



## **Planning Application Launch – September 2017**

### **Planning Application Overview – Events so far**

As indicated in our last bulletin the Planning Application to build a school on the fields at Batford Farm was finally launched earlier this week. Following the fiasco over notifying the Section 10 Consultation from the Trust at the beginning of September it is worrying that the launch of the Planning Application is already shaping up the same way.

What should have happened was a coordinated set of notifications by the Planning Authority, clear instructions on critical dates and a full set of supporting information available from the outset. What appears to have happened is that Herts County Council placed the first notification of the application on the Planning Portal of their website late on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> – this declared a planning application had been made and that consultation opened on 26<sup>th</sup> September and would remain open until 31<sup>st</sup> October. No other information was available, other than the summary statement that the applicant was HCC. The Trust via its Katherine Warington School website announced on 27<sup>th</sup> that *“The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), in partnership with the Harpenden Secondary Education Trust (HSET), have submitted plans to Hertfordshire County Council”* – still no supporting information. On 28<sup>th</sup> September documents did begin to appear: these are available on HCC’s web portal including the formal application form – stating the applicant to be *“Hertfordshire County Council / Educational Skills Funding Agency”*. So three days, three different applicants but still no formal notification. For those who have followed this process since its first public announcement – now over four years ago – it will be no surprise that Vincent and Gorbing are acting as agent for the Applicant (whoever it is) and that their lead is the same company officer who was convinced that the fields previous use was grazing for horses.

Later on 28<sup>th</sup> step forward County Councillor David Williams – remember the local councillor who was going to keep everyone informed – with a first note in a long while announcing that the application had been posted and advising that the closing date for submissions under the public consultation was 14<sup>th</sup> November – two weeks later than the website. RSRP queried this with Councillor Williams and were advised that HCC had experienced problems loading the details and that the date was to be revised to 14 November 2017 on the website. On 30<sup>th</sup> September ‘near neighbours’ began receiving letters from HCC advising them of the Planning Application being registered and directing recipient to their website for more information. The letters appear to confirm 14<sup>th</sup> November, although webpage has yet to be updated.

### **Planning Application – What should have happened?**

The Planning process is generally a well prescribed process. It involves clear times and methods for notification and publication of supporting material and submission of representations. The same principles apply whichever Planning Authority is hearing the Application. These include notification to those directly affected by letter, public notification (the familiar green notices) and clear instructions on where plans can be viewed and commented on. So far there are no notices on site,

late delivery of notices to neighbours, confusion over the consultation period and a delay in publishing supporting documents.

The document library that has now been published is substantial, and not the easiest to download (most documents are in zip files – persevere and it is possible to retrieve and open them). The advisory letter to neighbours identifies three options to view the application and supporting material:

1. HCC website: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/planning](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/planning) - follow search for application and enter reference PL/0866/17
2. Make an appointment to view at the offices of Spatial Planning & Economy Unit of HCC – this of course means a trip to Hertford as the office is at County Hall – call 01992 556266 to arrange appointment
3. Notice indicates that a third option MAY be possible – view the electronic copies at St Albans District Council – Civic Centre in St Peter’s Street. As this is not confirmed at this stage we suggest you ring the HCC number above to check what is required to arrange a viewing.

The notification suggests any questions be directed to the same number or by email to [spatialplanning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:spatialplanning@hertfordshire.gov.uk).

### **Planning – What happens next?**

The application is open for consultation – a first in the seven year history of this project – and anyone who considers they are potentially affected by the proposals should take the opportunity to contribute by making representations. The Planning process requires those assessing to take account of representations – most submission processes seek to ascertain whether the representor has a particular view, has concerns or is making a comment without stating a particular reason for doing so. In HCC’s case the online form (one of the options to make a representation) has a mandatory field titled support or object – do not be deterred by this the choices include the other options.

Comments will carry more weight if they refer to specific points and are related to information provided by the applicant – this generally means that to make a representation you will have been expected to have looked at (and understood) the supporting information provided. RSRP has a wealth of historic information, but the current planning application will take the majority of its evidence base from the material submitted and therefore the volume of this will need to be digested. RSRP will be reviewing all the material put forward and compare it with previous HCC advisory documents; where necessary expert opinion will be sought. This process will take a number of days to complete and RSRP will make its analysis known through their website and other channels.

For the present RSRP has not seen anything that suggests HCC has addressed the core concerns that have existed with this proposal from the outset. RSRP has already noted that despite having many challenges from RSRP, referring these and earlier queries to the Planning Application process, HCC has chosen not to formally advise RSRP of the Planning Application process. Similarly the Trust, who had in 2016 promised to notify RSRP of the Section 10 Consultation, chose not to do so. The section 10 Consultation remains open until 25 October.