

# **HUNSDON PARISH ANNUAL MEETING**

## **21st March 2016**

**Present B** Toll (chairman), S Oliver, D Gibbs & B Dunthorne with B Brunton (Dist. Cllr), A Pummell (PRT), B & J Carthy (PPP), PC A Page, J Robinette (Clerk), & 7 members of the public.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Cty Cllr r Beeching, Cllrs F Maule & C page & Mr. J Felstead.

### **2. Approval of minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March 2015**

The councillors approved the minutes and they were signed by the chairman, B Toll Gibbs.

### **3. Chairman's Report**

This is my first annual report as chairman of the Parish Council. I was elected to the role last May when David Gibbs stepped down. I'm glad to say he is still a member of the council. Last May we saw some new faces on the council. We were joined by Bernadette Dunthorne, Fleur Maule and later co-opted Carole Page. Stella Oliver continues her long service on this council alongside David. Helen Brown left us at that time and I thank her on behalf of the whole community for the sterling work she has put in and her commitment to the community. Throughout my previous eight years serving on the council and now in my period of office we continue to be well served by Joy Robinette, our clerk. I'm not sure if David saw what was coming but there is no doubt that the workload of the council has increased dramatically over the past 12 months. Apart from usual monthly meetings we have met on numerous occasions ad hoc to deal with the business that has arisen. This is almost exclusively being to deal with an avalanche of contentious planning applications that have arisen. As your Parish Council, we have endeavoured to represent the views of the community impartially. We have organised open meetings to let people have their say on the planning applications. Without exception, the community has expressed their apprehension at the piecemeal approach to housing development around the village. With the District Plan floundering in its numerous complicated procedures there is a planning vacuum and land owners not just here in Hunsdon but throughout the district has sought to take advantage relying on national policy to support their applications for housing in the light of the national deficiency. The unfortunate consequence is that we're going to see housing development on a piecemeal basis without the support of the necessary infrastructure to support the increasing population. Our schools, public transport and health facilities are already severely stretched and need the investment that housing development should be providing but isn't. Full permission for 13 houses south of Tanners Way has been granted by East Herts District Council irrespective of the fact that it is near the Hunsdon Skip Yard. They have also granted outline permission for another 13 houses off Wicklands Road north of Drury Lane. At first refused, the application was resubmitted and granted. It's difficult to understand what happened here as nothing changed. I wish to commend Martyn Reid for marshalling the residents of Woodlands and Drury Lane in their fight against this application. At the end of the day the issue hinged on the safety of the access roads and the difficulties of draining the site. These matters remain to be resolved at the full application stage and the Parish Council and residents' action group no doubt will be keeping a close eye on how this evolves. The application to build housing on the disused crane yard in Acorn Street has not been put before the District Council Development Control Committee for determination. We await developments. By far the greatest threat to our community is the ongoing saga of Hunsdon Skip Yard. Originally a small business operated by Mr. Bacon using three skip lorries, it has grown into a full-scale waste management facility over the last eighteen months extending over the wood yard and adjoining byway. For the residents of Whitehall Cottages this expansion has led to intolerable noise nuisance from dawn to dusk, odours and vermin. Our country lanes, Hunsdonbury and Church Lane, have been invaded by a stream of heavy bulk carrying lorries totally unsuitable for these roads. As residents, you know how hazardous our lanes can be at the best of times, let alone without the traffic generated by these waste operations. The Parish Council is committed to resolving this issue and seeing the skip yard relocated and the site given alternative more suitable use. The residents at Whitehall Cottages and the Parish Council have made numerous representations but sadly the County Council as Waste Planning Authority the District Council as Planning Authority and the Environment Agency as Licensing Authority are reluctant take any action. The Parish Council has gone to the extraordinary lengths of obtaining legal advice on the current situation. We have been advised that the current operations are unlawful on two grounds - material change of use detrimental to the local amenity and effective abandonment after Mr. Bacon ceased trading there. These arguments have been refuted by the County Council and as advised by our solicitors, the Parish Council is currently seeking further definitive advice from a specialist barrister in this field as the next step.

