

# BRAINTREE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

*Supporting parish and town councils in the District of Braintree*

**Newsletter 4 - September 2022** (Note: click on [blue underlined](#) links to see more)

## **Management:**

Our former Clerk, Graham Walkingshaw, resigned after finding the work at BALC did not fit in well with his other commitments, and a new Clerk, Kevin Money, has been appointed. His contact details remain unchanged as [balc.clerk@gmail.com](mailto:balc.clerk@gmail.com). Kevin is setting up a [website](#) which could be used to provide up-to-date information and as a vehicle for communicating between ourselves. At this stage we don't have the resources to use other channels effectively, for instance Twitter or Facebook.

Your Executive Committee continues to meet regularly, making use of Zoom to save on travelling time and expense.

## **Points from meetings:**

### 30th March 2022 (Executive)

This meeting heard from Andrew Hull and Juliet O'Brien representing WASP (which supports residents opposed to a potential new prison on the former Wethersfield RAF site). They explained the implications in terms of traffic levels during construction and when in operation, using only existing roads and lanes for access. While jobs would be created these would not be well paid and unlikely to attract local staff. There were also concerns over the impact on local ecology. Overall the impact would be felt over much of our area and local councils should be keeping watch on developments.

It was also reported that BALC now had 34 member councils with a further 18 yet to join.

### 18th May 2022 (AGM)

After the elections (no changes), the meeting, in Witham's Town Hall and on Zoom, heard from Cllr Roger Duffin (Vice-chairman at Finchingfield) about the County Council's "["Levelling Up Strategy"](#)" which amongst other things drew attention to the variation across Essex in life expectancy, health outcomes, numbers of people in deprivation, and the rate of housebuilding. Discussion covered food bank use and free schools as well as difficulties in getting about faced by rural residents. There was some doubt about whether the Strategy properly addressed conditions in rural north Braintree ([see this Press article](#)). It was decided to ask member councils to give some thought to the issues raised.

### 20th July 2022 (Quarterly)

Carole Randall (ECC's Energy & Low Carbon Project Development Officer) and Alex Templeton (Director of Development at Community Works) explained how South East New Energy was enabling local energy generation projects to go ahead. Following questions it was suggested that individual parishes should put forward their own ideas when seeking funding.

Concerns over road closures affecting business volumes and the rate of staff turnover at EALC were also voiced.

**Next Quarterly Meeting** is on Wednesday 19th October 2022 at 7pm in the Witham Town Hall (61 Newland Street, CM8 2FE) and by Zoom, when we welcome Roger Hirst, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex.



### Working from home (“WFH”)

ACAS publish a useful guide on responsibilities as employer when staff work from home, as all the duties of ensuring a safe working environment still apply: see

<https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home-and-hybrid-working>.

### Financial planning for 2023-24

Our member councils mostly follow the national rates and conditions, where negotiations for rates from 1st April 2022 remain open. We would be interested in your views on what a fair and affordable settlement would look like from last April, and going forward for 2022-23 budgeting purposes. How will you be affected by rising prices and supply shortages/delays? What will be the impact on your precept?

Last Spring, BDC cancelled their refund of over-collection of parish precepts and stated that they would not be reinstating it. They “recycled” most of this money towards district councillor grant-making, with the result that part of the parish precept is used for this. Let us know if you feel this is unfair so that we can make the point to BDC as they approach drafting their budget proposals: once these get into print, usually in November, they will be harder to get altered.

### Planning matters

On 27th July BDC commenced a scrutiny project on developer contributions entitled “Section 106 – Open spaces and NHS expenditure” as there is widespread concern on how these are spent and particularly on delays. BDC holds about £6m of S106 money (plus further sums held by the NHS). The minutes of this meeting ([click here to view](#)) throw light on an area that remains somewhat obscure. For instance, BDC is required to publish details of contributions received and spent, yet the latest annual report only covers 2020-21. It is suggested that the new government may replace this system with something like CIL, with a sort of levy on developments. Unlike CIL the automatic passing down to local councils of a proportion of sums levied hasn’t been mentioned.

Local councils are entitled under CIL to a share of the proceeds where a scheme is in force (not in this District), which is greater (25%) when a Neighbourhood Development Plan has been adopted. Should BALC lobby for a Braintree CIL? By this July, there were 6 adopted NDPs with a further 7 in hand in this District.

**STOP PRESS:** BDC’s housing land supply at April 2022 has been published as 4.86 years against the requirement for 5 years’ supply, exposing the District to unwelcome housing development by speculators that the LPA will find it hard to resist.



### Quality Council Award Scheme

EALC administer this in Essex where we see rising numbers moving from Foundation through Quality and on to Gold standard. Size is not an obstacle. The main benefit is increased credibility with those we seek to influence, and of course with those we serve. Council members also gain confidence that their office support and their ways of working are all that they should and could be.

### Communications

At long last faster broadband is becoming more widely available, and often at very affordable prices. This should help rural businesses, especially service based, although in the meantime we experience random road closures that can increase delays and costs. [The Essex Highways website](#) is now pretty good at listing these with a clear indication as to what, where and when in each case.

### NHS changes

CCGs or Clinical Commissioning Groups have gone and primary medical and social care now come under new Integrated Care Boards, bringing together medical and care services. The aspiration is for Integrated Care to provide seamless, effective, and efficient care that reflects the whole of a person's health needs: from prevention through to end of life, across both physical, psychosocial, and mental health and in partnership with the individual, carers, and family members.

Organisationally the GP service is moving towards practice mergers seeking shared costs and economies of scale. This is a sophisticated approach that requires a degree of understanding of how the system is supposed to and actually works. The recent [Fuller Report](#) describes the way ahead. Local councils can have a role in offering advice.

However the budgets remain separate and “bed-blocking” continues when fit ex-patients remain in hospitals in the absence of a safe place to return to.

### **Your views?**

Write in to our Clerk if there are topics you feel we should cover.