

Campus West Car Park Objection - 19 Scholars Mews

Objections to Campus West Car Park

Application number 6/2021/2207/MAJ

1. The need for another deck has not been substantiated. A report was commissioned by the Council prior to the pandemic but is now out of date and therefore unreliable and I note it has not been included in the documents to this application. It is inconceivable that the Council can go ahead with this project without undertaking an up to date car parking study. The way we work and where we work together with car parking needs has changed and will not go back to the pre-pandemic way of working. At the CPPP meeting on 19 August 2021 the Chairman, Councillor Samuel Kasumu, stated that some Council employees will continue to work from home and also people are more likely to need bigger houses to accommodate working from home.
2. The Council currently give over 400 free permits per year to Council employees and Councillors to park in various car parks including Campus East, Campus West, Hunters and Cherry Trees. If Campus East closes then the Council employees will need somewhere else to park. The real reason why a deck is being built on Campus West car park may be to accommodate the Council employees who will be parking for free. It is not a good way of spending the Borough's money.
3. The design of the car park is cheap and ugly, contrary to Saved Policy D1 (Quality and Design) and Draft Local Plan Policy SP9 (Place Making and High Quality Design) which states that proposals will be required to deliver a high quality design that fosters a positive sense of place etc. If a car park has to be built, then build one like Hatfield Station car park. You can't see the cars through the mesh and the noise is contained within the brick structure. The present design is not in keeping with the conservation area. The Council could build a red brick car park with neo-georgian details in keeping with the WGC ethos but no, instead the Council choose to build a steel frame with rusty stairwells.
4. The north elevation is open and therefore the neighbouring properties will suffer noise, fumes and light pollution. It is not sufficient to have a few fins angled to cut down the light. The north elevation must be solid to stop noise, fumes and light pollution.
5. The close proximity of neighbouring properties has not been addressed. In the Design and Access statement AZ Urban Studio state that "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." What about the neighbours who are closest, in Scholars Mews and Densley Close? No consideration whatsoever has been given to these neighbours. Our property is 32 metres from the edge of the nearest car parking space. This is very close and more consideration needs to be given to the impact on us and other neighbours.
6. Skateboarders, cyclists and joy riders will be using the ramp at all hours and causing a nuisance and disturbance. Because the deck will provide cover from the elements, it will become a place to hang out for yobs and druggies.
7. The Ayot Greenway is a popular footpath and connects to the town centre through the car park. If users of the footpath feel unsafe, and I am sure they will feel so, then the design is contrary to Saved Policy D7 (Safety by Design).
8. The conclusion to the report by AZ Urban Studio has clearly been written to portray the Council as having taken everyone's views into account. This is just not the case at all. The Council have paid lip service to the residents near the western and southern sides of the car park and completely ignored the neighbours on the northern side. Indeed, the properties at [REDACTED] Scholars Mews and [REDACTED] Densley Close directly overlook the car park and will be affected by the construction and operation of the car park on a daily and nightly basis. Nowhere in any of the reports has reference been made to the impact of the car park on the northern elevation. In fact the opposite is the case,

the report states that there is virtually no impact. This is absolutely wrong. Our property is 32 metres from the nearest car parking space and therefore we will suffer noise, fumes and light pollution.

9. A pole cat has been spotted and caught on camera near the car park. The sighting has been registered with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Further, there are several badgers, also caught on camera, living in the banks of the old railway line. There are owls living in the trees next to the car park too. We see bats most evenings as well as numerous birds such as birds of prey, woodpeckers and nuthatches. Not only will the construction of the car park disturb these creatures but the operation of the car park will likely encroach on their peaceful existence. It is noted that Councillor Trigg opposed a planning application close to his house recently citing animals in the vicinity. I would like to do the same here. Certainly, a report should be commissioned before any decision is made.

10. If the Council pass this application, which I sincerely hope they will not, I hope that construction will not take place at weekends at all under any circumstances.

11. Rachael Walsh said many misleading things at the first public consultation including that the new car park would be quieter than it is now because it would contain sound deadening material. I do not see any mention of sound deadening material in the plans for the car park.

12. Saved Policy D6 (Legibility) states that the Council will require all new developments to enhance and contribute to the legibility of the development itself and of the area in which it is located. It does not in any way.

13. The County Council Policy number 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 and potentially at workplace parking." The Borough Council currently gives over 400 free parking permits each year to employees and councillors. This is clearly contrary to the County Council policy and does not encourage the use of sustainable transport. Given that a lot of the parking permits are at Campus East car park, it is clear that the majority of the parking permits will be for Campus West. It is evident that the additional deck is really for Council employees to park for free.

14. The development at Campus East and therefore the loss of the car parking provision there is ill thought through. It is far more sensible to retain car parking next to a railway line rather than build high density flats and houses.