The Findlays have applied for planning consent to effectively regularise the current situation and enclose some of the operations in a building. This is due to be determined by the County Council in April. Along with residents, we have lodged strong objections. Rest assured that we will leave no stone unturned to defeat this threat to the community. I do not assume blame but I think the mere presence of these massive lorries on our lanes is going to lead to a serious accident one day. It's a nightmare and I don't want to live with the thought that we could have done more to prevent it. Putting aside all the technical arguments about lawful or unauthorised use of land, I fear for our society in this country if citizens' rights to live secure safe lives and enjoy their property in tranquility are deemed less important than profit margins. This spate of planning applications has revealed a democratic deficiency. Decisions on development in Hunsdon are taken by councillors from Hertford, Buntingford and Ware for example. Our local member has no vote. Perhaps our Neighbourhood Plan will address this deficiency? We have joined with the parish of Eastwick and Gilston to develop a joint plan. This is a community project facilitated by both Parish Councils. Over the next few weeks everyone will be invited to participate and contribute to the vision of how we want our parishes to look 20 years from now. We have also seen some positive progress on addressing the lack of reasonable broadband facilities in the village. Many households

have signed up to Gigaclear, sufficient for them to make investment and they are aiming to lay fibre cabling through the village this coming summer. For those who are happy to stay on the Open reach network with their chosen provider, there could be some good news if funding becomes available for BT to lay fibre to the village green cabinets. This has yet to be decided. I wish to thank our MP Mark Prisk for his hard work and support in pressing for a better service for us. More good news to record is the refurbishment of our War Memorial and improvements to the frontage of the Village Hall. We are working to secure improvements to our playground equipment, and create a wildlife area in the dell. There will also be a village fete this year on Saturday July 9th.

I close by recording my thanks to all my fellow councillors for the untiring work they have put in over the last year and to our Clerk. I also thank all those who contribute to our Council meetings. I'm afraid it is always the same few faces that we see about our community business. It's nice to know you are there to support but we have a population more than 1000 now so where is everyone? Getting the community more involved is the challenge for the coming year.

**4. Police Report.** 58 incidents, of which 9 are burglary related offences and 9 relate to motor vehicles from April 15 to March 16. East Herts is currently showing an increase in reported crime of 12% compared to last year, Crime trends change and evolve, and rural crime and criminality is not exempt of this. Officers are today spending more time investigating incidents relating to IT and phone scams together with abuse via social media. How poignant that this past year celebrated 100 years of women in policing further evidence of significant evolution given that both your local constable and PCSO are of female gender. Early January saw an incident in the village which prompted the attendance of air support and our off-road vehicles. Offences ranged from Criminal damage to dangerous driving. The suspects were apprehended and are currently on police bail until April 2016. Operation STOMP has been introduced and has been running for a year now. This operation involves a day of action in a village with both proactive and preventative aspects. Having spoken with your PCSO, she has nominated Hunsdon of consideration in this year's programme which I am confident can be delivered. The preventative aspect involves identifying vulnerability, be it people or property to enable preventative measures to be initiated.

#### **5. County Councillor's Report**

I am Vice-Chairman so in this office I must attend many functions such as civic services civic dinners, opening things, award ceremonies citizenship awards at Hatfield lectures Hertfordshire University and so on. Committees that I am on or panels including the following adult care and health scrutiny committee, standards committee and the monitoring recommendations topic group. I also chair some of these panels. Scrutinies I have been involved in and chaired are the following: Public health integration group, child sexual exploitation topic group autistic spectrum topic group HSCB HSAB thriving families' topic group I chaired IPP budget topic group an investigation into the budget of public health localism and libraries. Also care pathways in to diabetes and stroke. Locality budget I have again spent my 10,000 pounds benefiting all types of community projects. There were approximately 15 of these this year Highways locality budget here I have 90,000 pounds to spend on various highway related projects. And there were 20 of these including TRO's resurfacing highways and footpaths dropped kerbs safety features consultations these can be very expensive but they are democratically necessary and street scene improvements. Meetings there have been numerous all full county council meetings all committees I belonged to these are approximately one a month sometimes full day meetings. Then the evening I go to as many the town council and parish council meetings that I can fit in. I rarely have an evening in during the week then, of course there are the outside bodies on which I represent the county council and must attend their meetings as well. This leaves about a day and 1/2 a week at home to prepare for meetings reading papers and organising questions for other participants and witnesses. Sometimes it is difficult to decide what is important to read and what is not.

