

3/14/2144/OP – Education – HCC response to BS Civic Federation representations

**(a) The County Council have underestimated the demand for secondary school places implicit in the most recent version of the draft District Plan. This envisages over 5000 new homes being provided in Bishop's Stortford (including BSN) and Sawbridgeworth. Using the Council's metric of 1 FE generated per 500 dwellings, the proposed new housing would generate a peak demand of 10 FE not the 8 FE which the Council have assumed in support of this application.**

<b>BSCF detailed comment</b>	<b>HCC response</b>
<p>(para. nos. from original letter)</p> <p>3. The County Council's approach to forecasting demand for school places was last subject to rigorous scrutiny in 2011 when it supported an appeal by two Bishop's Stortford Schools to relocate to a Green Belt site on the south side of the town. The appeal was refused and the County Council's approach to forecasting was subject to some critical examination in the Inspector's report. The forecast made then comprised four components – data from GP surgeries etc. about births, JMI and secondary school population within the Educational Planning Area (EPA), pupil yield from new housing, and cross area flows.</p> <p>4. The County Council can continue to update its forecasts with recent data from the first two sources. In the case of the third source of demand – new housing – the assumption at the time of the public inquiry was that Bishop's Stortford North (BSN) would deliver 2728 new dwellings, i.e. rather more than is now proposed at somewhat less than 2600.</p>	<p>The County Council is satisfied that the education strategy formulated based on forecast demand is appropriate to meet the need for secondary school places across the Bishops Stortford area.</p> <p>The County Council has a responsibility for planning school places in its area and produces pupil forecasts to help inform school planning decisions. The pupil forecast methodology is tried and tested, based on Audit Commission recommendations and is similar to most other authorities' methods for making pupil projections. Hertfordshire's pupil forecasts have been shown to be accurate to within +/-1% countywide year on year.</p> <p>The forecast is updated twice a year to ensure, as far as possible, that projected demand is informed by up-to-date data. It is underpinned by the latest available information on both the pre-school aged and primary school aged population as well as assumptions on new housing growth and a pupil yield arising from this.</p>

At that time the implicit assumption (not discussed at the public inquiry) was that the pupil yield from new housing was 1 Form of Entry (FE) of 30 pupils per 1000 dwellings. As a result, the main generator of demand was perceived to arise from the so-called cross area flows – net intake of pupils to Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth schools from outside the EPA, mainly from Essex.

5. In considering the educational impact of the development actually proposed for BSN (2200 dwellings with one application for fewer than 400 dwellings still outstanding), the County Council appears to have doubled its assumption of the pupil yield from new housing to 1 FE per 500 dwellings. The only explanation given to the Civic Federation for this change is that the actual dwelling mix is now known. Given that BSN was always intended to be predominantly family housing and that the total number of dwellings has gone down since 2011, it strains credulity to accept this as a sufficient explanation for a change of such magnitude. We are not in a position to form a view as to whether this is a more appropriate metric than the one used by the County Council at the public inquiry 3 years ago since the basis of neither of them has been justified. But we do expect that it should be applied consistently to all the prospective housing envisaged in the draft District Plan. This does not appear to have happened.

Further information on how the County Council forecasts pupil numbers can be found at <http://www.hertsdirect.org/services/edlearn/aboutstatesch/planning/>

The pupil yield calculations from new housing in the forecasts are generic, sourced from historic census data, based on long term average yield assumptions and applied county wide. As such, they are not area specific nor do they take account of specific mix or dwelling type.

Large developments are therefore considered separately from the forecast once we have a clear view on scale and mix and we can more specifically model pupil yield figures, how demand builds as well as the timing of peak demand arising out of such large scale developments.

The County Council has done this for Bishop's Stortford North (BSN) and is seeking developer contributions for 5 forms of entry (FE) of secondary capacity to meet the peak demand arising from this new housing (the timing of this peak is estimated around 2030). The detailed modelling associated with the development at Bishops Stortford North has been shared in detail with both EHDC Officers and the Consortium and has been accepted.

