

To be refreshed annually:-

## Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group

### Chairman's report to sponsor Parish Councils

#### 1 Introduction

Under the remit given to us by you, as our sponsor Parish Councils, for us to act as a Neighbourhood Plan Group (Group). I am delighted to report back to you on our last year's activities alongside some thoughts on the future work we need to do.

#### 2 Purpose

Our remit is to act for both Parish Councils in developing a Neighbourhood Plan, as anticipated under the Localism Act 2011. Any Neighbourhood Plan for the joint parish needs to be in conformity with our District Councils Local Plan. East Herts Council, in their revised Local Plan, have proposed the removal of the majority of the Green Belt to facilitate the development of 7 new villages, each with a distinctive identity and physical separated by land which will not be developed. We, as a community, oppose this proposal.

If the independent Planning Inspector approves the Council's plan, following review, then our Neighbourhood Plan has to have recognition of the then reality of the new Local Plan. On this basis it is vital that the groundwork being used to justify the Local Plan housing allocation, and so green belt release, is tested and consulted on as this will form the basis for both the Council and landowners/developers ambitions. Our subsequent Neighbourhood Plan will need to be subject to a democratic vote by our community. The Council and developers/landowners have made a number of undertakings about how the development will be delivered, it is vital that these undertakings are analysed as they will shape the future of our communities, assuming of course that East Herts Draft Local Plan is agreed by the Inspector and subsequently the Minister. (Three earlier proposals for similar major development have been rejected after public examination although the Minister overturned the last Inspector's findings).

#### 3 Action required

This paper **requires no specific action** beyond reaffirmation of the support we, as a Group, enjoy from both parish Councils working in tandem through the Group.

#### 4 Last year's activities

We have had an exceptionally busy year working on behalf of our community this included responding to formal consultations etc. on:-

- The September 2016 Concept Development Framework which the Council put out to consultation in August 2017
- The Developers Outline Planning pre application consultation, also in August 2017
- Preparations for, and professional representation, at the Local Plan Examination in Public in October 2107
- Representations to and attendance at seminars on the “urban design vision” for the wider Harlow Garden Town project which includes the 7 proposed villages for Gilston, alongside extensions to Harlow.
- Making representations on the Local Plan Proposed Modifications in March 2018
- East Herts has established a Gilston Steering Group that meets monthly; we are a key part of that group.

In our ‘external’ facing work we have prepared several circulations to all households, either in the parish magazines or through organising house-to-house delivery. We have held 3 community consultation events, the last two, by way of example, were attended by 65 - 100 residents for the full morning and residents views were formally captured to inform our feedback to East Herts and the Developers. Members of our Group have attended three whole day site visits to see and comment on schemes felt by the Developers and East Herts to be examples of how Gilston might be developed. Our MP, Mark Prisk arranged for us to meet with the Secretary of State for Department of Communities and Local Government.

In our internal facing work we have held regular meetings as a Group and produced minutes that we have made public via our web site. We have made public all of our expenditure, approving all expenditure with our meetings.

## **5 The next year**

The major issues I believe we are facing during the next year are: -

- The Inspectors Report to Ministers is expected imminently, the Ministers decision will follow, if East Herts proposals are accepted, then we will have to prepare our Neighbourhood Plan in conformity with the Local Plan, working with the Landowners and other stakeholders.
- We have been trying to arrange further community workshops with East Herts and the Developer as there are many major issues, such as extending the A414 right through the middle of Pye Corner Gilston (through upgrading the C classification road), the “Vision” and Concept Development framework etc. We have offered dates for such functions but these have been declined and no new dates offered; we will continue to press for these as there are major issues that will affect residents for years to come and the Group believe that the views of residents should be properly represented.

- The Developers have suggested that they will be making an outline planning application shortly; this will require a major response from the community and of course is fundamentally linked to the Neighbourhood Plan for the joint parishes.

We also need to keep a careful eye on issues such as: -

- The relocation of Princess Alexandra Hospital as the Hospital have identified Gilston as one of their preferred sites for a new hospital. East Herts have made the case to the Inspector that there are “exceptional circumstances” for land to be released from the Green Belt to provide land for housing and so 10,000 homes. We believe the Council cannot accept all sorts of other major land users to their scheme, in our view, this is tantamount to changing their case, as they presented to the Inspector.
- East Herts have also recently made a suggestion that a 12 acre Business Park should be added to the Gilston proposal. To do so would be in conflict with their own Concept Development Framework (CDF) that they have spent so much time consulting us on.
- Consultants have been working on a “the urban vision” for the wider Harlow Garden Town but have been commissioned off a brief that ignores what the Council have put in their CDF. We have not heard from the Consultants for months so worry that they will produce some sort of vision that ignores the Local Plan and CDF despite our representations.
- The Garden Town Board have appointed a number of executives and a Quality Review Panel. We have been asking to meet the Director of the Board and Chairman of the Panel. The brief for the Panel again ignores the Local Plan and CDF. If the Gilston proposal gets approval we find it odd that the board, and through them the panel, are not in communication with us, especially given our remit under the Localism Act and the scale of housing proposed.
- Engagement Strategy, the Local Plan makes it clear that an engagement strategy needs to be prepared so that our Community is properly consulted on these major proposals which will have a direct affect on our lives and homes, it is both right and good that such a strategy should be prepared. The landowners/developers have produced a ‘Development Charter’ that starts to set out how things might work but this needs further review.
- The Developers very helpfully funded some professional support for us in connection with the CDF consultation, this demonstrated the benefit of having such support especially in helping planning, delivering and collating the responses, your responses, to the consultation. The Secretary of State has also met with us and agreed that we need such support ..... we just need to get the funding to provide the support!

## **6 The challenges we face**

- Resources, as our sponsors the Parish Councils have been kind in meeting the costs as they arise. For our part we believe that we should be provided with resources to fund professional advice for the substantial amount of work that is needed to respond to the documents/consultations etc., many with far reaching consequences. (It is right to acknowledge the support we had from an independent advisor on the CDF, we need more of that sort of support).
- Keeping the Community engaged is central to our work, your help and support is a vital part of helping us achieve that. There will naturally be many individual queries, worries etc., our job is to represent the community as a whole and become a powerful voice making well-reasoned points to East Herts and the Developers.

## **7 Conclusions**

We have, as a Group put in an amazing amount of effort over the last year and hope that, as our sponsors, you are satisfied with the work we have done. Please provide us, via your representatives on the Group with further feedback or comments. As Chairman I am, of course, willing to attend a meeting with you to expand on this report and/or take questions.

## **8 The team**

We could not have achieved as much as we have over the last year without an active, talented and engaged team who have made time to support a large amount of meetings, reading, drafting and doing things has been immense and, mostly done, on top of other community engagement. They all deserve commendation for their contribution,

The other members of the Group are;-

Bob Toll  
 Mark Orson  
 Janine Bryant  
 Bernadette Dunthorne  
 Mike Newman  
 Sarah Bagnall  
 Wendy Clarke  
 Terry Minkey  
 Frank O'Shea

We are always willing to embrace further members!

## **9 Requests from the Parish Councils**

- Your on going support
- Feedback via your nominated members

Anthony Bickmore, Chairman  
8<sup>th</sup> May 2018