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Dear Vanessa

Education Provision Within Hassocks Parish 2014-2031

I write on behalf of the Hassocks Parish Neighbourhood Plan Working Group and further to our meeting on 20 April 2015. Many thanks for your time at this meeting in explaining the process in planning and preparing for the provision of adequate school places within West Sussex County.

At this meeting, it was agreed that I would write to you to seek your formal confirmation and response to a number of matters that the Parish Council need to consider as part of their work in planning for housing within the parish up to the period 2031.

Since our meeting, I have reviewed your Planning School Places 2015 document (dated April 2015) and refer to this within my comments and queries below.

Current Situation

The parish of Hassocks currently benefits from Hassocks Infants School, Windmills Junior School and Downlands Secondary School. Both the Infant and Junior School have recently expanded to 3 form entries, and Downlands Community School is due to take an extra 1 Form Entry from September 2016.

It is understood that the Infant and Junior School are part of a wider “locality” which groups these schools with St Lawrence Primary School in Hurstpierpoint and Albourne Primary School.

Relevant to this background of school provision is the current and future housing growth requirements and proposals for the parish. The District Council have published an “unconstrained” housing number for the parish within their Draft Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) of some 600 dwellings over the Plan period 2014-2031. This is a proportion of the draft District Plan housing provision figure for the entire district of 11,050 homes over the same period.

Taking into account strategic planned provision and parish constraints, the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group envisages that the housing provision over the Plan period to be provided within the parish is likely to be within the range of 250-400 dwellings.

Evidence Base

In preparing the Parish Neighbourhood Plan, future housing, both in terms of total numbers and in terms of site selection, must be considered having regard to a broad “evidence base”. In order to

ensure that the emerging Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan is robust, we seek your confirmation of information and future plans in respect of education within the parish.

Please note, this evidence base is held in the public domain and will be available, amongst others, to the Examiner who will ultimately consider whether the Plan is acceptable to go forward to a Referendum.

Against this backdrop, I would be grateful if you could confirm and respond to the following.

Current Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN)

Please confirm the net capacity (which it is understood reflects the Published Admission Number (PAN)) of the schools that are located within the parish (by school) and within the wider locality group.

Current Pupil Numbers

Please confirm the actual pupil numbers attending the schools, both in the parish (by school) and within the wider locality group (understood to be the Number On Role (NOR)).

Current Prediction of Future Pupil Numbers

It is understood that the projected numbers of future pupil numbers has been calculated by reference to information provided by the Child Health Bureau and that this comprises the number of pre-school children living in any catchment area, together with data from Planning Authorities about expected housing development.

This approach is detailed in your Planning School Places 2015 document. However, when we met, you indicated that no recent information from the Child Health Bureau is available, and is unlikely to be provided in the near future. Please can you confirm whether such up to date data is now, or will be available in the future.

Given that the future numbers are based, in part, on predictions about expected housing development, please confirm the housing numbers that you have assumed will be developed within the parish of Hassocks and within the wider "locality" area. In doing so, please confirm assumptions regarding housing sizes and the proportion of affordable housing; given the acknowledgement that both these factors have an affect on the ratio of school children per dwelling.

I note that within the Table on page 15/16 of the Planning School Places 2015, the identified housing need within Mid Sussex over the Plan period is 8,800. The Draft Pre-submission District Plan sets out a housing provision for the district of 11,050 new homes (2014-2031). Please confirm what effect this increase in housing numbers has on your prediction of future pupil numbers, both within the parish and wider "locality" area.

The District Council's Draft HEDNA Report identifies an unconstrained housing need for Hassocks of 600 dwellings between 2014-2031. The Parish Council assessed number likely to come forward in the Neighbourhood Plan is circa 250-400. Please confirm to what extent these figures affect your prediction of future pupil numbers.

