

**Town & Country Planning Act 1990**

**Appeal against refusal by Stevenage Borough Council of  
application 19/00474/FPM for**

**Demolition of existing office building (Use Class B1) and  
structures, and construction of seven apartment buildings  
comprising 576 dwellings (Use Class C3) together with internal  
roads, parking, public open space, landscaping, drainage and  
associated infrastructure works**

**at**

**Land West of Lytton Way, Stevenage, SG1 1AG**

**Appellant**

**Hill Residential Ltd**

**SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

**DESIGN, TOWNSCAPE AND HERITAGE**

**(CD 3.21.1)**

**RICHARD COLEMAN**

**Dip Arch (Cant) ARB RIBA RIAI**

21 JUNE 2021

**Planning Inspectorate Reference:**

APP/K1935/W/20/3255692



## PRELIMINARY

In converting the documentation from a 'Hearing' to a 'Public Inquiry', I have not re-written my 'Supplementary Statement on Design, Townscape and Heritage' (CD 3.10), which was submitted with the Appeal in August 2020. There are four separately bound documents before the Inquiry, as set out below, including this Summary:

- Richard Coleman, 'Proof of Evidence' (CD 3.21), which includes two parts:

Part 1 sets out the documentation prepared for the Inquiry and highlights the importance of my originally submitted 'Supplementary Statement on Design, Townscape and Heritage', which also forms the main part of my Proof of Evidence, but is in a separate document;

Part 2 sets out my rebuttal comments to Mr. Robin Buckle's evidence. So that there is continuity, this part recasts some of the contents of my Supplementary Statement, dated 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020 (CD 3.10). It saves the reader from the need to constantly refer back to the Statement document.

- Richard Coleman, '**Supplementary Statement on Design, Townscape and Heritage**' dated 18th August 2020 (CD 3.10), which has already been submitted with the Appeal.
- A further A3 format '**Appendices 1-4**' document (CD 3.10.1, CD 3.10.2, CD 3.10.3, and CD 3.10.4) relates to my Supplementary Statement and has also been submitted with the Appeal.
- Richard Coleman, '**Summary Proof of Evidence**' (CD 3.21.1), which is this document.

This Summary begins with the **Supplementary Statement on Design, Townscape and Heritage** (CD 3.10)

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 I am Richard Coleman, architect and principal of Citydesigner, a design, townscape and heritage consultancy of 24 years standing.
- 1.2 I was appointed by the appellant in May 2020 following refusal.
- 1.3 I visited the site and additional potential viewpoints on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020.

1.4 My brief has been to assess design quality and the effects on the surrounding context, to review the Council's reasons for refusal 1 and 2 alongside, but independent of the appellant's architect, landscape architect, townscape assessor and planning advisor.

1.5 I confirm my evidence to be true and my professional opinion following good practice.

## **2.0 Appeal Site**

2.1 Stevenage was first of the New Towns, begun in 1949, within which the appeal site was developed in 1989 with the current building for an Insurance HQ designed by Ellsworth Sykes Partnership. Its plan form has wrongly been interpreted as an eagle assuming the original owner to be Eagle Star Insurance. It was in fact for Confederation Life Insurance.

2.2 The site is fully described in the Statement of Common Ground.

2.3 The existing building is redundant and will be demolished while its rich perimeter landscape will be retained.

2.4 Though the architects were prolific at this time, they were not at the forefront of HQ office design and the building, though gaining the nickname Icon, does not rate highly in the genre of such buildings in the UK and Europe.

2.5 Its status in terms of appearance, setting, durability and architectural standing is good in parts and reflects contemporary ideas, but lacks the depth of thought applied to other more successful examples.

2.6 Though of some substance, the building does not hold the architectural or innovative qualities which would give cause for its retention, nor does its deep plan lend itself to accommodating another use.

## **3.0 The Appeal Scheme**

3.1 In optimising the site for housing and creating a generosity of open space there arises a scale and height which is greater than the surrounding development. This is arranged compositionally as a series of housing blocks of varying size, form, and materiality amid an enriched landscape such that there is a harmony between the parts, an order to their arrangement and an undulation in their skyline. In consultation with planning officers the architect's pursued a maximum height which was explored taking reasonable measures to assess its effect on the historic parts of the town. The high elements have since been proven to be well judged based on the additional townscape

views prepared for this appeal. The C-shape of the plan embraces the main open space with a combination of car parking, landscaping and defined amenity spaces of different size, orientation, and character. The high elements at either end of the site define the scheme's inherent symmetry which follows in the lower intermediate blocks in an undulating form. This is best appreciated in medium distant views where its skyline is read as a coherent composition.

