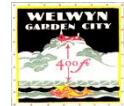


Proof of Evidence
Cllr Russ Platt
Appeal reference: APP/C1950/W/22/3294860

On behalf of Rule 6 Party
Welwyn Garden City Society



Site Address: BioPark, Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City

June 11th, 2022

Table of Contents

| Section | | Page |
|---------|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Introduction | 3 |
| 2 | Car Parking Comparators | 4 |
| 3 | Poor Public transport Alternative | 8 |
| 4 | Transport Issues | 9 |
| 5 | Summary | 10 |

1. Introduction.

- 1.1. This proof of evidence on parking and transport has been prepared by Russ Platt
- 1.2. I am an elected Borough Councillor within Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, my current term of office running from May 2021 to May 2024. The ward that I am elected to represent is Peartree Ward, which this application falls under.
- 1.3. I am also Chair of the Mirage Residents Association which is a body that represents residents of Penn Way, Otto Road and Broadwater Road (collectively known as Mirage). These are the roads, properties and development that immediately border the Biopark and the application, to the east. I have been a member of the association since 2015 and the chair since 2017.
- 1.4. As a direct neighbour to the Biopark since December 2012, I have considerable experience and knowledge of the immediate local area. As a resident on an unadopted development, I have experience of both the positives and negatives that come with these types of dwellings and subsequent lifestyle.

2. Car Parking Comparators

2.1. Comparator A – The neighbouring Mirage Development which consists of 209 dwellings in Penn Way, Salvisburg Court and Broadwater Road flats.

- 2.1.1. Dwellings are a mix of 1 & 2 bedroom flats and 3/4 bedroom townhouses.
- 2.1.2. The Mirage development experiences regular and ongoing problems regarding parking with a development ratio of approximately 1:1 parking per dwelling which is 40% higher than is proposed for the Biopark development. Within the development there are 10 dedicated, marked visitor/community spaces and room for a further 18 spaces (approximately) along the road on Penn Way, which are currently unmarked. The 1:1 ratio includes those spaces on the driveways of freehold houses.
- 2.1.3. All of the houses have dedicated parking - some houses have a driveway for 2 or 3 vehicles and others have 1 dedicated external space, either on the roads, car park area or beneath coach house flats.
- 2.1.4. Of the flats, some come with a dedicated space in the underground car park areas, some have a dedicated outside space and some do not have an allocated space.
- 2.1.5. Within the development there is no dedicated space for delivery drivers to park, but there are rarely issues as the design of the development is such, that there are areas where they can temporarily stop without causing major disruption.
- 2.1.6. The limited parking on the development leads to regular problems for residents and visitors. The most common problem is that people return home and are unable to find a place to park. This leads to one of several things happening: -
- People park in other people's dedicated parking space, thus moving the problem to the next person.
 - People park in areas that are not designed for parking, leading to disruption and blockages.
 - People park on grass verges/kerbs, causing damage that residents have to pay to rectify.
 - People park elsewhere in the town.
- 2.1.7. The other common problem is non-residents parking within the development. Commonly this will be from: -
- Residents of other roads in the area where parking is already a problem
 - Commuters using the development while travelling to London on the train
 - Staff of local businesses and town retail.
 - Workers and contractors from local developments that are under construction
- 2.1.8. A survey of Mirage residents was carried out in May 2022 to ascertain if residents throughout the development were experiencing issues regarding parking. The survey

was carried out online and the estimated survey pool was 139 residents in the development group. Response rate was 62 residents (45%).

2.1.9. The results can be summarised as follows:-

- 100% of residents state that parking is inadequate
- 98% of residents experience difficulties getting a space.
- 70% of those with an allocated space have had issues with people parking in it
- 84% of residents were advised that there would be adequate parking onsite when purchasing/renting
- Of those who use public transport, only 13% would rate it as good/very good
- Half those surveyed have an underground allocated space - all of them still state that parking is inadequate on the development

2.1.10. The residents association at Mirage are currently in consultation with the management company about installing parking restrictions within the development, using a third party APCOA service provider. This is something that we have tried to delay as long as possible, to avoid any further expense and inconvenience to residents. However, there are several reasons why this will now need to be expedited:-

- The imminent installation of council parking restrictions in the surrounding roads – please see documents relating to this on Welwyn Hatfield Council website here:- <https://archive.welhat.gov.uk/article/12311/Peartree-Area-1>
- The extant planning permission that exists for over 1,400 properties on The Wheat Quarter and Shredded Wheat Southside, which directly border the Mirage development to the north. These developments have considerably fewer spaces per dwelling than Mirage
- The potential for 850 new residents at the Biopark development, with a parking ration of 0.6 spaces per dwelling.

