

Little Easton Parish Council



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Minutes of the LITTLE EASTON ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY held in the Memorial Hall at 8:00pm on Tuesday 20th MARCH 2019

Present: Cllr Fowell Cllr Hindley Cllr Dodsley Cllr Rush Cllr Wyatt
 Mr. Angus Drever, Chair of Trustees – The forgotten Gardens of Easton Lodge
 Members of the public

APA 01	APOLOGIES – Cllr Jones
APA 02	WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN Cllr Dodsley outlined the proceedings for the Annual Assembly and welcomed all in attendance.
APA 03	MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY APRIL 2018 Duly signed by the Chairman
APA 04	CHAIRMANS REPORT - Full report - APPENDIX A
APA 05	CLERKS REPORT - Financial report at APPENDIX B
APA 06	DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT - Full report – APPENDIX C
APA 07	COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT - Full report – APPENDIX D
APA 08	PRESENTATION FROM ANGUS DREVER, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES from the forgotten GARDENS OF EASTON LODGE Angus presented an interesting and pithy overview of the Gardens history, the work of Harold Peto plus the colourful lifestyle of the Estate’s long term owner during the late 19 th Century, one Frances “Daisy” Maynard whom through marriage became the Countess of Warwick
APA 09	DATE OF NEXT PARISH ASSEMBLY - To be Confirmed
APA 10	CHAIRMAN TO CLOSE MEETING - The meeting closed at 9:15pm

Signed.....

Dated.....

APPENDIX A

Good evening and welcome to this the Little Easton Parish Council Annual Assembly for 2019.

My name is Andy Dodsley, I'm the Chairman of the Parish Council and alongside me is our Parish Clerk, Ian Brown. Amongst you are your Parish Councillors: Doug Wyatt, Janina Jones, Jessica Rush, Chris Hindley and Rebecca Fowell.

This Parish Assembly is where I, as Chairman, report to you on our activities over the past 12 months. More importantly, it gives you as residents the chance to ask questions and comment about subjects that are of concern or interest to you.

The structure of the forum is that firstly, I will deliver my chairman's report, then Ian as parish clerk will deliver the financial report. I will be going through the key areas that the parish council has responsibility for and what we have been doing over the last year.

I will also be giving an update on where we are with the Uttlesford Local Plan.

This evening we also have an agenda item for a speaker from The Trustees of The Gardens of Easton Lodge which we hope will be of interest to you.

If you have any questions about anything I report, there will be the opportunity for you to ask questions afterwards about what your parish council has been doing or anything else that you would like to raise.

War Memorial

The Parish Council is responsible for the upkeep of the War Memorial.

This year the initial planting suffered with the very hot temperatures last summer. A few plants died and had to be replaced, resulting in a slight alteration to the initial planting scheme. As far as can be determined at this stage the new plants are thriving.

Some rocks, painted white, were installed on the verge in order to prevent vehicles being parked and damaging the grass. This was done immediately prior to the Remembrance Service in November.

The planned upgrading work on the War Memorial is now complete. There are plans for the railings to be painted in 2019 and regular inspections, general weeding and maintenance work will be ongoing and be funded from the annual maintenance budget.

Village Sports Day and Family Christmas Gathering

Another successful and well attended Family Fun Day took place in August, with people coming together from the village and beyond to enjoy an afternoon of races, quik cricket, cakes and a picnic. The format of the day has become a popular formula that people seem to enjoy and we are now starting to plan this year's event.

This year's Christmas event was a family themed 'Christmassy Gathering' in the hope that this would appeal to more people. There was tea, coffee and hot mulled wine on tap and lovely chocolate cakes and biscuits were served along with pigs in blankets.

The scene was set with a red and gold decorated tree laden with gifts. Craft tables were set up for children to make Christmas crackers and decorate Christmas biscuits. There were also toys and games for toddlers. With Christmas music in the background and festive poinsettia on the tables, it was a lovely couple of hours spent with a very select group ranging from age 1 to 80 plus.

Councillor Jess Rush and her team of volunteers are already planning this years' events and if you would like to get involved just speak to her. Keep an eye out for information on both these events on the website and in the 5 parishes' magazine.