- 3.2 Additional illustrative images have been produced together with a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 3.3) based on a set of views on which I advised, showing how successful the scheme is at all distances.
- 3.3 Planning officers recommended approval and assessed that there was no harm to the significance of the principal conservation area. It pointed to a lack of assessment on the existing building which is now rectified in my evidence above. The Officers' report is logical, well written, and is an intelligent appraisal of the scheme, ultimately recommending approval.
- 3.4 In my main evidence (CD 3.10) I have methodically assessed the scheme based on guidance provided by the: NPPF (CD 7.1), NPPG, CABE/Design Council's 'A Design Wayfinder' (CD 12.5), the National Design Guide (CD 12.3 and CD 12.4), Historic England's 'Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings' (CD 12.9), and the Stevenage Borough Local Plan (CD 5.1). It stands up well to the vast majority of assessments in this suite of authoritative documents.

#### **4.0 Efficacy of Reasons for Refusal**

- 4.1 The Committee appear to have reached conclusions on the two Reasons for Refusal 1 and 2 without clear evidence, and contrary to planning officers' advice, based on the scheme being too high and too dense for the town. The evidence now includes the additional work done for the appeal, which should reassure the Inspector that a positive conclusion can be made.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

- 5.1 In this evidence I have established the origins of the appeal site in the context of the New Town masterplan, the adaptability of that plan to accept the current building and its HQ office use, and ironed out some myths about the building which reduces it to an ordinary redundant building. The redevelopment of the site for much needed housing and its ideal proximity to the town centre, employment sites and the station is thus fully justified.
- 5.2 I have considered the design concept, its spatial arrangement, form, use of materials, landscaping and visual effects and have reached the same conclusion as the Council's planning officers that it should be given approval. This has been backed up by the thorough townscape and visual assessment work carried out by Turley, which indicates from where the proposed development will not be seen and from where it will, the latter illustrating its townscape and landscape virtues. In particular, the good judgement by the architects and planners on height, the artistic and orientational approach to composition and the resultant successful silhouette and outline of the scheme in long views. In the latter case, the identity and sense of place established on site can be recognised and interpolated from such views. This is a further visual attribute.
- 5.3 The professional judgements I have made, and those made by the planning officers, are then backed up by my assessments against policy, guidance and advice using the NPPF, the NPPG, CABE/Design Council's 'A Design Wayfinder', the National Design Guide, Historic England's High Buildings Note, and the Stevenage Borough Local Plan. These set out objective criteria to which I have added objective responses.
- 5.4 Taking these considerations into account illustrates why the Council's disregard of their officer's recommendation and unsubstantiated refusal of the scheme was misjudged and a mistake. It is with this belief that I can confidently recommend to the Inspector for this appeal that, assuming other matters outside the scope of my evidence are satisfactorily resolved, the appeal scheme should be approved.

## **Proof of Evidence (CD 3.21) – Summary of Part 2: Rebuttal Comments on Robin Buckle’s ‘Supplementary Statement on Design’**

### **Section 1:**

This refers to design quality and pages 30-48 of Mr Buckle’s Statement (CD 13.3), where he responds to Section 3.4 of my Statement (CD 3.10). In my main proof I set his comments out in relation the items of guidance and my original response. I then, in sequence, make a rebuttal comment.

### **Section 2:**

At Mr Buckle’s paragraphs 3.1.9 and 3.1.11 – 3.1.15, he deals with height and context but does not acknowledge the unique promontory nature of the site and its surrounding large scale infrastructure. He poses his own design approach which would be more rich in contrast, in particular at the base and top, with little respect for the architect’s approach of simplicity in a rich landscape.

### **Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6:**

These sections of my rebuttal correct Mr Buckle’s responses to my assessments and draws out further clarity about why my assessments are fair and his is born of a personal higher aspiration for the appeal site rather than setting out objective reasons for why the appeal should be dismissed.

### **Conclusion to Rebuttal**

Having carefully considered each of Mr Buckle’s comments on my assessments, I remain of the view that my conclusions as set out at page 28 of my Supplementary Statement on Design, Townscape and Heritage (CD 3.10) remain sound.

**Richard Coleman**

**Citydesigner**