

23rd January 2019

Policy, Projects and Resources Committee

Chair's Update Report

Report of: *Phil Ruck, Chief Executive*

Wards Affected: *All Wards*

This report is: *Public*

Welcome to a New Year and as we move forward in 2019, we continue with our ambitious projects, working within tight budgetary control and are well prepared for the challenges ahead.

This year, we have some major projects coming through including our Leisure Strategy, a new Repairs & Maintenance contract for housing, progressing the Local Development Plan, appointing a Joint Venture Partner for our Town Centre plans - and our move back into a newly refurbished, repurposed Town Hall.

Next Christmas might seem a long way off but I am pleased to report retailers and traders are already expressing interest in booking for the Lighting Up Brentwood and Shenfield events 2019. Lighting Up Brentwood had its best turn out to date with almost 15,000 celebrating the countdown to Christmas on Saturday 25th November. These events are much enjoyed by our residents and clearly boost trade in Brentwood and Shenfield. Officers are working on a broader sponsorship offering which will support business and generate revenue. Together with the Family Day events, Strawberry Fayre, and Brentwood Business Showcase 2019 we continue to create opportunities for our local economy to flourish and build their businesses.

Living in Brentwood is a highly desirable proposition and there can be no doubt that our green spaces and woodland are a major factor in this. We have a duty to protect and enhance our environment and I'm delighted that work is now underway to implement the 5-year management plan to maintain and protect our parks. This follows the receipt of a £46,000 Woodland Management Grant. Financed by the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency our woodlands are partly Ancient Semi Natural Woodland – which makes up just 3% of the land coverage in the UK. We are privileged to have such an asset in our borough. This ongoing work will ensure that our residents can safely enjoy their local habitat knowing it is also protected for generations to come.

Maintenance is a necessary investment to protect our assets and I am delighted to say that the Repairs & Maintenance contract for our Housing is about to be signed

following a full and robust procurement process. This contract, worth just over £79m over 15 years, is a major step forward in getting the best deal for our taxpayers and the residents who live in our accommodation. Our Housing team has also identified some properties in Brookfield Close, Hutton which have subsidence. While there is no risk to residents long term, these properties will be replaced with new affordable housing. Tenants have been fully informed of the plans and are now being moved gradually to more suitable properties with officers overseeing the process with individual residents as needed. Long term this will offer the opportunity to provide much better, more efficient homes for residents which are much needed.

Maximising assets and efficiency is the key and this year and the return of our staff to the Town Hall is arguably our flagship example of how successful this can be. I am delighted that negotiations with a significant new tenant wishing to move into the building are now complete and I hope to be in a position to announce the full details very soon. In the coming months, the first residential apartments will be ready to let, community space will be prepared, council officers workspace areas will be set up and of course the civic areas and council chambers will be finalized. I have seen the work first hand and I know that members will be offered the chance to see for themselves the significant and exciting changes. The Town Hall project is ambitious but has been brought to fruition on schedule and is a significant example of what can be achieved by maximizing the assets we have.

We are nearing the end of the procurement process for a Joint Venture Partner to work on the Town Centre plans – another huge project that will be underway this year. Seven Arches Investments Limited continues to review, with expert advisers, the commercial property market for opportunities to invest and maximise our revenue streams.

2019 will be a significant year in so many ways. Particular regard must be made to our Local Development Plan and Brentwood Town Centre.

The Pre-Submission Local Plan was approved in November, and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal has been updated with certain evidence to reflect amendments made by Members at the Extraordinary Council. The LDP public consultation will run for six weeks and launch in the coming weeks with the Duty to Cooperate discussion continuing with our neighbouring authorities, including Essex County Council, and other stakeholders. During this consultation process the Draft Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide which goes into detail on the design considerations for the Town Centre development, will also be open for public comment. This will enable residents to explore the proposals and express their views.

The LDP is a live workstream that constantly adapts to the broader picture, particularly in relation to wider infrastructure. The Council is involved in two major road infrastructure projects - the Lower Thames Crossing and M25 Junction 28 - (Brook Street roundabout). Last month we approved and submitted a response to

the Lower Thames Crossing proposals and highlighted our concerns around the M25 Junction 29 improvements, which potentially impact on the access to the proposed Brentwood Enterprise Park. Discussions with Highways England continue of course and will feed into both the Highways England proposal and the Brentwood Local Plan.

It's a busy year ahead, with complex challenges nationally. However, I am confident Brentwood Borough Council is in an excellent position to forge ahead with our plans, see them through to fruition and make Brentwood a Better Place to Be.

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