastructure are included in the accompanying Transport Statement prepared by Arup.

## 8. DESIGN

8.1. Following feedback from consultations with relevant officers, members, and the public, a number of key issues have been considered in terms of revising the initial design proposals. These issues are discussed in the paragraphs below.

### ***Proposed design: bulk, scale and massing***

8.2. As a result of the formal pre-application process and consultation with the public, it is proposed that the upper storey element of the new car park will consist of only 1no. deck. This is in contrast to the original proposal which looked to develop two upper levels of parking.

8.3. Whilst the proposed development has a relatively large footprint; great care has been taken in terms of design to mitigate any negative impacts and to address and reference the immediate surrounding context and the architectural approach taken in general by the better-quality buildings around the campus.

8.4. The Design and Access Statement prepared by project architect, Brightspace, illustrates in detail the design proposal and the rationale behind it. The visualisations and views show how the proposal will sit comfortably within the local context and how, due to the extent of tree cover, only limited views of the new car park are possible from within the local area. Further the document, illustrate how a careful elevation treatment is proposed to break up the mass of the proposed structure and create a more varied elevation.

8.5. The proposed decked element of the new car park will consist of 1no. upper parking deck. There is approximately 2m change in level across the Site from North to South. In relation to the surrounding context, the overall height of the proposal sits below the nearest built elements of the Campus West leisure building and a number of storeys lower than the tallest part of the same building. In relation to Woodside House the proposal is 3 storeys lower than the upper floor and significantly lower than the ridge height.

8.6. The proposals seek to further mitigate the size, scale and bulk of the building through the retention of existing trees along the boundaries and a high-quality elevational treatment. This results in a building which, as Historic England Officers have stated at the pre-application stage, would “*cause minimal harm to the character and significance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area*”.



**Proposed design: materiality**

8.7. Following feedback from consultations with Officers and Members, the key drivers in façade approach are considered to be as follows:

- Provide greater solidity at the facade corners to help frame the façades and improve how ‘grounded’ the building appears;
- Homogenise the façades with a material approach so they appear more consistent as a skin over the whole facade and bring more of the overall facade down to ground level reducing the transparency at ground level;
- Maintain the previous balance between vertical and horizontal emphasis;
- Allow sufficient variation of colour in the facade cladding to continue the use of the autumnal colour palette in a measured and carefully considered way;
- Ensure the design complies with comments from Secure By Design in terms of visibility while maintaining the grounded appearance;
- Clad the building in durable, easily maintainable materials which tonally and texturally blend with the context.

8.8. As described in detail in the design document, a number of options have been considered for the car park’s façade and for its cladding. The preferred options for the cladding are summarised as follows:

<p><b>South and East Elevations</b></p>	<p>Metal cladding wraps the corners of the car park acting as ‘bookends’ to the facades and helping to ‘ground’ the building. To the south, a central feature is created with solid cladding to break the length of the elevation.</p> <p>Aluminium fins are set at a consistent spacing with a strong rhythm to locate angles and colours to break up the façade further. This rhythm varies more to the eastern elevation to prevent stripes of colour being visible. All fins, except those over openings, are extended to the ground to enhance the building’s solidity.</p>
<p><b>West Elevation</b></p>	<p>Aluminium fins are used to maintain consistency. The fins are mostly extended to the ground, except those over openings, to enhance solidity. This elevation is a secondary façade in terms of visibility (it is densely</p>

	<p>screened from the boundary) and importance from the public realm. The rhythm and pattern established to the other elevations is continued.</p> <p>Headlight screening is maintained to the first floor, however the 1.8m privacy screening is no longer required due to the reduction in height (and therefore reduction in potential overlooking to Woodside House).</p>
<p><b>North Elevation</b></p>	<p>Aluminium fins are used to maintain consistency and rhythm across the elevation. Again, the fins are extended to the ground to enhance solidity. Thinner solid cladding panels have been introduced to greater ground the building and enhance the verticality seen from the other side of the Ayot Greenway.</p> <p>Headlight screening will be used to minimise the effect of the light spill onto and across the Ayot Greenway. The fins located in front of the ramp have been angled to further minimise any light spillage. These have also been coloured to match the Corten effect cladding to provide an element of enhanced solidity to this elevation, as also seen with the South elevation.</p>

8.9. Full details of all elevational approaches considered are included in the design document, as is further discussion of the façade approach.

