

F4_ Summary of Proof of Evidence by Simon Camp

The document summarises the appeal evidence for the re-development of Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City, a site of an industrial site approximately 1.24 hectares.

The site

The site is located at Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City and is approximately 1.24 hectares (3.06 acres) in size. The irregular shaped parcel of land comprises a research and development complex, including laboratory and associated office space that was formerly owned and used by the University of Hertfordshire.

The existing buildings consist of 5 tall, industrial height storeys housing laboratories, 2 storeys of roof plant and 2 levels of basement. This provides a total building height of approximately 30.51m. Located along the eastern boundary are ancillary single storey buildings such as outhouses and plant rooms.

The site is within the Broadwater West SPD area, to the north of the site there is an approval for 9 storey building surrounding the listed Shredded Wheat silos. Across the railway tracks to the west is the heart of the Garden City.

Preparation of evidence

This proof of evidence has been prepared by Simon Camp, Partner at Alan Camp Architects LLP. The purpose of this proof of evidence is to support the Architectural proposals for the redevelopment of Broadwater Gardens.

Alan Camp Architects was appointed by HG Group in 2020 to provide architectural services through RIBA work stages 1-7 which includes the design development, planning submission and determination of the application.

My proof of evidence will consider the architectural matters relating to the refusal by WHC / the Council at Development Management committee for the application 6/2020/3420/MAJ ("Application").

The evidence will address the architectural and design matters within the Decision Notice dated the 16th September 2021 for the refusal: *'The proposed by reason of its form, height, bulk, scale and massing does not achieve high quality design. The proposed development also does not respect or relate to the character and context of the local area and fails to maintain enhance or improve the character of the existing area. As such, the application is contrary to Policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan and the Broadwater Road West SPD, Paragraphs 130 and 134 of the NPPF and Policy SP9 of the emerging local plan.'*

Design Process:

The scheme has been designed through an extensive, design led process that has been centred on consultation with the local community and planning authority. There has been an intensive programme of Pre-Application meetings with the WHC. The public consultation process was held virtually online due to Covid-19 restrictions. The changes made through these meeting are discussed in my proof of evidence. The scheme has drawn on influences from the Garden City and the local built context to provide a fully responsive proposal.

The proposal

The re-development at Broadwater Gardens will generate 289 high quality homes on the brownfield site of BioPark, contributing greatly to Welwyn Garden City's housing demand. The scheme has been designed to improve the existing site by creating permeability, reducing the bulk of the current laboratory buildings and by providing an aesthetically pleasing landscape-driven residential development.

The precedent was set by the Wheat Quarter for increased height and density as a departure from those shown in the Broadwater Road West SPD. I believe that the scheme demonstrates that we have produced a high quality responsive scheme that justifies the promotion of a similar high density scheme for Broadwater gardens.

There was a design led approach to sculpt an architectural response that was sympathetic and worked with the principles of the SPD. An alternative option would have been to convert the existing building. This would have created substandard homes and missed the opportunity to provide permeability through the site. There would also have been no net gain in biodiversity. The existing building would have remained as a monolithic reminder of the former animal testing laboratory.

The scheme consists of four apartment blocks and eight townhouses. Each has its own character which has been inspired by both the Welwyn Garden City architecture and the locally celebrated art deco modernist structures; such as the Roche and Shredded Wheat buildings.

The proposed scheme strongly upholds the Garden City principles by:

- The redevelopment of brownfield land for the benefit of the community.
- Ensuring there is community engagement during the design process and a strong vision from the outset.
- Generating mixed-tenure homes, with a good proportion of these being affordable.
- Proposing a community hub which will stimulate the creation of jobs and be a social place to meet.
- Proposing green links to the north and south, enhancing the route to the railway station.
- Designing homes based around the landscaped courtyards with communal orchards for growing food.
- Imaginatively drawing on contextual design features in a contemporary way, such as tiled mansard roofs and red brickwork.
- Creating a scheme that promotes low carbon technology with a 750% net biodiversity gain.

The presence of local residents will ensure amenity spaces are used throughout the day and into the evening on summer nights. New public realm around the site has been designed to act as an extension to the Garden City. The harsh, former industrial landscape will be softened by green landscaping and street trees which will increase the biodiversity of the area. Courtyards are proposed as a lively, green and sustainable environment where residents can relax whilst children play. Residential entrances are located with the courtyards providing a pleasant transition from street to front door for residents. The landscaping will also help to foster a local community where residents recognise, chat and use the edible fruits harvested from the landscape.

Submission:

Following the extensive consultation process, the scheme was recommended for approval with the council's principal urban design commenting: *this development achieves that high bar of expected design quality and will help to set the tone for future developmentspresenting a positive and truly distinctive uplift in design quality for the area.The amenity space was a triumph of the scheme...*

Conclusion:

The key ambition of the Site, is to develop a scheme that makes the best, most efficient use of the Site by delivering a significant number of homes, whilst also creating a sustainable, inclusive and active community.

Following the design developments throughout the process with the planning authority, I firmly believe this is the most suited proposal for this site and community. This scheme will raise the standard of development within the Welwyn Garden City and drives forward the much needed regeneration in the area.

Broadwater Gardens will not only be a wonderful place to live but will also improve the area for its neighbours by creating leafy views through the site where previously there were none. The scheme will increase the connectivity to other destinations in Welwyn, both visually and physically.

The original committee report declared the conclusion of the Planning Officers that the Application should be granted permission. For the reasons as set out in my proof of evidence, I continue to adhere to this view.