

## Report for Parish Councils from Cllr Iona Parker, Braintree District Council – Jan 2024

- **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 in December), 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.
- **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.
- **Budget** – BDC has started the process for setting the Council’s budget for 2024/25 and the medium term financial strategy for the next 4 years. Despite measures that have already been taken, BDC is still facing a budget gap over the next 4 years of over £2m due to economic and national factors (e.g. wage inflation, additional pressures due to legislative changes, lack of clarity re central government funding). We are looking at ways of plugging this gap through cost savings and raising income. There will be particular focus on how we can work more efficiently, including increasing the number of services we share with other authorities.
- **Planning** – Before Christmas the Government announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which removed the requirement for Councils with an up-to-date Local Plan, such as Braintree, to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable homes when considering new applications. Councils still have to demonstrate a 5 year supply in relation to applications already submitted but BDC can now demonstrate this. This will put us in a much better position to resist speculative planning applications on sites not allocated for development in the Local Plan.
- **Waste and recycling** – Around 27,000 properties have signed up for the year round garden waste collection which has brought in income of £700,000 for the Council. As part of efforts to reduce the volume of residual waste, a decision has been taken to no longer collect side waste from 1<sup>st</sup> April (ie waste contained in bin liners next to the black bin).
- **Local Council Tax Support Scheme** – This is a scheme to help those on low incomes who are struggling to pay their Council Tax. BDC has introduced a revised scheme which will increase the level of support for households on the lowest incomes, replace the current means-tested scheme with a simpler banded scheme and make the scheme easier to administer.

- **Bus transport** – I am pleased to report that following the consultation on passenger transport in Essex, ECC have agreed to retain the DaRT3 minibus service that operates in our villages. This service was threatened with closure and I would like to thank all those who took part in the consultation.
- **Parking in Sudbury** – You may have seen that Babergh DC are considering introducing parking charges in Sudbury. I have written to the leader of Babergh DC and asked him to consult the villages in Essex on the plans but I regret without success.
- **Local Highways Panel** – I am pleased to report that the application for deer warning signs near Mashey Wood have been approved and the signs should be erected in the Spring. The application for horse rider signs on Belchamp Road has also been approved but is awaiting a decision on precise location before funding is awarded. Please continue to report potholes on the Essex Highways website. I have reported a dangerous pothole near Gestingthorpe and it was repaired the next day. I am also finding that potholes which I report but which are not as hazardous are being filled when the weather permits.