



September 2019 Secondary Allocations etc. 4th March 2019

On Friday 1 March the first round of secondary place allocations was announced. Herts County Council (HCC) allocations this year are characterised by a number of applicants who received no allocation – 189 applicants across the County. Bizarrely in their Press Release on Friday afternoon HCC failed to mention this shortfall.

They also failed to publish where the shortfall was occurring. In 2015, 2016 and 2017, when the same happened at Primary entry there was a listing by Town/Parish of affected areas.

Some initial analysis (of the allocation statistics) however, reveals that:

- Harpenden has 40 applicants without allocations (7%), while Wheathampstead has 32 (31%).
- Neither Harpenden nor Wheathampstead have 'NRAs' (Non-ranked Allocations, where a school is allocated that was not on a parent's list of preferences).
- Most of the remaining unallocated students appear to be in districts of St Albans - Central districts (73), London Colney (29), Colney Heath (12) and Sandridge (1).
- While the total number unallocated is remarkably similar to the planned Katharine Warington intake (180), only 72 of the shortfall match the area the school is supposed to support (Harpenden Secondary Planning Area, or HSPA: Harpenden, Wheathampstead plus other larger villages)
- This HSPA shortfall of 72 is a far cry from the 240 shortfall sold to justify the school

It remains to be seen whether parents will be directed towards KWS from far further than we were led to believe (although Social Media suggests at least one London Colney pupil may have already accepted) and Central Beds and Luton are understood to be adding the school to their lists.

RSRP has for a long time questioned HCC's abilities to plan for school places in the right place. That St Albans has significant shortfall in a year when places previously ring-fenced for Wheathampstead (and a handful of Harpenden) students were turned back over to St Albans local use defies any logic. It becomes clearer, however, when it is also understood that this year Samuel Ryder adopted a pre-allocation of a third of its places to its through-school pupils, thus taking numbers out of the St Albans general pot.

Perhaps also there is no coincidence that, amid all the general furore, the Scholars Education Trust (SET, the ruling body of Samuel Ryder, Sir John Lawes and Harpenden Academy) announced the outcome of its consultation on proposed changes. SET has decided to deliver the same preference system in Harpenden, with Harpenden Academy pupils being given preferential entry to Sir John Lawes. Their consultation apparently attracted 246 public responses (that reached the school) as well as responses from other primary schools. It was noted that the balance of these were against, however no analysis of these points is given (see SJL Admissions page). SET's Admissions Committee is more honest in its reasons for recommending acceptance to the Trust. In particular they acknowledged that the Academy "at the time of its incorporation into the Scholars' Education Trust [2016] ... was not financially viable" in effect confirming that the change is all about money.

RSRP last week pointed out again that Harpenden has a large surplus of Primary places, a problem that largely lies on HCC's door for overproviding in years past. Rather than address the core problem, it looks like there will be a simple passing of the pain from one non-viable school to other Primary

Schools in the area in the years ahead. It is also highly likely that parents will move to secure places at SJL by having children at Harpenden Academy. This year, supposedly the highest point of the peak, saw SJL with a 920m radius for new pupils – essentially encompassing all of Batford. By 2021 in all likelihood the reach of SJL will have been substantially curtailed for those in un-associated Primary schools or without in-school siblings.

Perhaps a further sign of the current, some would say broken, system is that a school (SJL) which was unable to provide more secondary places is, according to its statement, now perfectly able to share a number of resources on its site with its linked primary school.

As might be expected there is plenty of opinion in circulation – including various local media. Should you have listened to a St Albans parent on BBC 3CR you might be under the impression that the (KWS) school is fully built. That in itself is an exaggeration that goes beyond HCC's normal standards. On Harpendia, you can see pictures of the first steelwork (add your own 'no that doesn't dominate the skyline' comment), but don't expect to find much mention of SJL admissions or any problems with County's allocation system. There is also a post-allocation statement on KWS web site. Judging by its content it would appear to be Kier and the Trust's way of telling local residents that they want to do night and weekend work through the first few weeks of opening.

If you are a first time parent visiting this site – we are a local residents group and have been having this type of experience with HCC for nearly six years now. If you have an allocation issue we usually repeat one piece of advice at this time of the year: the only direct line to County for questioning the process as it applies to your child is through your local County Councillor. Full details are on the County's website; the local Councillors to Harpenden are Cllr Williams (Harpenden North East) Cllr T Heritage (Harpenden South West) and Cllr Brewster (Harpenden Rural – Wheathampstead & Redbourn) – all three have direct experience as Council Education Panel members.