PC Meeting 16.11.26 Chair's Address (short form)

Good evening thank you very much for coming to this parish council meeting tonight where we have a special item on the agenda.

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So I'll move straight on to the first and main item which is a public issue and concerns the proposal by Wates builders to seek planning permission for about 90 houses on the land west of Acorn St which is commonly known as the Glebe land (and historically known as Spratt's Field). I think you all know where it is.

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10 days ago the parish council received an e-mail from a marketing company acting for Wates Developments that they proposed to apply for planning permission and would shortly be sending a consultation leaflet to all residents of Hunsdon which they did a week last Saturday. We just manged to get something on the Hunsdon Community Hub to forewarn people this was coming and you will have the leaflet and you may have looked at the website that the Wates have opened called Acorn St consultation; if you haven't links are on the Hunsdon parish Council website - just search Hunsdon parish council and go to Latest notices you'll see a section there with the links.

Its been confirmed to us that this land is still owned by the Diocesan Board of Finance for the Church of England based in Saint Albans ; Their agents we have spoken to have told us that they have entered into what's called a Promotion Agreement with Wates. The way that works is that Wates now have the right to apply for planning permission at their own cost and if they get the planning permission Wates have the option to buy the land and they and the Board will both make a lot of money . If they don't get planning permission Wates walk away and the land remains with the Diocesan Board . They tried this 10 years ago and failed but are now trying it again .We have received a letter from the Diocesan Board this morning they wanted us to share with you. Its two and half pages long but in summary it says: *The Diocese is promoting its glebe land south of Hunsdon for residential development to maximise financial returns, which are used to fund clergy stipends across the Diocese. It has signed a promotion agreement with Wates Developments, but the land has not been sold. Wates will seek planning permission, with a formal public consultation to follow. The Diocese acknowledges local concerns about infrastructure, schools and traffic but considers it has a legal duty to maximise the best financial return, leaving such local concerns to the planning process. It welcomes the inclusion of affordable housing and supports consideration of local connection in allocations.*

I'd like to set out now what we see as the important steps. The first thing NOW is that as many people as possible should register your views on the Wates consultation website or

by email and say what they think of this proposal. **The deadline for that is 21 November** . If you go to the parish council website you'll see the links to do that and also some basic suggestions why we think this proposal is not a good one and not in the interests of Hunsdon . If you haven't already gone online to register your opposition please do that and encourage everybody in family and friends to do so too- by 21 st November in 5 days time

The reason is that as and when Wates apply for planning permission (and they haven't done that yet) they have to say what community engagement they've undertaken and what the reaction was. What you don't want is them to be able to say that very few people responded or seem to be bothered by this. On the contrary you want hundreds of people to register and say what they think. It means that when they make the actual planning application the council is aware of people's views in principle.

Wates are offering to meet the local parish council but that meeting has not been arranged yet . When it is we'll be attending on in listening mode and it's not our intention to start telling Wates now all the reasons why we think this is a bad proposal; that comes later. Wates say they will in the **winter of 2026** make a formal application for planning to East Herts ;. When they do they will have to file 100s of pages and plans going into fine detail about what it is they are seeking permission for together with technical reports.

When that goes public everyone will be given 3 weeks usually, to respond in detail to the proposals . The parish council have a duty to respond and we will do so; we have already allocated £5000 to cover professional fees of an independent planning consultant to advise us. She is the person who helped us prepare the neighbourhood plan; we set up have a planning subcommittee of the parish council comprising me, Bob here and co-opted Mike Newman who has kindly volunteered, and who many of you know. Carole will support us as parish clerk .

Our job will be to go through the documentation with the planning consultant and she writes a detailed response with all the objections to the proposal; we will fight hard as the parish council to defend our Neighbourhood Plan and to defeat this proposal. If there are people among you who have particular expertise in planning or work for developers (so long as it's not East Herts or Wates) then we would be delighted if you would come forward and join our planning subcommittee and give us the benefit of your expertise too. I have a form you can leave your name and contact details on-come to me after we finish .

