

Cllr I Parker – report to Parish Councils – November 2023

- **Devolution** – Greater Essex (Essex CC plus the 2 unitaries, Thurrock and Southend) has been offered a level 2 devolution deal by the Government. This involves the creation of a Greater Essex Combined Authority but no directly elected mayor. The Combined Authority would be a new institution in which the three authorities alongside the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will take collective decisions on the powers and budgets that Government devolves down to Greater Essex under the deal. There will be representatives from the district, borough and city councils on the Combined Authority. There are currently discussions underway with Government about the level of funding and the precise powers which will be devolved which will be centred around skills, support for business, strategic transport planning and nature recovery. Once the discussions have concluded (probably end of November), ECC will conduct a full public consultation on the deal. The deal will enable give Essex greater control over strategic levers and will give Essex a stronger voice in Whitehall.
- **Wethersfield** – BDC’s application for a judicial review of the use of the former air force base at Wethersfield for housing asylum seekers was heard last week and we are awaiting judgment.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain and Climate Change** - Under the Environment Act 2021, new developments are required to have 10% biodiversity net gain and BDC are currently producing guidance to reflect this. We are also refreshing our Climate Change Strategy. Interestingly we are now involving the North Essex Farm cluster as a partner in this. This is a group of farmers focusing on supporting wildlife.
- **Rural England Prosperity Fund** – This fund is now open for applications. Applications can be made by parish councils, voluntary organisations and charities and rural businesses. Grants are available for between £10,000 and £50,000. There is no requirement for match funding but the project must be completed before the grants can be paid. See the BDC website for further information <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/business/rural-prosperity-fund>.
- **Safer Streets funding, Halstead** – The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner has secured £300,000 of funding from the Government’s safer streets funding in Halstead which has been match funded by a further £150,000 from BDC, Halstead Town Council and others. This will address anti-social behaviour in parts of Halstead and will build on the

successful scheme in Witham which has resulted in significant reductions in crime and fear of crime.

- **Off gas network homes** – An announcement will be made shortly about grants for off gas network homes to improve energy efficiency. This will be targeted at low income households. Please look out for this announcement which could considerably assist some residents.
- **Energy Switch** – BDC and ECC have restarted the energy switch programme which can also assist residents with reducing energy bills. Registrations open on 13th November for the next auction on 9th January. It is simple to register via the BDC website and there is no obligation to switch. <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/advice-environment/braintrees-essex-energy-switch>.