

Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group (HEGNPG)

January 2019 update

As we turn the year it seems good opportunity to give residents an update on what we, HEGNPG, are doing on your behalf.

HEGNPG was set up a couple of years ago to develop a Neighbourhood Plan and represent both Parishes in response to the East Herts Council District Plan proposals to remove the Green Belt protection and develop a large number of homes in our community; this was not something we, as a community wanted. Alongside our opposition to the proposal we also had discussion with East Herts Council and the landowners about the proposals so that 'If the destruction of the Green Belt here became a reality we would position the Community as well as we can to minimize the damage to our community'.

Many of you have supported our work and attended seminars to give feedback during last year but it might seem that everything has now quiet? So what are the key things we are working on on your behalf?

As many of you will know following the Examination in Public of East Herts Plan the independent Inspector worked with East Herts to make changes to their Plan so it could be adopted as a formal Plan; that happened last autumn. That was not something we wanted so we are now faced with the reality of the removal of the Green Belt protection and homes for some 30,000 to 40,000 new residents will be built, over many years, as 7 "Hertfordshire Villages" each separated by open countryside.

Beyond the adoption of the Local Plan, as described above, the strategic things we are working on as part of our work to develop our Neighbourhood Plan include:

The creation of a Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Board – This group has been set up by the three local Councils. So while we are within East Herts and they are the planning authority they work closely with Harlow and Epping local authorities. They have set up a design Quality Review Panel, appointed an Independent Chairman and employed staff. Sadly, to date, the Chairman and Chairman of the review Panel have declined to meet with us, a Community directly affected by the Garden Town proposals. We continue to ask for meetings as we believe that it must be wrong that public servants are unaccountable to the communities affected by their work.

The publication of a Garden Town Vision – see <https://www.harlow.gov.uk/sites/harlow-cms/files/files/documents/files/Garden%20Town%20Spatial%20Vision.pdf>) is the Vision the three Councils have endorsed. We have commented on this Vision and asked that it should properly recognize the East Herts Local Plan commitment of 7 Hertfordshire villages and not simply urban extensions built into the open countryside.

The Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) highway consultation on the A414 – This is really important and very current. We all know that the A414 and C161 (the road from Pye Corner to Sawbridgeworth) face major congestion and are dangerous so adding extra traffic to these roads will make matters worse. It seems HCC, agree but did not make this point when the plans were being adopted. HCC want to do a number of things the most alarming is to run the A414 as a major trunk road through the heart of the existing Pye Corner community. East Herts, who support the changing of the road from being a 'C' classification road with a weight restriction have confirmed that they have never considered any alternative options or studies including why the existing road through Harlow's commercial areas cannot be improved.

What does the Adopted plan really mean? – This might seem an odd question; surely it was all discussed in detail at the Public Inquiry? The new policy removing the Green Belt designation says

that the new development will be built in accordance with Garden Town Principles that include Land Value Capture, community ownership of community assets (so things like the spaces between the new villages and the former Hunsdon airfield etc.). Despite repeatedly asking what these principles will mean and how they will work we can get no answers for their authors! We think this is unreasonable.

So what do we see as the big things we will be doing over the next year on your behalf?

Responding to the A414 Consultation, as mentioned above

Developing a Neighbourhood Plan working with the landowners and eventually seeking a vote from residents on the neighbourhood plan. (NOTE: The scope of the Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan does not include Hunsdon Village. Hunsdon are working on their Hunsdon village Neighbourhood Plan now, including the important links with the Gilston project and the former airfield)

Developing tangible 'early wins' for us as a community; for example the East Herts Plan tells us that there will be community ownership of community assets, which will include the undeveloped land, and the green spaces – if they are not to be developed these could and we believe should, be transferred to the community at an early stage.

Communications with you – Respecting the trust you have placed with us and keeping you advised on progress and seeking your continued support

So how can you find out more information and or get involved? Please follow our activities on www.hegnp.org.uk or join us as a Group and so help to shape the area where you live so making sure that the Community has a proper and informed voice while this massive project takes place around us.

Anthony Bickmore, Chairman, HEGNPG
1st January 2019