

COUNCILLOR MRS GABRIELLE SPRAY

REPORT FOR PEBMARSH PARISH COUNCIL 2017

BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL – ACHIEVEMENTS 2016/17

This does seem to have been a remarkably busy year for your District Council. When I look down a list of what has been achieved I'm genuinely surprised at how much good work has been accomplished by Councillors with excellent support from Council officers.

Here are a few highlights which apply both to the District as a whole and to this village:

- We completed 7.8 million waste collections – that's 99.9% - on their scheduled day
- Reduced litter across Essex by 43% by working with other Essex local authorities and business partners to deliver a 'Love Essex' anti-litter campaign
- Provided potentially cheaper energy tariffs for over 1900 residents via the Braintree Energy Switch Scheme
- Won 21 awards from the Essex Playing Field Association for maintaining high standards across BDC owned play areas. These awards included four gold awards and eight silver plus five certificates of merit

The Local Plan is proceeding towards its final stages and I'll talk a bit more about it presently. But we have given planning permission for over 1200 homes which are much need in this District. We have enabled developers to deliver 48 affordable homes within the District. That's good but still not nearly enough and we need to do better.

In order to attract businesses to the area and, thereby, provide high quality employment opportunities we have:

- Built an additional 12 units specifically for start-up businesses
- Achieved 71% superfast broadband coverage across the District in conjunction with Superfast Essex
- Supported over 300 jobseekers together with the Department of Work & Pensions by hosting two job fairs and provided face to face access with employers

In my report last year, I mentioned that this District has one of the highest obesity rates in the County and that we, as a Council, were determined to do what we could to help overcome that very poor statistic. To this end, we have:

- Increased participation in sport through the 'Get Outdoors' campaign with Fusion, the organisation which manages our leisure centres
- Engaged with 16 fast food takeaways to encourage them to reduce the fat, salt and sugar levels in the food they offer
- Published a healthy eating recipe booklet and associated website to encourage residents to cook from scratch and eat well
- Launched the Livewell Child project in January where we will work with schools and families to attempt to halt the rise in obesity. This project has been jointly funded by Essex County Council and BDC and will run for a period of three years. It's around good eating habits, exercise and aims to be fun as well as educational

Finally, yes, residents have seen a rate increase for the first time in four years but it's a minimal increase and only necessary because all local authorities are experiencing cuts in funding from central government. I truly believe that BDC does a better job than most Councils in balancing the budget whilst maintaining an excellent level of service.

A recent survey of residents showed the satisfaction rate with the way the Council is run up from 81% to 86% and the district as a good place to live up from 87% to 92%. We must be doing something right – I think we are doing many things right!

MY ACTIVITIES

My view last year that 2016/17 would prove to be a challenging year for the Planning Committee was correct. Braintree District Council's Local Plan is reaching final consultation stage and will, hopefully, go to the Inspector next spring for approval. However, that will only happen if the Council can demonstrate a five year land supply for housing; currently, the supply stands at 4.5 years.

Until the Local Plan is approved and in place the District is vulnerable to developers bringing forward applications on sites which may not be considered appropriate by our planners or the Committee. The difficulty with refusing

planning applications lies with those decisions being over turned at appeal by Inspectors whose main focus is on whether or not the District can demonstrate the 5 year land supply. The resultant costs of a successful appeal by an applicant can be significant for the Council.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, I continue to enjoy sitting on the Planning Committee and being part of the decision making process.

The previously, very successful, Mi Community fund has been replaced with an exciting alternative: the Councillors Community Grant Scheme. All 49 District Councillors have a pot of £1500.00 to distribute within their Ward to support local projects which show benefit to the residents. The scheme launched in September last year and has already proved popular with over 30 projects being supported and demonstrating how a few hundred ££s can help. I have much enjoyed chairing the Grant Panel and assisting officers with setting up the scheme.

Between us, Chris Siddall and I have pooled our resources to fund new equipment for NETTS (the table tennis school based at Earls Colne Recreation Club) and the last stage of improving the lighting in St Andrews Church, Earls Colne. I have also just allocated the last of my 'pot' to Colne Engaine Memorial Hall towards roof insulation costs. With the start of the new Council year, another £1500 is now available per Councillor – get your bids in!

Other responsibilities: I have continued to sit on the Developing Democracy Group which examines the working processes of the Council and the Member Development Group which organises updates and training for Members.

I have also chaired two meetings of the Earls Colne Airfield Liaison Group and dealt with any related issues which have arisen during the last twelve months.

I much appreciate the work carried out by the Parish Council on behalf of residents and also the support they have shown to me over the last year. I am, again, looking forward to another productive twelve months as one of your representatives on the District Council.

Gabrielle Spray

The Colnes Ward