2.1.11. However, there would be a number of challenges to be overcome to enable Mirage to implement a parking scheme. These include the fact that many spaces (particularly those allocated to houses) are not numbered and are freehold to the dwelling owner. Therefore, there is no implicit permission for any enforcement, or signage, this would have to be sought and agreed by each dwelling freeholder.

2.1.12. Secondly, a very large number of residents were sold/leased their property with the sales pitch that they would not need a parking space (or second space) because they are so plentiful within the development. One could argue that they were mis-sold, rather than sold.

2.2. Comparator B – The Times Square Development

2.2.1. Dwellings at Times Square are a mix of 1 & 2 bedroom flats within 9 blocks, the total number of flats is approximately 600. Three of the blocks are a conversion from former offices and six of the blocks are newly constructed.

- 2.2.2. Times Square has a parking ration of 1:1, each flat has one allocated parking space. These are predominantly in outdoor car park areas, but some are underground. There are 12 visitor spaces. Parking restrictions are in place, managed by a third-party supplier.
- 2.2.3. Times Square residents have reported several problems relating to parking on the development.
- 2.2.4. Over 50% of the dwellings are 2 bedrooms, this means that the second person cannot have a vehicle parked onsite. For example, several residents have informed me that their partner will regularly park their car elsewhere in the town where there are no restrictions. They are then given a lift to collect their car when it is needed for work/leisure, and then are collected later, when use of the car has ended. This means that there are more car journeys taking place, at a time when there should be less.
- 2.2.5. The 12 visitors' spaces were regularly being used by residents as an 'overspill', meaning that they were regularly full. Recently the rule has been changed so that, to use a visitor space, the resident must now lodge a request on an app prior to the visitor arriving. This has the effect of stopping any ad-hoc or impromptu visits by friends and family – or alternatively residents go to collect them and then drop them home (if local enough)
- 2.2.6. The lack of space also means that other visitors to the development, such as tradespersons, deliverers etc – are unable to park on the development. I have this issue regularly when delivering literature to the development – I am lucky that I live within walking distance, others do not have that luxury.
- 2.2.7. The other side-effect of the lack of parking is that the surrounding areas of the town are used by residents for parking. This includes the car park of the sorting office opposite, which is regularly full, thus stopping customers parking. Other roads such as Tewin Road, Ludwick Way, Knightsfield and Heronswood Road are also regularly used. There is of course no problem with people parking legally on other roads, but this is moving the problem rather than reducing car use, as is often claimed.
- 2.2.8. The development has a large allocation of external bicycle racks, I believe enough for one per dwelling. It is no exaggeration to say that despite visiting the development regularly, I have never seen a single one used. I was informed by the management company that this is due to theft of bicycles being prevalent.

2.3. Comparator C – Welwyn Garden city Town Centre

- 2.3.1. Within the town centre, most if not all flats are sold/rented on the basis there will be no parking as this is, in theory, the most sustainable area of the town in terms of transport, with both a bus station and the train station. There is no more convenient area in WGC to obtain public transport.

2.3.2. However, there are hundreds of cars parked in the area in the evening and overnight plus some in the car parks, precisely because people need a car. Much as this is frustrating, and one would hope that it would not be the case, it is true. This has a detrimental impact on the businesses and night culture of the town as visitors to the restaurants, cafes and bars struggle to find a parking space.

2.3.3. There is surely no better example of when people are sold flats, they still need a car, and will buy/use one anyway.

2.4. Comparator D – The Biopark Application

2.4.1. I note that the 8 proposed houses on the BioPark each have a provision for 2 cars. This means that out of the proposed total of 197 residential parking spaces, 16 will be for houses, and only 181 spaces will be available for the 281 flats - a ratio of just 0.64 per flat, flats which will range in size between 1-3 bedrooms and 1-5 bedspaces.

