



24TH January 2019

Kevin Steptoe
East Herts Council
Planning Dept
Wallfields
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

Dear Mr Steptoe,

NORTHGATE END MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK
REF 3/18/0432/FUL

I am writing on behalf of the residents of Yew Tree Place, Northgate End, Bishop's Stortford, post code CM23 2EY. We are the nearest residents to the proposed car park, and the land at the rear of houses 7-10 is immediately behind their properties. This land is at the moment an open playing field used by the youth at the Northgate Youth centre. There is a car park for the use of the Northgate Centre which is approached via a right of way through the private roadway in Yew Tree Place, owned by Manormere Ltd which is the company managing the common parts of Yew Tree Place. The car park contains 22 spaces.

This amended planning application is now a live application following the outcome of a judicial review instigated by myself. The High Court Judge decided that the Council did not recognise the importance of conserving the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. There were other grounds high lighted numbering grounds 1-4. Although the parties to the Judicial review, namely East Herts Council, defendant, and Clive Risby, claimant, lodged the consent in which East Herts Council admitted that they had acted unlawfully, the high Court has yet to respond. In these circumstances we believe that the Council has brought forward the application again before the High Court has quashed the decision, and that their planning application is premature.

In the correspondence accompanying the amended application dated 4th January 2019, the Council states that comments must be submitted by the 28th January 2019, and that anything received after that date may be too late to influence a decision. This only allowed 24 days of submissions which is below the period normally expected. Then a further letter was issued also dated the 4th January in which the date for submissions was revised as the 4th February 2019, so we assume that there had been a re-think and that the period has been extended to the 4th February 2019.

The application now before us is only a slightly amended one, having removed the MUGA. The previous proposal had been opposed by HERTS CC, and we understand that the Youth Officers are still unhappy to see even part of their playing field used for car parking. There are already 22 spaces at the rear of the Northgate centre, so that amending the layout and utilising the open playing field for 27 spaces is not a worthwhile gain. It also creates an area to be used by the public on an extended timescale compared with the existing use by the Northgate Centre, in a much more

acceptable location. This allows the youth to participate in games on the playing field without having to transverse a public car park to an inconvenient space at the far eastern end of their site. Furthermore, if the open car park is allowed to go ahead, Manormere Ltd, as the owner of the private road in Yew Tree Place, will seek to withdraw the right of way granted to the Northgate School in order to protect our residents from unauthorised use of the access road.

The proposed emergency access for ambulances and fire-engines, will need to be through the land owned by East Herts Council and Herts County Council and NOT through Yew Tree Place.

There is also a proposal to open up the culvert at the rear of our woodland area in Yew Tree Place, and we are concerned because our surface water from the 11 houses drains into that culvert. There is already evidence that this culvert is either blocked or overused which causes a back-up into Yew Tree Place drains. We had assurance from Liz Watts that this issue would be high-lighted and precautions taken to maintain our use of the culvert and also to have free access to the Meads such as we already possess through our gated fence on the East side. We would require a written assurance on this point if the development is allowed to go ahead.

Conservation Area

Policy HA4 of the District Plan is the area which the High Court considered had been neglected in the officers' report to the Planning Committee. We recognise that the Planning Committee members have to rely upon the officers examining in detail the numerous objections to this scheme, but we do not believe it absolves them from discussing the main issues in the public committee. When the decision was taken to approve the application last July, hardly any mention was made of the major problems associated with this proposal. On the other hand a great deal of time was spent discussing electric vehicles and power provision, which although important, is not the most relevant issue involved. The local Town Council rejected the application, but this was not mentioned in the committee, not even by the Chairman, who is a Bishop's Stortford Councillor.

In considering the High Court Judge's views on Conservation we ask that the following factors should be taken into consideration:-

1. The nature of the area would be changed completely if the MSCP is allowed to go through.
2. The land on the north side of the Causeway and Link Rd is at present maintained either as Castle Park, the Town Meads, or an open tree lined car park, creating an attractive entrance into the Town.
3. Converting the Northgate Car Park and land to the North into a MSCP will create a 6 storey building towering over all other properties in the Conservation Area, and has been likened to a Cruise Ship in the centre of the Bishop's Stortford.
4. The playing field used by young people at the Northgate Centre is conveniently placed for easy access, whereas if the changes proceed it will be turned into a public open area car park.
5. The remaining piece of land at the east end of the playing field is not convenient for use by the young people.
6. Drawings of the buildings on the Northgate Car Park only show the frontage view along Link Road, and do not show the towering appearance of the 6 storey car park immediately behind.
7. The proposals should consider all the factors listed in the Neighbourhood plan, the Policy HA4 and any other considerations which are required under planning laws.

Old River Lane overall development.

The Council state that is necessary to put the car park into place to enable the future development of the Causeway Car park. We would dispute this for the following reasons:-

1. As a result of Waitrose objecting to the previously proposed access, the existing access to Waitrose prevents the area at the East end of Bridge Street, and outside Coopers, being turned into a public space.
2. This change enables the temporary car park to be fully utilised for a new Multi Storey Car park, which would be close to any new cultural centre and would be similar in bulk to the Jackson Square building.
3. The plans for the use of the Causeway Car Park have not been advanced, and until they are subject to the usual planning process, no relevant comments can be made.
4. However, the suggested proposals which were available to the public, showed that retail and housing would be the favourite proposal, coupled with the Arts Centre. These suggestions are now somewhat out of date and do not fit in with the way in which retail units are being closed in most town High Streets. In our own town more and more units are closing and being replaced with Charity shops or food/drink outlets. Creating a new retail site away from the High St will move the centre of activity away from the existing retail area, and this will encourage more closures.
5. Proposals for housing units in the Causeway car park site will place them in a polluted area, with the emphasis on high rise units unsuitable for young families.

Traffic Problems.

All recent surveys have accepted that there is a problem. We cannot see any sense in placing a new car park at the end of Link Road, which will create a hub to be approached from both ends of town. Congestion is bound to ensue, since trying to get into the new car park from either point will be slow and heavy. The traffic survey included in the Council's advice was undertaken in the period when Bishop's Stortford College had closed for the summer, reducing the volumes of traffic as a result. A fresh traffic survey should be commissioned before it is too late.

Pollution and Quality of Air.

With the additional traffic coming from both St Michael's Hurst and the thousands of new homes at the top of Hadham Road, the junction of Rye St with Link Road will become a severely polluted area. The sensor in Northgate End shows that nitrogen levels, are at the top of the scale already, and with the increase in traffic developing as the new building sites are occupied it will not be long before this junction is above the Hockerill levels. All current thinking shows that air quality is something to take into account when planning new developments, and the evidence that asthma in young children is increasing shows that Northgate Car Park is not the place to build housing units.

Letter from Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation.

This detailed submission from the Federation deserves real consideration, and their suggestion that the proposals should be deferred makes considerable sense. A town like Bishop's Stortford deserves very careful consideration and planning should be undertaken only when it can improve the quality of life.

Letter from Bishop's Stortford Town Council.

Following the decision of the Town Council taken on the 21st January 2019, their comments show that East Herts Council should listen to their views and not impose a solution which is not for the benefit of the whole town.

High Court Judge's views.

It is clear from the Addendum that the overriding points made by the High Court Judge have still not been properly addressed. Until those points are adequately considered we would regard any decision to be flawed and in direct opposition to the High Court.

We ask District Councillors to reject the application as submitted.

Yours sincerely,

For Yew Tree Place residents