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Dear Ms St John Howe

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan Examination – Supplementary Education Statement in respect of primary education provision within the Woolmer Green, Welwyn, Oaklands and Mardley Heath, and Digswell area

At the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) Examination in Public sessions considering Woolmer Green (Stage 9 Hearing Sessions on 10 March 2021), Digswell and Oaklands and Mardley Heath (Stage 9 Hearing Sessions on 10 March 2021), and Welwyn (Stage 9 Hearing Session on 11 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 those areas. The responses to the Inspectors enquiries are set out below.

Current and Forecast Capacity in the area:

Hertfordshire County Council forecasts demand for primary school places by Primary Planning Area (PPA) and forecasts 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 settlements of Woolmer Green, Welwyn, Oaklands, Mardley Heath and Digswell are all within the Welwyn PPA. The County Council strategically considers the impact of these settlements on primary education provision together.

The following primary schools are within the Welwyn PPA:

- Oaklands Primary School (in Oaklands)
- St John's Church of England Primary School (in Digswell)
- St Michael's Woolmer Green Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School (in Woolmer Green)
- Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School (in Welwyn)

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

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

12.2 Welwyn										
School Code	School Name	Places Available	Actuals				Forecast			
			2020-21	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
2302	Oaklands Primary School	30	27	24	30	29				
3376	St John's CofE Primary School	30	26	29	29	28				
3378	St Michael's Woolmer Green CofE VA Primary School	30	26	20	26	23				
3419	Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	60	61	60	60	60				
Total Year R Pupil Demand			140	133	145	140	126	135	143	128
Total Year R Places Available		150					150	150	150	150
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (No.)							24	15	7	22
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (%)							16.0%	10.0%	4.7%	14.7%
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (FE)							0.8	0.5	0.2	0.7

Table 1 shows that in the current 2020-21 academic year all of the primary schools are either full or very nearly full at year of admission, with only 10 reception places available across the whole PPA. A surplus is forecast in future years although it is noted that demand is not consistent and there is forecast to be very few spare places in 2022/23.

The County Council has undertaken desktop reviews of the expansion capacity of the existing schools within the Welwyn PPA and can confirm that only Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School (in Welwyn) is able to expand on its existing site. This school can be expanded by an additional 1FE.

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, a 1FE expansion of Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School could mitigate approximately 500 additional dwellings in the wider Welwyn PPA.

The County Council considers that the anticipated small level of surplus capacity across the Welwyn PPA plus the 1FE expansion of Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School provides sufficient primary education capacity across the Welwyn PPA to accommodate the scale of growth proposed in this area.

The four primary schools in the Welwyn PPA serve the villages to the north of Welwyn Garden City. 80% of the children living in the PPA attend one of the schools in the PPA, with the remaining families attending schools outside the PPA. Some families in Welwyn

Garden City look to the Welwyn North village schools for education provision and analysis of latest pupil data indicates a net inflow of around 1FE into the Welwyn PPA.

The County Council's admissions rules, with the exception of a Children Looked After or those with a particular Medical or Social need, prioritise allocations based on sibling links and then distance criteria. Apart from siblings, if you live nearer a school than anyone else applying, you are likely to gain a place.

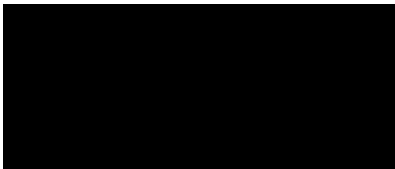
If the inflow of children into the Welwyn PPA from outside of the PPA was to be pushed-back (e.g. through an increase in demand from the local community) then these displaced children would require places at schools more local to their home. This is useful to note in the wider context of primary education capacity across the borough, particularly given the limited capacity in other areas of the borough and the issues this push-back may cause.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Hertfordshire County Council, as Education Authority, has a statutory duty to provide school places for all children in the county. It is the County Council's view that, based on the latest available data and as set out above, there is likely to be sufficient primary education capacity available across the Welwyn PPA to accommodate the growth proposed in this area. This is comprised of a 1FE expansion of Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and some surplus capacity within the schools in the Welwyn PPA.

The County Council trusts 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

Growth Area Team Leader (North East Growth Area), Growth & Infrastructure Unit