This modelled forecast incorporates both the anticipated yield from BSN plus the forecast demand from the existing community including any additional housing growth expected across the area within the lifecycle of the forecast, as advised directly by EHDC and in the scale reflected in its draft District Plan. The estimated peak demand from the existing communities who look to Bishops Stortford/Sawbridgeworth for secondary schooling and the peak

6. Para 5.7 of the amended environmental statement has the following to say about the demand for school places in the context of these applications

*' Discussions have taken place between the County Council and the developers about meeting the educational needs of the development, which has resulted in the identification of a suitable location for a new secondary school which would be better located to serve that development (i.e. BSN) as a whole, as well as cater for the wider educational needs of the town. A separate planning application has been submitted for the proposed school. The Hadham Road site would therefore not be required for the provision of a new secondary school and so the County Council Cabinet resolved to dispose of the site on 24 February 2014.'*

7. We take issue with the suggestion that the proposed location for the secondary school would be more suitable than the site at Patmore Close. A copy of our objections to that planning application is enclosed with this letter. However, the suitability of the alternative site is not an issue for these applications. What does need to be tested is whether the proposed 6 FE school on that alternative site would in fact be sufficient to cater for the demand arising from the BSN development and the wider educational needs of the town. If it is not, then, as the applications themselves make clear, this site cannot be released for housing.

demand from the yield arising from BSN do not coincide. Peak demand from the existing community is forecast around 2021, with secondary pupil yield from BSN not estimated to peak at 5fe until 2031, a decade later.

This demand forecast takes account of the existing population living in the area, historic pupil movement and all planned EHDC housing growth. This is considered a sound methodology for forecasting pupil demand.

The education strategy based on the analysis of demand and yield data concludes the need for a new 6fe secondary school ideally located in the heart of BSN to serve those new communities.

It should be noted that pupil forecasts do not extend to the end of the Plan period as those children requiring a secondary school place beyond 2025 are not yet born.

Beyond the next decade, further secondary capacity may be required to meet needs from both existing and new communities formed through new housing growth in the latter part of the Plan period.

Potential opportunities for additional secondary capacity across the area have previously been outlined in detail to EHDC.

<p>8. Previous documents provided by the County Council (including their formal response to the application to develop ASR's 1-4 at BSN) indicate that they have assumed that the housing numbers proposed in the draft district plan (the preferred strategy was published for consultation in May 2014) would generate a peak demand for school places of 8FE, with 5FE arising from BSN and the rest from new housing elsewhere within the EPA. However, this forecast of educational demand was prepared in September 2013 and was based on an earlier version of the draft plan at the time that the planning application for BSN was being considered. At that time the County Council assumed that the plan allowed for only 4078 additional dwellings in the EPA, including BSN (this is consistent with a metric of 1FE per 500 dwellings). The consultation draft of the plan actually provides for 5196 new dwellings within the EPA and so the overall demand for places which the housing numbers in the plan would generate (including BSN) is 10FE, not 8FE, assuming that the County Council's method of calculating demand is applied consistently.</p>	
<p><b>(b) The County Council have also made the unrealistic assumption that there will be no increase in cross area flows – net movement of pupils to schools in the area from places further afield. A more reasonable assumption – that these will take up about 30% of the extra school places as they have done for many years at our existing schools – would add a further 2-3 FE to the overall demand for places.</b></p>	
<p><b>BSCF detailed comment</b></p>	<p><b>HCC response</b></p>
<p>9. The final element in the County Council's forecasting methodology is the so-called cross area flow – the net addition to the demand for school</p>	<p>Our forecasts take account of historic migration patterns using a 3 year weighted average and therefore assume the current inflow into the area at secondary transfer continues into future. This</p>

places from pupils travelling into Bishop's Stortford from outside the EPA, after offsetting pupils travelling from within the EPA to schools outside it. Because of the location of the EPA and the nature and location of the alternative provision, most of this additional demand comes from Essex with very little compensating outward movement to Essex. The County Council's own data show that for many years about 30% of the population in secondary schools in the EPA comes from Essex addresses, with a further increment from more distant parts of Hertfordshire.