***Proposed design: overview***

8.10. As outlined above, the proposed building will be largely screened from view due to the extent of local tree cover. In addition to this, the materiality and elevational approaches have been developed with regard to the local built environment context to ensure the building fits well within its context. The proposed elevational treatment will provide some interest to the external appearance of the building, and due to its vertical emphasis will break up the scale of the building.

8.11. The proposal will therefore seek to comply with all relevant design policies at a local and national level, including those saved policies of the District Plan and policies contained within the emerging new Local Plan. It will be developed to ensure

compliance with the relevant townscape, public realm and secured by design policies as listed in Section 4 of this Statement.

## 9. HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION

### *Townscape, Heritage and Visual Assessment*

- 9.1. A Townscape, Heritage and Visual Assessment has been prepared by Bridges Associates to accompany the application. It outlines the nature of the Campus within the central part of WGC, noting that it contrasts with the more ordered commercial core of the town. It notes that while the underlying layout, established as per de Soissons' masterplan in 1920, survives (i.e., the exedra layout and civic functions around it), the individual elements "*somewhat detract from the underlying core principle of symmetrical harmony in the townscape as envisioned by de Soissons*". The Assessment states that there is an opportunity to remedy this by providing an anchor and an edge to the south-western edge of The Campus.
- 9.2. The principle of intensification of this Site has been accepted by Historic England (March 2020). With regard to the building's height, scale and massing, the Assessment states that the overall massing of the proposed development will result in a well-articulated composition, respond positively to the shape and levels of the Site and its existing context. The massing addresses the local context on all sides of the Site, including considering the intervisibility from the residential areas to the west as well as the wider prevailing townscape character around Campus West. The proposal responds appropriately to these aspects and is therefore assessed to be a coherent and well-designed addition to this part of WGC.
- 9.3. As covered in the Design section of this Statement, the proposed design has many qualities which respond well to the character of the surrounding context. The proposed articulation of the scheme ensures comfortable proportions and a clear identity for the proposed use. Overall, the proposed scheme utilises a well-reasoned and justified high-quality palette of materials and will be carefully detailed, durable, robust and characterful.
- 9.4. In terms of its effects on the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area, the Assessment finds that the proposed development will:
- Adhere to the established spatial layout of The Campus through the addition of an appropriately scaled edge to The Campus;
  - Keep links to the visual principles of the Conservation Area through referencing key themes found throughout Welwyn Garden City;
  - Respect the primacy of the landscaped and wooded setting of the Campus.

- 9.5. Therefore, compared to the existing condition of the tarmac-surfaced car park lined with tall floodlights, the proposal will enhance the specific qualities associated with the character and appearance of the Conservation Area around The Campus and the wider appearance and character of Welwyn Garden City will be preserved.

### ***Assessment of effects on heritage assets***

- 9.6. 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.
- 9.7. Section 7 of the accompanying Heritage document prepared by Bridges Associates 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'
- 9.8. The Heritage Assessment shows that the scheme would cause minimal, if any, harm to the heritage assets. This view is shared by Historic England, who state in their pre-application response that the scheme would cause minimal harm.
- 9.9. This lack of harm, when considered with the benefits that the scheme is providing as identified in preceding sections of this Statement, specifically facilitating the delivery of a substantial amount of much needed new housing, comprises another reason why the proposed scheme should be approved, in our view.

