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Contacts

Client:
Anglodane (Welwyn) Ltd

Architects:
OSP Architecture
Tel: 01252 267878
www.osparchitecture.com

Planning Consultant:
Jones Lang LaSalle
Tel: 020 3147 1815
www.jll.com

Highways Consultant:
Pulsar Transport Planning
Tel: 07747 323200
www.pulsartransport.co.uk
Introduction

This document has been prepared in response to the pre-application process for the development of 134 apartments at the former Norton’s Building, Welwyn Garden City. The proposal includes the demolition of the former Norton’s building and the construction of 4 new apartment buildings, providing a mixture of 1,2 and 3 bedroom apartments, associated parking and landscaping.

The proposals for the development have been revised from those previously submitted to the Council in response to the comments received on 13th June 2019.
Welwyn Garden City is a town located within the county of Hertfordshire and is the largest settlement in the borough of Welwyn Hatfield. It also lies in between the primary town centres of Stevenage to the north and Hatfield to the south.

The site is located 0.6 miles east of Welwyn Garden City’s green crescent named the ‘The Campus’, where numerous shopping facilities are located. The surrounding areas are scattered with attractive green space in the form of local parks, public golf courses and tree lined ‘avenues’.

Welwyn Garden City also sits approximately 20 miles directly north of London and has good road connections to the rest of the country.

The site is the former Norton’s building in Welwyn Garden City. The majority of the existing building is vacant office floor space with ‘Norton Gym’ occupying part of the ground floor. The site can be accessed by vehicle and pedestrians from both Bridge Road East and Tewin Road. The development is within easy reach of a good range of local facilities including the city centre shops and local schools such as Sir Frederic Osborn School and Howell Primary School. There are various local public transport options available, including the Welwyn Garden City mainline railway station approximately 0.8 miles from the site.

The built environment consists of a mixture of commercial, office and industrial units with residential properties in the Peartree area to the southern side of Bridge Road East. The character of the immediate site context is currently in transition with the recent consent of 54 apartments on the site of 51 Bridge Road East which directly adjoins the western boundary of this site.

The area of the site measures 1.327 hectares (approx. 3.27 acres).
Vision
The vision for the proposed development is to create an attractive new residential neighbourhood in a sustainable location and a setting where people will aspire to live. The unique design of the existing building will inform the layout, massing and detailing of the apartment buildings.

Development Concept
Following an appraisal of the constraints and opportunities presented by the site, the development concept diagram shows the preferred approach to the site layout. The main features of the development concept are as follows:

• Primary access to the site, in similar locations to the existing.
• Primary access road through a central spine of the site.
• Series of development blocks, with landscape areas including a central public open space which many of the apartments overlook.
• Potential pedestrian/cyclist link connection.
• Replacement of the existing building with a new structure of similar scale and form which is inspired in design approach by the existing building and it’s historic references.
• A safe and secure form of layout with a more appropriate use where publicly accessible space is subject to good natural surveillance from neighbouring dwellings.
• Consideration of the residential development recently consented at 51 Bridge Road East for 54 new residential apartments.
Proposed Site Layout

The layout has been amended following the pre-application advice.

- The unique design of the Norton Building has been utilised to inform the design of the overall development of the site in terms of location, form and massing of the development.
- The mix has been revised to provide a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments over 4 apartment buildings, A to D.
- The relationship between the proposed buildings has been reviewed. Apartment Building B has been redesigned to increase the distance between it and the neighbouring buildings on the western edge and between apartment building C. Apartment building E has been omitted and apartment building D has been relocated the northern part of the site.
- The amenity space has been increased and the positions of the amenity spaces reviewed to ensure they are usable and removed from the shadow of the proposed apartment buildings. Apartment building B and E have been redesigned to increase the usable amenity space.
- All undercroft parking has been removed and surface parking will be provided instead along with the basement parking in apartment building A. Access to the basement parking will now be provided at the rear of apartment building A, along with surface parking along this road. The number of car parking has been amended to 162.

**Key**
- Site access
- 5.5m wide main access road/shared surface with turning heads provided
- Secondary access road/shared surface
- Apartment refuse/recycling stores with full access provided for refuse vehicles through the site
- Bicycle stores
- Basement parking access

Scale 1:500
Amenity and Landscape Strategy

Additional amenity space has been added by redesigning the apartments and revising the parking provision. The apartment buildings overlook two large amenity spaces. Additional landscaped areas of amenity space are also provided in and around each apartment building. Residents will also have access to a private balcony space at a minimum of 5msq. It is envisaged that a mixture of hard and soft landscaping and tree planting will provide an attractive setting and enhance the value of the open space. Footpaths will link the amenity spaces for the residents and the orientation for these spaces ensures that they are usable and located away from the shadow of the apartments.

Parking Strategy

The number of car parking spaces has been amended to 162 including 20 disabled parking spaces. 1 space for 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings and 2 spaces for the 3 bedroom dwellings. 26 visitor spaces have also been provided. Some of the parking for the affordable dwellings will be M4 (2) compliant. 134 bicycle spaces in lockable bicycle stores have also been provided throughout the scheme.

