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Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan EIP Hearing Statement

Questions 22 and 23

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of
The Wheat Quarter Ltd

May 2018

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ON BEHALF OF THE WHEAT
QUARTER LTD

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**Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan EIP Hearing
Statement**
QUESTIONS 22 AND 23

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement is made on behalf of The Wheat Quarter Ltd (TWQ).
- 1.2 TWQ is a Joint Venture between Plutus Estates Ltd and Metropolitan Housing Trust and the company are the owners of land at Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City (known as the former Shredded Wheat Factory) – land allocation Pea02b in the draft Local Plan.
- 1.3 On August 2017, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council granted planning permission for a residential-led mixed-use redevelopment delivering up to 850 new homes, together with office, retail, leisure, open space, highways improvements, landscaping and other benefits (application ref: N6/2015/0294/PP).
- 1.4 TWQ acquired the site at the time the permission was granted and following a review of the consented scheme, alterations were identified to address the limitations of the consented scheme and achieve a more successful planning outcome for all parties.
- 1.5 Whilst it is noted that the current application is materially different, the proposal has retained the garden city principles that are outlined in the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) but now includes an increased amount of affordable and market housing, together with a refined and more bespoke strategy for the Listed Building and community/commercial heart of the project in order to create a new destination and community within the centre of the town.
- 1.6 The main changes between the current application and consented scheme are detailed in the table below:

Component	Consented Scheme	Proposed Scheme
Residential Units	850	1,340
Extra Care Units	0	114
Affordable Housing Units	50	414
Affordable Housing Percentage	6%	31%

Commercial and Community Floorspace	14,359m ²	14,531m ²
Car Parking	1,023	1,140

1.7 The main changes can be summarised as follows:

North Site

- An enhanced community core within the heart of the development to create increased public performance space, art uses, museum and health centre;
- Amplification of employment strategy for the site through introduction of WeWork within Listed Building to provide focus for small and new start-up businesses;
- Removal of Hotel use;
- Provision of 114 assisted living units
- Reworking of design strategy to the north, west and east of the Listed Building in the North Site to optimise the development potential of the site, whilst creating a more appropriate design response to the Listed Building, elevating residential yield from 357 to 811 units;
- New residential block to the north of Listed Building;
- Enhanced focus given to front (eastern elevation) of Listed Building through enhanced boulevard and landscape setting; and
- Densification of townhouse areas into apartment blocks, consistent with the predominant and defining urban form to the east of the Listed Building.

South Site

- Retention of residential blocks in same approximate locations as south site masterplan and within same height parameters;
- Removal of residential block in south-eastern corner of South Site to create a public square against the Listed Building; and

- More efficient and buildable residential blocks to increase South Site dwelling yield from 493 to 654 units, in order to facilitate delivery of 414 affordable homes; and
- Inclusion of specialist tenure, over-55's affordable retirement homes.

Parking

- Increase in parking provision across the site and an increase in cycling provision and the provision of electric car club vehicles for residents, through a decrease in the parking ratio per dwelling from 1.02 to circa 0.7.

Evaluation

- 1.8 Although it is recognised that elements of the development are markedly different to the consented scheme, the general principles and concepts which underpinned the consented scheme have been retained.
- 1.9 The provision of 1,340 high quality residential units will make a vital contribution towards acute local and strategic housing objectives and lead to the immediate delivery of affordable homes through Metropolitan's interest in the site. This is a significant benefit in the light of Welwyn Hatfield's pressing housing need and the role of the local planning authority in fulfilling that need.
- 1.10 The increase in residential units from 850 to 1,340 would suggest an increase of circa 70% residents on-site. However, the proposed scheme has been strategically re-designed to focus a greater quantum of 1-bed and 2-bed units and a reduction in family housing to reflect the characteristics of the location. It is therefore calculated that there will only be a 29% increase in the number of residents residing at the site compared to the consented scheme.
- 1.11 Whilst the previous scheme included a larger number of family-sized dwellings, the proposed scheme concentrates on providing for young professionals and elderly downsizers, hence 1-bed and 2-bed units dominating the dwelling mix. This mix of units is considered to be more fitting given the highly urbanised and central location of the site and education capacity limitations.
- 1.12 Furthermore, it is considered thousands of larger family units will be delivered through new garden suburbs and settlement extensions, which dominate the Council's emerging development strategy.
- 1.13 The proposed scheme also contains a significant uplift in respect of affordable housing. Under the consented scheme, of the 850 residential units only 50 would be affordable. This equates to an affordable housing provision of 6%. Under the proposed scheme, the development will provide 414 affordable housing units, which will equate to an on-site provision of 31% affordable housing. The

social benefits of the proposed scheme are therefore considered to be far greater than the consented scheme.

