

**MINUTES OF THE 2026 BILLERICAY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
HELD IN THE MAIN HALL, CHANTRY CENTRE, CHANTRY WAY, BILLERICAY
ON THURSDAY 23rd APRIL 2026 @ 7.00P.M.**

In the Chair: Cllr J Devlin, Chairman Billericay Town Council

Present: The Rt. Hon. Richard Holden MP
Fourteen Town Councillors
Ten member of the public

Also in attendance: the Town Clerk

1/26 Welcome by Town Council Chairman

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the twenty-sixth Billericay Annual Town Meeting. He also thanked Richard Holden MP for attending.

2/26 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 24th April 2025

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 24th April 2025 were summarised by Cllr Devlin, then taken as read and approved as a correct record. No questions were raised and there were no matters arising.

3/26 The Rt. Hon. Richard Holden MP

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Five Essex unitaries are the Government's preferred option which is not sensible, goes against their own advice on size/population, and also does not reflect natural community boundaries. Mr Holden said that since taking office 15,000 pieces of casework have come across his desk and he sees everything which gives him a feel for the issues affecting constituents. He knows that with Basildon being joined with Thurrock under LGR many residents are concerned about Thurrock's debt and whether it will have any long term effect on local services. As yet no reassurances have been received from Government.

Housing Development. Current plans from developers will see a merging of towns all the way along the Thames. Provision of more housing must be done in context and within reasonable planning boundaries. The Mayor of London has underperformed in respect of housing targets which is why development has spread outside. It is important to protect the Green Belt, plus the scale of the proposals are wrong and will destroy communities that people are proud to call home. Government policies are also having a big impact on businesses within the constituency due to changes in business rates and the national insurance contribution increases.

Constituency. Mr Holden undertakes visits across the constituency and has been to many schools as part of this. It is important for young people to understand about democracy and that there is a direct connection between the local Member of Parliament and the Prime Minister. He is everyone's MP whether you voted for him or not, and he will always represent everyone.

4/26 Question and Answer Session

Q. Transport – both highways and public transport are a concern for residents.

- A.** There is room for improvement and as Shadow Transport Secretary Mr Holden is involved in obtaining this. Hauliers are also very concerned about the impact of the current world situation on fuel duty.
- Q.** Why is it so difficult to make an appointment for an x-ray? The number you are given to call is very often unanswered and even if you hang on you will get cut off after 30 minutes of waiting. Surely there is a more efficient system.
- A.** GP access and hospital services do have issues. Most NHS staff do a good job, but the main issues come from layers of management. Mr Holden picks up cases for people that come to him directly as he can help if residents get stuck in the system. The Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) are currently under re-organisation and there should be one across Essex soon. People mostly want to find out what is wrong with them quickly so Mr Holden is fighting to get more diagnostic centres locally and would like to see one in Billericay.
- Q.** Many drivers don't stick to the speed limits in and around Billericay.
- A.** Along with the speeding in Queens Park Avenue other areas have issues with parking, e.g. around the new Aldi supermarket. Mr Holden is looking to get this addressed relatively easily with small changes. Also footpaths and bridleways don't all link. He will speak with the Chief Constable of Essex Police as they meet regularly.
- Q.** Many young people are concerned about infrastructure around the new housing developments – where will the schools and doctor's surgeries come from?
- A.** All the new building will have a worrying impact on both social infrastructure and traffic congestion. The local plan isn't aligned to delivery of local services. 27,000 more houses across the Borough means 50,000 to 60,000 more people. This is equivalent to a population three times the size of Billericay and will require a huge amount of extra services. East London schools are undersubscribed on a mass level and many are closing due to falling numbers. The Government should focus on building more properties in the capital rather than see these schools close.
- Q.** Many young people have safety concerns due to both crime and anti-social behaviour when travelling on public transport.
- A.** Mr Holden said that the Billericay Youth Town Council were really good at highlighting the issues, and are a very good voice for young people
- A.** Trackside Litter at Billericay Station gives a really poor impression of the town to visitors arriving by train but is difficult to engage with the train operators and get something done.
- Q.** Mr Holden made a commitment to get this sorted. He also feels that the hoarding located at the junction of Radford Way is an eyesore and would like to get that addressed also.

Cllr Devlin thanked Mr Holden for attending.

5/26 Closing Address and Summary of the Council's year

Cllr Devlin said his return to Chairman last May was unexpected, but highpoints of this year have included the Town Council working with Cash Access UK, and the MP to get a banking hub in the High Street, and working with Basildon Council to start the Business Improvement District (BID). The Town Council has funded a youth worker in collaboration with the Bar'n'Bus charity and taken over the running of the Good Companions senior citizens club at the start of the year otherwise it would have had to close. These activities are an indication that the direction of the council is changing and that we are now looking to achieve different things.

Under LGR Billericay is due to join with Thurrock under Basildon. Cllr Devlin is meeting with Cllr. Callaghan, the current leader of Basildon Council, to discuss amongst other things LGR and local elections.

Community organisations in the town are doing well. The Billericay Community Cinema celebrated their 10th anniversary and also won a couple of national awards. The Community Pastors are also expanding and linking in with other groups in Essex.

Finally he mentioned the Council's Committee Clerk Diane McCathy who retired last year after twelve years service. He thanked Diane for her contribution to the Council and wished her well.

The Chairs of Planning, Health, Wellbeing and Environment and Finance and General Purposes then presented a summary of each Committee's year.

Cllr Chris May – Planning

Planning committee serves two key functions. To review and evaluate planning applications and responding to consultations and national surveys. Applications are scrutinised for impact on the local environment, contravention of regulations, and any detriment to the conservation area. Although members have local knowledge the Committee has no statutory powers and comments carry no additional weight. Many consultations have been responded to in the course of the year, notably the Local Plan, and three key iterations have been reviewed to date. 8,000 new homes will have a big impact on the town and there are concerns about a lack of robust plans and strategies for the infrastructure required to meet people's needs. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) introduced the Grey Belt which the Town Council has strongly argued against, as it is vital to try and preserve the Green Belt as much as possible. The National Grid Norwich to Tilbury pylon project was objected to strongly. Further consultation on the Local Plan is due next year, meanwhile developers are using this period to apply for yet more developments.

Cllr Moira Moore – Health, Wellbeing and Environment

The committee tries to enhance the environment of the town. During the past year the War Memorial was repaired and cleaned, and there is currently a project underway to redesign the green spaces known as Jim Shields and Festival Gardens. One of the aims for Festival Gardens is to make the space more accessible for disabled people and to also reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour that takes place there. A solar compacting bin has replaced an always overflowing bin outside the Chantry Centre and we are working with the Borough Council to try and get more litter bins throughout the town. The Committee worked with the British Heart Foundation to place a living memorial red bench on Sun Corner as part of their 65th anniversary celebrations. The pole baskets and planters continue to provide colourful floral displays in the High Street and we planted up two large new planters provided by the

BBC area committee. The Christmas Lighting Scheme will be extended to other areas of the High Street in 2026, and with the Police Station being sold a new flagpole is to be installed outside the Chantry Centre so we can continue to fly the Town Flag.

Cllr Adam Adshead, Finance & General Purposes Committee

Finance and General Purposes is responsible for raising and overseeing how the Council obtains and spends money. This ensures the Council runs on a financially sound basis. The precept for 2026/27 is unchanged from the previous year, so a Band D property still pays just £26.01 per annum. The Committee also oversees the operation of the Chantry Centre, revenue from which has increased by 8% this year. A large variety of organisations use the Centre and key initiatives for this year have been to offer an events assistance grant to individuals and community groups to encourage activities that don't currently run in Billericay. A portion of the Public Works Loan Board borrowing was repaid from reserves to reduce the Council's debt. Also a full-time youth worker for the town is being funded for an initial one-year period and a councillor will monitor and work closely with Bar'N'Bus who are the charity providing the youth worker.

Cllr Devlin thanked the Committee Chairs for their reports and asked whether there were any questions. As there were none, he thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.06pm.