



Billericay Town Council Annual Report 2021/2022

Billericay – A Great Place to Be

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021/22 Cllr. Jim Devlin



The past two years have been dominated by the Coronavirus outbreak but thankfully I think we have turned the corner and life is resuming a normality, although things will have changed permanently for many in their working and leisure habits. The work of the Council has returned to normal and our meetings this year returned to being face-to-face instead of virtual on Zoom.

Billericay Town Council was very lucky in the timing of the construction of the magnificent Chantry Centre as it means we were able to use the larger spaces for our meetings unlike some Parish Councils that have had to resort to meeting in churches and cold barns. The Chantry Centre has gone from strength to strength since the removal of restrictions on gatherings and the bookings calendar is very full. The work that Councillors and especially our staff have put in to ensure that the Centre runs smoothly is enormous and brings to mind the picture of a swan, serene on the surface but a fantastic effort going on underneath. I do ask users to remember that this is a Centre run for the Community at very low

charges and we try to keep our running costs as low as possible by asking you to do the work of setting up and returning everything to its original condition, including cleaning up afterwards. This will enable us to continue keeping charges low. On the subject of charges I was particularly pleased that through good management of our finances we have been able to maintain our precept, the portion of your Council Tax that goes to the Town Council, at the same level as last year. When costs are rising fast elsewhere it is good to know that the Town Council will cost exactly the same as last year.

At our Annual Council Meeting last May, when I was re-elected as Chairman again, I stated that I would not be offering myself for re-election again in 2022. I wanted to give plenty of notice to Councillors so that someone could step up and take my place. I have been Chairman of the Town Council for 7 years, longer than any previous Chairman, and I feel it is time for someone else to take the helm. I will remain a Councillor and will continue with the work I do in the Town and the Council related work that I do outside of Billericay Town Council; I am Chairman of the Essex Local Councils Forum and sit on the Executive of the Essex Association of Local Councils and on the

Basildon Borough Council Standards Committee. It has been a pleasure to serve the residents of Billericay as Chairman of the Town Council since 2015 and I have enjoyed representing the Council at the many events I have attended in the Town.

As I look back over those seven years the Council has changed a lot, hopefully for the better. We have changed our focus as we have grown and are now more focused on delivering services. We have moved from our rented offices in the Coach House to the new Chantry Centre and are now in a position to be the hub of the community. In the future as the devolution process unfolds Billericay Town Council is poised to take on the roles that are given to it. My last official role as Chairman will be to Chair the Annual Town Meeting on 28th April in the Chantry Centre. We have changed the format of this meeting to make it more about the Town and its people, bluntly less boring Council data and more interesting details from local organisations. There will however be a chance for residents to question Councillors on any subject they need answers on, and I hope to see many residents there.

I now look forward to the Chantry Centre becoming the focal point in the Town. ■

HEALTH, WELLBEING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE Chairman: Cllr. Moira Moore



The Health, Wellbeing & Environment Committee works to enhance the environment around Billericay. We do this either by providing additional services or enhancing services provided by other councils.

We funded various planting around the War Memorial throughout the year. We also look after two small gardens in the town – the Festival Gardens located in Crown Road and the Jim Shields Garden at the junction of the High Street and Western Road.

The Town Council continues to provide hanging

baskets in the High Street during the summer months as well as planting flower displays in the summer and winter in the High Street planters.

Unfortunately much of the work of the Town Council had to be cancelled, deferred or much reduced by the Covid-19 pandemic that brought about various lockdowns and other restrictions to normal business. As a result we had to, once again, cancel the Billericay in Bloom competition. We did, however, continue to provide the Christmas lights in the High Street as well as an illuminated Christmas Tree outside the Chantry Centre.

During the year the contract relating to the public convenience in the car park behind

Santander became due for review. A cost benefit analysis and a town wide consultation regarding usage and removal was carried out. As a result of the ongoing costs and the response to the consultation the Town Council decided on removal. However, the Town Council has formed a Working Party which is examining how a similar resource could be provided for residents more economically.