Refuse collection

Refuse vehicles have full access to the site and access to the apartment refuse and recycling stores. The scheme has been amended to provide refuse and recycling stores for each apartment building. 5.5m turning heads have been added to where necessary at refuse vehicle collection points.

Key

- Site boundary
- Main amenity spaces
- Proposed trees
- Proposed landscaping
- Tarmac access road
- Shared surface spine road
- Shared surface parking areas

Scale 1:500
Affordable Housing

The development seeks to maximise the amount of affordable housing to be provided, whilst also seeking to develop a long-term vacant building.

The Government has sought to incentivise developers to maximise housing development on such sites, by introducing the Vacant Building Credit. The 2019 NPPF reiterated this in paragraph 63 where it is stated that “To support the re-use of brownfield land, where vacant buildings are being reused or redeveloped, any affordable housing contribution due should be reduced by a proportionate amount”.

In this case, the developer is seeking to increase the delivery of housing on a highly sustainable brownfield site. As such, Vacant Building Credit should be applicable to the development of this site in accordance with national policy. There are no exceptional local circumstances as to why this should not apply.

Using the vacant floorspace from the existing building (which is the first, second and third floors) means that the development can provide 21 new affordable units (which equates to over 15% of total provision). The current proposal is to provide all these units in one block for ease of management by a housing association. The affordable units will be developed to the same standard of finish as the market housing and there will be no perceptible difference between the buildings. We are proposing 10 of the units to be affordable rented and 11 as intermediate housing.

The provision of affordable housing on this site is a significant benefit.
Scale/Massing
The scale and massing has been amended following the pre-application advice.

The proposed massing of the development remains at 4 to 4 1/2 storeys, with the only exception being the 5 story towers on apartment building A. These heights are appropriate to the site and respond to the massing of the surrounding buildings as noted below.

Apartment Building A – It is proposed that it will be built above the existing basement and it’s massing is informed by the massing of the existing factory building. A new 4 ½ storey building is proposed with two 5 storey towers. The ground floor will be elevated slightly to allow for undercroft parking which will be accommodated in the current restricted height of the basement. Two 3 bed duplex apartments will be provided in the towers on its northern edge accessed from the fourth floor. The floor to ceiling heights in the new building will be reduced from those in the existing building meaning that the overall height of the proposed building will be no greater than the existing. The distance between main face of the apartment building A and apartment building B has been increased to 22m, this narrows to 10-14m at the projecting towers. The access road for the basement parking has been relocated to the southern side of apartment building A along with surface parking.

Apartment Building B has been redesigned to create more space between the existing neighbouring apartment buildings and the proposed. It has been repositioned 25.5m minimum from the existing neighbouring apartments on the western side rather than 15m on the previous proposals. The distance between apartment building B and C is now 30m, rather than 12m. The undercroft parking has been removed to negate any potential noise and fumes, the building is now served by parking on the west and the south side.

Apartment Building C is in a similar position as before however it has been redesigned. The affordable apartments will be located in this building, with the parking located to the rear of it. The majority of the apartments will overlook the two main amenity spaces. The design of Apartment Building C reflects its position on the Site and its relationship to the neighbouring site and land use. It has been redesigned to reflect this relationship and to ensure that good quality living conditions are secured for future residents without affecting the ability of the neighbouring site to continue to operate.

Apartment building D has been relocated to the position of apartment building E which is now omitted. This allows us to create more usable amenity space for the residents. It also increases significantly the distance between the existing office buildings on the western edge and the proposed apartments. The apartment building has also been pulled forward to provide parking to the rear which allows us to remove the undercroft parking.

The amenity space has been significantly increased with two main landscaped areas now provided. Apartment buildings A, B and C all surround a central open space which provides an attractive area for these apartments to look onto. Apartment building A, B, C and D also have views over the second amenity area to the north of the site.
View 1 - Axonometric view looking east
Appearance

We intend to reference the existing building which is a 1930’s building in an Art Deco/Streamline Modern style. Buildings from this era would normally have the following characteristics:

• Strong vertical lines
• Stepped outline
• Blocky, towering silhouettes
• Flat, polished surfaces
• Parapets and turrets
• Sharp corners
• Large windows and glass blocks
• Decorative panels around entrances, windows and roof edges

It is proposed that the new apartment buildings will reference the above characteristic’s, therefore we have designed them with the following features.

• Strong vertical lines in the form of red brick pilasters which project from the facades providing a stepped outline and footprint.
• Around the main entrances we would provide corbelled pre-cast concrete surround’s.
• Parapets to all the apartments with brick decoration and corbelling.
• Two new ‘tower’ elements would be added to apartment building A with a decorative zinc roof.
• Glass blocks used where overlooking is an issue for privacy.
• Large glazed balconies to mimic the large windows on the existing building.
• Angled corner balconies to reference sharp clean corners.
South elevation of apartment building A

Existing and historic images of the former Norton’s building
View across amenity space towards apartment building A

Existing and historic images of the former Norton's building
Summary

The proposed development will:

- Deliver much needed new homes in a sustainable location;
- Create an attractive residential neighbourhood where people will aspire to live;
- Provide visual enhancements to Welwyn Garden City by removing the untidy, derelict buildings and structures;
- Provide new high quality open space;
- Improved permeability through the site including a new footway.