

Annual report to the Rayne Ward by District Councillor Paul Euesden, April 2023.

This will be my last report after 4 years as your Braintree District Councillor. I will not be seeking re-election and will be retiring in May. So this report will reflect local and district achievements for the last year and the full term. Overall, it has been an enjoyable, if sometimes challenging, time. It can often be difficult to balance the views of different sections of the Ward. In addition, there is also a wider responsibility to the district to be taken into account.

As usual I have been approached by a good number of residents this year on a wide range of issues and I believe I have successfully resolved all of them, except one. The issue of fencing at Fentons road footbridge has stubbornly refused to be resolved and although partial success has been achieved, this is an outstanding issue for my successor to take up.

Over the last four years I have used my Councillor Community Grant to support numerous local organisations. This year my funds have supported the following organisations /initiatives.

- Friends of the Flitch Way to set up a Litter Pick station.
- Rayne School PSA. Funds to purchase musical instruments.
- Rayne Village Hall. Repairs to Playground equipment.
- Baby Stuff. A Braintree based charity that supplies essential baby items to mothers across the district, including the Rayne Ward.
- Salings PC, towards the cost of renovation of the war memorial and establishing a Memorial Garden for residents to enjoy.

I am delighted that, despite Budget constraints, the Councillor Community Grant Scheme will continue for 2023. The average grant across the district over the last 4 years was £854. Awarded grants ranged from £95 to £6,000. The smallest, £95, was given to fund a sign for a village toddler group. The largest, £6000, saw 13 councillors contributing to the costs of providing the “Space – Fact or Fiction” exhibition at Braintree District Museum Trust. Whilst there were multiple grants for noticeboards, defibrillators, equipment, running costs and planting projects, some of the more unusual activities included recording a CD for a brass band’s 50th anniversary, speed sign stickers and a potato rumbler.

The last four years have been unlike any other in the Council’s history. The COVID pandemic brought huge challenges for the whole organisation, including Parishes, and new and different ways of working had to be learnt quickly and new problems responded to. I remain immensely proud of my District and Parish Councillor colleagues, council officers and communities across the district who pulled together to recognise the problems and health issues faced by residents and implement solutions. From food and Prescription deliveries to the excellent Duty Councillor Scheme set up by Rayne Parish Council and everything in between. Although the worst of Covid has faded, it is still with us and affecting many residents so the support goes on. Officers at the Council distributed many millions of pounds in Grant aid to support struggling businesses. These and many other activities created many unsung and uncredited heroes and I will always be grateful for their efforts and dedication.

During this time the everyday delivery of Council services (both Parish and District) continued and the high satisfaction levels were maintained.

Here are just a few of the achievements.

- The PC have enabled the additional Memorial Walls to be built at Rayne Church.

- The Rayne Heritage Trail has been established.
- The Salings Entry gates have been purchased.
- Funding secured for Salings Memorial Gardens.
- Salings Neighbourhood Plan was developed and adopted.
- Section 2 of the Local Plan was adopted and sets out the development plans for the next few years.
- The plan to boost the Planning Enforcement team was implemented with some improvements already being seen, although there is still a long way to go.
- Over 3,344 fly-tips across the district were removed.
- Mobile Anti-Littering signage was introduced to discourage littering.
- 1,621 reports of Abandoned Vehicles were investigated.
- 280 stray dogs were collected.
- Licencing team Issued hundreds of revised Alcohol licences to allow for tables on pavements etc.
- The Handy Man service is going from strength to strength with the installation of many key safes and mobility rails in order to facilitate the discharge of patients from hospital.
- We collected 214,707 tonnes of waste and recycled 106,435 tonnes, an average recycling rate of 49.57% over the 4 years.
- Maintained a consistently low figure of missed bins – averaged only 3.65 per 100,000 over the period.
- Delivered the Victoria square redevelopment with 34 apartments now occupied, most via a Housing association. The medical facilities are also open and operational, as is the Bus Park and the Car Park. Plus, a Travelodge which is bringing extra business to the revamped Town Centre.
- The Plaza, the district's new £15.6 million enterprise and innovation centre created to support start-ups and small businesses is fully open. The three-storey centre consists of: 42 private offices for small businesses; A co-working space with dedicated desks and hot desks; Shared meeting and seminar rooms with roof terrace; Conference and event spaces and Café Plaza run by Josh and Grace Meehan.
- Horizon 120 is already attracting new employment to the district with CareCo now open, British Offsite opening soon and Essex Xray starting construction shortly. The site has also created a new wildlife area, 470 trees, thousands of plants & shrubs, swales & wildflowers, public art, links to country park and of course Gridserve Electric Forecourt and a new electric on-demand bus service, Digigo, delivered in partnership with ECC.

Affordable Housing is a particular interest of mine, as many residents need social housing, part ownership options or homes for their adult children. The last 4 years has seen success in the number of new affordable homes secured from private developments, 1280 since 2018. The last full civic year (2021/2022) alone has seen 417 new affordable homes completed in the district, more than the total achieved by Chelmsford, Maldon, Uttlesford and Colchester who between them only achieved 312. It is likely that the target for this year of 250 will also be exceeded.

The invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis has created a different backdrop for the next administration. Members elected in May 2023 will face new challenges.

Although our financial position is much stronger than most other Authorities there will be a financial gap to close and tough decisions will need to be taken. In addition, the face of local government is

likely to change significantly over the term of the next Administration and it will be important to ensure that the district is well positioned in any new arrangements.

It has been my pleasure to be your District Councillor for the last 4 years and my sincere thanks go to those that have helped to make me welcome. I would also like to thank the editors of Rayne in Focus and The Salings Magazine for publishing my articles every month. I continue to be amazed at the number of positive comments I receive about my articles from residents.

I wish continued success to all the communities in Braintree District but particularly to the communities in the two Parishes of The Salings and Rayne that make up the Rayne Ward and to their duly elected representatives.

Paul Euesden

District Councillor for Rayne and The Salings.