

## **Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston Neighbourhood Plan Group**

### **Report to Sponsor Parish Councils**

We are pleased to offer our annual report and in doing so have the opportunity of thanking both Hunsdon and Eastwick and Gilston PC for their support, financially, and their encouragement. The last year, as I hope our report illustrates, has been a very busy one. I am happy to take questions, or attend a meeting, to review this report with your Councils, if helpful.

#### **1 Background/overview**

With your sponsorship we have met, as an NPG, monthly, had bi-monthly meetings with East Herts Council (EHC), had regular meetings with the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Board (HGGTB) and meet with the lead developers monthly. We also review many documents and respond to ‘consultation’ requests on behalf of both Parish Councils; in short a lot of volunteer time has been invested on behalf of the community in meetings, let alone the work between meetings!

Over the last year we have made significant progress, alongside reforming how we operate, as summarised below: -

#### **2 Neighbourhood Plan V1**

Almost exactly a year ago we formulated an approach to preparing our Neighbourhood Plan based on the already agreed Concept Framework and making it the heart of our Neighbourhood Plan. Our objective is to ensure that this agreement of the Concept Framework between the community, EHC and developers is given real meaning through being made into a part of the EHC Local Plan. As the Concept Framework was “agreed” by all our view is that we should be able to put this in place quickly and so hopefully it will become a material consideration in any consideration of Gilston planning applications. Over the summer, with the help of our external Planning advisors, we produced a draft Plan running into some 110 pages and, in September, undertook a formal ‘Regulation 14’ public consultation including three well attended public meetings. As a result of this consultation we had some 550 responses that needed to be individually reviewed and we then considered whether the Plan should be modified. We have done that and are shortly about to undertake further consultation with key stakeholders.

Our aim is to have the Plan in place during the summer of 2020, after its review by an independent Inspector and subsequent public ballot.

#### **3 Formal responses to the four planning applications made last year**

The landowners/developers have made four planning applications over the year and we have responded to the public consultations. In all cases we have had to respond to the consultations over national holiday periods so have in effect been at a disadvantage because of that. With the support of our consultant teams, funded by Places for People and/or HGGTB we have made responses and published these on our website as well as in Gilston the PC has arranged for a printed copy to go every household. On detailed analysis of the 1,000s of pages of documents the applicants put in to support their applications the NPG could not support the applications **so we have objected to them**; major, strategic, issues include: -

- The scheme did not comply with the Concept Framework – as already agreed by them
- The necessary infrastructure was planned to be delivered after new homes are built so increasing the current problems we are all familiar with.
- The transport aspirations were not met and improvements to the station not detailed or guaranteed.

We are waiting to hear of EHC’s assessment of the applications and expect the applications to be modified and possibly a further round of consultation – watch this space!

#### **4 Highways response**

Alongside the ‘responses’ on highways proposals in the planning applications we continue to vigorously object to the proposal that the A414 should be extended from Eastwick Roundabout to the proposed new eastern crossing through the middle of Pye Corner so cutting the community there in half by a major highway. Both EHC and HCC are clear that they have not considered any alternative options or assessed the environmental implications of these proposals; this feels like a neglect of their duties. Our highways consultants prepared a review that showed that the rerouting of the A414 is not needed by the housing development; a point it now seems HCC Highways Dept. accept although one we will need to make sure they continue to advocate!

## **5 Stewardship**

A key part of the commitment made at the outset by both the developers and Leader of EHC is that the Community would have ownership of the landscape buffers between the Villages and of the Airfield Park, between Eastwick and Hunsdon. Working out how we, as a community, will hold and manage this land so that the promises that it will never be developed and used for public purposes are complex and sadly have not been moved on at the speed we would like. We continue to press the Developers, EHC and HGGTB on this subject given that it is a part of the formal Local Plan policy. Our view is that these agreements need to be put in place now and not after the ‘last house’ has been built whenever that is – maybe in 30 or 40 years time when these commitments might be diluted?

## **6 Website and administration**

With the help of your funding we have taken on the help of a Secretary and Communications Manager to share the burden of administration. In addition to this working well we have issued press releases, sharpened up our community messaging and revamped our website – please visit – which is a store of useful information and contains minutes of all of our meetings etc. see [www.HEGNPG.org](http://www.HEGNPG.org)

## **7 Funding and governance**

To do the above we have needed a lot of support from professionals as well as massive amounts of time across the members of the NPG working on behalf of our community. The consultancy work needs paying for! We have long argued that we should be given funding to help us do our work; beyond the very important funding we are given by you, our parish Council sponsors. This year I am pleased to report that this principle was agreed and we have received funding from the developers of Villages 1 – 6 (but not Village 7 developers), HGGTB and Locality, via EHC, for our Neighbourhood Plan.

We are using this money judiciously as we will need resources going forward as there is still much important work to do!

## **8 Next steps and major activities anticipated over the next year**

- We aim to put in place our Neighbourhood Plan by the late summer
- The four planning applications we believe will be modified and so need further scrutiny generally and especially on the phasing of infrastructure.
- We hope to agree a way forward with the Developers over the important issues of Stewardship.
- The Developers, as a first step to thinking about the individual village master plans, will start on a landscape master plan; we, as a community, we need to contribute to that work, including early wins.
- Both developers plan to connect to the stations with paths and cycle routes over land they do not own or control; the Stort Valley is an important local area and needs to be carefully managed.

## **9 Conclusion**

None of the above happens without an active Group of willing people prepared to take a community-wide view, they are all unpaid for the massive amounts of time they contribute; at the many public meetings their work has kindly been acknowledged, that is greatly appreciated. We also need the support of our hard working Secretary and professional advisors, while we are paying them, they have

done a wonderful job for us and with that brought a real professionalism to our work and so I believe respect, by many, for us making serious, balanced and meaningful responses on the above issues.

Your Council's endorsement of that sentiment and continuing support for us remains vital too; thank you for the trust you have placed in us.

**Anthony Bickmore, Chairman**  
**12<sup>th</sup> February 2020**