



Gosfield & Greenstead Green Ward

ANNUAL REPORT to PARISHES in the **GOSFIELD & GREENSTEAD GREEN WARD**

by DISTRICT COUNCILLOR **PETER SCHWIER**

It has been around one year ago that we last met face to face, and it has been a year like no other in the memories of most members and residents reading this.

Some of us have learned new IT skills to allow to continue the best we can. Some of us have even learned how to mute and unmute our Zoom meetings.

Over the last year over 10,400 residents in the Braintree District contracted Covid-19 and regrettably over 360 related deaths were registered. I am sure I speak for all of us in expressing our condolences to the family and friends of those who have died or been seriously ill.

The District Council itself has faced many unique challenges.

Facilities for staff to work from home have had to be provided, arrangements for Council businesses to continue together with those of Parish Councils and voluntary bodies, have had to be put into place to hold formal decision making remotely. This has highlighted very clearly some of the deficiencies in internet connectivity in parts of our district.

The Covid expenditure to the Council has cost in excess of £3.55m with some £2.24m from loss of income. This includes other less obvious expenditure such as the need to financially support our leisure provider which operates on a not for profit basis and have had no income to maintain the swimming pools and other leisure facilities in a safe and sustainable manner in order to prevent them from closing down.

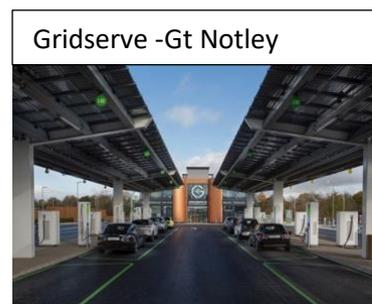
Officers and Members have aimed to keep Parish Councils and local businesses informed about the incidence and spread of the disease and what financial support is available for those financially affected. The Council has invited, administered, and distributed government grants to around 7,200 local businesses with a total expenditure currently awarded at £39,838,458.00.

Council staff have had to learn new skills to carry out work in addition to their usual duties.

- EHOs have been seconded to operate the finer details of the test and trace initiative.

- Economic Development and Revenue & Benefits Teams have been responsible for distributing government grants to individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic.
- Council Officers and Members have aimed to keep parishes informed about the very latest developments in the incidence of Covid, and the vaccination rollout and details of any financial aid that might be available to those affected financially due the lockdown.

Despite these considerable financial and staffing pressures, the Council has continued to develop its environmentally friendly initiatives. We have established and earmarked reserves of £500,000 to take forward our 'green' priorities. We have maintained the popular Councillor Community Grant scheme for 2021/22. New expenditure also includes a new artificial grass pitch at the Halstead leisure centre at a cost £750,000, and £100,000 for children's play areas. We aim to support the future of the District by creating new jobs and making financial investments. Work on the creation of a three storey £14m Enterprise Centre on the new Horizon 120 Business Park and Innovation Park at Great Notley has started. This will provide a state- of- the- art energy efficient complex with shared meeting rooms, flexible workspaces, conference and training facilities and offices for smaller businesses to grow into. The Business Park also boasts the first all solar-powered electric vehicle-charging centre in the UK, to supplement the 16 new dual electric vehicle charging points being installed across the District.



Additional funding has also been made available to improve the Town Centres of our three major towns.

The Planning Inspectorate finally approved part 1 of the Local Plan, and at the same time confirmed that the number of houses we have to provide for in the Plan period 2013-2033 is 14,320, or 716 per year. Disappointingly, Part 2 of the Plan is not due to be examined by the Inspectorate until July 2021.

The financial commitments and our ambitions towards maintaining service standards have been set against a background of prudent financial management. We are not intending to increase car-parking charges to help support our town centres as life gradually returns to normal, and unlike many other local authorities across the country, we did not increase our share of the Council Tax for 2021/22.

I have been immensely proud of the numerous voluntary organisations across our Parishes who have supported the vulnerable by delivering medicines, food, and other basics during the lockdowns.

The Covid epidemic has affected people in a variety of different ways and as we come out of the lockdown, there will be lasting problems of social isolation, loneliness, emotional instability, and health. The Council supported by our communities will continue to do whatever we can to help ease these problems.

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