Delivery of Additional School Places

In our meeting, you indicated that there is a need to increase school places within the parish. You set out three sequential options for achieving this, namely: (1) providing additional school places through expansion of existing schools; (2) a change to the catchment area (i.e. to manage pupil demand in

any one school); or (3) the provision of a new school. I would be grateful if you could confirm if this is an accurate reflection of your comments and of County Council policy.

Set against this, representatives at the meeting indicated that the Infant and Junior School in Hassocks have now increased to 3 Form Entries and it is considered that there is no further potential for additional growth. At that time, you indicated that there needed to be further dialogue with the schools before reaching a firm, final conclusion on this point.

I note the Planning School Places 2015 document now states that: *"The Hassocks locality has seen sustained growth in pupil numbers, particularly for Primary and Hassocks Infants, Windmills Junior and St Lawrence Primary Academy, have expanded to the full capacity of their sites"*.

Please confirm which position is correct and, if further assessment is required, when you anticipate being in a position to finalise a view.

The Planning School Places 2015 document also states that, *"Work is being undertaken with the Parish and District Councils to identify the option of a further site in Hassocks Village, where demand is higher than the number of places available"*. In the subsequent table, you indicate the intent to provide a new primary school for Hassocks which would be capable of taking one Form Entry (30 pupils) in a through school primary school (i.e. 210 places in total).

Please confirm if this is the clear policy position of West Sussex County Council on the need for a new school.

Please also confirm the current position of work undertaken to date in finding land for a new school; what work lies ahead; and what is the timeframe for undertaking this.

Please advise the criteria for site selection of a new school site (i.e. size, topography, geographic location).

It is understood that at least one promoter of a housing site within the parish has liaised with your Authority over the potential provision of land for a new school. Please confirm the nature of these discussions and the role this has in your determination of the need for a new school and the most appropriate site for it.

Please confirm the protocol for liaising with other key stakeholders in the site selection process for a new school; in particular with the Parish Council, District Council and the National Park Authority.

Timing of Delivery

As explained at the meeting, for a Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted, it must pass the considerations of an Examiner and subsequently a popular vote through a Referendum. It is therefore important that the Neighbourhood Plan is wholly justified and meets the needs of local residents.

In preparing the Neighbourhood Plan, resident feedback has consistently raised concerns at the inadequacy of the existing number of school places within Hassocks. There is a concern that if the Neighbourhood Plan fails to address future school places, it may fail at the Examination or Referendum stage. It is therefore important that there is adequate provision planned for the parish schools, the mechanism for delivery is robust and the timing is aligned to future housing growth.

For these reasons, it is necessary to understand the projection of pupil need on an annual basis over the Plan period (2014-2031) and the timing of delivery of the additional places that are identified to be

needed. I note in Planning School Places 2015 that delivering sufficient education provision requires the implementation of changes which take time to achieve. In particular, it is stated that “*There is likely therefore to be a significant planning period that has to be included in the forward planning process*”.

In the event that school places for the totality of the Plan period cannot be delivered in the short term, it is considered that it may be prudent and necessary to ensure that housing delivery is phased to match the delivery of additional school places.

This approach is likely to be the subject of considerable interest of an Examiner who will consider the Plan. On this basis, and in order to ensure policies are fully justified, we consider it incumbent upon the County Education Authority to either confirm that sufficient places will be available in conjunction with housing development when needed or, if there is a requirement for phasing, that you would support a policy within the Plan that controls the delivery of housing over the Plan period.

On this basis, please confirm whether the projected need for additional school places can be delivered as soon as they are required or, in the alternative, that your Authority would support a phasing policy within the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Next Step in Preparing the Neighbourhood Plan

The next step in preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan is to undertake a public consultation exercise on the range of potential housing sites that have been promoted through the evidence gathering stages. This will lead to the selection of the sites to be included within a Draft Neighbourhood Plan. These sites are to be selected, cognisant of all constraints and opportunities, and this should include the need for a new school/additional school places.

Given this, and the date of this forthcoming public exhibition, we would be grateful for your feedback on the above points, on or before Friday 5 June 2015.

I trust that this is acceptable, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



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Director

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