9.10. The Assessment prepared by Bridges Associates concludes that the proposed development will preserve and in parts enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as required by Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

## 10. ARBORICULTURE

- 10.1. District Plan Policy R17 seeks to protect existing trees whilst Policy D8 requires landscaping to form an integral part of the overall design. Due to the nature of the existing Site, existing landscaping within the central area of the Site is limited, with the exception of a few isolated, low-quality trees.
- 10.2. There are however numerous trees located on the edge site and directly adjoining it, including a dense line of primarily oak trees on the Site's northern boundary. A significant number of trees screen the Site from The Campus on the southern boundary. A cluster of Leyland Cypress trees is located in the north-western corner of the Site and various other species are located in a cluster at the site entrance. A hedge runs along the western boundary.
- 10.3. These trees are important to the character and appearance of the streetscene and many have been surveyed as being Category A or B. They are therefore proposed to be retained as part of the development. The footprint of the MSCP would fall within the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of some of these trees, and it is therefore proposed that as little excavation as possible will be undertaken within the RPAs to prevent the direct risk of harm to the roots of these trees.
- 10.4. An Arboricultural Report has been prepared by Tim Moya Associates and is submitted as part of this application. The report includes the following information:
- An assessment of the character of the local area in relation to trees and other vegetation;
  - A description of the application site and the landscape significance of the trees and other vegetation;
  - Observations on the trees relevant to the proposed development;
  - The planning policies relevant to the consideration of the trees on the Site;
  - The impact of the proposed development upon the tree population in and around the Site;
  - Methods of reducing impacts on trees;
  - Measures to be taken to protect trees during the proposed works; and
  - Proposed new tree planting and landscaping.
- 10.5. The report concludes that the proposals will require the loss of 5 category C trees which are located centrally within the existing car park area. The trees to be removed were planted within the car park and include 2 young maple, 2 early mature ash and 1 early mature lime tree.

- 10.6. Potential tree impacts are considered by the report and the appropriate tree protection measures have been recommended in accordance with best practice to ensure retained trees can be successfully safeguarded during the proposed works.
- 10.7. New planting will enhance the visual and ecological value of the Site and therefore have a positive impact on the character of the local area in the future.
- 10.8. The report concludes that the proposed development complies with the requirements of planning policy as they relate to trees and construction can be successfully achieved by following the information outlined within the report.



## **11. NEIGHBOURLY MATTERS**

11.1. Neighbourly matters, including impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers, have been carefully considered as part of the design development process.

### ***Daylight and Sunlight***

11.2. A comprehensive Daylight, Sunlight and Overshadowing Assessment has been prepared by BLDA and is submitted as part of this application.

11.3. For the purposes of the assessment, a three-dimensional computer model was constructed which was based on a high-definition 3D laser scan survey of the site and its surroundings.

11.4. The technical assessment has quantified the potential loss of daylight and sunlight to the neighbouring residential dwellings resulting from the implementation of the proposed car park development.

11.5. The results of the technical assessment show that c. 95% of the windows tested will fully comply with the Vertical Sky Component (VSC) test while 100% and c. 97% of the habitable rooms tested will fully comply with the Daylight Distribution/No Sky Line (DD/NSL) and Average Daylight Factor (ADF) test respectively.

11.6. Furthermore, in terms of the sunlight effects, all (100%) of the south-orientated neighbouring windows will fully comply with both the annual and winter sunlight criteria.

11.7. Finally, with regard to the overshadowing effects to the communal amenity area at Woodside house the proposed development will cause no adverse effect and the garden will remain well sunlit throughout the year.

11.8. Therefore, the report concludes that the proposed car park development is fully acceptable in daylight, sunlight and overshadowing terms, in the context of the Site, BRE guidance and relevant planning policy.

### ***Noise and vibration***

11.9. A Noise Assessment has been prepared by Hepworth Acoustics which assesses the potential noise impact from the use of the proposed car park on the nearest dwellings. The assessment includes the undertaking of noise surveys of the prevailing noise

climate in the area, calculations of likely noise levels resulting from use of the car park and evaluation of the likely noise impact.

11.10. It concludes that the predicted noise levels from the car park extension are low in absolute terms and within the prevailing noise climate and character of the area. Therefore, the use of the proposed car park would not result in an adverse noise impact on the amenity of people living nearby.

11.11. The proposed development therefore complies with relevant local and national policy in relation to noise.

### ***Lighting***

11.12. Careful consideration has been given to reducing obtrusive light during the night and the visual impact of the lighting scheme during the day, whilst maintaining an adequate level of illuminance for its application within both the covered car park and the external parking areas.