**County council finances** This year government grant cut by 80,000,000 pounds this is 33%. Local government finance settlement has offered 7.8 million extra To Bridge this gap there will be a 1.99 per cent increase in council tax, means band D property will pay 22 pound 71 p extra in a year. This will help to pay for schools' roads fire and rescue services and so on. To meet the growing cost for care for elderly and vulnerable adults our biggest spend at £311, million we are taking up the government suggestion to raise an extra two per cent on council tax to directly fund social care for adults. Even after all this we still must save £124,000,000 over the next four years. This is on top of the £211,000,000 we have already saved since 2010 by being more efficient innovative, working more closely than ever with our partners.

**LIAISON.** This takes place between town councillors and parish councillors by email or when I go to meetings. I try and give advice and cross fertilisation of ideas when this is required. I also will talk with district Councillors especially those whose areas overlap with my division. And with the seven East Herts County Councillors and us all work together for the good of the district. Particularly on the infrastructure housing roads and transport. **And problems** These are continuous and ongoing. Unfortunately, we do not always get the result that some residents might like to have, especially as rapidly as some would want either. I fully understand that any problem you're having is foremost in the resident's mind and the most pressing for them. As I have about 8 to 10 on the go at any one time I must prioritise. Bureaucracy is not always the quickest in responding or in action, again unfortunately. The problems I've had to deal with in no order have been regarding housing, social services, school admissions, roads conditions, Poor and illegal parking, speeding, dropping leaves in the autumn, blocked gullies, flooding, dog fouling, litter, noisy neighbours, contamination of water courses, various police matters, lack of services, planning matters, enforcement matters, badly placed signs, street signs both broken and stolen, and so on and so on. It is a rich and varied life, never ever boring, and sometimes very tiring. It can however be very rewarding, especially when someone says thank you for what I have done for them, but this rarely happens. I shall continue in the same vein for the next year Thank you for your support.

**6. District Councillor's Report** I was privileged to be elected as your District Councillor last May and would like to thank all those who voted (for whatever party) as the turn-out was truly spectacular. I hope I've demonstrated that I serve all in the district irrespective of anyone's political preferences. I currently represent the ward of Hunsdon on the following committees: Licencing & Licencing Sub Committee, Corporate Business Scrutiny & Joint Scrutiny, Development Management Committee (reserve), Full Council and serve on the District Plan Policy Group. Licencing & Sub-Licencing: I have been involved in hearing and agreeing/not agreeing various licencing cases regarding Taxis and Bars/Restaurants. All pretty exciting stuff and much formal training was involved. Corporate Business Scrutiny & Joint Scrutiny: This involves our committees looking at and scrutinising the business of the council regarding the accounting of various departments, reviewing budgets, seeking detail from officers and voting on whether any of this business should be 'called in' for our Executive to look at in a more formal manner. Development Management Committee: This was a late calling due the resignation of a serving member. The Executive chose to appoint three reserve DMC members and rotate them on a meeting by meeting basis, or as otherwise required. I've spoken on three occasions during the year and represented Hunsdon on two committees. District Plan Policy Group: This group is set up to scrutinise the development of the wording/phrasing of the emerging District Plan although it has no powers of influence as to the areas affected/proposed within the actual plan. The District Plan: This is due to go to public consultation in the second half of this year. The area at Gilson & Eastwick continues to form part of the emerging plan as does an area just to the North of Ware. The transport models are almost complete and will be fed into the emerging plan before public consultation. After the plan has gone through its public consultation and any adjustments allowed for, it will then be put to the Planning Inspectorate and hopefully be 'found sound' ready for adoption. Although I have my own reservations on major developments within the green belt I do intend to engage with any probable future provider to try and secure the best I can for our villages and residents. In general I feed through the district information to the Parish Councils as and when I receive it from EHDC plus I've could help in releasing some old S106 monies and assisted where I can with a range of local concerns ranging from dog fouling to an out of hours' bin collection. By far the most rewarding part of my role is helping any individual or groups with their grant applications and being able to endorse each of these as they come through. I've attended as many meetings as I can on behalf of the ward and look forward to an exciting, interesting and challenging year ahead.

