

13 July 2020

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

By email only

Dear Mr Haigh,

WELWYN/HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS: 2018-BASED HOUSEHOLD PROJECTIONS

1. When the Welwyn/Hatfield Local Plan was submitted for examination, in May 2017, its housing requirement had been calculated using, among other considerations, data from the 2012 based household projections, published by the then Department for Communities and Local Government in February 2015. The accompanying Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) update of April 2016 (HOU/21) identified a need for between 664 and 707 dwellings per annum, which was extrapolated to a need for 12,000 dwellings between 2013 and 2032 in the submitted plan.
2. Before the Examination commenced in 2017, the 2014 based household projections had been published and you arranged for your Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need (FOAHN) to be reassessed. The 2014-based projections were taken into account in the evidence provided by Turleys, on your behalf, in its SHMA update of April 2017 (HOU/21). This supported the housing requirement figures in your revised housing submissions. These resulted in an increase in the plan's housing target from 12,000 to 16,000. Following a Hearing session in October 2017, I concluded that these revised housing requirements were soundly based and invited you to submit additional sites for housing development to the Examination, to make up the shortfall, following a further review of the contribution various sites made to the purposes of the Green Belt.

3. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), having taken over responsibility for preparing the household projections, published the 2016-based projections in September 2018. You again arranged for Turleys to update your housing need assessment. In its 2019 update to the FOAHN (EX103A), despite a reduction in the household forecast, it argued that for affordability and other reasons, including government pronouncements on the housing need for younger people, as reflected in the ONS 2016 forecast, there had not been a meaningful change. You nevertheless provided revised housing need forecasts based on a revised plan period 2016-2036. I held a further hearing session into housing need in December 2019 at which, among other things, the implications of the 2016-based projections for the Plan's housing requirements were discussed. I subsequently concluded that there had not been a meaningful change. In my letter to you of 15 January 2020 (EX178), I concluded that in the context of the housing situation in Welwyn/Hatfield a FOAHN of 800 dwellings per annum was still consistent with national policy and soundly based.

4. As you will be aware, the ONS published their 2018-based household projections on Monday 29 June 2020. Relevant guidance in the national Planning Practice Guidance on Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (Paragraph:016, Reference ID: 2a-016-20150227¹) advises that:

The government's official population and household projections are generally updated every 2 years to take account of the latest demographic trends.

Wherever possible, local needs assessments should be informed by the latest available information. The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that Local Plans should be kept up to date. A meaningful change in the housing situation should be considered in this context, but this does not automatically mean that housing assessments are rendered outdated every time new projections are issued.

5. In order to determine whether or not the Plan's housing requirements remain soundly-based, I will need to consider whether or not the publication of the 2018-based household projections

¹ This version of the PPG continues to apply to the Section 1 Plan because the Plan is subject to the transitional arrangements set out in paragraph 214 of the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019).

represents a meaningful change in the housing situation from the situation that existed when I produced my letter of 15 January 2020.

6. As a first step, I would like to invite you to address this question. Please could you provide a statement, with evidence-based reasons, as to whether or not you consider that the publication of the 2018-based household projections represents a meaningful change in the housing situation from the situation that existed when I wrote that letter. If so, what are the implications for the housing requirement figures in the submitted Plan. Would you provide an assessment based on the original plan period as well as one for your revised period?
7. Would you please provide that statement to the Programme Officer by **Friday 31 July 2020**, and publish it on the examination website. If you need more time, please let the Programme Officer know as soon as possible, including with justifiable reasons.
8. It is likely that I will seek the views of examination participants on this question, once I have your statement and before making any further pronouncements myself.

Yours sincerely

Mel Middleton

Melvyn Middleton

Inspector