Children's Play Area

The council is responsible for arranging and paying for the annual safety checks that need to be carried out on the play area and all of the equipment. These checks are ongoing.

Following an inspection of the Play Area at the beginning of the summer, a number of major and minor issues were identified with the equipment. The zip wire had to be closed for a few weeks while it underwent major repairs and the football goal required repairs to the goal net fixings which the inspection identified as being dangerous. These repairs were given the highest high priority as the safety of children and users of the equipment is paramount. The repairs have now been successfully completed and both pieces of equipment are now fully repaired and open again.

A program of remedial works has been planned with the objective of addressing all the issues identified in the inspection report. We have commissioned a new bin and signage and further work to keep the vegetation tidier around the fence and the basketball hoop. This work will be prioritised based upon the levels of risk identified in the inspection report and will be funded from the play area annual budget.

The inspection also identified a number of areas where the play equipment is starting to show its age. A play area working group was formed last year with the objective of putting together a strategic plan to refresh and renew the play area over the next few years. This year there are plans to apply for one or two more grants to replace equipment where parts are beginning to wear out and become unavailable or too costly. We will also be looking to replace much of the surfacing materials around the equipment with modern safety surfacing. The estimated costs of the play area renewal will be significant and cannot be funded from the annual maintenance budget. The speed and scope of what we can achieve will depend upon what additional grant funding we can secure. We are currently looking at potential funding sources which include UDC, the National Lottery and local businesses. A quiz was held last October which raised over £600.00 for the play area renewal fund and we were grateful for a further grant of £600.00 from our District Councillors Martin Foley and John Freeman.

We are also keen to involve the village community in the work and will be consulting families in the village on selection of any new equipment as well as inviting villagers to help in brightening up some of the metalwork. We feel that this renewal will secure the future of the play area for future generations of children in the village.

Speeding and Speedwatch

I spoke last year about the council's efforts to reduce speeding through the village. I explained that we were lobbying the Local Highways Panel to replace the unrestricted speed limit on the section of road between

Mill End and Duck Street with a 40MPH speed limit. This lobbying proved successful and after a consultation period, the new 40 MPH was put in place at the beginning of this year. The intention of this change is to prevent cars speeding up to maximum speeds in between the two parts of the village. Despite the implementation of the new limit, speeding remains an issue through all parts of the village. Judging by comments on the village Facebook site and other social media, residents are concerned about this issue. I spoke last year about the councils attempts to set up a speedwatch group to try and reduce the instances of dangerous speeding. We are still in possession of a speed camera and other necessary equipment and I would encourage any resident who would like to help in addressing the issue of speeding through the village to get in touch with the council. We need about four or five volunteers to form a speedwatch group and organise the appropriate training. Your council remains open to the formation of a speedwatch group but this will only happen with the committed support of residents. If anyone feels strongly enough about the issue of speeding through the village to get involved and help do something about it, please let us know.

Highwoods Quarry

The site is progressing on schedule. Finished extracting from point E and have now started extracting from point F. Point C will be fully restored by the end of October. Metering of the water away from the quarry is still going on with 40% being channelled to Easton Ponds. We are still receiving full analysis of all the boreholes. Planning permission for the start time for lorries leaving the quarry to London via the A120, is currently with LandSecs lawyers. A visit to the quarry was held in June of last year which proved very popular and was very interesting. Highwood would be very happy to hold another Open day this year during the summer. Please don't forget to inform the Parish Council of any unusual activity regarding the Quarry.

Superfast Broadband

The new Fibre-to-the-Curb Superfast Broadband service was successfully implemented to the Duck Street/Manor Road part of the village in the 4th quarter of 2018. Superfast speeds are now available to all residents in this part of the village

The rest of the village will be covered by a Fibre-to-the-House solution provided by Gigaclear Ltd. This will give up to 1000Mb/sec broadband but may be more costly depending on how the landline phone service is handled. The latest projected dates for the implementation of this service are between December 2019 and July 2020. Those of us in these areas of the village will continue to struggle along with poor broadband speeds until this phase of the Superfast Essex Programme has been implemented. We will keep you informed of the progress of the project and will let residents know when Superfast speeds become available in the remainder of the village.

I would like to thank Adrian for his continuing efforts in monitoring and reporting the progress of the delivery of Superfast Broadband to the village.

Footpaths

This year we've had five problems reported to Essex Highways in relation to Little Easton's footpaths. Currently all of the problems have been inspected, with four being solved resulting in two new bridges and one new set of steps. One problem has been scheduled to be worked on.

It was decided not to take part in the Dog fouling campaign of 2018, as it was felt that it would be more affective in a town based environment due to its sticker based format. As always please let us know if there's any problems with Little Easton's footpaths.

Grounds Maintenance and Grass Cutting

The council arranges and pays for the maintenance and grass cutting of parish owned land around the village, particularly the village green outside the memorial hall. This also includes the clearance of the large volume of leaves in the autumn.

Following the tree survey I spoke of last year, a 3 year plan was put in place for the inspection and maintenance of the trees around the playing field. The first year of the plan was successfully completed in 2018 with the trees to the East side of the field being cut back and managed. The remaining trees will be managed over the remaining two years of the plan.

The four village plant boxes at the entrance to both ends of the village had been showing signs of needing repair for a while and the hot summer last year was the final straw. Upon examination, it became clear that there was a need for new planter boxes as well as a new planting scheme.

The council commissioned work to rebuild the planters over the winter and residents will now see the new

boxes at both ends of the village. Painting and colours are currently being planned and new planting will take place in the Spring ready for the Summer. A watering schedule will also be put in place to ensure that the boxes don't dry out during the warmer weather.

Parish Council Website

The council has commissioned the design and delivery of a new parish council website. The old website had been in place for a long time and we felt it needed a refresh to make it more up to date, more accessible to residents and enable greater synergies with other social media.

The new website is currently being built and will be implemented later this year.

Memorial Hall

Although the memorial hall and car park is owned by the parish council, it is managed throughout the year by the memorial hall committee. A range of improvements have been made to the hall over the last few years and since completion of the changes, the memorial hall has seen a 33% increase in booking revenue, while the running costs have been reduced following some remedial work on the drains.

Funding for the improvements and repairs came from a variety of sources - The regular stall at the Countess of Warwick Show raised over £600, donations of over £700 were received in memory Roy Blackwell and there was also a £3000 grant from UDC.

The surface of the car park was improved and some new shingle laid to the side and front and a large area of vegetation cleared to the rear of the hall. The Hall continues to be used for a variety of functions and regular classes.

The last year has seen a significant increase in incidents of anti-social behaviour in and around the Memorial Hall car park. Residents have reported cars speeding round the car park and on Manor Road and evidence of drug taking equipment has been found in the car park. This has been reported to the police on numerous occasions and the Parish Council have been in regular contact with the Uttlesford Community Safety officer requesting a more co-ordinated and effective response and are continuing to press for further action by the Community Policing Team. The police have confirmed that the site is on their attention list and a number of visits have been made to the area.

The Memorial Hall Committee, who manage the hall and car park are also looking at potential solutions to enhance the security of the car park and the memorial hall. They have confirmed that any security plans for the car park will be published for comments prior to any changes being implemented.

Battle's Over Beacon Lighting

On 11th November 2018, the United Kingdom marked the 100th anniversary of when the guns fell silent at the end of the First World War.

The "Battle's Over" tribute was a series of events to pay personal and community tributes to the millions that gave their lives for their country.

The council were keen to participate in the tribute and organised an event to light the Little Easton Beacon at 7.00pm on Sunday 11th November. The beacon symbolised an end to the darkness of war and a return to the light of peace. We were one of more than a thousand Beacons of Light that were lit throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and UK Overseas Territories, with the first of these Beacons being lit at Westminster Abbey.

There was an excellent turnout from residents of the village and beyond to commemorate the anniversary. The tributes were read out by Vincent Thompson, Deputy Lieutenant of Essex and the last post was played. Refreshments were then taken at the Village Hall.

We would like to thank Vincent for his involvement and also thank Roger Board for all his help in organising such a successful event.

Lighting

The council pays for and arranges the maintenance of all street lighting in the village. We have recently changed suppliers to reduce the annual cost to residents of the electricity supply.

