

Welwyn Garden City Estate Management Scheme

Welwyn Garden City (WGC) is unique and the Estate Management Scheme was set up to protect this character and history in parts of the town.

This leaflet outlines the background to the Estate Management Scheme and the policies which the Council will use to determine requests for changes to residential properties, either freehold or leasehold, within the scheme area.

What is the Estate Management Scheme?

In recognition of the importance of the Welwyn Garden City environment and to protect the amenities and values of the area and residents, the High Court in 1973 imposed a scheme of management under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 covering areas of the town. The scheme:

'to be administered for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing amenities and values in Welwyn Garden City with due regard to the convenience and welfare of persons residing, working and carrying on business there'.

It has the effect of applying similar controls to freehold properties that exist under the terms of the leases. The scheme contains 11 conditions that are binding upon each subsequent owner of the building including the need for prior consent for alterations to the appearance of buildings.

Essentially, the purpose of the Management Scheme and its importance to homeowners is to ensure that homes and street scenes are kept in harmony with the original design and concept of the town.

Why is Welwyn Garden City Important?

- Welwyn Garden City is one of only two garden cities in the country
- The main aims of the garden city movement were to provide balanced, sustainable communities with provision for housing, employment and recreational space within a high quality garden environment
- Conceived by Ebenezer Howard, the town's importance in town and social planning is recognised globally.
- The master plan for Welwyn Garden City was designed and subsequently implemented by Louis de Soissons
- Welwyn Garden City has grown along these concepts and now includes many examples of developments also carried out by the New Town Development Corporation, the Commission for the New Towns and Welwyn Hatfield Council.
- Welwyn Garden City's special character and quality is made up of many aspects that include:
 1. Carefully designed layouts with formal and symmetrical patterns
 2. Design and detailing of architecture in groups and individual buildings
 3. The buildings set within an 'Arcadian' landscape context with accessible open space and large mature trees, hedgerows and planting.
 4. The human scale and accessibility of the commercial, residential, leisure and employment area.

WGC combines some of the best UK domestic architecture of the last century all set in a designed urban and landscaped setting. The town is unique because both its design and its development during its early years were in the hands of a single person: Louis de Soissons. It is doubly unique for also being designated as a New Town.

The town was originally designed and built at a time when city living was very unhealthy and increasingly difficult. The “garden city” was seen as a combination of living in the country yet at the same time having industry close by. This was a new concept in the early 20th century and explains why the town is now recognised as a model of urban planning the world over.

Why is the Management Scheme Important today?

Property valuations are often determined by the settings in which properties are located. Quite simply, inappropriate developments, poor quality alterations to buildings and the erosion of the special character of the environment will lead in turn to the lowering of neighbouring values both in visual and economic terms.

The challenge for all concerned with garden city settlements is how to manage change whilst at the same time ensuring that the fundamental aesthetics, amenities and values of the garden city remain intact. This is important, not just in visual terms, but also because garden city settlements provide evidence for the ongoing debate about housing provision in the UK and the creation of sustainable communities. As a society, we have much to learn from what was essentially an ‘experiment’ but only if we succeed in understanding and protecting the special qualities of such settlements

Is this communication important?

Yes; residents are strongly advised to keep this communication safe as it sets out the main aspects of the Management Scheme.

Where do I find more information?

Welwyn Hatfield Council – Development Control Team
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE

Email: planning@welhat.gov.uk

Telephone: 01707 357000

A map showing the areas of Welwyn Garden City covered by the Estate Management Scheme can be found on the council’s website – www.welhat.gov.uk.

Further Sources of Information

Your solicitor will be able to provide you details of your lease and/or advice on legal aspects relating to your home

Welwyn Garden City Society – website: www.wgcsoc.org.uk

email: info@wgcsoc.org.uk

Twentieth Century Society – website: www.c20society.org.uk

Publications:

'Welwyn Garden City: A Town for Healthy Living' Maurice de Soissons, 1988, Cambridge University Press

'The History of Welwyn Garden City' Roger Filler, 1986, Phillimore & Co Ltd
'Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform' Ebenezer Howard, 2003, Routledge

History of the Town and Estate Management Scheme

Welwyn Garden City is one of only two garden cities in the UK. The town was the vision of Ebenezer Howard, who was the founder of the Garden City movement. The town is doubly unique in also having been designated as a New Town, shortly after the end of World War II and by the fact that its original designer, Louis de Soissons, was in charge of its development from its inception until his death in 1962 and his firm's influence continued through to 1978.

The ideas for the Garden City grew up during the late 19th Century and were based around the idea that densely built-up towns and the countryside both had advantages and disadvantages. Howard's idea was to combine the advantages of both in a pleasant, co-operative egalitarian environment. This was encapsulated in his book of 1898 "To-morrow – A Peaceful Path to Real Reform".

