



BioPark Planning Appeal

Proof of Evidence

Welwyn Garden City Society

Architecture

Mr Richmond Bauer AA Dipl.

1. Introduction

1. I am Richmond Bauer and, on behalf of the Welwyn Garden City Society (WGCS), I discuss the architectural issues relating to the Appeal Proposal.
2. I studied at Boston University in Sociology & Psychology, 1964-1966, and was in the US Army 1968-1970. I studied at the Architectural Association 1970-1974 earning RIBA Parts I-III and an AA Diploma.
3. Starting work as an office boy for Walter Gropius in 1966, I worked part-time during most of my architectural studies and I moved to the U.K. in 1970 to start working in housing rehabilitation.
4. My early planning highlight in the UK was obtaining planning permission for a double extension to a John Nash house in Regents Park in 1975.
5. From 1976-78 I was Assistant News Editor at The Architects Journal. My responsibilities included general news articles, interviews, architectural photography, astragal entries and Building Study and I stood in for the Editor during his absences.
6. Between 1980-2004 I was Director of Planning & Design Consultants, specialising in office space planning, workspace analysis and office storage analysis. I was responsible for about 4 million square feet of office space planning.
7. Between 2005-2006 I was at the University of Hertfordshire, as leader of the General Studies in Construction Management course, whilst gaining a Masters in 2009 with the thesis, "Problem with Work' (45 pages) (Architectural Association Diploma)
8. I've been a resident in Welwyn Garden City since 1989 and a member of Welwyn Garden City Society since 2002.

2. Scope of Presentation

9. This report addresses several issues arising from the BioPark housing scheme submitted by the HG Group comprising 289 housing units on a 1.24 hectare site. The scheme comprises seven buildings ranging from a 3-storey terrace to 9-storey blocks of flats. The predicted population of the site will be 852 people giving a density of 687/hectare.

3. The Proposed Development

10. When Ebenezer Howard forecast the development of the garden city, he said, "*The town will grow, but it will grow in accordance with a principle which will result in this: that such growth shall not lessen or destroy, but ever add to its social opportunities, to its beauty, to its convenience.*"¹
11. Proper consideration of the appearance of the BioPark scheme is a complicated matter. Looking at the architect's plans, elevations and coloured perspective views, my impressions are:
 - a. 5 large blocks of up to nine storeys that are totally out of scale to adjacent sites (see Appendix A) and to Council guidelines, which set a five-storey limit to proposed new building.
 - b. The blocks are very closely spaced, leading to overlooking of neighbours and neighbouring developments.
 - c. There will be limited penetration of sunlight due to orientation and spacing of buildings, leading to the question, "*The Appellant has failed to provide proof that the required 2 hours minimum amount of sunlight will be met with this scheme*".
 - d. Use of two-storey mansard roofs is inappropriate and visually intrusive, particularly in views from a distance - see Appendix B.
 - e. The overall impression of architectural style is that it is good for an urban setting; but there is just too much 'architecture' in too small a space.

¹ Garden Cities of Tomorrow by Ebenezer Howard, Chapter 12, 1898

12. Upon closer inspection of the submitted material, my observations are:
- a. In the few areas where sunlight could penetrate the spaces between the buildings, trees are indicated which would further block sunlight
 - b. All parking is below ground, including that for visitors, which could present security risks.
 - c. Ventilation extracts are located at ground level in proximity to children's play areas, creating potential noise and pollution risks.
 - d. There is no special consideration for vehicular access onto Broadwater Road and this could potentially lead to traffic backup at peak times - as referenced in the separate Hertfordshire County Council representation.