Planning Applications

The council receives a copy of all planning applications impacting on the village and is required to either support, object or otherwise comment or not upon the application. In the last year the council has received both individual applications and from commercial enterprises such as the Highwood Quarry and Landsecs.

If you have any comments on any of these areas or would like to discuss them further, please feel free to come along to a parish council meeting or contact the parish clerk. All of the parish council meeting dates are published on the parish council website and on notice boards in the village.

Uttlesford Local Plan and Easton Park

At last year's assembly, I reported on the status of the Uttlesford Local Plan proposals for Easton Park. UDC had announced that they needed to build a total of 14100 houses in the next plan period of 15 years to meet the housing demand. The preferred strategy was to put the main part of this new housing in a number of New Settlements with the balance of the housing then spread around the district.

One of the proposed new settlements is at Easton Park and the district council plan is for a new settlement of 10,000 houses on the deer park at Easton Lodge. We all understand that if the proposals go ahead, they will have a profound effect on the village and all of our lives as well as on the character of the whole local area. I will therefore give you an update on what your council has been doing with regard to the local plan over the last year.

At last year's parish assembly, UDC had completed the first public consultation on the Local Plan – called Regulation 18 – and we were starting to prepare for the 2nd public consultation – Regulation 19 – which ran between the 25th of June and 13th of August last year.

Your parish council has submitted robust challenges in both the regulation 18 and 19 consultations. All of our comments are available to view alongside all comments on the UDC website. We also continued leafleting the village to raise awareness of the consultations and to ensure everyone knew how, where and when to make comments if they wished to do so.

Representatives from the parish council and Stop Easton Park have spoken at numerous UDC planning meetings, challenging the proposals on a number of fronts and highlighting the bias inherent within the plan assessments and evidence.

We have also been working with the Stop Easton park campaign group to try and establish the legal status of a restrictive covenant set in place by the last Countess of Warwick in 1939 to prevent precisely the type of development that the district council is proposing on the Easton Park land. The district council are party to the original restrictive covenant and as such should be instrumental in protecting the land it covers. Sadly this is not the case and it seems that there are legal ways of setting the covenant aside should they and the land owners decide to do so.

Efforts are still continuing in this direction and further legal advice is currently being sought.

We continue to believe that there are significant flaws in the Local Plan and that the assessment of potential sites for development, and in particular Easton Park, was unsound. At the end of 2018 Uttlesford District Council acknowledged a number of these flaws and engaged consultants to re-write the Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal on which the Local Plan proposals are based. The new appraisal was open for consultation between January 14th and February 25th this year. The Parish Council responded to this consultation with a further set of comments and challenges highlighting the flawed sustainability appraisals made by the district council and their consultants.

The Local Plan was submitted by UDC to the Secretary of State in January of this year.

The next stage of the process is for a public examination of the Local Plan by inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State. The inspectors have recently been appointed but no dates have yet been set for the public examination. We expect it to be sometime from May onwards.

We remain optimistic that when the Local Plan is examined objectively by the planning inspectors, it will become clear that the selection of Easton Park as a site for a 10,000 house new town will be shown to be an unsustainable option for a range of reasons, including:

- An unacceptable impact on heritage assets – the destruction of an ancient deer park and the settings of multiple heritage assets and listed buildings including The Gardens of Easton Lodge and the Little Easton Conservation Area.
- Coalescence with Great Dunmow (which itself is planned to double in size irrespective of Easton Park)
- The site's proximity to Stansted Airport with the associated Health & Noise impacts
- The unacceptable Environmental and Landscape Harm that will be caused.
- The underplaying of the enormous impact on our Transport Infrastructure, including the lack of robust infrastructure plans to accommodate the increased traffic- particularly the impact on the A120, local roads and Junction 8 of the M11
- UDC's over-estimation of local employment benefits from the plan
- A range of deficiencies in the UDC process for the selection of proposed sites and the presentation of the evidence base.

The inspector of the North Essex Authorities Local Plan (Colchester, Tendring and Braintree) last year found their local plan to be unsound in a range of areas and we see a lot of similarities between their plans and the Uttlesford approach. So there is still cause for some optimism.