11.13. As stated in the Energy Statement which is submitted as part of this application, the internal car park lighting will take the form of surface-mounted LED luminaires with a rating of IP65 and at least IK10 and anti-ligature.

11.14. The scheme will be controlled such that energy efficiency will be promoted. However, anti-panic light (emergency) will be provided in accordance with Secure by Design scheme requirements.

11.15. Any façade lighting will take the form of a combination of decorative wall mounted weather resistant luminaires with zero upward light component and column mounted luminaires within the open-air parking area. The car park and surrounding landscaped area lighting schemes shall be designed to meet the requirements of CIBSE LG 6, Secured by Design standards and TABLE 1 of the ILE Guidance notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive light (2012).

11.16. Car park internal lighting will be controlled via a combination of presence sensors and photocell, with the time switch programmed to be automatically dimmed between 2300hrs and 0700hrs. External lighting will also be controlled via a combination of time switch and photocell, with the time switch programmed to be automatically dimmed between 2300hrs and 0700hrs. In each case, the photocell shall switch on the

luminaires once the ambient light is at such a level that it is necessary to become illuminated.

11.17. Further detail is provided in the Energy Statement.

### ***Overlooking***

11.18. Following detailed discussions with the LPA, the design of the proposed western elevation has been adapted to further reduce any overlooking from the upper deck into the amenity space of adjoining properties. As illustrated in the drawings the external fins rise slightly higher in this location. Further additional mesh screening is proposed on the inside face of this element of wall to remove potential overlooking or light spillage. Further it should be noted there is extensive existing landscape screening on this boundary.

## **12. ENVIRONMENTAL (INCORPORATING SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND ENERGY STATEMENT)**

### ***Ecology***

- 12.1. An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Assessment (also comprising a Bat Scoping Assessment and a Great Crested Newt HIS Survey) has been undertaken and is included as part of this submission.
- 12.2. The Assessment states that the majority of the Site is comprised of hardstanding and buildings which offer limited to no ecological value. Within the Site, areas of introduced shrub may offer some foraging resources for invertebrates and birds. Mature trees throughout the Site may offer value for birds and some mammal species. No evidence of badgers was found during the survey and, although badgers may be found in the wider landscape, the majority of the Site is considered to offer low-value habitat for badgers due to its built-up nature and frequent human presence.
- 12.3. An area of woodland along the northern border of the Campus West section of the Site provides high ecological value and a ditch running along the north of the Town Centre North section of the Site may provide a biodiversity corridor.
- 12.4. The proposed development site is located directly adjacent to 'Dismantled Railway E. of Sherrardspark Wood' Local Wildlife Site which connects to Sherrardspark Wood SSSI and LNR. The proposal will ensure that the woodland, and any species it may provide a home to, is retained and protected from any impacts arising from the proposed development.
- 12.5. Trees within the car parks of the Site have been assessed for their potential for roosting bats as these are due to be impacted by the proposed development. These trees have been assessed as having negligible potential to support bats, as have the existing buildings on the Site.

### ***Flooding and drainage***

- 12.6. The entirety of the Site is within Flood Zone 1, as confirmed by the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning, and therefore has a less than 0.1% annual probability of river flooding. As the Site exceeds 1ha in area, a Flood Risk Assessment is required to be submitted as part of this planning application.

- 12.7. Regarding surface water drainage, Thames Water have confirmed that there will be sufficient surface water capacity in the sewerage network to serve the development, contingent on the suggested phasing arrangement being retained. It is proposed that surface water runoff from the proposed development will discharge to the existing Thames Water surface water sewer to the south of the Site.
- 12.8. Surface water runoff will be restricted to a peak rate of 5 l/s for all events up to and including the 100-year return period event, with an additional 40% allowance for climate change.
- 12.9. A geocellular storage structure will be located beneath the car park footprint to provide surface water attenuation storage for all events up to a 1 in 100-year return period event including an allowance for climate change. In their pre-application advice, the Lead Local Flood Authority viewed the inclusion of a below ground storage tank as being acceptable in this instance due to the constraints on the Site.
- 12.10. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment concludes that the Site is sustainable in terms of flood risk and is compliant with the relevant criteria set out in the NPPF. The Drainage Strategy element takes into account the points raised by the Lead Local Flood Authority at the pre-application stage and is also compliant with the relevant criteria set out in the NPPF.