The reasons why we will oppose this application when it is made are basically **that it is in direct conflict with the Hunsdon Area Neighbourhood Plan.** This is a document less than five years old and it was prepared by the PC and a dedicated group of residents after a housing survey of Hunsdon, two public consultations, a strict examination by a planning QC, and finally a referendum of the people in Hunsdon who gave it approval with a 95%

majority on a good turn out; and it was formally adopted by East Herts Council in November 2022

It is available on their website in the final official copy. It is a very important document alongside the district plan the council made in 2018 which together form the development plan for all house building in this area. The 2018 EH district plan said that to meet the total targets for east hearts Hunsdon would have to increase its housing stock by 10% which was 37 houses. That it has done. The district plan went on to say that over and above that 10% it was down to the neighbourhood plan to decide if any further housing would be desirable . The only additional housing that the NP supported is small infill sites within what's called the village boundary which is essentially the core of the village, for small scale housing like starter homes or bungalows for older people. This site, the Glebe land is not within the village boundary and it is not an infill site.

Unfortunately, the targets EHC was given overall have not been met to date and they're behind and this has meant that chinks have opened up in the district plan to enable speculative builders like Wates to apply for planning permission that is not authorised by the district Plan.

However there are still policies in the district plan that they have to meet and **most importantly, all the policies in the neighbourhood plan are still good. Our consultant agrees that our neighbourhood plan will carry an lot of weight in determining this application and we intend defend it.** It does not authorise this type of speculative building and it also has other reasons too particular to the Glebe land about its importance as a the green gap between the village and Hunsdonbury and protected views and hedgerows along the B180. There are also other issues like availability of local school places and the effect developments of this type would have on the rural roads serving this village and the fact that there will be no unmet need for housing in Hunsdon because just down the road there will be 100s of new housing units with 23% affordable, in the Taylor Wimpey and Places for People developments

But the most important thing is that if the NP is overridden on this application, it will be the thin edge of the wedge to development which could follow it on all sides of the village. If it is overridden, then what is the point of having development plans?

The second thing when applications are made like this , as I'm sure you will know is to put together a public campaign against the development and we would like to suggest to you that now is the time for people to come forward and form a campaign group or steering committee. As you know we are a small parish council of only 5 members ;there are essentially 3 people so far involved who will form our planning committee, and anybody else who can come forward to help us do that, but we do not have the capacity to run a whole public campaign with effective communication channels. We have to accept that our

resources in human terms are limited, we need to share the load as it will be too much for us few to bear, and none of us is that young anymore or have the best skills, time and energy to do it all.

As well as this new development we are heavily engaged with the V7 end of the Gilston development; with the future of the parishes of Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston and early in 2027 there will be the first consultation on EHC new District Plan for the next 10 years which is likely have an impact on Hunsdon . Don't forget we are all volunteers please.

It will be vital for all residents to file formal objections with East Herts in the 3 week period and it will help enormously if they are publicly encouraged to do so by a concerted action plan.

We are happy to facilitate a first meeting of a group if you start so they can start to plan a campaign against this development. It will involve engagement with residents, social media communications, political pressure to MP and local councillors, posters and old fashion letter box drops, reaching people who are use social media and those who don't, or don't use the Internet so much.

We have sheets of paper that you can leave your name and e-mail and number on Carole's table. I'm thinking that if we get enough people involved that we can have an early meeting in the meeting room at the back of the village hall here to start the group off, so please give that serious thought and come forward now .

Whether or not that happens and we hope it does, the parish council commits itself to putting in a strong defence of the neighbourhood plan and strong representations against planning consent by East Herts.

We don't yet know when Wates will submit their planning application to EHC . They say it will be around the winter of 2026 whatever that means; it might be before Christmas or possibly in the new year but we all need to be ready.

Please ask questions on what I haven't cover in this outline and I or the other councillors will do our best. I will also invite Councillors Eric Buckmaster and John Dunlop to address you on where they stand on this.

Thank all you so much.