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Date: 31 March 2021

Dear Ms St John Howe

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan Examination – Supplementary Education Statement in respect of primary education provision in the Welham Green and Brookmans Park area

At the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) Examination in Public sessions regarding Welham Green (Stage 9 Hearing Sessions on 16 March 2021) and Brookmans Park (Stage 9 Hearing Session on 17 March 2021) a number of questions were raised regarding primary education provision in those settlements. The Inspector has therefore requested specific additional information from the Education Authority clarifying the position of primary education provision in Welham Green and Brookmans Park. The responses to the Inspectors enquiries are set out below.

Given the relatively close geographical proximity between the two settlements and the flows of pupils between the two primary schools and across the area, Hertfordshire County Council considers that the primary education provision and mitigation for Welham Green and Brookmans Park should be considered together in the wider context rather than separately and in isolation.

Current and Forecast Capacity at Welham Green:

Welham Green is currently served by St Mary's Church of England Primary School. This is a 1 Form of Entry (FE) primary school located within the settlement.

The County Council forecasts demand for primary school places four years into the future. It is not possible to accurately forecast primary yield after four years as the children are not yet born. These forecasts are informed by the numbers of pre-school aged children registered with GPs as living in the area and take account of historic migration patterns as well as assumed pupil demand from an element of new housing expected to yield within the next 4 years.

The forecasts provide information in terms of Primary Planning Areas (PPA). St Mary's Church of England Primary School is within the Hatfield PPA.

Table 1 below sets out the latest current capacity and forecasts in relation to the Hatfield PPA (published summer 2020).

Table 1: Current Primary School Forecasts for the Hatfield PPA (published summer 2020):

14.1 Hatfield									
School Code	School Name	Places Available 2020-21	Actuals			Forecast			
			2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
2004	Hatfield Community Free School	60	60	60	62				
2007	Birchwood Avenue Primary School	30	48	28	31				
2039	Green Lanes Primary School	60	60	60	60				
2225	Howe Dell Primary School	60	59	60	60				
2391	The Ryde School	30	28	28	30				
3388	St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School	60	60	60	60				
3406	Countess Anne Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Hatfield	30	30	30	30				
3976	St Mary's Church of England Primary School	30	23	14	16				
3982	De Havilland Primary School	60	72	62	58				
3989	Oak View Primary and Nursery School	60	56	57	59				
Total Year R Pupil Demand			496	459	466	459	462	391	427
Total Year R Places Available		480				480	480	480	480
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (No.)						21	18	89	53
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (%)						4.4%	3.8%	18.5%	11.0%
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (FE)						0.7	0.6	3.0	1.8

Table 1 shows that currently (data for the 2019-20 academic year) St Mary's Church of England Primary School is just over half full at reception (there are 16 places taken with capacity for 30 places). It is currently expected that in the next four years that the spare capacity within the school should decrease slightly, resulting in there being no more than 0.5FE of spare reception capacity in the school.

Whilst St Mary's Church of England Primary School is within the Hatfield Primary Planning Area (PPA) all the other schools in the area are located within Hatfield. Children from Welham Green would not be expected to be mitigated at the primary schools in Hatfield given the distance of those schools from Welham Green and priority that Hatfield children would have over the Welham Green children given admission criteria based on distance. Furthermore, the total forecast capacity for the Hatfield PPA for the next four years, as shown in Table 1, does not include the significant levels of growth proposed for Hatfield and therefore any spare capacity in the primary schools in Hatfield cannot be relied upon to mitigate the growth proposed for Welham Green.

The current site size of St Mary's Church of England Primary School is approximately 0.8ha. The County Council requires the site size for 2FE primary schools to be approximately 2.1ha. Therefore, there is insufficient space for St Mary's Church of England Primary School to expand on its current site beyond its current 1FE provision. Furthermore, the County Council is aware of vehicular access issues which would be prohibitive to any further expansion of the school.

The County Council is not currently in ownership of land adjacent to the St Mary's Church of England Primary School meaning that any off-site expansion of the school, into adjacent land, would require additional land to be provided to the County Council at nil cost and to be suitable for education use. As no feasibility work has been undertaken

to confirm whether or not this approach is possible, the County Council questions how easily and achievable this proposal would be, particularly in comparison to other options set out later in the Statement. In addition, given that the County Councils understanding is that the adjacent land is community playing fields the County Council questions how the resulting deficit in community provision could be reasonably addressed.

Current and Forecast Capacity at Brookmans Park:

Brookmans Park is currently served by Brookmans Park Primary School. This is a 1.5FE primary school which is located within the Ridgeway West Primary Planning Area (PPA).

The County Council forecasts demand for primary school places four years into the future. It is not possible to accurately forecast primary yield after four years as the children are not yet born. These forecasts are informed by the numbers of pre-school aged children registered with GPs as living in the area and take account of historic migration patterns as well as assumed pupil demand from an element of new housing expected to yield within the next 4 years.

