

30 November, 2020

Mr. Colin Haigh,
Head of Planning,
Welwyn Hatfield Council

Dear Mr Haigh

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan – Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need
(FOAHN)

Thank you for your letter of 18 November setting out your Council's latest position on the implications of the 2018 household forecasts for the FOAHN to be used in the Local Plan. As you say in paragraph 7, the Planning Practice Guidance does not envisage a situation where more than one forecast would be produced. Notwithstanding that, the Council has now submitted two.

Your original response to my request for a revised position on the FOAHN has now been the subject of a consultation. My original intention was to assess the responses, along with the other evidence, following the close of the consultation and to move forward to a decision on that aspect of the plan, with or without a hearing as appropriate, as soon as practicable. We would then very likely have had a revised FOAHN before the final deadline for your submission of the material requested in paragraph 135 of my interim report.

Your decision to submit a further FOAHN assessment will postpone the completion of that work and necessitate yet another consultation and further delay to the Examination's timetable. Unfortunately, an implication of that delay will be an inability, on my part, to publish a revised FOAHN before January 2021 and on yours to submit sites that would meet that figure rather than the one that is currently before the Examination. Assuming that the requirements of the first two bullet points to paragraph 135 of my interim report are met, by 30 November, then I will proceed with the supplementary consultation into the FOAHN.

I shouldn't need to remind you that this plan is being examined under the policies contained in the 2020 Framework. Any, as yet, speculative changes to the standard method that may come about are irrelevant to the consideration of this plan's FOAHN.

Whilst I note that you now say that the Turley evidence was sent in advance of their report being considered by members, nowhere in your letter of 24 August

does it say that the report and its conclusions are to be the subject of subsequent member scrutiny and endorsement. Indeed, the recommendation in the report submitted to the Planning and Parking Panel on 10 September clearly says **“That the Panel notes the updated Objective Assessment of Housing Need for the new plan period 2016-2036 is 715 dwellings per year, equivalent to 14,300 dwellings over the plan period”**. Had it done so the Programme Officer would not have undertaken the consultation and you would have been told to produce your final response to the implications of the 2018 household forecasts long before 16 November.

Whilst, if necessary, a hearing session into revisions to the FOAHN will be held as soon as possible and before there are any held to consider additional sites, if your latest FOAHN is to remain before the Examination then none of that would be before January 2021. My report makes it perfectly clear that **“details of the additional sites that will make up the supply of housing land to meet the FOAHN figure, along with any evidence that has been used in their selection that is not already before the Examination should be submitted by 30 November 2020 and responses to all of the other outstanding requests for additional information by 31 December 2020”**. I shouldn't need to remind you but for the avoidance of doubt I will conclude by pointing out that the FOAHN that is currently before the Examination is 16,000 and not whatever alternative figure the Council would prefer it to be.

Yours Sincerely

M Middleton

Melvyn Middleton

INSPECTOR