### ***Contamination***

- 12.11. A Ground Investigation Report was prepared in March 2020 to identify the geo-environmental and geotechnical constraints of the Site. Prior to this, a Phase 1 Geo-Environmental Assessment was prepared in October 2019. The assessment concluded that:
- The potential risk posed to current and future site users from onsite and off-site sources - **Low (Low to Moderate in areas of soft landscaping)**
  - The potential risk to construction site workers - **Low to Moderate**
  - The potential risk to adjacent land users - **Low, rising to Moderate** during any future groundworks undertaken
  - The potential risk posed to groundwater - **Moderate**
  - The potential risk posed to surface water - **Low to Moderate**
  - The potential risk to on site buildings and services - **Low**
  - The potential risk to soft landscaping - **Low**

12.12. The key geotechnical risks are summarised as follows:

- Metastability (chalk solution features) – **High**
- Variable soils (Made Ground/ Superficial Deposits – **Low to Medium**
- Remnant Substructures (hard spots and voids) – **Medium**
- Shrinkable soils (near to existing / proposed trees) – **Medium**

12.13. It is important to note that the risk levels have been assigned without consideration of remediation / risk management activities which will be considered at a later stage.

### ***Air Quality***

12.14. An Air Quality Assessment has been prepared by Ensafe Group and is submitted as part of this application.

12.15. During the construction phase of the proposed development there is potential for air quality impacts as a result of fugitive dust emissions from the Site. These were assessed in accordance with the IAQM methodology. Assuming good practice dust control measures are implemented, the residual potential air quality impacts from dust generated by construction, earthworks and trackout activities was predicted to be not significant.

12.16. Dispersion modelling was also undertaken in order to predict air quality impacts as a result of road vehicle exhaust emissions associated with traffic generated by the development. Results were subsequently verified using monitoring results obtained with WHBC local monitoring data.

12.17. Impacts on annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> and PM concentrations as a result of operational phase exhaust emissions were predicted to be negligible at all 9 sensitive receptor locations within the vicinity of the Site. The overall significance of potential impacts was determined to be not significant in accordance with EPUK and IAQM guidance. The use of robust assumptions, in the form of worst-case road vehicle emission factors was considered to provide sufficient results confidence for an assessment of this nature.

12.18. Based on the Assessment results, Ensafe's report concludes that air quality is not considered a constraint to planning consent being granted and the proposed

development is considered suitable for the proposed end use. The proposals thereby accord with relevant local and national policies.

### **13. ARCHAEOLOGY**

- 13.1. Policy R29 of the District Plan (Archaeology) states that where a proposal for development may affect remains of archaeological significance or may be sited in an area of archaeological potential, developers will be required to undertake an archaeological assessment, if necessary, with a field evaluation, and to submit a report on the findings to the Local Planning Authority, before an application is determined.
- 13.2. Draft Local Plan policy SADM 15 (Heritage) advises that an Archaeological Assessment will be required if the scale and nature of a development proposal are likely to have an impact on the significance of all or part of a heritage asset.
- 13.3. An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment and Walkover Survey has been prepared by Archaeological Solutions Ltd. and is submitted as part of the application.
- 13.4. The Assessment states that the Site is judged to have a consistently low potential for archaeological remains throughout the prehistoric to post-medieval periods. It states that the most significant potential of the Site in archaeological terms is for early 20<sup>th</sup> century remains associated with the sawmills, which date to before 1918 and are associated with the WW1 German POW camp that formerly stood to the west of the Site.
- 13.5. Previous ground disturbance at the Site is judged to be moderate, and specifically dating from the modern period. The report meets the relevant requirements for this stage of the planning process.