Table 2 below sets out the latest forecasts and the number of reception places available in relation to the Brookmans Park Primary School, which is the only primary school in the Ridgeway West PPA (published summer 2020).

Table 2: Current Primary School Forecasts for the Ridgeway West PPA (published summer 2020):

15.3 Ridgeway West									
School Code	School Name	Places Available 2020-21	Actuals			Forecast			
			2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
5210	Brookmans Park Primary School	45	45	45	46				
	Total Year R Pupil Demand		45	45	46	47	42	36	37
	Total Year R Places Available	45				45	45	45	45
	Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (No.)					-2	3	9	8
	Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (%)					-4.4%	6.7%	20.0%	17.8%
	Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (FE)					-0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3

The forecasts in Table 2 clearly show that Brookmans Park Primary School is currently at capacity (data for the 2019-20 academic year show a match of places available and places taken) and is also forecast to have only a very limited (negligible) surplus of reception places in the school for the next four years (e.g. only 3 reception places in 2021-22, only 9 reception places in 2022-23, and only 8 reception places in 2023-24).

Feasibility work, undertaken by the County Council, on the Brookmans Park Primary School site shows that a 0.5FE expansion could be accommodated within the current school site. This would result in a 2FE primary school. The Inspector has asked whether a larger expansion can be accommodated within the current primary school site, taking the school up to a 2.5FE or 3FE primary school. The County Council can confirm that a 0.5FE expansion (taking the school up to a 2FE primary school) is the maximum size of expansion that can be accommodated within the current primary school site.

Furthermore, the County Council can confirm that there is no opportunity for the Brookmans Park Primary School to expand off-site.

Options for primary education mitigation across Welham Green and Brookmans Park:

As set out above, the primary education mitigation currently available in the Welham Green and Brookmans Park area is as follows:

- Utilising the limited spare capacity currently at St Mary's Church of England Primary School (amounting to no more than 0.5FE of spare reception capacity in the school); and
- A 0.5FE expansion of Brookmans Park Primary School within its current site.

At the local plan stage Hertfordshire County Council currently calculates primary pupil yield based on a ratio of 1FE of need arising from 500 dwellings. Therefore, utilising the limited spare capacity currently at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and the 0.5FE on-site expansion at Brookmans Park Primary School there would be sufficient provision to mitigate the level of development currently proposed in the submitted WHBC Local Plan for this area and the pupil yield calculated to arise from it.

The County Council has assessed whether the existing education provision at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and Brookmans Park Primary School currently caters for residents of these settlements or whether there is a significant proportion of children at these schools who are coming from elsewhere. For those who live closest to Brookmans Park, approximately 80% of this population attends Brookmans Park Primary School whilst the remaining 20% attend other schools in the wider area. For those 20% of the population who attend other schools approximately 5% attend Little Heath Primary and 3% attend St Mary's Church of England Primary School. If the entire primary age population of pupils who live closest to Brookmans Park Primary School were to attend the school, this would result in the school being approximately 80% full from its local population.

For those who live closest to St Mary's Church of England Primary School, approximately 36% attend the school; with a further 27% attending Brookmans Park Primary School, 18% attending Hatfield schools and with the remainder spread over a wider area. Currently, the pupil population at St Mary's Primary School comprises approximately 39% who live closest to the school, 31% from predominately Hatfield and 30% spare capacity. Over the past seven years, if all of the population that live closest to St Mary's Primary School were to attend the school this would have resulted in the school being oversubscribed. Therefore, an outflow of pupils from this area would have been required.

When considering the current situation of the two schools (St Mary's Church of England Primary School and Brookmans Park Primary School) and the Welham Green/Brookmans Park area together, excluding any further inflow or outflow from outside of the combined area, there would only be a minimal amount of spare capacity for any additional demand; approximately between 0.2FE and 0.35FE. This shows that, at present, the level of primary education provision across the Welham Green/Brookmans Park area broadly matches the primary education demand which is arising from the current population and therefore any significant new growth in the area would require additional mitigation.

Together with the 0.5FE expansion of Brookmans Park Primary School within its current site, the spare capacity in the St Mary's Church of England Primary School would provide sufficient provision to mitigate the pupils arising based on the growth within the submitted WHBC Local Plan.

In addition to considering the impact of primary schools within Welham Green and Brookmans Park the County Council has considered the mitigation of children across the plan area as a whole. If the pupils currently flowing into Welham Green and Brookmans Park are pushed back, either through a greater local need or through a greater level of dwellings being allocated in these settlements than currently proposed, then this will have a ripple effect and is likely to have further implications on the primary education provision required in those other areas.