10. This element of demand, rather than the pupil yield from new housing, formed the main component of the case for expanding school capacity when the schools' relocation appeal was considered in 2011. But it seems to have been entirely ignored by the County Council in assessing whether one 6 FE school will be sufficient to meet future demand.

11. Nevertheless, there is good reason to suppose that demand from this source will continue to increase as well. The draft district plan for Uttlesford has just been rejected by the Inspector conducting the Examination in Public, partly on the grounds that the housing provision in it needs to be increased by 10%. Among nearby Essex schools, Newport Free Grammar School has limited scope to expand while Forest Hall Academy (formerly Mountfitchet College) was until recently in special measures and has no 6th form. East Herts' draft District Plan proposes a

includes: the dynamics around the geography of Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth; neighbouring Essex County Council (ECC); as well as the inflow at secondary transfer for faith provision from a wide area.

We remain in dialogue with colleagues in Essex County Council around school place issues.

Even if demand from Essex residents for places at secondary schools in Bishop's Stortford increase it is not accurate to assume that increased demand will equate to an equal increase in the allocation of places to Essex families. All schools are their own admission authority and it would be unlawful for any of the schools specifically to make allocation decisions simply on the basis of a child's home authority. However existing admission arrangements should ensure that the proportion of children from Essex is not likely to increase. After children with EHC plans, looked after/previously looked after children and siblings etc.:

- Birchwood School – prioritises children living in Bishops Stortford, Thorley and a number of Hertfordshire rural parishes
- Herts & Essex Girls – prioritises girls attending named feeder primary schools, all but one located in Hertfordshire. With the increasing pressure on primary school places in Bishops Stortford it is unlikely that higher numbers of Essex children will gain places at Hertfordshire primary schools
- Bishops Stortford High School for Boys – the recent amendment to the school's admission arrangements (removal of 8 feeder primary schools and change to the tiebreak rule) should mean that more Hertfordshire boys are allocated places at the school

<p>settlement of 3000 dwellings north of Harlow during the plan period (to 2031) and in the early years of such development, parents are more likely to want to send their children to an established school in the EPA rather than to any new facility on site or to Harlow.</p> <p>12. However, the County Council’s forecast of demand to 2025 appears to make no allowance for any increase in cross area flows arising from developments outside the EPA in spite of the weight they attached to it at the public inquiry only 3 years ago. This is not something within the County Council’s control. Each school is its own admissions authority and the same will be true of the proposed new school at BSN. Indeed, to achieve critical mass as quickly as possible, any such school would be wise to extend its catchment beyond the EPA and it will be the closest new school to Stansted Mountfitchet, Elsenham and Takeley. If the County Council were adopting a prudent approach to meeting demand, it might anticipate growth in cross area flows commensurate with growth of demand within the EPA, i.e. 2-3 additional FE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St Mary’s RC – allocates places in proportion to named catholic parishes - only 15% of places are available to those living in parishes in Essex</li> <li>• Hockerill Anglo European College – 66% of places to children attending one of 11 primary schools in Bishops Stortford</li> </ul> <p>All schools must act in accordance with the School Admissions Code which requires admission arrangements to be “fair and reasonable”. It is worth noting that HCC, as the commissioner of the new schools in Bishops Stortford North, will seek admissions arrangements for the new schools which prioritise pupils residing local to the development. It is likely that the school will grow in size, for example opening with perhaps 3fe (90 places) and then moving incrementally to 6fe (180 places) as that local demand increases. Whilst families from Essex may initially obtain any places not required from the local community, as the development fills it is likely that any such inflow will diminish as a result of the specific admission criteria requested.</p>
<p><b>(c) The County Council’s claim that the proposed 6 FE school will be sufficient to meet the long term demand for school places is therefore incorrect, and the Council appear to have no plan to meet the excess in demand above 6 FE. Policies BIS7, saved from the adopted District Plan and BISH5 in the draft District Plan both require that the demand for secondary school places will be satisfied elsewhere before the site can be released. Since the site cannot yet be released, permission must be refused.</b></p>	
<p><b>BSCF detailed comment</b></p>	<p><b>HCC response</b></p>
<p>13. The County Council’s evidence to the Inquiry</p>	<p>HCC’s representations to EHDC’s District Plan proposals include</p>