## **14. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

14.1. In addition to formal pre-application meetings with the Council's planning team, the County Councils Highways team, and Historic England officers, there has been ongoing engagement with members of the public. The proposed development has been informed by a careful and proactive programme of engagement.

14.2. The engagement that has been undertaken responded to the advice laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the published guidance in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The project team undertook a robust programme of public engagement in late 2020 relating specifically to this application.

### ***Project website and general approach***

14.3. Due to restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic and to ensure public safety, it was not possible to hold in-person engagement sessions relating to the proposed development. Instead, a website was created which hosted a detailed online exhibition.

14.4. This general approach is supported by the MHCLG who have stated that moving to digital events and processes is critical in this period and that digital events present opportunities to increase participation in planning processes which are important for local communities. They state that such events will minimise the impacts of delays to planning decisions which might otherwise occur due to the requirements for social distancing.

14.5. Furthermore, a report published by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) on 8th December 2020 states that "*digital engagement is no longer a nice-to-have*" and that it should be built in from the start of any consultation or engagement. Even after the pandemic, the report recommends that digital engagements should be part of any large-scale engagement programme.

14.6. It should also be noted that other digital engagement events have taken place in Welwyn Hatfield and neighbouring boroughs, including a design competition in St. Albans, and events relating to the redevelopment of BioPark in Welwyn Garden City and an industrial estate in Hertford.

### ***Virtual Exhibition and Feedback***

- 14.7. The virtual exhibition was held between the 23<sup>rd</sup> November and 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and was viewed 1,920 times during this period. Detailed feedback was received in response to the exhibition during this period, including 144 forms, 46 emails and 2 written letters (192 responses in total).
- 14.8. The feedback received has been recorded and collated and was used by the project team as they finalised the proposals for submission as a planning application. Key themes of the written and verbal feedback are summarised in the table below. Twenty-nine individual themes were identified: the “count” column notes how many times each theme was referred to in total throughout the 192 responses.

Theme	Count
Noise/Air/Light Pollution	67
Car parking demand and demand post-Covid	64
Design not in keeping with area	47
Impact on neighbouring properties	39
Pedestrian Access to Ayot Greenway or Sherrards	38
Increased Electric Vehicle spaces	36
Building height	35
Safety	28
Overdevelopment or development in other area	26
Green infrastructure (roof/wall/screening/planting/retaining trees)	23
Increased traffic	23
Increase use or investment in sustainable modes of transport	20
Public engagement process	19
Cladding	17
Design for North Elevation	17
Building in conservation area	15
Further studies required for proposal (Sustainability, SUDS and other)	10
Park and ride	10
Infrastructure (Doctors, Schools, etc)	8
Underground parking	8
Bike spaces	7
Impact on environment	7
Car park use and accessibility	6
Solar panels	6
Colour palette and materials	3
Support	3
Lift	2
Other (Not relevant to virtual exhibition)	2
Objection	1

**Total****587*****Response***

- 14.9. The feedback detailed above was useful for understanding the concerns of the local community. This section details the project team's responses to the concerns raised.

Noise, air and light pollution

- 14.10. It is proposed that the car park will have barrier-less entry which will lead to traffic around the entrances being as free flowing as possible. This will reduce the number of stops and starts and will minimise idling, thereby reducing both noise and air pollution. Also, as the car park will be subject to a speed limit, noise will be reduced to as low a level as possible. Additionally, new and retained landscaping will act as a noise buffer between the Site and the surrounding area. Finally, the provision of electric car charging spaces will mean that a percentage of vehicles using the car park will be quieter, non-polluting electric vehicles.
- 14.11. Careful consideration has been given to reducing obtrusive light during the night and the visual impact of the lighting scheme during the day, whilst maintaining an adequate level of illuminance for its application within both the covered car park and the external parking areas. The scheme will be controlled such that energy efficiency will be promoted. However, anti-panic light (emergency) will be provided in accordance with Secure by Design scheme requirements.