2.4.2. When comparing to comparators A to C, and the actual 'lived in' experience, this is clearly insufficient.

3. Poor Public Transport Alternative

- 3.1. Public transport infrastructure is poor, this is particularly the case for those that need to travel East/West as noted in Appendix E of the statement of Case from the Welwyn Garden City Society. It is indeed also the case that public transport infrastructure is lacking in any direction that is not directly North/South.
- 3.2. The table below shows that on average, journeys to the surrounding towns take almost FOUR TIMES longer by public transport at the weekend and over twice as long during the week.
- 3.3. The figures also show that there are no public transport services available at 10.00pm from two very local, and very well used towns.

| | | | Driving | Public Transport | | | | | |
|------|---------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | | Weekend | | | Weekday | | |
| | | | | | Sat 11.00am | Sat 10.00pm | | Tue 11.00am | Tue 10.00pm |
| From | To | Distance (miles) | Time (mins) | Time (mins) | Method | Method | Time (mins) | Method | Method |
| WGC | Harpenden | 8.4 | 19 | 73 | Bus & Train | Bus & Train | 33 | 366 Bus | Bus & Train |
| WGC | Ware | 9.3 | 22 | 46 | Bus & Bus | Bus | 55 | Bus & Bus | Bus |
| WGC | Wheathampsted | 4.7 | 11 | 79 | Bus & Bus | None | 16 | Bus | None |
| WGC | London Colney | 8.2 | 16 | 76 | Bus & Bus | None | 33 | Train & Bus | None |
| WGC | St Albans | 8.0 | 17 | 55 | Bus | Bus | 43 | Bus | Bus |

Source: Google Maps Journey Planner 11/06/2022

- 3.4. Neither Stansted nor Luton, the two nearest airports, are served directly by any form of public transport from WGC. Luton does have an irregular bus station to the Parkway rail station where a link to the airport is available. Stansted has no link at all.
- 3.5. It is interesting to note that Marks & Spencer recently closed their store in Welwyn Garden City and have opened a new store in the out-of-town centre retail park in Stevenage (Roaring Meg). One of the expectations and assumptions from M&S was that existing customers from WGC would use the new store. However, the store is not easily accessible from the train station and would therefore only be accessible by car if one planned to purchase anything more than a small bag of items.
- 3.6. Retail is moving generally away from town centres and until such time as this is not the case, then people will still need vehicles in places where there is not a regular and integrated public transport network.
- 3.7. Whilst it is not the role of a developer to plan and implement public transport infrastructure, it is in their power and responsibility to offer alternatives or solutions within their developments, where existing networks are not adequate.

4. Transport Issues

- 4.1. Various issues were raised by Hertfordshire County council in relation to this application. The decision notice states that the application is not in line with policy H2.
- 4.2. In the I-Transport report (Doc Ref Ref: NM/MD/ITL16195-008a) it states that it is unclear which parts of the policy this refers to. The document then proceeds to endeavour to address this, detailing the policy requirements in section 3.1.3.
- 4.3. I would strongly argue that several sections of this policy are not addressed in the TA, namely the following: -

Policy H2 of the District Plan: “Location of Windfall Residential Development”

“All applications for windfall residential development will be assessed for potential and suitability against the following criterion:

- (iii) The capacity of existing and potential infrastructure to absorb further development;
 - (iv) The ability to reinforce existing communities, including providing a demand for services and facilities;
- 4.4. I would also argue that the development does not meet the criterion below, which is contained in the same policy
 - The development provides for local affordable housing needs or other clearly identified local housing needs;
 - The development would assist in the construction or provision of improved community facilities over and above those that would be required to support the development itself.”

5. Summary

- 5.1. The Application does not cater to the needs of the residents that will live in the development, with regards to the requirement for parking.
- 5.2. The application does not cater to the needs of neighbouring residents, residents whose views were not adequately considered during the consultation process.
- 5.3. The application does not learn from or improve upon the real-life experiences of similar developments. In fact, it gives a lower parking provision than these developments.
- 5.4. The application does not adequately address the shortcomings of the local transport network, whether in terms of parking provision or s106 contributions.
- 5.5. The application is contrary to policy H2.
- 5.6. Having spoken to the other rule 6 community group for this appeal, they are in agreement that there are issues with parking provision.
- 5.7. I respectfully suggest to the Inspector that the adverse impacts of the Appeal Proposal are so significantly damaging to the town and contrary to Council policies that the Appeal should be dismissed.