

Copy of submission made by NHDC on Line to East Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan Main modifications Consultation – 29.03.2018

This response is submitted by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) for information purposes in relation to secondary education provision around Stevenage.

It is for the Inspector examining the EHDC plan to come to her own view on the level of certainty required over future infrastructure provision in the latter years of the plan period. Planning Practice Guidance recognises that less detail on infrastructure may be provided for later stages of the plan period as the position is likely to be less certain¹. Policy DEL1 of the EHDC plan (as proposed to be amended) already contains provisions, should they be necessary, for circumstances where there is a “changed outlook for the realistic prospects of delivery of infrastructure to support development”.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) in its role as education authority assesses future requirements for education provision on the basis of school place planning areas (SPPAs). Site EOS1 lies within the Stevenage SPPA, along with the whole of Stevenage Borough and part of NHDC.

NHDC’s new Local Plan is currently undergoing its own examination. The NHDC Plan makes provision for 8 forms of entry of additional secondary school-aged provision within the Stevenage SPPA². This meets the numerical requirement that has been identified by HCC to serve the future needs of SPPA. This requirement takes account of the cumulative secondary education needs that HCC project will arise from the development of all sites proposed within the Stevenage SPPA, including EOS1.

NHDC consider that the approach set out in its own submitted Plan – which splits potential future secondary education provision across two sites within the District – is both deliverable and sound and has approached its own examination on this basis. However, the proposed format and locations of provision in NHDC are subject to outstanding objections from HCC, who also consider that NHDC have failed to comply with the Duty to Co-operate.

The question of secondary education provision generally, and in the Stevenage SPPA specifically, has been considered at the NHDC examination in hearing sessions held on 16 November 2017 and 26 February 2018. To date, the Inspector examining the NHDC plan has not requested that NHDC undertake any additional work, propose any Main Modifications to alter the secondary education strategy for the Stevenage SPPA in the plan as submitted or otherwise seek to accommodate the objections of HCC on this matter.

However, until such time as the Inspector examining the NHDC Plan issues his report (or, potentially, issues Main Modifications demonstrating that he is not minded to seek substantive changes on this issue), there remains an element of uncertainty.

¹ Planning Practice Guidance, How can the local planning authority show that a Local Plan is capable of being delivered including provision for infrastructure?, Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 12-018-20140306, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans--2>

² One form of entry (FE) is a class of 30 children at each age-group.

Notwithstanding the above, evidence submitted to the NHDC examination by HCC sets out their view that, on current development trajectories, it would not be necessary to establish a wholly new secondary school of any type within the SPPA / NHDC until 2029³. HCC presently forecast that demand until this point can be accommodated through the expansion and re-use of existing premises within Stevenage as allowed for in Stevenage's own plan, and found sound by the Stevenage Inspector's report.

NHDC have additionally identified in our own examination hearings that, given the long-term nature of the need, other options for secondary school provision may become available in the intervening period and that this issue should be kept under review by HCC and the three affected local planning authorities. By way of example, NHDC's own plan proposes the removal of further land from the Green Belt to the west of Stevenage and 'safeguarding' it for potential strategic-scale, residential-led development in the period after 2026 subject to a future review of the plan.

Under proposed new statutory arrangements, the local plans of all three authorities in the SPPA would, if adopted, need to be reviewed by the mid-2020s at the latest. This would provide further opportunity for a formal re-appraisal of the situation through the plan-making process.

³ HCC (Education) Statement to Matter 10/11 – Stevenage (Great Ashby), Appendix A, <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/local-plan-examination/hearing-timetable-and-statements-week-7>