We installed lighting for the bronze statue, celebrating the sailing of the Mayflower, located in the Jim Shields Garden. The War Memorial is also illuminated at night with the colours of the Union Jack. ■

FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE Chairman: Cllr. Adam Adshead



Despite increased costs, and in contrast to many local authorities we were able to freeze our Precept for 2022/23. The annual cost for a typical Band D household remains at £24.75 a year – about £2 per month – ensuring that Billericay remains one of the lowest charging Parish/Town Councils. During the year we were delighted to award three grants from our Community Grants fund to both new and established volunteer community groups.

Billericay Men's Shed were awarded £500 in start up costs to help refurbish a building in Lake Meadows as their meeting place. They focus on social isolation, helping to combat loneliness and unwanted isolation providing friendship and an opportunity to learn and pass on practical skills whilst benefiting the wider community.

The **Friends of Lake Meadows**, a group of dedicated volunteers who the Town Council have supported over many years were granted £375 to purchase plants to replenish the rhododendron area.

Finally £337 was awarded to **Billericay Parkrun** towards the cost of a defibrillator to support their new start area. Open to anyone, they operate a 5km walk/jog/run around Lake Meadows every Saturday. The Parkrun has now seen over 45,000 finishers since it started in Billericay.

With the move of our staff and offices to the new Chantry Centre the majority of our effort has been in building our experience of managing and running the facility.

In moving to the new building our high level

objectives were two-fold:

- **Social:** to provide facilities for community groups to use at an affordable cost. This year of the 2,400 hours of activities over half have been delivered by community/not-for-profit groups based in Billericay.

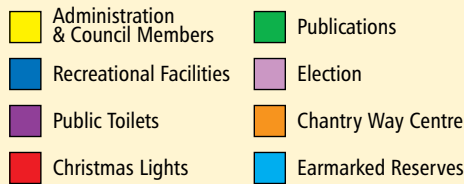
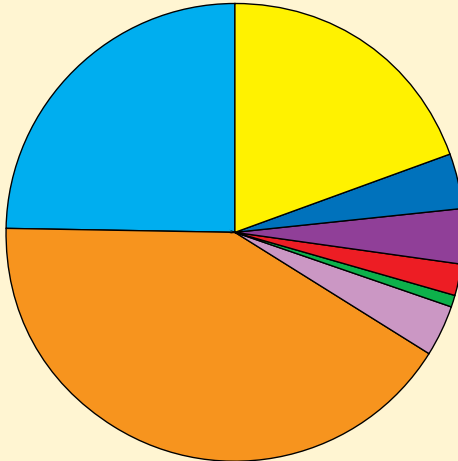
- **Financial:** to generate income from commercial hirings to subsidise costs. Almost 75% of the revenue has come from commercial organisations. With 2 weeks to go before our financial Year End we expect to have generated over £40,000 in revenue, significantly ahead of expectations from our first "start up" year of operations.

The facility is hosting a wide range of activities. Some 470 hours have been provided by groups focusing on social isolation or social support, 142 hours concentrating on young children and 315 hours of meetings by community groups and clubs. We've hosted jazz concerts and films, support groups, exercise classes and lectures as well as providing a base for the Rotary Club for the Christmas Market.

Cost control plays an important part of F&GP's activities. This has been especially important in our first year when many costs had to be estimated (utility bills, cleaning costs etc.) and I am glad to report that we will finish the year under budget. We are fortunate to have isolated ourselves from the current energy crisis having locked in our electricity costs until late 2025 and our gas until 2027.