into the proposed schools relocation was that BSN and cross area flows combined would never generate sufficient demand to justify the building of an additional school, which is why they supported relocation proposals which added only 45 extra places. Since then, their conversion to the view that BSN would generate enough demand by itself for a new school and that a 6 FE school would be sufficient to cater for the wider educational needs of the town are merely assertions, unsupported by any evidence, and contradict the evidence that they gave only three years ago at the public inquiry. East Herts Council, as planning authority, should attach no weight to such unsupported assertions which appear not to be justified by the County Council's current method of calculating the demand for school places. These applications are therefore incompatible with policy BIS7 in the adopted District Plan and BISH5 in the draft District Plan, both of which prohibit the release of the Patmore Close site for housing unless the demand for secondary school places is being met elsewhere, and planning permission should accordingly be refused.

the stated education strategy to ensure sufficient secondary school places across the Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth education planning area for the future. These representations are attached as Appendix 3a and Appendix 3b.

The County Council, with a statutory responsibility for ensuring sufficient school places across its area, has an education strategy in place that delivers 6fe of additional capacity into the Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth education planning area.

We remain satisfied that this delivers the right level of additional capacity, with sufficient additional capacity options available to manage any fluctuations in demand or further possible demand in the longer term. What is clear is that forecasting secondary demand into future decades cannot be certain and therefore flexibility is key in planning sufficiency for the longer term.

Potential opportunities for additional secondary capacity have been outlined to EHDC in previous submissions. In addition to any spare capacity in the new 6fe secondary school at Bishops Stortford North the options identify possible capacity of up to 4 f.e. within the existing school estate across the area. Deliverability of these identified options would need to be both in agreement with the schools and tested through the town planning system. Further capacity, if required, could be made available through a further education site allocation to the south of the town, which is referenced in our representations to the district council as prudent planning in the long term.

The County Council is satisfied therefore that sufficient options for additional capacity exist to provide the right level of secondary

places across the area for the long term future.

**(d) Removal of the proposed Bishop's Stortford South development from the draft District Plan would significantly reduce the demand for school places and might then add some weight to the County Council's belief that one 6 FE school would be sufficient to meet the long term demand. But the draft District Plan has further stages to complete before the housing numbers in it are finalised, and so such a possibility is speculative and not a sound basis on which to grant planning permission.**

**BSCF detailed comment**

**HCC response**

14. Finally, it should be noted that 1000 of the dwellings in the East Herts Draft District Plan are provided for on Green Belt land south of Bishop's Stortford with start and completion dates falling within the same timescale as the BSN development. There is no reason to suppose that the dwelling mix would be significantly different from BSN – they are not going to be mainly small apartments – and so the demand for school places can be expected to be similar. Since they would be on the opposite side of town from the proposed school in the linked application, the only realistic means of access to the proposed new school site would be by car.

As indicated above, the pupil forecasts take account of proposed new housing developments across the area, as detailed in EHDC's draft District Plan and formulated in line with the District's housing need assessment. There is no firm certainty that all of the currently proposed sites will come forward and indeed, some sites may be replaced with others within the area. In the context of long term planning of secondary education provision, the key considerations are around scale of development, build rate and overall growth rather than the specific location of developments within an area.

15. The Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation has objected strongly to the development of the Bishop's Stortford South site which is currently within the Green Belt and which is not supported by any forecasts of population growth other than a wish to relocate inward migration here rather than elsewhere within the district. We do not know whether this development will remain in the version of the plan which East Herts Council chooses to adopt – consultation responses are still being considered.

It is for EHDC as Local Planning Authority to allocate land within its area as part of the District Plan process. HCC has already made representations to EHDC around site allocations in the south of the town to plan prudently for further potential secondary capacity if and when that is required beyond the next decade.



Meanwhile, given that on the evidence of this application the County Council has no plans to meet the demand for secondary school places which, on its own methodology, the Bishop's Stortford South development would generate, it is clear that any major residential development on that site would be educationally unsustainable.