Mitigation

Although we continue to oppose the concept of Easton Park, we are also continuing to progress our thinking on contingency plans should the public examination of the Local Plan find that the plan is sound and the development go ahead.

We continue to meet with representatives from both Uttlesford and the landowners – Landsecs - to try and protect the interests and assets of Little Easton village should the development go ahead. We now have a dedicated contact at Barton Wilmore who are the consultants representing Landsecs.

Both Uttlesford and the developers have been advised of our initial list of mitigation requirements (known as “Red Lines”) and other potential community benefits. One small success was to have one of our key requirements – That there would be no access to any part of Park Road or the continuing private road from Easton Glebe to Brook End Farm from any new development – enshrined in the Local Plan policy for Easton Park. We can now be confident that should the development go ahead, all traffic from the development would have to exit onto the A120 and no traffic would be allowed to come directly from the development through the village.

We will continue these meetings alongside the progression of the Local Plan and continue to press UDC to enshrine our red lines and mitigation requirements into the Local Plan policies so that we gain some protection for the heritage assets and buildings around the village should the development go ahead.

I would like to thank Vincent Thompson and the other members of the Stop Easton Park Group for their support, passion and enthusiasm in fighting the proposed development of Easton Park in the Uttlesford Local Plan and their ongoing commitment to preventing the destruction of a beautiful deer park and the development of a 10,000 home new town on our doorstep. If you feel strongly about this and would like to get involved in the fight, please feel free to contact the parish council or the Stop Easton Park Group for advice.

Summary

Finally, I would just like to say a sincere thank you to my fellow Councillors for all their commitment and hard work through what has been a very busy year.

2019 is an election year and there will be elections on the 2nd of May this year for all District and Parish Councillors. Two of your parish councillors – Janina Jones and Doug Wyatt – have decided to stand down this year and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them both on behalf of the whole village for their commitment and dedication to the parish council over the past few years.

This leaves us with two vacancies on the council so if anyone feels that they would like to make a difference in their local community and volunteer to stand as a parish councillor, please contact Ian or myself as soon as possible.

As a Parish Council we work very closely with our County and District Councillors and I would like to thank them for their input and support. In particular I would like to thank Martin Foley for his unswerving support and dedication in representing the interests of the residents of Little Easton and surrounding villages.

I would also like to say a big thank you to Ian Brown our Parish Clerk who ensures that the Council conducts its business properly in line with regulations and who underpins the work of the council through his objective advice and support.

This is your Parish Council and we are here to represent you the residents so please come along to the Parish Council Meetings and get involved - This is your community.

There is now a public forum session and an opportunity for you to ask any questions about any of the topics I have covered in my report or any other subject you would like to raise.

After the Public Forum:

Our Parish Clerk will now report on the Parish Council finances.

APPENDIX B

LEPC CLERKS REPORT APA 2019

You will be pleased to learn that yet again your council have been wise stewards of the pennies, bringing in the year within budget.....JUST.

Last year we achieved an unqualified Audit which was very good news, my aim during this year's Audit will be to repeat that achievement..... I will not bore you with the details but in round terms this is how the accounts fared, excuse me whilst I read this.....

In common with all parish councils across the country our Income predominantly arrives via the Precept which in 2018 was £17,500.

We were successful in being awarded various grants such as a war memorial maintenance grant, a District council community award, a grant from the Stansted Community Fund, we also enjoyed a private donation from the community plus the council's own fund raising efforts all amounted to some £2,500.

Our Income was approx. a £1,000 shy of our budget so we have dipped into our reserves to make up the final shortfall for this year.

Major areas of expense included doing what we could to support GDTC in the costs associated with the Regulation 18 & 19 consultations, that was some £6,000 which for this little parish is a chunk of money.

The play area continued to focus our attention and will do so even more this coming financial year as we work to improve and renew that facility for the benefit of all those who use it but we will need to be successful in winning some grant funding if we are to achieve certain aims. £1200

Parish maintenance is another area of notable expense, whether that be grass cutting, general grounds maintenance, hedge clearing, Tree works and the most recent renewal of the planters. Just under £6,000.

Lighting and Utilities cost us another £900, whilst everything involved in general parish Admin such as insurances, printing, the website, staffing costs, Auditing, Association subscriptions, the list goes on... cost around £6,300.