15. The Cherry Tree car park is a prime location for building a deck on the existing car park. There is a natural ramp going down into the car park so a ramp could be built going up to the deck. Further, Waitrose and the Council offices are taller buildings than the car park would be with another deck so it wouldn't look out of place. Cherry Tree car park is in the town centre so is a more viable option for shoppers and Council employees than Campus West.

16. The statements at 7.14 and 8.11 of the document by AZ is incorrect in that it says "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 pointed out in this letter as well as the letter from Place Services headed Historic Buildings and Conservation Advice, there are a number of policies that it does not comply with.

17. The AZ statement at 9.3 that "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." This is utter rubbish.

18. At 9.5 AZ state that "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." Further, at 9.10 AZ state that it will "enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area". This is simply not the case as

pointed out in Place Services letter in their Historic Buildings and Conservation Advice dated 24 August 2021.

19. With regards to 11.18 regarding overlooking, why does the report not address overlooking on the northern elevation? Additional mesh screening is being applied to the inside of the western wall but no mention is made of the northern elevation. The western elevation has an enormous evergreen hedge between the car park and Woodside House. Indeed Brightspace's report states at 4.1 "West elevation – This elevation faces Woodside House. This boundary benefits from a mature planted boundary that reaches around 8m in height, this planting will significantly screen the proposals from Woodside." Although I welcome additional mesh screening being added, why is screening being added to the western elevation but nothing on the northern elevation? When the leaves come off the trees the car park is completely visible from our house but nothing is being done to screen the car park from our view. Further the report prepared by Brightspace states that the northern elevation is "low impact" and "there are limited views from publicly accessed areas, in appearance terms this elevation has lower sensitivity levels". Why is the Council only concerned with publicly accessed areas? What about people's homes and the view they have over the car park and the impact on them?

20. At 14.2 AZ state that "The project team undertook a robust programme of public engagement in late 2020 relating specifically to this application." It is not robust but was held during lockdown, no one was notified until after the start of the consultation and the shops were still shut so holding it in the Howard Centre was pointless. I have requested to attend the Regeneration meetings but it has been declined. There are no minutes of any meetings where Campus West car park has been discussed. It is always discussed in Part II where the public are excluded. I have written to the Council many times asking why this is the case but no proper reason has been given.

21. The online exhibition contained misleading information and drawings. Several people wrote to the Council about this but no changes were made.

22. At 14.12 AZ state that "the elevation treatment has been configured to relate specifically to the residential properties on the south-west corner." What about the properties in Scholars Mews and Densley Close that directly overlook the car park?

23. In 3.1 Opportunities and Constraints prepared by Brightspace the northern elevation is described as "Low priority fascade (sic) potentially left fully open with no cladding" and the Southern and Western elevations are described as "Important fascade (sic): Heritage and views". Why is the northern elevation described as low priority?

24. The plans contained in Brightspace's report are misleading as the trees are out of proportion with the car park.

25. The proposed view from the Ayot Greenway in 5.3 of Brightspace's report is misleading. The car park will not be set as far back from the edge of the Ayot Greenway as the visual suggests.

26. It is inconceivable that no noise mitigation is proposed. It was stated by Rachael Walsh at the first public consultation that noise deadening material would definitely be installed in the new car park.

27. I note that Lynette Fawkes, Inspector at Historic England, has reservations about the lighting and suggests that the "provision of lighting which could result in a dominant building at night". She says the Council "should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information".

28. Where is the lighting assessment report? The one included in the documents is a 1 page plan. Lighting should not be street lights on the upper deck but bollard lighting and lighting located in the car park walls, so light pollution is minimised.

29. In the Noise report, it is suggested that spaces closest to dwellings could be demarcated for daytime use only. We would welcome this suggestion.

30. The car park should not be 24 hours. It is surrounded on 3 sides by residential houses. The car park should have a barrier and be closed between 11pm and 6am. This would reduce light and noise pollution.

31. It is noted that Place Services in their letter dated 24 August state that “the erection of a single storey car park is considered to result in some residual ‘less than substantial’ harm to the significance of the Conservation Area. It is a large structure in an area originally laid out to contain the Garden City’s main civic, community and education buildings fronting the central green space. The original character of this part of the Garden City is still perceivable, and the car park structure is considered to detract from this. The addition of lighting ...exacerbates its presence and visual impart on this part of the Conservation Area at night...”. The letter concludes that “The proposal is considered to result in a low level of ‘less than substantial’ harm to the significance of the Conservation Area.” Paragraphs 199, 200 and 202 of the NPPF need to be observed with regards to preserving the Conservation Area.

The proposed car park is so ill-conceived that it begs the question, what is the real reason for spending over £2m on an additional 156 spaces?

Regards

