

I wish to object to the above application.

Buildings A and B when completed will be significantly higher than all buildings nearby. The buildings are four storey apartment blocks situated on top of retail premises. To the west is the Hertford Club, a Grade II listed building and to the south Folly Island, a Local Conservation Area.

The site remains part of the Hertford Town Centre Conservation Area. Although the Bircherley Green Shopping Centre was part of this Conservation Area it was a modern development built in the early 1980's and had no merit either historical or architectural. Notwithstanding this, it would be preferable that any new development should endeavour to blend in almost imperceptibly with its surroundings.

The site as planned will dominate the town centre skyline. Buildings A and B with their current height proposal will dominate that section of the River Lea. It will be visible to more properties on Folly Island and people walking through to the town through Thornton Street or along the river path from the east. It will be visible as you enter town from South Street and from Sainsbury's as you approach from Hartham Common, and also from Mill Bridge. The new apartment blocks will be even more visible at night when the residents lighting is on.

This is not the heritage statement that should be made in the county town; that a twenty first century mixed use development completely overshadows the historic and architecturally rich town centre. The majority of town centre buildings are Grade II listed properties with at least one feature of historical or architectural significance.

I quote from Russell Moye, Project Architect of Shire Hall writing in 1990 in 'The Restoration of Shire Hall':

*'A threat of wholesale re-development blighted the core of Hertford for more than twenty years. Once that threat was removed in the late 1970's the town blossomed, and the new buildings which have appeared generally rest easily, in scale and detail, with their mature neighbours.'*

Something that cannot be said of this proposed development and it does not sit well with the existing character of the town as suggested by the applicant.

The two apartment blocks will have 100 units. Irrespective of the split between one and two bedroom properties and the hopes of planners and applicants, a majority of new residents may have a car (or two) and wish to park close to their home. It is inconceivable that 40 dedicated residential parking spaces in Bircherley Green car park will be adequate.

There are 188 spaces in this car park and apart from 5 given over to Car Club charging points the remaining 143 Pay and Display spaces are insufficient for the needs of the general community.

This will include hotel guests, visitors to residents in the new apartments, those attending the new surgery if approved, shoppers in the town centre and those coming to town to enjoy the night time economy. To this must be added the needs of delivery drivers following the recent increase in internet ordering.

Hertford is a medieval market town and the road layout has not changed much since that shown in Spede's map of 1611. The increase in vehicular traffic will surely cause problems in the centre of town with more and more people looking for parking space. This development is not a 'destination' in its own right – it is apartments with a limited retail offer.

The certain increase in residents will cause a consequential demand for health services. It is already difficult in Hertford to register at any of the town centre GP surgeries; and almost impossible to register at a dentist.

It would be hoped that permission would be granted for a new super-surgery but details for this are lacking such as to how many GP patients it will take and if there is to be a dentist surgery.

The applicant states that *the 'development's location within the town centre with less than convenient parking is likely to appeal to a younger audience who are accepting of this and the town centre throng (!)'*. However even younger residents have children and places at schools in Hertford are limited.

This development will create problems by the increase in road traffic, residential movement and demand for health, school, community and social services and the number of apartments should be amended accordingly.

As mentioned above these apartments will overlook Folly Island. Many resident's gardens can already be viewed from Level F of Bircherley Green so it is not foolish to presume that the extra two floors living space above the existing level will mean a dramatic invasion of privacy for Folly Island residents.

The retail units and apartments will completely ruin the skyline. The illumination from the rooms at night will mean increased light pollution in the town centre and ruin the enjoyment of the night sky and possibly the transit of the moon. It is worth noting that Folly Island properties date back to the late 1890's and are entitled to enjoy the traditional views since that time.

I note that similar to previous applications there is to be a thoroughfare from Railway Street to the river and the current service road is to be improved with restaurants, cafes, seating and greenery. However this area has historically been gated by which means local disturbance at night has been kept to a minimum.

The applicant makes no mention about measures to contain noise and anti-social behaviour, especially during the peak hours of late night/early morning such as CCTV or licensing restrictions. The development will increase these activities where there have been none or very little before. Likewise there is no improved screening of the river frontage to minimise noise from the riverside establishments and disturbance caused by drivers headlights during darker days.

It would appear from the Full Design Statement that the bus station waiting room will be retained. However, there is no provision stated for a food counter, real-time bus information board or even toilets. The latter are of course essential for even normal travelling but Hertford is not just a destination stop but also an interchange. Three doors are marked on the Design Statement where the public toilets are placed now but nothing to suggest that these are to remain as such.

The applicants state that their target audience is one that need not use their car; *'everything is provided on their doorstep'*. Unfortunately the retail choice in Hertford is very limited; shops are closing every week or changing use to the health and beauty sector; and provision of selective competition is almost non-existent.

Public travel such as east/west is limited to route 724 and route 390. The latter only runs direct to Lister Hospital twice a day and the former is well known as unreliable where timetables are concerned. There is currently a replacement bus service between Hertford North and Stevenage and engineering work is quite common on the Hertford East Line. A travel pack would benefit not just new residents but existing ones; not everyone has a smart phone.

It has been brought to the attention of East Herts Council on many occasions by traders groups and representative organisations that as desirable as it might be to shop in Hertford the lack of a total shopping experience makes it necessary to shop elsewhere i.e: Stevenage, Welwyn or Harlow.

In fact, the car has become a necessity for even everyday purchases. The alternative is to use the internet for shopping which increases vehicular traffic in town and reduces the amount of money that stays in town.

The applicant uses the word 'destination' throughout. However there are few 'key attractors' left in Hertford and the town is not a destination for shoppers. I have heard conversations on buses and trains and this is repeated time and time again. People's towns of choice have switched to Stevenage or even Hoddesdon. This makes the reliance on car travel even greater.

It would be preferable if the applicants could design the retail spaces to attract the big names to give a reason to visit Hertford. However they are correct in stating *'that we no longer believe that larger retailers are expanding as they were perhaps only three-four years ago. The commercial environment is rapidly altering and faces an insurmountable uncertainty with regard to what the modern bricks and mortar high street will be in the next decade'*.

Therefore the need to encourage key retail attractors is even greater. The spaces marked for a recording studio and cycle rack might be better employed to increase the floor space for a national retailer.

If the applicant really wants to make Hertford a 'destination' then there has to be something to make people want to come here. Apartment blocks and a minimal retail offer is not going to encourage those visitors.

In summary I wish to object to this planning application on the grounds that the design does not fit well into a conservation area, is of excessive height, shows minimal consideration for local residents, provides a lack of adequate parking, places increased pressure on health and other services and does not improve a poor retail offer.