So finally - your council recognises its finite resources are having to spread over a wide range of expenditure but it remains committed to ensure they can achieve most of what they set out to achieve and with a following wind and maybe a sprinkling of luck I believe they will.

APPENDIX C

COUNCIL TAX

You may have already had notice of this...

UDC element will go up by just under 3% this year.

ECC element will go up by 3 % this year

Adult Social Care will go up by 1% this year

Essex Fire by 2.9%

Essex Police by 14.7

Police - At last, there will be a few extra police in Essex (150 in total) but this follows a drop of 600 over the last few years and many believe (including serving police officers) that this has had a detrimental effect. This is against a background of over 20,000 fewer police officers in England and Wales.

NEW HOMES BONUS

I gave a grant this period for Play Equipment for Little Easton.

UTTLESFORD HIGHWAYS MEETINGS

Although highways are largely an Essex County Council Matter...

I have had a couple of meetings over the last two months with ECC Highways Liaison Officer for Uttlesford and asked for immediate action on the potholes and speeding issues on the main roads through The Eastons as well as the road between Thaxted and Dunmow and particularly the problems we have in Little Easton brought up at the last parish meeting.

THE (UTTLESFORD) LOCAL PLAN

Following the submission of the draft Uttlesford Local Plan to the Secretary of State which includes the 10, 000 homes at Easton Park. UDC received a letter from the Planning Inspectorate giving details of the inspectors appointed to examine the soundness of the Local Plan; they are Louise Crosby and Elaine Worthington.

I have to tell you that this is not a done deal yet. I have opposed this plan throughout the consultation period and voted against Easton Park. I still believe this is the wrong place to put 10,000 homes and will continue to work with SEP and our Parish Council to do what is best for local people.

There is another issue which I think is relevant. Carver Barracks will become available in a few years time and it will be one of the biggest brownfield sites in East Anglia and likely be available for new homes. UDC has offered to build a running track on one part of the site at a cost of £500k as long as they had guaranteed that it would not disappear within a short period. The MOD would not give that undertaking and would not agree to a claw-back if it went to another use in a short period. This, many of us feel would be a better garden community than Easton Park.

I have seen a report from Campaign for the Protection of Rural Englan that there are in England enough brownfield sites to build around a million homes in the next few years. This is about the number that the government wants to build but instead allowing a massive takeover of our countryside and not really building the sort of housing that is actually needed. They often say they are going to build affordable homes. 80% of market prices in this area are not affordable to many people.

Just to be absolutely clear, I support "Stop Easton Park". Should it go ahead I will work shoulder to shoulder with Little Easton Parish Council on mitigation measures.

Libraries

I have been involved with others in the campaign to "Save our Libraries".

Working alongside many other local groups we have taken the "SAVE THAXTED LIBRARY" and "STOP CUTS TO DUNMOW LIBRARY" campaign to County Hall Chelmsford on several occasions and lobbied for support at

Uttlesford District Council. We are grateful to all the people who have supported the campaign. We must keep our Libraries open, and keep the library staff, who play such an important role. We need to stay completely within the Essex Library Service to benefit from the essential professional support which it can offer.

THE AIRPORT -STOP STANSTED EXPANSION

Dr Mike Tayler who is here tonight myself and indeed the entire Stop Stansted Expansion team and thousands of residents have expressed dismay and disappointment that Uttlesford District Council (UDC) Planning Committee granted approval for Stansted Airport's planning application to grow to an annual throughput of 43 million passengers per annum. If this approval is allowed to stand, it would mean that Stansted could increase its flights by 44% and its passenger throughput by 66% compared to last year's levels.

The UDC Planning Committee, comprising ten elected Uttlesford councillors, split right down the middle with five in favour of the application (including the Planning Committee Chairman) and five against. Where there is a split vote, the Council rulebook gives the Chairman an additional (casting) vote. The voting by individual councillors is available but sadly it split into party political lines backing the government's wishes.

Campaigners from Stop Stansted Expansion and opposition groups at UDC had argued that the development should have been decided at a national rather than local level and SSE vow to continue their legal battle. After permission was granted by the council in November last year, the verdict was subject to a review by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

In a letter published last month, Communities Secretary James Brokenshire, unfortunately, confirmed the government's approval of the airport's planning application, lodged in February 2018.