**7. Parish Rooms Trust Charity Report** Hunsdon Parish Room Trust was founded in 1921. It was established in its present form with a Charity Commission Scheme in 1984. Under the terms of the Trust's Charity Commission Scheme, the Trust's income shall be applied "for any charitable purposes for the general benefit of the inhabitants of Hunsdon". The Trustees in 2015 were; Mr Tom Whyman (Chairman), Mr David Gibbs., Mrs Esther Nicklin. Mrs Judy Walford. Mr Andrew Pummell (Secretary). The Trustees met on three occasions in 2015; on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, the 12<sup>th</sup> of October and the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. The following grants totalling £359.88 were made during the year. £202.38 to Hunsdon JMI School. This amount of money was used to provide prizes for endeavour throughout the school year. £97.50 to Hunsdon Active. This money was used to pay for the printing of a questionnaire/leaflet to ascertain the demand within the Village for improved children's facilities on the playing field. £60.00 to Hunsdon Gardening Club. This money was used to pay for a Gardening Club initiative at Hunsdon School which would involve children rising and tending plants and which might hopefully also encourage entries at the Gardening Club autumn show.

During 2015, the Trust has had to pay costs involved with the management of the Charity. These amounted to £1800.00 paid to Paul Wallace, a firm of surveyors/valuers and £1680.60 paid to Longmores Solicitors. There will almost certainly be further ongoing management costs to be paid and the Trustees have taken the decision that to meet these costs the Trust should, apart from a small ongoing commitment to the School, suspend payments of grants for the time being. This decision has been taken in line with the Trust's Charity Commission governing document and the Charity Commission has been informed. The accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 have been approved by the Trustees and are currently being inspected by a person independent of the Trust. The accounts can be inspected by reference to myself, Andrew Pummell, Trust Secretary. The Trust held a total of £21047.84 at the start of the year and ended the year with a total of £20338.70 divided between its Nat West current account and its Barclays savings account.

**8. Council Footpath Warden's report** for those of you who were not at the meeting last year or are new to the parish, I want to give you some background as to what the Parish Paths Partnership is all about. Hunsdon Parish Council has been a member of the Partnership for some 15 years. It involves us working with our partners, Groundwork Trust, Hertfordshire and the Hertfordshire County Council Rights of Way Team. The object is to manage and promote the local footpath network at a local level, at the same time funding and carrying out rights of way improvement schemes in the parish. In April of 2014 we took on the Footpath Warden role from John Ashley, John continues to walk the footpaths and gives us informed help and advice. Additionally, Martyn Reid has provided regular feedback from his walks around the parish. This is immense help from both individuals. Our primary role as volunteer footpath wardens has been to monitor the condition of the paths and carry out any small items of routine maintenance such as cutting back overhanging bushes across paths and replacing damaged waymark discs. Numerous posts have been replaced, at our request, by the HCC Rights of Way team. A continuing theme in the parish is the length of time it takes to re-establish footpaths which run over arable meadows. This is a topic that we need to work on more with local farmers. As our available stock had dwindled to almost nothing, Martyn Reid, working closely with Eastwick & Gilston parish council, organised a reprint of the leaflet that John Ashley published in 2004 entitled Walking around Eastwick & Gilston and Hunsdon Parishes. The re-print was funded by a grant from Groundwork Hertfordshire. In conclusion, we would like to thank the council for their support in our endeavours, also Nicholas Maddex, the Countryside Access Officer at HCC who, has helped sort out issues that we encountered, but significantly John Ashley and Martyn Reid who continues to provide informed advice to two non-dog owning walkers.