Usable Outdoor Space

13. In the BioPark scheme, the developers make much of the communal areas at ground level and the play areas provided for children. Unfortunately, these spaces will probably end up being ignored because they will be in shade when people may wish to be there- see Appendix C.
14. The ventilation extracts will be located at ground level, in proximity to children's play areas, and these locations will impact the use of these areas - see Appendix E.
15. The amount of usable outdoor space varies depending on whether a property is a house or a flat. Ground floor flats require a minimum of 5m² of space for a 2-person unit; balconies for flats require a minimum depth and width of 1.5m.
16. Other observations of the other outdoor spaces are as follows:
- a. Most of the open spaces are covered in hard paving, leaving very little 'green' space for adults or children.
 - b. Soft play areas for children are limited
 - c. It is noted that several roofs in the revised scheme are showing rooftop gardens. These are surrounded by only 1.0m high balustrades which could be a potential hazard for active children. Roof gardens tend to be quietly closed after being built because of excessively high service charges, risk of falling debris hitting passer-by and risk to children.
 - d. The rooftop gardens are the only areas that would receive maximum sunlight.

Impact on Welwyn Garden City

17. There is no doubt that the development will have an adverse impact on the local area for a number of reasons:

- a. Overspill parking in adjoining areas leading to friction between existing and new residents as evidenced in the Society's Proof of Evidence on Car Parking.
- b. Traffic congestion at peak times due to lack of consideration for concentrating a large number of vehicles in a finite area. This will impact workers' ability to get to work on time.

The internal floor area (+62%) and the number of occupants (+42%) are greatly increased over the current site - see Appendix D.

- c. Insufficient educational facilities being available on completion will stretch existing schools beyond design limits.
- d. Lack of adequate medical facilities.
- e. Lack of adequate open areas for children of differing age groups to play which could lead to the Parkway – the nearest green open space – becoming an ad hoc football pitch.
- f. For those less athletically inclined, the town centre will become the meeting place for large numbers of restless youths, potentially impacting retail sales in a town already showing the signs of economic stress.

18. The impact could worsen if the BioPark approval sets the standards for future developments in the area. With an aggregate increase of around 6,000 people in the population of the town as a result of the developments around Broadwater Road West, approximately 15% of the Welwyn Garden City's population will be concentrated in the very heart of the town.

19. The 9-storey BioPark development will be visible from Grade 1 listed Hatfield House, further afield, which will detract from Hatfield House - as referenced in the separate Gascoyne Estates representation.

At night, light pollution from the numerous, large windows at the BioPark will further impact on the townscape.

20. Quoting from NPPF Para 194, "Local planning authorities... should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or

minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.².

21. Due to its size, the buildings will also be visible from the west side of the Parkway and its contemporary design will stand out in harsh contrast with the architectural vocabulary used throughout this part of town.

Housing & Population Density

22. The density of occupation on this site with the proposed development is the main problem.
23. One of the prime reasons for creating the 'garden city' was to offer an alternative to the severe overcrowding in London, which it has succeeded in doing.
24. At the moment, London is experiencing a growth spurt with an increase in population of 144% between 1996 and 2011: the problem seems to still be there.
25. In Ebenezer Howard's book "Garden Cities of Tomorrow", various density figures are mentioned but 12 houses per acre with an average occupation of 5.5 persons per house is firm. Thus 66 people per acre or 158 per hectare was the guideline. The current scheme allows for a density of 687 persons per hectare.
26. For comparison purposes, the most densely populated area in New York City has a density of 646 per hectare. Closer to home, current figures for density in London show, for example, that Islington, the second most densely populated borough, has 118 people per hectare. – 1/6th the density of the proposed scheme.
27. Equally worrying is that, should this proposal go ahead, it will open the door for further developments of a similar density, in the area. At the moment, the figures for the proposed developments around Broadwater Road total over 6,000 residents, 15% of the population of Welwyn Garden City.
28. On the issue of density of occupation alone, this scheme is contrary to everything that Welwyn Garden City was created to replace.

² NPPF National Planning Policy Framework, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, July 2021

Conclusion

29. To conclude, I can do no better than quote the words of Michael Gove MP, who recently said, *“It’s no kind of success simply to hit a target if the homes that are built are shoddy, in the wrong place, don’t have the infrastructure required and are not contributing to a beautiful community.”*³

³ Michael Gove speaking on Radio 4, 11 May 2022