



WELWYN GARDEN CITY SOCIETY

www.wgcsoc.org.uk

DMC Application Statement for 8th November 2018 re 22 Parkway

I am speaking to you tonight as an objector to this application on behalf of the WGC Society and local families who are not members but have expressed grave concerns.

We have made a detailed submission into the consultation on the matter, so it's not necessary to recap all of that now, but we do hope that committee members will give it weight as they contemplate the decision that needs to be made.

It's useful to reflect on the fact that your report states that **360** representations have been received in response to the application, and that **248** of those were objections, which is about 70% of all respondents. I'm fairly sure that this is one of the highest response rates to any planning application in recent years. It shows how strongly people feel about this and why over two thirds of respondents strongly object to it.

The previous 2015 and 2016 applications while marginally different from that before us now were equally unpopular with our members. There is a very significant local objection to turning 22 Parkway into some sort of pub/restaurant hybrid and the disruption it would bring.

What is at the core of these objections?

In our view it has nothing to do with whoever the applicant happens to be. But it has everything to do with how our town centre was planned almost a century ago. The zoning has stood the test of time and the town centre has thrived. There is no reason to change course now by setting a detrimental precedent. This side of Parkway has never been zoned for C1 hotel use, and especially a hotel that appears to be more pub than a hotel.

Many of the respondents who supported this application did so because they want to see a new pub in the town and in particular a Wetherspoon pub. We acknowledge that view and have no objection to it.

The problem is this is a recognised heritage and conservation location. A couple of days ago I had an email from a nearby resident and Society member who wanted to be here tonight but couldn't make it. She speaks for many residents when she tells me that this application is the thin end of wedge, and 100% against the ethos of our Garden City. Her email articulates how strongly many long-standing residents feel about this proposal.

Over the last 40 years, successive planning policies have protected this particular row of buildings from conversion to retail and leisure. This policy is long standing and has been re-affirmed in the current draft Local Plan which is soon to be finalised.

If this application is approved it will set a precedent for all buildings on the west side of Parkway to convert into retail or entertainment with negative consequences for the town centre proper.

The Planning officers report is comprehensive and well balanced in our view. The conclusion is clear – there are four grounds on which to refuse this scheme. This is a clear cut case. In recent years a number of other eateries and a hotel have opened in the town centre and we have lodged no objections, should this applicant decide to apply to open in an appropriate location we should again have no objection.

Thank you.

Will Davis.

Chairman – on behalf of the WGC Society.