

District Councillors Report February 2019

BUDGET AGREED TO ENABLE 'CAN-DO COUNCIL' TO CONTINUE TO PUNCH ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

Tendring District Council (TDC) has agreed its budget for the coming financial year to allow the authority to continue to “punch above its weight”. The budget delivers some savings, as part of the ten-year financial plan agreed last year, and the council has also set aside funding for some major projects across the district.

These include more than £2million on business, investment and growth, £4.6m for the cliff stabilisation scheme in Holland-on-Sea and £2.5m on homes for Jaywick Sands.

As part of the budget, a £5 increase in council tax for a Band D home was agreed, in line with the long-term financial plan. Neil Stock OBE, TDC Leader, said it was a “no frills” budget, “crafted to enable us to carry on being the outstanding local authority we have become”.

Cllr Stock added: “We have already set aside significant amounts of money to keep moving our priorities forward. These are bold and ambitious projects because we are a bold and ambitious council. We play a vital role in the lives of the residents of this district and we are a force for good. We constantly punch above our weight and I can see no reason why this should change – the Government see us as a ‘can-do’ council, and that’s a reputation we want to keep delivering against.”

Full council voted in support of the budget at its meeting on Tuesday, February 5th, with 50 votes for, three votes against and one abstention.

LOCAL PLAN PROCESS IS CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT

Three north Essex councils are reminding residents of the next steps in the development of their shared Local Plan. Braintree District, Colchester Borough and Tendring District councils, supported by Essex County Council, are creating a shared section one of their Local Plans – a blueprint for development in their areas up until 2033.

The Local Plan was examined by a Government Planning Inspector who in June last year set out what issues needed to be addressed for the document to be found sound, including more evidence around viability and transport infrastructure. Since then the North Essex Authorities (NEA) have been revising the evidence, in an approach agreed with the Planning Inspector.

The Inspector also praised the “commendable ambitions for high-quality, strategic-scale development in North Essex”.

Acknowledging criticism from some quarters about how the process is being carried out, the councils are again informing residents about the next steps in an effort to be clear and transparent about the process. As part of the process an independent organisation, LUC, has been brought in to rigorously assess the various potential sites put forward against the potential new garden communities to ensure that the most appropriate ones are taken forward to help the three councils meet their future housing obligations.

This work, called a Sustainability Appraisal, is ongoing and has involved engaging with stakeholders and local communities to make sure each proposal is explored and assessed fairly.

Once completed the Sustainability Appraisal, and any modifications to the draft Local Plan needed as a result, will need to be considered by each respective councils' Local Plan Committee – and if approved would go back out for public consultation. The results of this are provided to the Planning Inspector to resume the currently paused Inquiry into the Local Plan. It is anticipated the consultation will happen in the summer of 2019, and then the Inquiry re-opened in the autumn.

Neil Stock OBE, Leader of Tendring District Council, said the process was clearly defined in national planning policy. "Local Plans are not a new feature of planning law, and the process of a Planning Inspector highlighting areas of further work required before adopting a sound Local Plan is perfectly normal. The North Essex Authorities are now busy carrying out that work, including commissioning an independent Sustainability Appraisal, just as the Inspector asked. "I welcome the scrutiny being placed on this process. It is absolutely right that our Local Plan is developed in a transparent, open and inclusive way; it's what we have done from the beginning and what we will continue to do all the way through. The Inspector told us to get on with the job, has approved our approach to tackling it, and will ultimately be able to tell us in no uncertain terms if he does not approve of the new evidence when we go back to an Inquiry. That is what we are focusing on, not idle speculation."

Graham Butland, Leader of Braintree District Council, said a benefit of three authorities submitting a shared Local Plan was that there is three times the level of scrutiny.

"Each council has its own process for scrutinising the work it carries out, and ultimately three councils all taking a robust look at the work being done," Cllr Butland said. "In addition there are three sets of planning officers, experts in their field, as well as in-house solicitors, regeneration teams and so on – not to mention where necessary outsourced experts and legal guidance – all contributing towards developing a first-class Local Plan for our area. All of those officers involved in this process are doing an outstanding job, and I know I speak for all three council leaders when I say we are proud of them."

Mark Cory, Leader of Colchester Borough Council, said garden community principles were the best way forward for sustainable housing growth in north Essex. "The independent Sustainability Appraisal will look at the impact of new development in comparison with other potential sites, and when we have the findings we will need to consider this carefully. It is clear that residents want to see a commitment to new infrastructure before further development goes ahead." Cllr Cory said. "We must continue to listen and be conscious of the real, genuine concerns of existing communities. The Planning Inspector confirmed, between the three authorities we must build a total of 2,186 houses every year up until 2033. That is not optional – what we do have control of, is where and how these new homes are built, and we will continue to be clear that this must be done with appropriate infrastructure in the right place."