**9. SHN report** Since last year's report, East Herts Council have continued work on the District Plan which is expected to name the "land in the Gilston Area" as a "a Broad Location for Development". The Plan itself needs to be sufficiently robust to pass various examinations and to this end, the Council has commissioned several studies and reports to validate it. The main objections to a development North of Harlow include, Transport, Water and Sewage and Green Belt issues but at the time of writing (March 2016), only a report on the Green Belt is known to have been submitted. **Green Belt** the Green Belt Study discussed at Council on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015 concluded that the Harlow North proposal has very low suitability for development. While not within the report, the author observed at Council that no development in the Green Belt on this scale has ever been approved nationwide. Discounting the possibility that we will be the first to suffer such a catastrophe, the inevitable conclusion is that the plan submitted by PFP will need fairly radical change given it currently shows about two thirds of the housing on the Green Belt. Having said that, the Green Belt is quite narrow and so moving the village "necklaces" North is possible but would exasperate infrastructure problems that are already estimated to cost about £50,000 per dwelling. This scheme is already only marginally viable (assuming 40% affordable housing) and so any increase would be painful for the developers. It should be noted that the infrastructure costings to arrive at the £50K per unit were before detailed numbers were available. It is likely therefore that they will be significantly higher than the Developer would like to portray. Mindful of the potential lack of profit for those involved in the scheme, PFP have already reduced the suggested affordable housing to 30% to offset the significant infrastructure requirements.

**Transport** The two main areas of concern when it comes to transport are road and rail. Since both are already approaching peak capacity, a significant level of investment will be required to alleviate the problems the equivalent of a new town presents. (The size of Harlow North in its full implementation would equate to between two and three Sawbridgeworths). At just one car per household we are talking about an additional 10,000 cars added into the mix. The County Council has already predicted some roads in the area (e.g. A414) will be at peak capacity within 5 years and that is without Harlow North. Some might argue that we are already there at certain times of the day and not just on the A414. It is thought that the plan will require, at the very least, a second Stort crossing and enhanced access to the M11. When it comes to the Rail network, our understanding is that adding more rolling stock will not help the current overcrowding due to the "chicane" into Liverpool Street Station. In other words, until this is resolved, Liverpool Street is already taking as many trains as is possible at peak times. Removing the restriction in the network would be a substantial civil engineering prospect in its own right. We wait to see the report commissioned by the Council detailing the transport issues with possible solutions and costs.

**Water and Sewage** The Developer's solution to the sewage issue is to treat the sewage onsite and discharge it into the River Stort. This repeats the solution proffered to, and rejected by, the Independent Commission a few years ago. We await to see details of how this is different this time around but the facts on the ground have not changed. The current Sewage arrangements are already at capacity (and it could be argued already at over-capacity) and so we wait with interest to see why the current proposal is materially different to the previous failed submission. **Harlow North by Stealth** Perhaps the most significant and dangerous development over the last year has been the new option introduced by East Herts Council of assessing the viability of Harlow North Lite. Clearly getting approval for 10,000 dwellings that has previously been rejected would be more difficult than a smaller settlement of "only" 2,500 homes ("Only" - more than half the size of Sawbridgeworth). This dual track approach is now being actively discussed. It is not clear until the various reports are in whether this eases or increases the Developer's viability issues but we will oppose this on the grounds that once the smaller town is in place; it is only a matter of time before it increases to the full 10,000. **The Coming Year** The actual date for publication of the District Plan is not entirely clear but is expected in mid-2016. It is clear that it will include Harlow North as a "possible" option and may even allocate it as "the" option to fulfill Central Government house building quotas. Once the plan and the supporting reports are made public, we will oppose the development by all means at our disposal with the aim of once again defeating the Council via the Independent Planning Inspectorate.

#### **10. Report from the Neighbourhood Plan**

As I mentioned in my report, we have joined with Eastwick and Gilston to promote a Neighbourhood Plan. We have formed a steering group under the chair of Anthony Bickmore with colleagues Mark Orsen and Tim Geddes from Gilston joining with Bernadette Dunthorne, finance manager, Mike Newman, communications manager and myself making up the Hunsdon part of the team. The designated area covered by the plan comprises the combined parishes and this has been registered with East Herts. We are now setting up the communications systems and collecting information on those people and organisations who are likely to want to have a say in how the plan develops. The key point of joining forces is to address the issues arising from the proposals for housing by the major stakeholder in the area, Places for People. This will be an opportunity for everyone to have a say and influence what is proposed. We have to bear in mind however that our Neighbourhood Plan has to sit within the emerging District Plan and cannot contradict it.