Impact on neighbouring properties

- 14.12. The relationship to neighbouring properties and possible impact on occupiers has been a fundamental concern of the design team from the inception of the project. Great care has been taken to minimise the impact of the proposed building. Daylight/sunlight reports have been submitted as part of the application which illustrates that no unacceptable impacts result from the development. As illustrated in DAS the elevation treatment has been configured to relate specifically to the residential properties on the south-west corner.

Car parking demand post-covid

- 14.13. The applicant is not providing more car parking spaces overall, instead they are consolidating the existing spaces to unlock Campus East for residential development. This will allow the closure of the existing surface car park at Campus East without impacting the parking that serves the town centre and local businesses. A lower overall number of spaces in the area meets the aims of the Council's sustainability policies and may also reflect a slightly reduced demand for car parking post-Covid.

#### More electric vehicle parking

- 14.14. The proposal has been designed to be adaptable to incorporate more EV spaces as demand increases: future provision for an additional 10% of bays will be made by way of suitable infrastructure and conduits. The Council have applied for a grant under the UKPN Green Recovery Fund to allow the existing sub-station to be upgraded to provide the supply for additional EV charging points.

#### Pedestrian access to Ayot Greenway

- 14.15. Access to the Ayot Greenway will not be lost as a result of the proposals. The Greenway is a public right of way and the proposals have been developed so that residents, the public and visitors can continue to enjoy using it. A new stepped access to the Greenway is to be provided at the north-east of the Site.

#### Green infrastructure (roof/wall/screening/planting)

- 14.16. As detailed above and in the submitted arboricultural assessment, the trees located to the north of the Site are being protected. In addition, the applicant is adding several new or replacement trees to the east of proposed development as well as providing new landscaping.

#### Building in Conservation Area

- 14.17. A comprehensive programme of engagement has been undertaken with Historic England and Council officers which has resulted in changes being made to the height of the building and its cladding. Historic England are now of the view that the scheme would cause minimal harm to the character and significance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area. This view is shared by the applicant's heritage consultant.

#### Design for north elevation

- 14.18. Headlight screening will be used to minimise the effect of the light spill onto and across the Ayot Greenway. The fins located in front of the ramp have been angled in to further minimise any light spill. These have also been coloured to match the Corten effect cladding to provide an element of enhanced solidity to this elevation, as also seen with the South elevation.

#### Bike spaces

- 14.19. The Transport Statement demonstrates in Table 4 that a total of around 91 short stay cycle parking spaces would meet WHBC standards. The proposed cycle parking arrangement is as follows:

- There are 9 existing Sheffield stands (18 spaces) located by the library;
- An additional 40 Sheffield stands (80 spaces) are proposed as part of the scheme:
  - 20 Sheffield stands (40 spaces) located by the entrance to the car park;
  - 20 Sheffield stands (40 spaces) located to the northeast of the site access.

#### Solar panels

14.20. It is not considered appropriate to install solar panels as part of the development as there is insufficient roof space due to the open character of the upper deck.

## **15. CONCLUSION**

- 15.1. This statement assesses the proposed development at Campus West in the context of planning policy at the national, regional, and local level, as well as other relevant and best practice guidance and material considerations. As outlined, the proposed development is in accordance with and will deliver the objectives of all relevant development plan policies. Furthermore, it will assist the Council in achieving its strategic aims for Welwyn town centre.
- 15.2. It is clear that the proposed new decked car park will facilitate the continued regeneration of The Campus site and the wider Town Centre North area. In addition to providing upgraded and consolidated parking that will be more convenient and safer for users, the development will allow the co-ordinated delivery of the other elements of the Town Centre North regeneration. In this way, it will help to improve the town centre's viability and vitality as both a retail destination and residential area.
- 15.3. The design responds to the nature and character of the surrounding context and builds on an extensive programme of engagement and scoping with residents and key stakeholders. The design is configured to reduce any negative impact on the surrounding context or neighbouring properties' amenity. Furthermore, public realm works are incorporated into the design to improve the pedestrian routes through and around the Site.
- 15.4. As such, the proposed development is in accordance with and will deliver the objectives of all relevant development plan policies.