

## **Message from Bob Toll Chairman Hunsdon Parish Council**

### **What a year!**

This time last year East Herts Council published its draft District Plan incorporating the Gilston Area policies for up to 10,000 dwellings situated in the Green Belt north of the Stort Valley. These policies have been strongly challenged by Stop Harlow North, the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England and by both Hunsdon and Eastwick and Gilston Parish Councils acting through our joint Neighbourhood Plan Group (NPG). Together we have consistently argued that sacrificing our Green Belt for housing is not justified and the proposals are unsustainable.

The District Plan was submitted in March for independent scrutiny and an Examination in Public was held by an Inspector at Hertford in October and November. Our communities were well represented at the examination by the NPG's consultant, and by SHN and CPRE. Around 60 residents attended on the 8th November armed with banners and placards to protest about the Gilston Area proposals. Mark Prisk our MP joined us and spoke very effectively in the examination debate.

There is no way of telling how this will all pan out. There will be modifications to the Plan policies as requested by the Inspector and further consultation before a final decision is made, probably around Autumn 2018.

The Neighbourhood Plan Group, whilst maintaining its opposition in principle to the Gilston Area, have taken a pragmatic approach and during the year we have engaged in a series of workshops with East Herts and the developers seeking to ensure that, if the Gilston Area is allocated for housing, the environmental impacts will be minimised, adequate supporting infrastructure will be provided and the development will be sympathetically designed and of high quality. Also, the future of the Airfield is a major issue for us and we will seek assurances about its future ownership and management.

These discussions have centred on a 140-page document, produced by East Herts and the developers, called the Concept Development Framework (CDF). It was the subject of a public consultation exercise in August and through the joint NPG, which arranged an independent consultation, a comprehensive response is now with East Herts for consideration and consequent amendments to the document. We will continue to engage with East Herts over the next few months to ensure that the communities' comments and suggestions are taken on board.

Meanwhile, the Parish Council has been busy minding the shop. On the planning front, we have had some success. The proposals for 12 houses at Nine Ashes was refused on appeal and the outline proposals for up to 40 houses on the Glebe Land south of the village was refused at committee stage but I expect there will be the usual appeal.

The PC has engaged professional support with our responses to these planning applications and it has raised our profile and given us a stronger voice. We will continue to adopt this policy on major applications.

Currently there are permissions for 41 new houses in the parish. Building will start in the new year on land south of Tanners Way and probably about the same time on the Wicklands/Drury Lane development. I am not aware of any plans when work will start on the old crane yard.

In May, Joy Robinette, our Clerk for more years than I can remember, moved from the village and Carole Page was appointed to the post. Carole's seat on the Parish Council has been filled by Dave Jolley. I wish to record my thanks to Joy for all her hard work as Clerk and to Carole for taking on this arduous responsibility. I also thank all my fellow councillors for their unstinting commitment to our community through the year.

At our October meeting we paid tribute to John Ashley for his contributions to the village community over many years. He ran the village post office and shop, was Clerk and then Councillor, managed the Parish Paths Partnership and ensured the village hall and pump were decked with glorious blooms plus a million other things. He will be missed.

Looking forward to next year we have to remain active on the Gilston Area front but looming large is the prospect of a gravel quarry on the Briggens Estate at Olives Farm and we are already arming ourselves for this battle. It seems we are surrounded by greedy selfish landowners who care nothing for the village.

Please try to come to the Parish Council meetings. We encourage contributions from the floor raising issues for our attention. Remember that you can see a record of our meetings on the Parish Council website.

On behalf of the Parish Council I wish you all a happy Christmas.