Looking forward it is encouraging to note that our pre-bookings for the 2022/23 year already exceed those of this year and it is reasonable to assume that our revenue will be substantially higher in the next financial year. ■

EXPENDITURE & RESERVES 2021/2022*



EXPENDITURE AND RESERVES		
2020/21	EXPENDITURE	2021/22*
£'000	DESCRIPTION	£'000
122	Administration & Council Members	91
13	Recreational Facilities	18
19	Public Toilets	18
13	Christmas Lights	10
25	Other Projects	0
3	Publications	5
0	Election	16
919	Chantry Way Centre	193
0	Youth Town Council	0
9	Earmarked Reserves	114
1297	Total	465

* figures are approximate as were prepared before year end final close off

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE		
2020/21	INCOME	2021/22*
£'000	SOURCE	£'000
292	Precept	300
0	Interest Earned	0
1	Local sponsorship	0.5
5	Outside Funding	1.5
616	General Reserve	6
9	Earmarked Reserve	0
0	Chantry Way Centre	38
200	PWLB	119
1123	Total	465

BYTC Chairman: Archie MacKay

Last October we sadly said goodbye to several of our older Youth Councillors who had reached the maximum age of 18 years and were entering the next stage of their careers and going off to University. We wish them all every success in their future careers.

Our Chairman Oliver Grimes also stepped down to devote more time to revision. We thank you Oliver for all your hard work as Chairman, and we still have you as a Youth Councillor for another year.

As one Chairman steps down we welcome new Chairman, Archie Mackay and wish him well for his Chairmanship.

We also congratulate Jessica Garlick, James King, Lucy Popham, Elias O'Callaghan, James Sherwood and George Wood who are now Officers of the Youth Town Council.

Like many organisations we struggled during lockdown, but continued to meet on Zoom. With our new committee we are beginning to pick up momentum and hope soon to be actively involved in community work. ■

COUNCILLORS ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS APRIL 2021 – MARCH 2022

COUNCILLOR	PLANNING	FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES	HEALTH, WELLBEING & ENVIRONMENT	COUNCIL	TOTAL
Cllr A Adshead		5	6	5	16
Cllr J Clark	13	4	6	6	29
Cllr L Clark	8			6	14
Cllr R Clark	13	6		6	25
Cllr M Dear	2	3	2	3	10
Cllr J Devlin	15	4	5	5	29
Cllr J Henshaw	8	1		5	14
Cllr C May	14			5	19
Cllr M Moore	12	6	6	5	29
Cllr K Mordecai			5	6	11
Cllr M Mordecai		1	2	5	8
Cllr M Roessler		6		6	12
Cllr E Sainsbury			5	5	10
Cllr C Smith				5	5
Cllr D Spencer	13		6	4	23
Cllr G Talbot		4		6	10
Cllr A Talboys	14	6		5	25
Cllr M Thomas		6	5	3	14
Cllr J Tutton		1	1	2	4
Cllr D Wakefield	10		6	5	21



First meeting of the new youth town council after the election

PLANNING COMMITTEE Chairman: Cllr. Jim Devlin



During the past year the Planning Committee has operated mainly with physical meetings but there was a short period when powers were devolved to the Planning Committee Clerk into conjunction with myself when we were unable to hold meetings because of restrictions.

Over the past year we reviewed 324 applications, an increase of 38 over the previous year. Of these applications Billericay Town Council had no objection to 193 and Basildon Borough Council granted permission to go ahead with the development. Most of these were for small extensions which would not impact on neighbours or the general street scene and thus there was no reason that they should not be permitted. There is a presumption that development should be allowed unless there is a good reason that it should not go ahead. There were however 39 applications where the Town Council objected and Basildon did not

agree with us and granted permission. In general our objections were because of over development, excessive height or damage to the street scene. These are quite subjective issues and opinions vary. Conversely there were 26 applications that the Town Council did not object to that Basildon refused, so it works both ways. Those of you that are alert will have noticed that the figures don't add up, this is because the applications that the Town Council have looked at have not all been determined by Basildon Council.

In some case Basildon Council will refuse an application and the applicant will not accept that ruling. In that case they have the right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. During the last year 6 applicants did this. At the appeal the submissions by Basildon and the Town Council are looked at by the Inspector in the light of the application. This year the Inspectors upheld 3 appeals and dismissed the other 3, I suppose that is a score draw.

The Committee is also a consultee on Licencing Applications. Again, just like Planning, the law now states that an application must be granted unless there is evidence that granting the application will cause harm in a number of specified areas. This is a vital role that the Town Council can play as we can provide some of the local knowledge that may otherwise be missing. Over the course of the year seven new licences were issued, all but one in the High Street.

Each year there are usually a number of consultations that the Committee has to reply to. The pandemic certainly reduced the number that appeared and last year Basildon asked us to comment upon a new Street Naming Policy that it was looking to implement.

The Planning Committee is the busiest Committee of the Town Council and meets every two weeks on a Tuesday at 7pm in the Chantry Centre. All meetings are open to the public. ■

TOWN CRIER & ANNUAL REPORT Editor: Cllr. Marie Dear



Welcome to the first delivered edition of the Town Crier for a while due to covid restrictions. The Town Crier aims to keep residents in touch with Town Council projects. It will now be published again at intervals throughout the year and give the latest news on our activities and initiatives.

We are never short of material as there are so many community minded volunteers in Billericay which provides a wealth of potential material for publication in the Town Crier.

Articles from residents are welcome for consideration but please limit these to 200 words as space is tight.

The Annual Report provides a deeper analysis of the Town Council's projects and activities.

Thanks are due to our graphic designer, David Vinten, for his work on our publications. ■

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

AS RESIDENTS WILL be aware, recent weeks have seen significant developments with the progress of the Local Plan. As it stands, given long-standing questions over whether the proposed Plan reflects current housing demand and following significant Resident concerns over the use of the Green Belt, at the Extraordinary Basildon District Council Meeting held on Thursday 10 February 2022, an Emergency Motion which resolved to withdraw the Emerging Basildon Borough Local Plan was approved and was ratified at the subsequent full Council meeting on 3rd March.

These latest events are yet more twists and turns in a saga that commenced in April 2014 with the Town Council response to the initial draft Plan and consultation process. Throughout this period the Town Council has been diligent in listening to the views of residents as well as responding with our own thorough critique of the proposals.

The significant groundswell of local opposition resulted in a further protracted delay whilst Basildon deployed a consultancy review and undertook further consultation.

In 2018 the Town Council set up a dedicated Working Group to carry out an in-depth review of the revised draft Plan culminating in a detailed submission to Basildon which highlighted the proposed Plan's many shortcomings. These included;

- Scale of proposed building
- Detrimental impact on local environment and green belt
- Lack of workable proposals on the provision of community infrastructure
- Weak proposals for an appropriate transport infrastructure
- The proposed housing mix.

Throughout this protracted period Billericay Town Councillors have participated in consultation meetings with Basildon Council, responded to requests for feedback, and sought the views of Residents. We will continue to do so as Basildon seeks to achieve an acceptable Local Plan which meets the needs and aspirations of Billericay's current and future Residents.



LATEST NEWS ON BILLERICAY PLAY AREAS

OUTWOOD COMMON – The Town Council was contacted at the end of last year by residents of Outwood Common as the play equipment at Morris Avenue is tired and outdated. They approached the Town Council to ask whether we would be prepared to revamp the area and make it a much more exciting play space. To start the project off local homes were leafletted asking for comments/suggestions, and Sunnymede School PTA got pupils involved by asking them to design a park or a particular piece of equipment they would like to see on the site. All the children's designs will be reviewed by the Council and we will be working with the community to get this project underway as soon as possible.

LAKE MEADOWS – unfortunately the wooden skatepark had to be removed due to constant vandalism, so in 2020 the Town Council started consulting with skatepark users to find out what they wanted to see it replaced with. In 2021 Basildon Borough Council informed us that they were intending to take the project over in its entirety and had approved a £500,000 budget to be split between facilities in Billericay and Laindon. This is great news for the young people of Billericay and it is hoped they will have their new skatepark before the summer.