There is a growing group of people like Dr. Tayler and myself will work together with SSE members ready to back a judicial review.

Martin Foley
07968 520520

APPENDIX D

Essex County Councillor's Annual report 2018-2019

Budget: Over the past four years we have made savings of £311 million, by improving value for money, generating income and reducing costs. And despite finding further budget savings of £60 million for the next financial year, we have had to raise the County Council's portion of Council Tax by 2.99%. For a Band D property this is equivalent to 94 pence a week.

The Council continues to face major financial challenges; this coming year, our main grant from Government will be reduced by £27 million, staff costs through National Insurance and agreed pay increases along with other support costs, particularly those of our contractors continue to expose the Authority to significant financial pressures. In addition, a growing population, changing demographics, and increasing demand across many of our services all add to the challenges we face.

We have lobbied Government hard over ensuring sufficient funding is made available to ensure a stable Adult Social Care Service, and are still pushing for more details regarding the use of Business Tax as an alternative to the Government's Revenue Support Grant.

So in a year of financial challenge, your County Council has still managed to achieve a lot.

Children's Services have been rated 'Outstanding' by OFSTED, which ranks us as one of the best in the country.

The County Council has been ranked in the top ten of all UK Local Authorities, which reflects well in the way that it is managed.

A number of my Cabinet Colleagues are working nationally to advise failing councils, and example of the high regard the administration is held.

Examples follow which highlight an number of achievements over the past year

Equalities:

- Launched a Hate Crime Strategy
- Promoted apprenticeships to employers and young people
- Been assessed as a Disability Confident Leader
- Produced the joint Health and Well Being Strategy
- Improved the effectiveness of Mental Health Social work
- Developed new accommodation and employment opportunities for people with mental health problems

Enabling Inclusive Economic Growth:

- Created over 2,750 school places
- Implemented a Young Carers Service
- Set up a Multi-Academy Trust to support schools
- Helped establish a new college at Stansted Airport, a Centre for Health and Development in Colchester, and in Braintree, a Science Technology Engineering Maths Innovation Campus.
- Enhanced Careers education in schools
- Campaigned and put in bids to support the improvements to the A120, A12, A13, A127 and the M11
- Invested a further £5 million for broadband
- Invested £120 million to improve and maintain the County's roads

Helping People get the Best Start and Age Well:

- The Youth Offending Service, assessed as 'Outstanding'
- Increased support for all care leavers up to the age of 25
- Developed our own in-house fostering service, so reducing reliance on agencies
- Provided a seamless social work service for disabled children and young people
- Initiated a dedicated service to encourage young people to leave gangs
- Won funding from Sport England to improve physical activity

Help Create Great Places to Grow up and Live Well:

- Improved volunteering opportunities through the Essex Youth Service
- Funded Community Agents and Care Navigators
- Developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy to protect enhance and develop our green spaces
- Further protected 329 properties from flood risk
- Provided a Ride demand responsive travel pilot to help preserve rural bus services
- Worked with Districts to drive up recycling rates to over 54%
- Published an updated Essex Design Guide
- Built 38 new homes through Essex Housing including 15 for those with learning disabilities

I continue to be Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste, a portfolio brief that covers not just the functions of a Waste Disposal Authority, but flood prevention, renewable energy, (including the proposed new nuclear power station at Bradwell), rural matters, coastal partnerships, heritage, country parks and the County's woodland estate. In addition I represent the County Council on a number of external bodies, including two regional flood and coast authorities, the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, Suffolk Coast

and Heaths Area for Outstanding Natural Beauty (it is being extended into Essex) and the Kent and Essex Inshore Fishery and Conservation Authority. I also sit as an executive member of the Rural Community Council for Essex, and represent the ECC on the Stansted Airport Community Consultative Committee. Twice a year I represent the rural interests of Essex (as Chairman of the Essex Rural Partnership) with Government Ministers from DEFRA. Nationally, I sit on the Local Government Association's Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) and another SIG concerned with New Nuclear Builds.

Simon Walsh
County Councillor for the Thaxted Division

DRAFT