FREE INTERNET SAFETY SESSIONS ON OFFER TO PARENTS

Parents are being invited to find out how to make sure their children stay safe online at a free training session. Organised by the Tendring Community Safety Partnership (TCSP), the sessions will be run by EST E-safety Training – who have also been delivering workshops with a number of schools in the district.

During the sessions parents will be shown the risks of children being groomed while using the most popular apps, games and social media – and how to keep them safe. Sessions are being held at Clacton’s Princes Theatre, from 12.30-2.30pm on March 6, and 7-9.15pm on March 7.

Lynda McWilliams, TCSP Chairwoman and Tendring District Council Cabinet Member for Health and Education, encouraged parents or other family members to go along.

“We held some of these sessions last year, and the feedback from those who went was so positive – parents found it a real eye-opener as to the risks their children face when online,” Cllr McWilliams said. In this digital age not being online isn’t an option for our young people. But what we can do is take steps to keep them safe, and pass on tips and advice so they can also protect themselves and enjoy the benefits of the internet safely. So I would really urge parents, carers, grandparents – anyone who looks after children – to come along.”

The sessions are free but a place should be booked by visiting the Princes Theatre website at www.princestheatre.co.uk

PROGRAMME OF 2020 EVENTS FOR HARWICH CELEBRATING MAYFLOWER 400 IS SHAPING UP

Event organisers are working together in Harwich and Dovercourt to pull together an exciting programme for next year. The Mayflower ship, from Harwich and captained by Harwich resident Christopher Jones, took the first settlers to America in 1620 in a voyage marked annually by Thanksgiving in the USA.

A whole programme of events is being planned across 11 UK destinations, including Harwich, for 2020 to mark the 400th anniversary. As well as bespoke and new events introduced specifically for 2020, organisers are being encouraged to look at if their existing event or activity can also get involved.

Paul Milsom, Chairman of the Harwich Tourism Group, said he was pleased at how many people were already building on the Mayflower theme. “While big landmark events are of course a great way of drawing people into Harwich to enjoy all the area has to offer, it will be the vibrant, exciting activities and events which we deliver year-in year-out which will create that buzz and bring visitors back year after year,” Mr Milsom said. “Harwich is already renowned for events such as the Maritime Festival and the Harwich Festival of the Arts, and it is so encouraging to see the organisations behind those already thinking ‘Mayflower’. I was impressed to learn from a recent meeting of our group just how many people are picking up this thread – and I would urge others to do the same.”

Last year Tendring District Council (TDC), which is part of the Harwich and Dovercourt Tourism Group, promoted a Get On Board campaign encouraging local businesses and organisations to think about how they can contribute to Mayflower 400 – and what it could mean to them.

Mick Skeels, TDC Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism, said he was thrilled to hear that message was being picked up. “Mayflower 400 is such an opportunity, not just for 2020 but for years to come, for Harwich and Dovercourt,” Cllr Skeels said. “As we’ve already announced, TDC is providing a lot of support and some exciting projects to help make Harwich an exciting visitor destination, and I am delighted that others in the town are also picking up the mantle.”

CALL FOR MEMORIES OF COUNCIL HOUSING AS PART OF CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Former and current council housing tenants are being asked to share their memories and experiences as part of a commemorative event marking 100 years of council homes.

July 2019 marks the centenary of the Housing, Town Planning Act, - known as the Addison Act after its author, then Minister for Health Dr Christopher Addison. The legislation meant local councils for the first time, funded by the Government, were given a central role to play in providing affordable housing, constructed to high quality standards and available to all according to need. It paved the way for the national construction of council housing on a large scale.

Tendring District Council (TDC) has a number of properties which date back to the Act, and in total has more than 3,000 council homes on its books – as well as plans to build and acquire more in the coming year. To help TDC mark the centenary of council housing, the authority is appealing for people’s memories and experiences of council housing, including any photos. A number of commemorative activities are being planned, and any stories or images received will be used as part of these events.

Paul Honeywood, TDC Cabinet Member for Housing, said he was looking forward to seeing what people sent in. “There is a rich history of council housing right across the country, and Tendring is no exception,” Cllr Honeywood said. “It plays such an important role in supporting our residents by providing quality and secure housing to those who would otherwise face living in unacceptable conditions. I would encourage people to share their memories with us – perhaps they gave birth in a council house, or started a new life in one, for example.”

Any council housing memories or pictures should be sent to Emma Norton at 88-90 Pier Avenue, Clacton, or email tenant.involvement@tendringdc.gov.uk