



The Truth Revealed? Update February 2019

With a couple of months elapsed since the possibility of further archaeology was dismissed, work has clearly begun in earnest on the site of the proposed school. Viewed from any local vantage point (except those used by HCC for planning permission views) the change in landscape is inescapable. Much of the fields are dug-into, creating a quarry-like vista with many of the permanent steep slopes already being formed.

Any archaeology that may have been present when the ultra-quick investigation was undertaken is unlikely ever to be found. Land was worked in daylight and darkness to clear the way for the builders to get on with throwing up the first pre-constructed structures (Archaeological investigation approvals made no provision for further on-going monitoring).

New School Forecasts Confirm Previous Concerns

If it proved impossible to reveal any archaeology, the long wait for School forecasts has eventually ended. Shortly after submitting its own planning application 18 months ago HCC abruptly withdrew both its published schools forecasts and its report on future requirements in the County. A short message appeared explaining that forecasting model had been changed and that it had teething problems – so much so that they couldn't predict beyond 4 years (previously 10 years). However not to worry, HCC were confident that these would be sorted out early in 2018 and a full set would be published. Despite this, they were, of course able to state with confidence they had a long-established planning system that supported their Planning Application documents.

Eventually two years late, HCC feel confident enough to reveal their first full set of school demand forecasts. These show a **fall** since the planning application submission, equivalent to **half a school** (down 3.2 Forms of entry in the critical first five years).

Forecast	Year of Entry (Secondary)								
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Current (Feb 19)	634	663	625	635	673	642	636	608	610
Planning Application Sep 17	703	759	730	730	773	723	716	670	639
Change	-69	-96	-105	-95	-100	-81	-80	-62	-29
	-95								

Primary school forecasts show a similar pattern suggesting Harpenden **has over 100 excess places** (details below), which supports the much reduced move through to Secondary in future years. Full details are available by following the links on HCC's School Planning page:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/at-school/school-planning/school-planning.aspx>

Of course HCC and the Trust had anticipated this situation. When the application for the new school was first submitted in late 2014 it identified that the school could call on **120 pupils per year from Luton and Bedfordshire**. Perhaps no surprise that RSRP challenged this when the Trust undertook its required (Section 10) Consultation. Perhaps less surprising is the Trust declined to answer and the DfE didn't pursue the point. Not that the relevant other Education Authorities appeared to condone the provision. Luton was clear it had sufficient and of course, the new secondary school in its area (just up the Lower Luton Road opposite Gypsy Lane) is nearing completion.

Latest HCC Primary School Forecast (Source HCC published Feb 2019, green = surplus)

11.2 Harpenden		No of places available 2018-19	Actuals			Forecast			
School Code	School Name		2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
2033	Sauncey Wood Primary School	30	26	25	21				
2034	Manland Primary School	30	30	30	30				
[2018]	[Harpenden Free School]	0	41	0	0				
2060	Harpenden Academy	60	0	28	25				
2203	Roundwood Primary School	45	45	44	45				
2336	The Grove Infant and Nursery School	90	90	79	77				
2390	Crabtree Infants' School	60	60	60	59				
2412	The Lea Primary School and Nursery	30	25	28	27				
2437	High Beeches Primary School	60	59	59	49				
2457	Wood End School	60	83	60	60				
3336	St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School	22	20	22	20				
3401	St Dominic Catholic Primary School	30	31	30	30				
Total Year R Pupil Demand			510	465	443	409	419	419	393
Total Year R Places Available		517				517	517	517	517
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (No.)						108	98	98	124
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (%)						20.9%	19.0%	19.0%	24.0%
Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (FE)						3.6	3.3	3.3	4.1

Planning Condition Changes?

The planning application needed some 50 conditions, including obvious Archaeology and construction programme issues, many due before work could start. The Judicial Review Judge also found that HCC's Planning Officers failed to identify the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Over recent months HCC has been busily submitting/discharging batches of conditions. Most have been out of sight (they are not required to inform the public) and some have seen significant change from the original application.

The construction programme listed access off the Lower Luton Road to protect residential areas and create a safer route for delivery vehicles. That, and early drainage installation (to prevent flood damage from overflow during construction) were among the first to go. Instead access at a much higher risk location was authorised with no apparent priority given to restore original arrangements. Site offices and supporting generators were quickly established directly opposite the Flexicare home. How many other non-neighbour friendly changes will be granted remains to be seen. The brass-neck award however must go to HCC for:

- not only ignoring the EIA requirement flagged in the Court Case when they submitted their first conditions discharge application
- but justifying doing so on based on the exact same previous work the Court had found at fault.

What can / is being done?

During the saga RSRP raised many points with HCC, escalating a number to formal complaints. Going into the Planning Application process, a number remained unanswered. It has since become clear that HCC had no intention of addressing those matters at all. RSRP has therefore this week submitted a request that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) investigate HCC's conduct: the matters outlined above, a significant number of un-actioned complaints, apparent bias against local residents and a general lack of accountability. The LGO covers all aspects of local authority behaviour and they have a range of measures they can call on to bring authorities to account. This is now in their hands and we will advise progress in due course.

RSRP remains committed to continuing to represent the interests of local residents. HCC has a legal responsibility as a Planning Authority to ensure any development under its jurisdiction is delivered in accordance with planning conditions – individually you raise any matter of concern with Spatial Planning at County (E: Spatial.Planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk).