

Annual Report 2025/26

Cllr. Iona Parker – BDC Stour Valley North Ward

This is the end of my 11th year as your District Councillor for the Stour Valley North Ward, which takes in the villages of Ridgewell, Ashen, Little Yeldham, Tilbury-Juxta-Clare, Ovington, the Belchamps, Pentlow, Foxearth, Liston and Borley. I aim to do my best to represent the interests of your communities on Braintree District Council, help residents with their enquiries and to serve on Council committees.

I am a chair of the Planning Committee and am also a member of the Local Plan sub committee, the Licensing Committee and one of the scrutiny committees. I have had a lot of meetings this year, as there have been many Local Plan sub committee meetings as well as Planning Committee and Planning Members Forum meetings. I also represent the Council at meetings of the Essex Rural Partnership. In addition, I endeavour to attend meetings of the 7 Parish Councils in my ward or send a written report if I am unable to attend in person.

I received £1,250 under the Councillors Community Grant Scheme and was able to provide funds for a hearing loop for Borley church, a new gate at Borley village hall and a defibrillator for the Essex Gliding Club. Since the inception of this scheme, I have tried to distribute the funds equally around my ward. I am pleased that despite ongoing pressures on the Council's budget, in 2026/27 the Council will be increasing the amount allocated to each Councillor under this scheme to £1,500. The Council is also restoring the twice-yearly verge cut to improve safety on roads, particularly rural roads.

As always, I have been dealing with a variety of issues raised with me including anti-social behaviour, planning issues and road signage and potholes. Resurfacing has taken place on various sections of road in my ward and I know more is planned, including in Foxearth and Sturmer, following the incessant rain this winter. I continue to report potholes on the Essex Highways website when I see them as well as reporting any fly tipping to BDC. I have supported residents and parish councils with problems caused by the construction of the solar park at Knowl Green and ensured the planning conditions are enforced. I have also supported Ridgewell Parish Council with their attempts to provide holiday activities for school children in the village.

In wider terms, Braintree District Council has continued with its priority of delivering high quality services on a balanced budget and this year, due to sensible decisions taken earlier, residents will see no increase in their Council Tax for 2026/27. There will also be no increase in the garden waste collection charges.

Plans for devolution for Essex are continuing which will see a directly elected Mayor and a Combined Authority, although the elections for the Mayor have been postponed till 2028. Devolution should enable Essex to take more strategic decisions itself rather than decisions being imposed by civil servants in London. 2027 should also see the creation of new unitary councils in Essex to replace the current mix of County, District/Borough and Unitary Councils. BDC has engaged in the Government consultation on this and supported the creation of 3 unitaries. The Government has recently announced that it is proposing 5 unitaries for Essex, with Braintree becoming part of a North East Essex unitary, along with Colchester and Tendring.

BDC has also been working on a new Local Plan for the District to extend the life of the current plan to the early 2040s. The Government has imposed a mandatory housing target on Councils and BDC has produced a draft plan setting out proposed allocations for housing and employment as well as updating planning policies. The public consultation on this (known as Reg

18) has just started and I would urge anyone interested to respond to the consultation, a link to which is on the BDC website. There are no housing allocations proposed for the villages in my ward.

The other major piece of work for this year has been the design and implementation of the new waste strategy. This came about as a result of Government legislation requiring Councils to collect more materials directly from households, a need to increase recycling and reduce the amount going to incineration, and a desire to increase revenue from recyclable materials, particularly paper and card. We were very pleased with the level of response to the consultation and are grateful to the time residents took to engage with this. The new bins have arrived and a letter with information on the new service will be sent to households in May.

Some highlights of the Braintree District Council achievements or activities during the 2025/26 year are:

- Awarded a contract to a new provider, Freedom Leisure, to run our 4 leisure centres in the District.
- Renewed the contract with Suffolk CC for processing of dry recyclates.
- Continued to support residents and communities impacted by the cost of living crisis. The budget allocated further funds to the Cost of Living Grant Scheme launched last year.
- Provided just short of the annual target of 250 affordable homes.
- Continued to operate the housing register, providing housing for those eligible for affordable housing and to provide temporary housing if required.
- Awarded grants from the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds to a number of businesses and community organisations.
- Supported delivery of a Safer Streets programme in Halstead and Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Braintree, including a PSPO to stop car racing.
- New 3G all-weather pitches in Braintree.
- Works started to improve the public realm on Witham and Halstead high streets.
- Continued with regular litter picking on the main roads in the District.
- Continued to respond to fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and other public nuisance issues.
- Developed a new Air Quality Strategy.
- Reviewed operation of the customer service centre to deal with incoming calls more quickly.
- Held Sports and Volunteer Awards to recognise achievements and a volunteer day to advertise volunteering opportunities to residents.
- Held a dementia awareness week and a slipper swap to reduce falls.
- Held a number of business briefings and jobs fairs both for young people and people in midlife, including a jobs fair in Halstead in March which attracted 189 attendees and 22 exhibitors.
- Responded to consultations on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Responded to consultations on National Grid's Bramford to Twinstead and Norwich to Tilbury pylon projects.

Cllr Iona Parker
10th March 2026