One of the key themes of the garden city ideal was self-containment, providing jobs, services, leisure facilities and housing all within one town in a high quality, green and open setting. This has some parallels with modern ideas about sustainable development in the sense that providing a mixture of land uses in close proximity reduces the need to travel

The town's historic significance in the field of town and social planning is global, attracting study and visits from tourists and representatives of civic organisations from abroad to visit. Its success led directly to the creation, in the UK and abroad, of other new towns such as Harlow, Stevenage, Radburn. It is often held up as the best example of civilised, sustainable new settlements and a model for others to follow.

Architecturally, although much of Welwyn Garden City is neo-Georgian, it is a very simple neo-Georgian, pared-down, free of too many features and therefore was eminently suitable for the C20th. Although neo-Georgian revival architecture was not uncommon elsewhere during the 1920s and 30s; the planned, singularly controlled concentration here is unique. On the whole, individual buildings of all styles, public and private, form a collection that is of the highest significance, defining the character of the Garden City and vital to its integrity.

What Changes Need Consent?

On a day to day basis, Welwyn Hatfield Council administers the Estate Management Scheme. The Estate Management Scheme has 11 conditions binding on householders ranging from keeping the buildings and garden in good repair to ensuring they are insured.

A numbers of these conditions require the householder to apply and obtain consent from the council before making changes to their home. Essentially consent is required from the council for the following before carrying out the following:

1. Extensions and alterations to the external appearance of any building (including addition of cladding, inserting new windows/ doors, porches, conservatories and demolition works)
2. The erection of new buildings (i.e. garages, sheds and greenhouses)
3. The formation of hard surfaces such as paths and driveways
4. Roof alterations including addition and removal of dormer windows, roof lights, chimneys, and micro regeneration projects including wind turbines, solar panels and air conditioning units plus changing of materials
6. A satellite dish or aerial
7. Any advertisement
8. To use the house for any purpose other than as a single dwelling house (i.e. not for running a business or boarding house)
9. The storage of a boat, caravan or commercial vehicle on the frontage or within the garden
10. Planting or creating any enclosure, wall, hedge or fence upon the boundary adjacent to an area of open frontage
11. Any works to a tree more than 15ft or 4m in height
12. Removal and works to hedgerows (except trimming)

What changes don't need consent?

Some works do not need consent under the scheme. In addition, the council has decided that it does not wish to ask householders to apply for consent for the following:

1. Replacement windows and doors of a different or the same materials which match the original design within the building (in terms of size and position of glazing bars, mullions, frames, transoms, sight lines and so on)
2. Standard TV aerials
3. Installation of paths and hard standings in rear gardens
4. Fences and walls between rear gardens
5. Planting of trees, hedges or shrubs
6. House numbers or name plaques
7. Repairs to existing buildings – Subject that the repairs being undertaken are 'like for like' in terms of materials and detailing
8. Painting buildings provided the colour is in keeping with the colour of others in the neighbourhood

Will I need any other consent?

Some changes to your home may also need Planning Permission and consent under the Building Regulations. If your house is a 'listed building', you may also need listed building consent. The council can help with further information on these consents.

If you are a tenant you may also need permission from your landlord. In addition, certain works, falling under the Party Wall Act, mean you have to give notice to your neighbours.

Why do I have to apply to the Council for several consents?

Planning legislation and building regulations that apply to the rest of the country do not cover all the aspects covered by the Estate Management Scheme within WGC town to ensure it is properly safeguarded. The Management Scheme, which is under different legislation, is intended to ensure that the special environment that was created when the town was first designed will be retained for future generations.

What happens if I don't apply for consent?

The Council has enforcement powers which it can use to ensure compliance with the terms of the Management Scheme under which most residents, whether leaseholders or freeholders, are legally bound. In addition, you may find it harder to sell your home if all the necessary consents are not in place, although, your solicitor will be able to advise you further.

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How do I apply?

Applications should be made on forms which are available on the council's website www.welhat.gov.uk or can be collected from the council's reception in Campus East. No fee is payable for the application provided the works have not been carried out. However, from 1st January 2009 retrospective applications will incur a fee of £200. In order to assess an application the Council requires that all applications include the following:

1. Completed application form
2. Ordnance survey plan 1:1250 with the site outlined in red
3. A block plan showing existing/proposed fences, boundaries, hard surfacing, tree's
4. Existing and proposed plans and elevations drawn in a legible metric scale (e.g. 1:50 or 1:100)
5. Supporting justification for the proposal (if applicable)

Without this information, we may not be able to accept your application. Other information can be included and will be helpful when we look at the visual impact of the works including photographs.

The Council's officers can offer advice in writing on your proposal's design and acceptability prior to making an application.

What happens to my application?

The Council will acknowledge and check (to see if we have all the information we need) the application. Applicants will be notified if any additional information is required to accept an application. If we have everything we need, we aim to inform the applicant which officer is dealing with the case within 3 working days of receipt. The Council will also write and ask neighbours for their comments. The application will then be passed to an Officer for consideration who often wishes to visit the property and/or contact you to clarify any details.

