

BRAINTREE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Supporting parish and town councils in the District of Braintree

Since our last newsletter your executive committee has been busy with the initial admin to support our association. A bank account with Unity Trust Bank is now open, and funds left over from the old BALC are being retrieved. Recruiting a clerk is essential and is now being advertised via EALC (provisionally 15 hours/quarter). **If any of your own clerks are interested, do please ask them to get in touch via email (balc.clerk@outlook.com).** Important nominations have been made to EALC and the Local Highways Panel (contact details below).

Dates for your diary (paid-up members only)

7th October at 7pm: Quarterly meeting based at Steeple Bumpstead (Zoom details to follow). Guest speaker Neil Jones, senior planner at Braintree DC with special responsibility for S106 agreements, plus information sharing opportunities for your ideas that work (or don't).

27th January 2022: Quarterly meeting based at Witham Town Hall (unconfirmed).

7th April 2022: Quarterly meeting based at Braintree

May 2022: Annual Meeting

The intention is for all meetings to be face-to-face but with a remote connection to allow those far from the venue to take part.

Planning

The government appears to have put on hold its initial proposals to replace the present local plan system with local maps where different types of development would be allowed, along with a system of design guides. The idea of house building targets for each local authority also seems to have been dropped. Because it would take at least a couple of years for any new system to go through Parliament and then more time to transition to a new system, we seem fated to endure the complex and long-winded local plan system for some time yet. We need to take advantage of the freedoms we do have, in particular to put the fine detail on the district local plan with our own neighbourhood plans, to consider local development orders, and of course to develop our own local design guides. There remain significant concerns over the notice actually taken by the local planning authority of representations in particular by parish and town councils, and the quality of expert advice sought.

The Braintree District Local Plan Part 1 (with strategic policies common to Colchester and Tendring as well) was adopted by Braintree District Council on 22nd February this year and replaces the former Core Strategy policies with similar but important differences. And the NPPF was again updated on 20th July. Both should guide responses to consultation on planning applications.

The District Council hope to have Part 2 with site allocations and development control policies through inspection and adopted this year.

Continued next page.....

Elections 2023

It's not too early to consider how to validate our democratic credentials by avoiding the need to co-opt. Every seat is contested in many councils, but local democracy is damaged where councils comprise too many co-optees. NALC is running a campaign (<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections>) to encourage volunteers to come forward to help run their local communities as candidates, and it will be an opportunity to strengthen our collective voice.

Action groups

It's taken a long time, but we are now ready to start up the special interest groups as a preliminary to speaking with that louder and more persuasive voice to get the changes we all need in attitudes and performance. They need to be locally led and locally contributed, so the invitation is for any of our members to step forward to establish and lead on a topic, with executive committee support where needed. There's been interest in planning matters, regulation and repair of highways and footpaths, environmental issues and community safety including policing. As the local government landscape is also set for future change, with the devolution of services a key theme, we should be considering what could be better done by our councils that is now done at district or county level, especially as the district tier may disappear locally as it has already elsewhere.

Please contact our chairman, Cllr Martin Lee (martinlee28@hotmail.co.uk), or any executive committee member to take up this invitation. It's the main reason we restarted BALC, to develop that stronger voice to call for actions, and the groups will provide the evidence and substance of what we need to say.

Membership reminders

With over 50 town and parish councils in the district, many quite small, we need the majority to join up if we are to be credible and influential as a group. The benefits of membership include that stronger voice, but also sharing good ideas that work, a friendly but knowledgeable network that may know the answers, access to senior decision-makers, the opportunity to make that persuasive case for change, and the potential for sharing services and perhaps staff and equipment with neighbours, all for a modest subscription of £40 pa.

Chair Cllr Martin Lee

Email:- balc.clerk@outlook.com

