

## Welcome

I should first like to introduce myself, I am Paul Gilbert, Chairman of Hopton & Coton Parish Council, and I welcome you all here this evening. Some of you are here as users of the Hall and others have an interest in the Parish and local area. The Annual Parish Meeting provides an opportunity for us, as a council, to deliver an update on the council's work and the work of the newly formed Village Hall Committee. The current and future facilities of the Hall are available to the public and the military alike although the MOD personnel probably enjoy far superior facilities than we are presently able to offer. The meeting also facilitates the exchange ideas and suggestions which we hope you will present to any council member here tonight.

## Council

If I may just take this opportunity to inform you that there are currently two vacancies on the council which we are hoping to fill in the very near future. I should also point out that once the vacancies are filled it will not preclude anyone from joining the council as a member of an appropriate sub-committee.

There are a number of major projects in the pipeline and expertise in any of the areas of design, planning or project management, to name but three, will be welcome. All councillors and the clerk are easily contacted via details on the website, notice board and information leaflets and we look forward to hearing from interested parties.

## HS2

The council had intended submitting a petition to the House of Commons Select Committee relating to the proposed minor amendments by HS2 which affected Hopton. The petition would have restricted the council to minor details of amendment and we were advised that those limited items of appeal would be rejected by the House of Commons Select Committee. As a consequence the petition was not submitted and major efforts are now being concentrated on the House of Lords petition which allows us to argue the merits of a tunnel to replace the current plan and will include any alternative proposals to

mitigate the serious problems which are being and will be experienced by residents in Hopton.

HS2 personnel will be visiting the council this month for consultation and advice prior to the submission of our petition.

Mr Jeremy Lefroy M.P. has agreed to present the petition on our behalf and we have a meeting with him at the end of the month.

### Neighbourhood Plan

This Council has agreed that the Clerk should investigate the availability of funding to develop a Neighbourhood Plan specific to Hopton. If we are successful in obtaining funding the plan will provide a strong element of security from further development within the parish. The plan will probably take up to two years to complete.

### Highways

Many of you will have noticed that there have been extensive road repairs carried out in Within Lane. The lane has sustained substantial damage over the last few years and has become unsafe for pedestrian use. The council has requested both speed and weight restrictions and Cllr John Francis assures us that these should be in place later this year. Once implemented the lane will become safer and, although we are assured HS2 traffic will be excluded from using Within Lane, we must all be vigilant in preventing HS2 project creep.

In the meantime, the mobile homes in Within Lane are becoming more isolated limiting access for children to the playground and football field. The Council is investigating solutions to this problem.

### Planning

The Local Plan for Stafford includes the development of 2000 homes in the north of the parish. Despite a number of enquiries to the Planning Consultants, Pegasus Group, they are failing to provide any information concerning community provisions on this major development. Without co-operation it is highly likely that some provisions and or amenities will

needlessly be duplicated. It is also the intention of the council to alternate council meetings between the new development location and the village hall thereby improving public participation. It is now our intention to contact the developers, Maximus Developments, for more information on their proposals relating to community amenities.

There is also a correlation between HS2 activity and the obligations of the developers to provide highways improvements. Maximus Developments and Pegasus Group are once again failing to co-operate. Our Borough Councillor, Mrs Frances Beatty, has provided valuable support with regard to both these issues.

We frequently receive planning applications relating to Beaconside Business Park and the Council generally welcomes the contributions these businesses provide in employment and the local economy.

### Village Hall

The Council is adapting and organising for the further 2000 homes to be built in the parish, in addition to the 1000 new homes which are almost completed at Coton and the somewhat smaller 120 home development to be built at the junction of the Sandon Road and the A513 Beaconside road. So, instead of being accountable for 400+ homes and their occupants we shall eventually find ourselves responsible for an eight-fold increase in homes and population. Our current facilities will be less accessible during and after HS2 construction and will certainly be inadequate for the tremendous increase in the parish population.

I am delighted that members of the council have embraced the forthcoming challenges with enthusiasm and we are currently formulating plans for the provision of improved amenities and adequate support services.

There will be increases in the elderly population and new homes generally include many more children. The strategy we are developing will be appropriate for the demands on our services from the expanded population.

Obviously, we shall be requiring a new Village Hall to accommodate the additional calls on our services. In order to secure the funding required for this project the council has engaged the services of a funding

consultant to explore the vast range of funding options and donor organisations.

Last year, the council decided to separate the Village Hall from the Parish Council and we have now advanced to the position of establishing the Village Hall as a charity with an initial committee of 5 trustees. On behalf of the hall committee I am pleased to extend an invitation to anyone interested in this project to join us in this undertaking.

### Conclusion

To conclude this year's report, I should like to thank my colleagues on the council for their commitment to their fellow residents and for all their efforts over the past year. Furthermore, I wish to express the gratitude of the council to our Clerk, Mrs Sylvia Gibson for her extraordinary capacity to undertake the formidable tasks we set for her and finally, to thank you all for attending today.