

BRAINTREE DISTRICT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS – Newsletter 3: February 2022

Your Association has appointed [Grahame Walkingshaw](#) as Clerk. Grahame brings considerable experience in the business of parishes to the job, and we look forward to working together for the benefit of all our residents.

Your Executive Committee has met regularly to plan and organise the forward business.

Quarterly Members' meetings (minutes have been circulated)

1st July 2021: we heard from Sonia Church, ECC's Highways Liaison Manager, who explained how the Local Highways Panel works, its functions (wide-ranging) and powers (limited), and answered Members' questions on funding, decision-making and quiet lanes.

7th October 2021: we had invited Neil Jones, one of BDC's Senior Planning Officers to enlighten us on "Section 106" (of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990), under which developers in receipt of a planning consent agree to arrangements including making appropriate payments to make their development more acceptable. Neil explained the legal basis and limitations on developers' obligations: they can only be imposed to make a development more acceptable or ensure the provision of health, educational, sporting or recreational or other community benefits. Because the obligations need to be supported by evidence, documents such as the District Open Spaces Action Plan are important and need to be specific, detailed and up to date. In some cases financial contributions can be aggregated over several developments to provide a shared facility or benefit. Neil answered questions, when Members also commented on the ECC Highways Maintenance Devolution Scheme as over-restrictive and bureaucratic.

For information, slides presented at the meeting can be downloaded from [S106 presentation](#).

27th January 2022: Cllr Chris Siddall who chairs the LHP was our guest at this session. Chris threw more light on the LHP's workings from a Member viewpoint, mentioning that the chairman can allow visitors on request. At this meeting, it was agreed to ask BDC to reconsider their proposal to discontinue refunding over-collected parish council tax with a letter to BDC's Leader, Cllr Graham Butland,. The text was circulated to BALC member councils and to all BDC councillors. At their budget meeting on 21st January 2022, Cllr Butland and some of their Members referred to the proposal but in the event none took it up and our councils will lose this useful component of their funding.

Planning (update)

BDC is required to maintain a housing land supply for the next 5 years: until last year this target had not been met which allowed a flow of building permissions outside the normal rules. Then the supply was re-assessed at March 2021 as 5.34 years, but the current (February 2022) interim assessment is just 5.1 years. In the short term, approving the Local Plan Part 2 will allow more sites to be included in the calculation, but it appears this may be a short-lived relief. The message for parishes (and towns) is to

use Neighbourhood Development Plans to identify suitable sites rather than leave it to the housebuilders, whose interests are not always the same as those of local residents. It takes at least 18 months to get a NDP through so the time to start is now. Grants and knowledgeable help are available for the asking.

The planning system continues to cause unhappiness in many cases, particularly on the treatment of representations on applications where our ability to influence decisions has been further limited with the new process introduced in 2021. We do need a forum to identify exactly what we feel are weaknesses and agree on improvements, which will need a volunteer from among us to run it. If this appeals, please contact our Clerk in the first instance.

Dates for your diary (paid-up members only)

18th May 2022: Quarterly meeting as Annual Meeting, based at Braintree

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

MCML/25.2.2022