

**Chief Executive: Owen Mapley**



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25<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Tom,

**Proposed expansion of Codicote C of E Primary School, Codicote**

The County Council has taken the statutory decision to enlarge Codicote Primary School from 1 form of entry to 2 forms of entry (FE) to ensure future demand for school places from the local community can be met.

The school does not have sufficient classrooms or site area on its own to expand and therefore the county council has made representations to the North Hertfordshire Local Plan requesting that additional land be secured within its Plan to enable the 1FE expansion of the school.

Site allocation CD5 within North Herts DC's draft Local Plan, which is located to the south west of the school site, includes land to enable Codicote C of E Primary School to expand. It is proposed within the CD5 planning application for the housing at Heath Lane that freehold the land be transferred to Hertfordshire County Council to enable it to deliver an expansion of the school. Town planning consent for the expansion scheme, which utilises this additional land as playing field, has been obtained.

NHDC Planning Officers have advised they are considering taking the planning application (REF 18/02722/FP) on land south of Heath Lane (site allocation CD5) to a Development Control Committee meeting to seek approval of the application in advance of the adoption of the Local Plan. As we understand it, very special circumstances will need to be justified in order to grant of permission as the site is currently located in the Green Belt.

This letter seeks to outline and evidence the urgent demand case for the expansion of Codicote Primary School.

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan allocates land in Codicote for a total of 315 dwellings across four sites. Based on a one form of entry (FE) yield per 500 dwellings, this will result in a peak primary pupil yield of approximately 0.7 FE. Further to an assessment of need generated by actual Codicote planning applications submitted and in preparation, the county council estimates that the peak yield will be close to 0.8 FE based on NHDC housing trajectories.

Codicote Primary School serves the village and currently does not have the current capacity to meet the anticipated yield from this scale of new development. The school offers 30 places each year and, even in advance of any additional demand arising from proposed new housing, the school has temporarily expanded to offer additional places to meet existing local demand in four out of the last six years to ensure children living in the village are able to gain a place.

Forecast demand for reception places exceeds the number of places available at Codicote Primary School in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and analysis of the local pre-school aged population living closest to Codicote School from GP registration data indicates the same or more children for whom it is their nearest school compared with places available at the School in all years.

**Count of pre-school aged children for whom Codicote Primary is their closest school (GP registration data) March 2020**

School name	Year of entry to Reception			
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/2024
Codicote (C of E) School	51	50	41	30

As illustrated with the above data, the numbers of children living in the village and requiring a reception place year on year is not a constant. The pre-school aged population, in line with the general population ebbs and flows. However, it is clear that the school at 1 form of entry has been unable recently, and will be unable in the future, to meet all existing local demand.

The county council has worked with the school to agree temporary expansions at the school on an annual basis in order to ensure village children are able to access a place at their local school. However, with the school running additional classes in temporary accommodation and with the operational issues of increased pupils and staffing within the existing buildings, in 2019 the county council agreed with the school that it is no longer possible to provide additional temporary capacity in this way.

There are no further options for temporary expansion without locating a mobile classroom on the existing playing field, further encroaching onto the already constrained site area, or on the location of a new permanent classroom block plus placing further pressure on the existing core facilities.

The anticipated pupil yield from the proposed new housing sites combined with identified level of unmet demand in the village demonstrates a need to support a 1FE permanent expansion of the school.

In light of the immediate demand from the existing community, the County Council has planned a programme of works to construct the new permanent buildings at Codicote Primary School to enable it to expand from September 2022. In order to deliver this, the school requires the identified parcel of land within the CD5 site allocation in order to achieve compliance against BB103 site standards at 2FE. The school expansion delivery programme is based on the CD5 application being consented in March 2021. Any further delay would give insufficient time to complete the expansion scheme for September 2022, and miss the seeding season for the playing field works.

The draft S106 agreement and associated land transfer agreement requires that the land transfer takes place between February 2021 and September 2021. Whilst the S106 agreement (as currently drafted) does not give certainty on the precise date of transfer of the education land, the granting of planning permission would be a significant step forward and help reduce the risk of delays to the transfer of the education land and accordingly reduce the risks of delays to the delivery of the school expansion project. The school cannot be expanded without this additional land; it will provide the school with sufficient playing field for a 2fe primary school. It is acknowledged that a public footpath runs between the current school site boundary and the parcel of land which is proposed for the school's playing field. The playing field will be fenced with secure gated access from the existing school site, with access managed by the school & pupils crossing the footpath supervised to ensure the safety of the school community.

There is already unmet demand from the existing community. With the additional demand arising from the known new housing coming forward in Codicote, there is a need for certainty around both the delivery and timing of additional school places. This can only be achieved by securing the land at CD5.

As the transfer of this land is currently linked to the planning consent of land south of Heath Lane, the delay in the adoption of the Local Plan means we cannot be certain when an expansion of the school can be implemented. This risks local children being unable to access a local school place. With the next nearest primary schools over 2 miles away, this impacts not only on sustainable transport but also on community cohesion.

Until the expansion of the school can be brought forward, it is likely that some children in the existing community will be unable to access a place at the school in some years due to the demand exceeding the current number of places available. Therefore in the meantime, those pupils could be travelling out of the village to the next nearest schools which are Welwyn St Mary's C of E Primary School (2.3 miles away), Oaklands Primary School (2.6 miles away), Kimpton Primary School (2.8 miles away) and St Michaels Woolmer Green Primary School (3.9 miles away).

Hertfordshire County Council has not pursued a Compulsory Purchase Order and would only resort to this where there is no realistic alternative to the acquisition of the requisite land. In this case we have been offered the land on a voluntary basis by private treaty by the freeholder in the anticipation that the residue of this land will attract planning permission for residential development. That permission is unlikely to be forthcoming unless all infrastructure requirements are met, the expansion of the existing school being one of those requirements. Accordingly, the County Council believe that resorting to compulsory powers to acquire the requisite land is not appropriate in this instance.

Hertfordshire County Council is keen to support appropriate strategies which secure the identified additional land to enable the delivery of the expansion scheme at the school as soon as possible to meet existing local demand and to ensure that the families moving into the new housing will more easily be able to access a local school place.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any queries with regard to the content of this letter.

**Chief Executive: Owen Mapley**



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SMcLaughlin".

Sarah McLaughlin  
Head of Growth & Infrastructure Unit  
Hertfordshire County Council