We will shortly be circulating everyone, residents, land owners, businesses and organisations who have an interest in the two parishes setting out the vision and programme for the Plan and inviting participation in its development.

**11. Report from VHMC** The village hall continues to be a popular venue and is well used by local user groups and private hirers alike. Whilst the charity has a full complement of Trustees, since the retirement of some long serving members and loss of our booking officer due to illness, it has been a struggle to manage the day to day running of the hall which has fallen on three committee members; with the bookings role being fulfilled by a member of the VHMC who is also on the business team. We have been unable to recruit a person to take over the role of the Booking Officer on a voluntary basis and as a result the committee has decided to advertise the post as a paid part time position. The Parish Council have been generous in providing a grant to fund the position for a year in the hope that eventually the Hall can fund the position. This year has seen some unforeseen building issues. There have been ongoing problems with the central heating system, some of which stem from the original design of the annex, and others relating to the boiler itself. As a result, a local firm was employed to amend some of the pipework supplying the annex pipework in order to increase

the water flow. In addition, a fault was discovered on the boiler, which was probably there from new, which caused it to continually overheat and lock out. This has now hopefully been resolved.

The planning Permission for the replacement windows to the two cottages has still not been resolved. However, with the help of Mike Newman, who has been liaising with EHDC planning department, we hopefully have a way forward. However, the replacement timber windows desired by the Conservation Officer may exceed the money allocated to the project. In addition to planned works there was an unexpected problem with the roof of No 43 with water coming through the ceiling into the rear bedroom. After getting various opinions and prices we opted for the middle quote and the whole roof has been stripped re-felted and replaced. As to be expected with the age of the building, when exposed, many of the rafters were found to be rotten and had to be replaced. However, stripping the roof afforded an opportunity to insulate the ceiling above the bedroom; an area which was previously inaccessible to insulate. The resident has already commented on the improvement. During the work some of the main roof where it abutted No 43 had to be repaired due to rotten tile battens. This indicates that there may be an overall problem with the main roof which will require work at some time in the future. As many people will have noticed the front fences of No 43 and 47 have been replaced with a new picket fence which has improved the appearance of the frontage. After consultation, it was agreed to omit the section of fence across the front of the hall. This has been widely accepted as an improvement and makes the hall more open and welcoming. A number of additional improvements to the hall look and usability have been made including Stage curtains, bulbs planted in the rear garden, clearance of the loft, regular gutter clearance, rear garden floodlight, inventory checks, kitchen clean, new Christmas tree stand and lights, additional sessions for the internet café. This year has seen an increase of just over 10% of the number of bookings taken compared to the previous year. This has equated to an overall increase in income of just over 30% mostly due to additional larger events (christenings, adult and family parties and private regular classes). Hire charges have been increased for the first time in 3 years which should increase the income for the coming year.

#### **12. Open Forum.**

**Fete.** New residents asked how to get involved in the fete. They were directed to Cllr c page's e mail address.

**Hunsdon footpath 5.** Cllr Dunthorne stated that the footpath was closed due to water mains renewal pipe work. However, the work had now been completed and therefore the footpath should now be open again.

**Direct Scaffolding.** This PA had been refused, but the applicant has taken it to appeal.

**Abandoned car.** There has been a car with a "buy new & used cars" promotion signage stationary at the top of Hunsdon Pound Lane. Action; the clerk will investigate further to see if it can be removed.

**Litter.** There is a great deal of litter on Church lane and the A414. ACTION: the clerk will highlight HCC for litter picking.

**Parish Room Trust.** Clarification was given by Mr. A Pummel on the expenditure of legal and survey costs that the Parish room trust had had this year. It is a long outstanding issue concerning the property owned by the Parish room trust.

**Meeting finished at 9.00pm.**