- 1.14 The mix and tenure of affordable (and market) housing has been selected to both respond to policy objectives in respect of providing mixed and balanced communities and ensuring overall housing delivery. The development is considered to include the maximum viable and deliverable quantum of affordable housing, and this will be delivered in a form and manner that will facilitate the immediate regeneration of a vitally important development site in the District.
- 1.15 In regard to commercial floorspace, the difference between the two schemes is not significant. In terms of overall quantum, however, the proposed scheme is considered to have evolved and will provide a wide range of community and employment facilities and will facilitate increased economic development in Welwyn Garden City in both the short and long term as a result. The scheme is now considered to have the potential to be a significant employment centre in its own right in a vibrant location that will facilitate and maximise sustainable living and working.
- 1.16 In regard to landscape, the landscape proposals continue to be underpinned by a coherent vision that draws upon the principles and qualities of the existing Garden City and the site's location, heritage, character and the wider setting of Welwyn Garden City. This vision formed the basis of the Consented Scheme and has been carried through to inform the current landscape masterplan.

2. SP 17 BROADWATER ROAD WEST – QUESTION 22

Should the development principles include the provision of footpath and cycleway links within the development and connecting it to the Town Centre and the wider sustainable network?

- 2.1 The site is arguably the most sustainable in the District. The proximity to shops and services is unparalleled and is being supplemented by significant new employment and community floorspace to create an incredibly strong fusion of land uses. This will, in effect, facilitate the creation of a community of residents that could have little need to travel by car on a day-to-day basis.
- 2.2 With the creation of 22 squares and spaces of different types and functions across the site, an extensive and connected new public realm will be created and opportunities to promote walking and cycling should be maximised.
- 2.3 There is a significant opportunity to provide cycle parking and cycle hire points throughout the development for both residents and visitors, which may otherwise be difficult to provide elsewhere in the town centre.
- 2.4 The site is currently accessible from the town centre via a footbridge that connects the Howard Centre to the train station and extends over the railway into the site, with steps down to ground level at Hyde Way. Hyde Way crosses the site and intersects Broadwater Road on the eastern boundary of the site, and is accessible to vehicles as well as to pedestrians, but is currently a dead-end road (with site access only). The footbridge-Hyde Way east-west link, which splits the site into the North Site and South Site, is the main existing line of access and circulation. This is currently a major pedestrian and cycle route for commuters which suffers from environmental degradation due to the combination of a largescale redundant site and a moribund footbridge. Accordingly, the focus of the strategy is the enhancement of this primary movement route.
- 2.5 The development includes restoration and improvements to the railway bridge, including the provision of a lift which does not presently exist. Unfortunately, due to the railway located immediately west of the site, there is no scope to deliver additional pedestrian and cycle access routes out of the site to the west, and so the policy requirement for a new access road across rail land to the north-east of the site must be removed. Aligning the above Plan with the submitted proposals will ensure that there is a clear accord between the development proposals for the site and the position of the site within the Development Plan.

2.6 In response to the Inspector's question, it is therefore considered that the proposed development does indeed make provision for new footpath and cycleway links, thus facilitating a more sustainable pattern of development and one which is better connected to Welwyn Garden City. The site, at present, is inadequate in terms of connectivity and accessibility. The proposals seek to address this issue by enhancing permeability across the site and improving a direct connection between the town centre and Peartree to create a more attractive and effective movement network linking the town centre and railway to the site and wider eastern side of the town.

3. SP 17 BROADWATER ROAD WEST – QUESTION 23

Given the surplus of jobs in Welwyn Hatfield above the number of indigenous economically active people and the shortage of available land for housing, is it appropriate to encourage redevelopment for employment purposes or the retention/relocation of employment infrastructure on the site?

- 3.1 The site is a vacant brownfield site in a highly sustainable location and which is, in principle, suitable for mixed-use redevelopment. The policy approach established by the District Plan, Supplementary Planning Documents and draft Local Plan acknowledges this and accordingly the site forms the larger part of the Broadwater Road West redevelopment site identified as suitable for mixed-use redevelopment. The proposed development will facilitate the delivery of a high quality mixed-use development on a site which is well connected to employment, public transport, shopping, entertainment, community facilities and social infrastructure.
- 3.2 It is our contention that the redevelopment of industrial sites in highly sustainable locations can generate significant amounts of homes and jobs when redeveloped for mixed-use residential-led higher density development. This is a much more appropriate land use for central locations than industrial development which should instead be focused where road connectivity is strong.
- 3.3 The concept of residential-led mixed-use development is a long-established and sound concept which promotes patterns of development that support and sustain sustainable travel and living patterns.
- 3.4 The establishment of the Wheat Quarter as a civic and economic destination in its own right is of planning merit, given its location in the centre of the town and as a Gateway site to a high number of visitors.
- 3.5 The site is highly sustainable and accessible, and is therefore suitable and appropriate for a multitude of land uses, including residential, leisure, employment, community and town centre type uses.
- 3.6 The need for new homes does currently outweigh the need for jobs in the District and with so many homes being developed on the Green Belt on the edges of settlements, the need to maximise housing density for flats on a site like Shredded Wheat is compelling.
- 3.7 The application scheme strikes the right balance, in our opinion, between reconciling the need for housing and creating a new Civic Quarter for the town

- 3.8 It is therefore considered that mixed-use development is wholly appropriate for this particular site. The proposal itself also presents a highly sustainable development outcome by providing high quality mixed-use development on previously-developed land, with a diverse quantum of residential development to support housing choice for future residents, as well as a considerable quantum of commercial and office floorspace with the necessary supporting infrastructure.
- 3.9 The site will become a destination in itself, and therefore mixed-use development is considered to be more beneficial to the wider community instead of simply being allocated for residential use. Providing a diverse array of commercial and office employment opportunities will facilitate the continued use of an existing and historic employment site, but with residential development to also help alleviate the District and County's housing need.

4. PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES

- 4.1 The Local Plan advocates the use of sustainable land use principles that provide the necessary homes, employment opportunities and infrastructure for the successful delivery of the development strategy. The proposal for the site is considered to be a flexible scheme that has been designed appropriately to fit the circumstances, and, as such, aligns with the overall objectives of the Local Plan.
- 4.2 The Shredded Wheat proposal promotes higher density development on previously-developed land with the best transport links. It is considered that development densities should be maximised on such sites, with parking and design standards relaxed to enable greater densities to be achieved.
- 4.3 The ability to achieve higher densities in accessible locations is supported in order to minimise the extent of Green Belt release and maximise the number of homes in close proximity to public transport.
- 4.4 The overall development strategy is likely to result in an augmented uptake of brownfield land, and this is considered to be positive and appropriate. With the alterations detailed above, the general strategy will allow for the successful implementation of the aims and objectives of the Local Plan in a sustainable way that maximises brownfield land delivery and achieves greater brownfield: greenfield land ratios.
- 4.5 It is our contention that the development proposals should directly align with the relevant planning policy for the site, and we therefore suggest that Policy SP17 (Mixed-use development site at Broadwater Road West (SDS3/Pea02b and SDS4/Pea02c) is amended as follows:

Policy SP 17

Mixed use development site at Broadwater Road West (SDS3/Pea02b and SDS4/Pea02c)

*Land at Broadwater Road West is allocated for development to accommodate approximately ~~1,020~~ **1,430** new homes **and 114 extra care homes (Use Class C2)** over the plan period. Mixed use development on this site will comprise primarily ~~employment, housing,~~ **housing, employment,** leisure and ~~rail-related~~ **community** uses. Development on this site will comply with the **design principles outlined in the Broadwater Road West Supplementary Planning Document**. Development on this site will conform to the Strategy Diagram shown in Figure 10 below and the following principles:*

- i. To create a sustainable neighbourhood with an appropriate mix and density of uses for its central location; and to support living and working in close proximity;
- ii. To establish strong connections between the east side of town, the site and through to the town centre;
- iii. To provide a wide mix of housing types, sizes and tenures, including a minimum of 30% of all units as affordable housing unless it can be robustly demonstrated that such a proportion would not be viable; housing for older people;
- iv. To use the industrial heritage as a cue for form, character and identity – re-use listed structures and ensure sympathetic development;
- v. To adopt the urban design principles set out in the Broadwater Road West Supplementary Planning Document;
- vi. To accommodate large scale uses which would best be located near the town centre;
- vii. To incorporate open space in accordance with the principles set out in the Broadwater Road West Supplementary Planning Document;
- ~~viii. At least 17,650 square metres of Class B1 employment floorspace will be provided in addition to that which was already provided on the site as at 1st April 2016. Within this total, SDS3 should provide a minimum of 6,400 square metres of Class B1 employment floorspace. The BioPark site will be retained in Class B1b use unless it can be demonstrated that it is no longer suitable for use as a research facility or it is reprovided elsewhere in Welwyn Hatfield.~~
- ix. About ~~4,020~~ **1,340 dwellings and 114 extra care homes (Use Class C2)** will be provided in addition to those already provided on the site as at 1st April 2016. Affordable housing will be sought on the basis of an overall 30% on-site delivery target.
- x. Provision will also be made for ~~community uses, fitness / leisure, retail (about 570 square metres), cafés / restaurants / bars and a hotel~~ **the erection of a civic building comprising 494 sq.m of health (Use Class D1), 494 sq.m of community use (Use Class D1), 1,232 sq.m of office (Use Class B1) and 646 sq.m of retail (Class A1/A2/A3/A4/A5); alterations, additions and change of use of Grade II Listed Building and retained Silos to provide 5,096 sq.m of flexible business floorspace (Use Class B1), 265 sq.m Combined Heat and Power (Sui Generis), 2,494 sq.m International Art Centre (Use Class D1), 1,226 sq.m Gymnasium (Use Class D2), 1,576 sq.m of restaurant/coffee shop/bar (Use Class A1/A3/A4/A5), Creche/Day Nursery of 644 sq.m as well as a Network Rail TOC Building of 364 sq.m; plus associated car parking, access, landscaping, public art and other supporting infrastructure.**

Development at this site must contribute towards school provision off-site in the immediate vicinity. Development at this site will also need to include upgraded

wastewater infrastructure and take into account noise from the railway and adjacent commercial activities as well as the potential for contaminated land.

Once constructed, all new class B development on this site will be afforded the same policy protection as that accorded by Policy SADM9 of this plan.