

Annual Report to the Rayne Ward by Paul Euesden, District Councillor. March 2022.

The last year has been another challenging one with everyone having to continue adapting life due to Covid 19. 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. For me, remotely held meetings had some advantages as they avoided travelling but they lacked the social interaction of “in person” meetings.

I was delighted by the way our local communities pulled together to support the more vulnerable and isolated in our parishes. It is obvious that this relationship is being maintained and continuing. My thanks go to our excellent Parish Councils who continue to be heavily involved in the various initiatives to support residents. I would also like to thank all of the volunteer groups in both Parishes for the excellent work they do, helping to make the parishes a great place to live.

The District Council for its part has distributed huge sums of money to support those businesses severely impacted by the enforced closure and Covid restrictions. Unfortunately, whilst there was an initial rapid rebound in global growth; inflationary pressures, supply chain issues and the Russian invasion of Ukraine now provide new challenges, which I’m sure we will overcome, but will undoubtedly influence the year to come.

On a more local level I continue to be mystified by the inconsistencies and illogical decisions made by individual planning inspectors from the Government appointed Planning Inspectorate which seem to ignore the views of local residents, the democratically elected Parish Council and the District Council Planning Committee. I know that the Cabinet Member for Planning has written to the government minister to raise this issue.

This year my Councillor Community Grants have gone to the following organisations.

- Rayne Heritage Trail.
- Rayne Community Speedwatch.
- Rayne Village Hall and Playing Field.
- Braintree Youth Project Charity
- Braintree Cultural Education Partnership.

I have also carried funds forward to the new financial year for two projects in The Salings Parish.

During the year I have received a number of requests for help from residents with a range of issues. I believe I have successfully dealt with them all but one. I’m still working on the outstanding fencing issue around the A120 Footbridge.

From a District wide perspective there have been a number of successes this year. These include:

- 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. 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. The Salings Neighbourhood Plan has been successfully completed, many congratulations to all involved in this excellent Plan.
- In order to significantly improve our local planning enforcement activities, the Council (following recommendations from a cross party working group) has allocated significant new resources in the 2022/23 budget for the planning department to dramatically improve its planning enforcement functions, including the monitoring of planning conditions.

Other initiatives concluded this year include

- The Victoria Square covered car park, part of the Manor Street development in Braintree, has opened and provides 48 parking spaces to the public in the centre of the town.
- The BDC car parks have been awarded the Park Mark accreditation for yet a further year, confirming the safety and low crime levels of our car parks in Braintree and Witham
- The relatively new bring-bank recycling collections of textiles, and of food and drink cartons, have proved popular and are being more and more used by residents. 19 tonnes of textiles, and 7 tonnes of cartons, were collected during 2021, plus an additional 7 tonnes of small electrical material - all these collections provide a revenue to the Council.
- An officer and Member Working Group has carried out a review of the BDC Taxi Licensing policies, to ensure that best-practice is followed in Taxi and Private Hire vehicle provision for the District.
- The opening of the iConstruct building, bringing training and new jobs to the District.
- The successful attraction of larger new employers to the Horizon 120 Business and Innovation Park, with 6 buildings under construction. The CareCo building is due to open in May.
- The completion of Braintree Town Centre Improvements and the opening of the Travelodge and Bus Park.
- Over 350 new affordable homes have been completed.

As 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.

All of these scores are above the national average.

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 my attendance at Parish Meetings and email correspondence with your Clerk.

As always, please be kind to each other.

Kind regards

Paul Euesden. District Councillor for The Rayne Ward which comprises of Rayne and The Salings Parishes.

March, 2022