

## **REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 2023**

I have been pleased to continue representing The Colnes Ward over the last year; as usual it has been a busy time both for Braintree Council generally and also for me carrying out my Cabinet duties as the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure.

### **DISTRICT COUNCIL ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Developed 65 acres of employment land at Horizon 120, Great Notley, which is attracting new jobs and companies to our area. On the same site we have also built The Plaza Enterprise Centre part funded by £7million of the Government's Get Building Fund
- Developed the I Construct innovation hub which supports small companies in the development of new goods and services in the construction sector
- Revenues from The Plaza and I Construct now support the authority's income
- Completed a refresh of Braintree town centre including new homes, a hotel and the bus interchange
- Started plans for a refresh of Witham and Halstead town centres
- Enabled the building of 417 affordable homes against a target of 250
- Over £250,000 given to Councillors for the community grant scheme
- Delivered a Cycling Strategy to encourage a change of habits, allowing safer cycling connectivity across the District
- Adopted a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to make the Council's activities carbon neutral as far as practical by 2030
- Planted with the help of schools, Parish/Town councils and Community groups – 18,700 native tree whips and 73,000 bulbs
- Distributed tens of millions of pounds of pandemic grants to our businesses

### **MY ACHIEVEMENTS**

As I say, a busy year. I am probably most pleased about getting our District Local Plan adopted in July 2022. It has been a long time in the making but we do now have a document which determines where we want to see houses built

and it sets our planning policies until 2033. Having a Local Plan in place does not stop speculative applications coming forward and we do need the added protection of a 5 year housing supply in order to help with refusing unsuitable developments and defend refusals at appeal. Currently Braintree Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year supply, it stands at 4.86 years. This is frustrating because it is largely down to several sites with permission not being built out and, under current planning rules, these sites cannot be taken into account.

I look forward to seeing the detail of the Secretary of State's proposed planning reforms, one of which is less reliance on a 5 year supply when a Council is able to demonstrate that sufficient permissions have been given. There is also a suggestion that developers will be penalised if they do not build out on sites once permission has been granted.

The Planning Committee Members Forum has been established. An innovative process for this Council in order for members to engage with developers before applications are submitted to achieve better designs.

I continue to attend meetings, and engage with, representatives putting forward Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) such as the A12/A120 upgrades, National Grid's East Anglia Green project, Bramford-Twinstead energy upgrade and Longfield Solar Farm (Braintree/Chelmsford borders).

Without any difficulty, I have managed to spend my Councillor Community Grant allocation of £1200 on excellent projects within the Ward; some of these have been joint grants with Cllr Courtauld.

Finally, I have received numerous emails and phone calls from residents and the four Parish Councils within the Ward, asking for advice on a range of topics (not just planning!) and I have been pleased to help resolve those problems.

It has been a pleasure to represent The Colnes over the last year. Rest assured that Braintree District Council will continue to work hard and support residents in our part of Essex.

Gabrielle Spray