The County Council confirms that it has a preference for new primary schools being at least 2FE. This is due to the overall effectiveness, financial stability and flexibility of primary schools when they are at least 2FE in size. This has been the County Council's position since 2005. Therefore, the County Council expects that any new primary school would be delivered at a minimum of 2FE. Based on the ratio of 1FE of need arising from 500 dwellings approximately 1,000 dwellings would generate children to fill a 2FE primary school.

Given that 2FE is the required minimum size of a new primary school in Hertfordshire then if additional dwellings were being allocated in the Welham Green and Brookmans Park area there would need to be, as a minimum, approximately 1,250 dwellings allocated across Welham Green and Brookmans Park. This would equate to approximately 2.5FE, which could be mitigated through the existing capacity at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and a new 2FE primary school in either Welham Green or Brookmans Park. Less than this number of dwellings does not provide a critical mass for a new 2FE primary school and would provide levels of pupils for which there is not a primary education mitigation solution.

At the present time, and until the total number of dwellings in the area and distribution of development sites is known, the County Council cannot confirm whether a new primary school should be located in either Welham Green or Brookmans Park.

Any new site for a primary school would need to meet the County Councils school site land specification in order that the land is sufficient for education provision.

The County Council requires that the need for a new primary school site is set out within a specific development site within the Local Plan and that the broad location of it is not left to be determined until after the Local Plan has been adopted.

For reference, based on a ratio of 1FE of need arising from 500 dwellings, a new 3FE primary school together with the existing limited capacity at St Mary's Church of England Primary School could mitigate approximately 1,750 dwellings in the Welham Green and Brookmans Park area. Therefore, depending on the total numbers of dwellings allocated in this area, a primary school site which allows a new primary school to be up to 3FE in size in the longer term (and which would require 3ha of land) may need to be identified and set out in the Local Plan.

Use of the proposed new primary school at HS11/Hat11 to mitigate Welham Green:

There is a new 2FE primary school proposed to be included within the HS11/Hat11 site allocation.

The County Council can confirm that, given the significant levels of growth already proposed for Hatfield, the new primary school at HS11/Hat11 is required to mitigate demand arising from Hatfield.

Without the primary school at HS11/Hat11 being used to mitigate the growth in Hatfield there would be insufficient primary education capacity for the proposed growth in Hatfield. Therefore, if this was the intention, there would need to be additional primary education provision allocated in Hatfield. For example, through additional primary education provision at either the HS11/Hat11 school site (e.g. a primary school up to 3FE rather than 2FE as currently set out) or for there to be additional primary provision as part of the Hat1 allocation (e.g. primary provision up to 4FE rather than 3FE as currently set out).

Furthermore, the County Council has analysed the location of primary pupils living in Hatfield and Welham Green and can confirm that there are significant number of pupils in Hatfield who live closer to the HS11/Hat11 site and primary school than those in the northern part of Welham Green. Therefore, pupils from Welham Green would be less likely to be obtain a place at the HS11/Hat1 primary school on the basis of admission criteria based on distance. In addition, it is likely to be easier for those pupils living in Hatfield to travel to the new primary school at HS11/Hat11 than for those living in Welham Green.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Hertfordshire County Council, as Education Authority, has a statutory duty to provide places for all children in the county. In terms of primary education provision, the County Council considers that it is relevant and appropriate to assess primary education provision across Welham Green and Brookmans Park together.

It is the County Council's view that, based on the latest available data and as set out above, the level of growth within the submitted WHBC Local Plan for Welham Green and Brookmans Park can be accommodated through utilising the limited spare capacity currently at St Mary's Church of England Primary School (at Welham Green) and a 0.5FE expansion of Brookmans Park Primary School within the current school site.

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is unable to expand further within its current site and neither St Mary's Church of England Primary School or Brookmans Park Primary School can expand onto adjacent land.

The new 2FE primary school at the HS11/Hat11 site is to mitigate the significant growth proposed for Hatfield and if the expectation is that pupils from Welham Green should be mitigated at the HS11/Hat11 primary school then further primary education provision is therefore required in Hatfield.

The minimum size that the County Council builds new primary schools is 2FE.

Based on this information, if additional growth was required within the Welham Green/Brookmans Park area (beyond that within the submitted WHBC Local Plan) then, from a primary education perspective, this would need to be a minimum of, approximately, 1,250 dwellings in order that there was a sufficient critical mass to ensure the deliverability of a new 2FE primary school in the area. 1,250 dwellings could be mitigated through the existing limited capacity at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and a new 2FE primary school in the area.

If the total number of dwellings across the two settlements was in excess of 1,250 dwellings then, to allow flexibility and for pragmatic planning purposes, there should be consideration as to whether the new primary school needs to have the long-term ability and land to be able to expand to be up to 3FE in size in the future.

The County Council trust that this information is of assistance. However, please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any clarification in relation to the information in this Statement.

Yours sincerely



Antony Proietti

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