



ANNUAL REPORT to PARISHES in the GOSFIELD AND GREENSTEAD GREEN WARD

By DISTRICT COUNCILLOR **PETER SCHWIER**

Last year I wrote about 2020 being a year like no other in recent times, and how local councils were having to find new ways of holding meetings and decision making as a result of Covid 19. We are now returning to face-to-face meetings providing more opportunities for residents who are not councillors to attend and raise issues at public question time.

Whilst the pandemic is still a very real threat, most of us are learning to live with the virus and are returning to something resembling normality. However, at the same time we recognise and respect those families who lost loved ones or suffered serious illness.

Personally, I quite enjoyed remotely held meetings which avoided travelling thus saving time, cost and helped the environment.

I know the District Council was impressed by the way local communities pulled together to support the more vulnerable and isolated in our parishes and it is obvious that this relationship is being maintained and continuing.

The District Council for its part has distributed huge sums of money to support those businesses severely impacted by the enforced closure and restrictions. Unfortunately, whilst there was an initial rapid rebound in global growth; inflationary pressures, supply chain issues and the Russian invasion of Ukraine now provides new challenges.

Part 1 of the Braintree District Local Plan has been found sound by a Planning Inspector but we still wait for confirmation of Part II. If found sound, this will provide the basis for controlling new housing and other developments across the District. I welcome the initiative taken by many Parishes to introduce their own Neighbourhood Plan which will give residents in those parishes a significant role in shaping the area in which they live, and allow local planning for the types of development that could meet the community's needs. This is a significant piece of work for the parish council alone to undertake and will require the active involvement of a number of volunteers.

In a further attempt to regain control of our local planning system, the Council has allocated significant new resources in the 2022/23 budget for the planning department to dramatically improve its planning enforcement functions, including the monitoring or planning conditions.

The Planning Committee has continued to be extremely busy throughout the year with meetings every fortnight, rather than monthly, to determine the large numbers of applications being submitted.

Other initiatives included in the Council's 2022/23 plans include

- Supporting affordable housing schemes and further regeneration of our town centres
- Raising income to reduce the financial burden of the Council Tax by investing in offices for hire, health facilities, business grow - on units and superfast broadband
- Contributing towards highway improvements which might otherwise not happen.
- Investing in key Council priorities such as new cycling infrastructures and initiatives to combat climate change, including additional air quality monitoring.
- Already worked with Parish & Town Councils, Schools, Community & Voluntary Groups to plant 18,700 native trees and 73,000 bulbs across the district.

We recognise the financial pressures on households and our Council Tax proposals include holding the increase of the district council share of the tax to £4.95 – less than 10p a week – for a band D property, meaning a band D rate for the BDC share of the overall council tax bill at £189.63, a below inflation rise of 2.68%. Unfortunately, this excludes any increases imposed by the County Council, Fire and Police Commissioner and the Parish Council. We hope these increases; whilst not welcome will continue to receive the support of our residents. A measure of the Council's overall effectiveness, headlines from the 2021 customer satisfaction survey showed

- 89% of residents were satisfied with the Braintree District as a place to live
- 80% were satisfied with the way BDC run things
- 60% feel that the Council offers value for money.

And it will be interesting to see the impact of these new proposals have on future surveys.

I am also pleased that the Council will continue to provide funding for the Councillor Community Grant Scheme. This has provided over £322,000 of financial support to 248 community organisations since 2016.

I aim to continue keeping your Parish Councils informed of ongoing issues from BDC as they arise through
1. Attendance at Parish Meetings 2. Continuous email correspondence with your Clerk.



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Best Wishes

Peter Schwier

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