In looking at applications the Council has to consider the need to balance the objectives of the scheme with the wishes and aspirations of today's residents who wish to extend or alter their property. Everyone, the Council and residents, have a role in ensuring that the town's environment continues to be of the highest standard, retaining its value and passing the heritage onto future generations.

Can I appeal if my application is refused?

Most applicants have the right of appeal to the Council's Planning Control Committee if an application is refused. All appeals and supporting information, outlining your request and the reasons, must be submitted in writing to the Council. The appeal will then be considered by the Committee, usually within 8 weeks of receipt of the appeal. As the appellant you have the opportunity to present your case by speaking at the Committee meeting. For dates of the meetings, please look on the website www.welhat.gov.uk.

WGC Estate Management Scheme Area Policies

The following policies will form the basis for the consideration of applications for changes to residential properties within the Estate Management Area – both freehold and leasehold. The policies will be updated and expanded as the need arises. The latest policies will be found on the Council's website.

Extensions and Alterations Policy EM1

In order to preserve the unique architectural heritage of the town and its buildings the Council expects that all applications for extensions and alterations respect and do not harm the character and appearance of the building and the street scene. The policy also aims to secure the retention of the existing or original space at first floor level between properties and above between the flank wall and side boundary. In addition, extension or alterations should not materially affect the residential amenities of adjoining residents through loss of day/sun/skylight, loss of privacy and outlook.

POLICY EM1 - Extensions and alterations to existing buildings will only be allowed if they are in keeping with the design, appearance, materials and architectural detailing used in the existing building and do not have a detrimental impact on the amenities and values of the surrounding area or the residential amenity of adjoining occupiers.

Erection of New Buildings Policy EM2

Because of the formal planned nature of the town and its layout, the erection of new buildings including dwellings, garages, greenhouses, sheds and other outbuildings and structures can have a significant impact on the quality and appearance of a street scene or view.

Proposals for new buildings should respect the visual appearance of the area in terms of its siting, scale (height, width) and not result in a visually over prominent or discordant element. All applications for new buildings should also ensure that they do not harm the residential amenity of adjoining occupiers and the immediate surrounding area.

This policy also applies to removable/temporary items, structures and chattels such as boats, caravans, trailers and vehicles stored within the front curtilage of a property

POLICY EM2 – Proposals for the erection of new buildings will, only be permitted where they do not have a detrimental impact on the amenities and values of the surrounding area and the residential amenity of adjoining occupiers.

Soft and Hard Landscaping

The use of generous landscaping, tree planting, hedgerows and open space provision within the town is what helps the town to retain a particular and unique character. The Council acknowledges that there is a need to prevent the erosion of landscape within the town and believes frontages, hedgerows and trees are critical in preserving this character.

There are visual amenity issues in relation to the formation of hard standings within the town used to accommodate the rise in car ownership never anticipated when WGC was conceived. So it has to ensure that a balance has to be found between the needs and requirements of the town's car owning residents and the need to preserve the town's unique character and amenities.

In particular, the need to accommodate the rise in car ownership has resulted has over time resulted in a change to the street scene within the town. Accommodating private motor vehicles off street can erode the street scene, over time, by the excessive removal of landscaping within front gardens.

Soft Landscaping

Consent is rarely given for the complete removal of hedgerows or trees without sound justification and a replacement element of landscaping will nearly always be required. If you are planning on any changes to the landscaped frontages of your property then Policy EM3 'Soft Landscaping' applies:

POLICY EM3 – Works to trees and hedgerows will only be allowed where the works would not result in the loss of landscaping which would harm the character and amenities of the area and where sufficient justification for the works has been given or there are other considerations that apply.

Hard Landscaping

The need to accommodate the rise in car ownership has resulted in pressure for vehicular hard standings on the frontages of homes and this has over time resulted in a change to the appearance of streets. The removal of excessive areas or prominent landscaping such as trees and hedges rather than the hard standing itself can over time erode character. Accordingly, the Council will only allow hard surfacing (paths, paving, concrete, gravelled areas, drives and hard standings) in front gardens for the parking of private motor vehicles which retain or create sufficient soft 'green' landscaping (grass, flower beds, shrubs, trees and hedges) and a sufficient length of hedgerow (if applicable) along the frontage of the property to reduce the visual prominence of parked vehicles. The council will aim to ensure that a significant proportion, around 50% unless individual circumstances indicate that this would not be appropriate, of the frontage is retained as landscaped 'greenery' to retain the appearance and ethos of the garden city.

The space for a single hard standing for a car must be no less than 4.8 x 2.4m.

This policy will also apply to side gardens facing either open space, footpaths or roads.

POLICY EM4 – Proposals for hard surfacing, for the parking of private vehicles in front gardens will only be allowed where the works would retain an appropriate balance between hard and soft landscaping and do not result in the loss of any existing hedgerows or landscaping along the boundary, other than the minimum required to access the hard standing, that would be harmful to the amenities and values of the street scene in which it is located.