

## **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE**

**18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

### **UPDATE SHEET**

#### **Item 5**

#### **14/00511/OUTM – Watford Health Campus**

#### **ADDITIONAL REPRESENTATIONS**

The following additional representation has been received from the Planning Manager, Development Services at the County Council:

“Further to my email of 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014, I note your report which is scheduled for consideration at committee tomorrow evening and I would appreciate it if you would make the following additional comments available to the committee. These comments follow the meeting which took place between HCC and WBC officers on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

I am grateful to you for setting out the County Council’s representations and for identifying that the matters of S106 contributions and particularly appropriate education provision are yet to be resolved. However, I write to emphasise my concern that it appears the development may not be able to meet the cost of education provision to mitigate the impact of the development by a significant margin.

As you are aware the County Council has considered both the needs arising from this planning application whilst keeping an eye on wider local issues and in this particular case, the need to find additional primary places to serve this part of the town. We are disappointed that the proposal may also not offer a primary school site, something which has been sought in the past (as referred to at page 99 of the report).

I recognise that the report recommends that planning permission is granted subject to completion of a S106 agreement (at page 114, Informative 1) and I hope that the council in considering this report will undertake to continue to work together with HCC to satisfactorily resolve these issues. HCC officers are very willing to meet again to that end.”

The applicant has responded to this representation as follows:

“A substantial amount of work was undertaken prior to the submission of the planning application and in association with Herts County Council to identify a potential school site for the Health Campus. Originally, it was proposed that a Primary School could be constructed on the site of the former Irish Club on Wiggshall Road. Work was undertaken to progress this proposal but it was

eventually deemed as unacceptable in principle due to issues relating to highway congestion and safety, the location of the site within the flood plain and the position of overhead power lines.

Following this, further work was undertaken in early 2013 and a total of ten possible school sites were identified and put forward to Herts County Council for review. These were the only sites within this part of Watford that were felt could be suitable in principle and should be explored. In June, HCC provided a response for this and provided RAG ratings for the ten proposed sites. None of the sites proposed were given a green rating by HCC.

A recommendation was made by HCC that further discussions with Laurance Haines on the proposal to expand the school by 2FE take place which would have addressed the 1.43 FE demand generated by the Health Campus. Following this, the LABV instructed architects to undertake a Feasibility Study for the expansion of Laurance Haines by a further 2FE. This study was undertaken and it was demonstrated that this was possible. Discussions with the school were held to ensure the LABV were aware what the school wanted to achieve from the expansion proposals and these subsequently were incorporated into the plans.

HCC then made the decision that it was not acceptable to expand Laurance Haines by a further 2FE and that a 1FE expansion (that would not address the generated) need should instead be explored. Accordingly, the LABV appointed architects to undertake a further Feasibility Study and this also concluded that this was a feasible expansion proposal. This was subsequently included within the planning application but HCC have now raised concerns over the proposal, despite them indicating that a 2FE expansion was not previously acceptable. Land has been allocated within the planning application to facilitate the extension of Laurance Haines as directed by Herts County Council.

The County Council has a duty to plan for and secure sufficient school places for their area in line with their duties under section 14 of the Education Act 1996. It is a statutory duty of the County Council to ensure there are enough school places to meet the demand in the town.

It should be noted within the Site Allocations Document of the Local Plan Part II that Watford Junction is also allocated as providing an additional primary school and that a further primary school could be provided on the former BECC site if the County Council decide not to sell this for additional housing. Given that residential development on the Health Campus within the next four years (which is the maximum period that HCC plan for school provision) will be limited to around 150 one and two bedroom flats, it is felt that, once these additional school sites come forward, a rebalance of demand will take place.

The 2007 application for the Health Campus would have provided circa £1m towards education provision in the Borough and it is significant that the s106 Agreement was only completed in 2010. This £1m financial contribution was a result of the 500 units proposed on the site. The current, hybrid masterplan application proposes 681 units which is a 36% increase on the earlier consent

of 500 units yet the contributions sought by Herts County Council are not proportional to or reasonable when viewed against the previous, extant consent.

Whilst the Campus has significant viability issues, we are continuing discussions with Herts County Council with the view to providing a resolution that all parties agree on to the overall benefit of the town.”