

Committee(s): Ordinary Council	Date: 13 th March 2024
Subject: Leaders Report, Cllr Barry Aspinell	

Along with other Members, I attended a planning briefing on the 14th February to discuss land North of Shenfield, one of the sites approved in our Local Development Plan. The developing consensus from those attending the briefing indicated that this particular site needs considerable work in developing an approach that delivers on its LDP objectives and we shall be looking to our new Director of Planning to take this forward.

On Monday 11th March, I attended a meeting with the Chief Executive along with the Leaders and Chief Executives of Thurrock and Basildon to discuss the *West Horndon Project*. This is a development proposal that Thurrock have in their Local Development Plan with a planning application expected to be submitted by September for 2,000 homes on the Thurrock side of West Horndon Station. This forms part of their overall scheme to deliver 8,000 – 10,000 new homes. Basildon were present as they share a border with Thurrock close to this project. As Leader of Brentwood Borough Council, I raised the major infrastructure improvements that would need to be put forward, not least the problems of building and developing on a green belt, flood plain. The major concern to Brentwood Borough and our West Horndon residents is the terminology ‘rapid development’ and ‘rapid planning application approval’ being used, which seems out of kilter with the need for appropriate consideration of these proposals.

When we took over control, while not a direct Brentwood Borough Council responsibility, I met with the Cabinet Member for Highways to discuss a whole range of issues affecting our borough, one of those issues was the poor condition of our roads due to the increasing number of potholes that seemingly remain unrepaired. I shared concerns that when they are eventually attended to, the repairs prove to be very temporary, reverting to their unwelcome condition within a few short weeks.

I had proposed that, pending Brentwood Council ‘s agreement, we could explore an arrangement whereby Brentwood retained a dedicated pothole repair team for the town’s exclusive use. As this was a ‘first time ’proposal the Cabinet Member found it an interesting and engaging idea and agreed to give further consideration.

Following the successful introduction of the Brentwood Business Improvement District (BID) a collective fund of £2 million over five years will be available for local businesses and other partners to initiate projects that will range from the improvement of Ingatestone, Shenfield and Brentwood High Streets to organising the celebrations that are so well received Plans for Christmas are already underway and promise to be bigger, better and more exciting than ever before!

Preparations are also well underway in transferring our wedding service from the Town Hall to Merrymeade House. This new arrangement will provide a more tranquil surroundings for such occasions.

I have been speaking to the Police regarding the potential for a dedicated team of officers who would focus solely on Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone under a similar arrangement currently enjoyed by Epping Forest Council. I am still awaiting a response despite several approaches to them. On a positive note, I am informed that the Epping arrangement has reduced all levels of crime in their area significantly and as such I intend to press for a similar outcome in Brentwood.

We have also undertaken a Peer Review, which in Brentwood's case has been conducted by Councils from around the country who are in a similar position, i.e., one team of officers holding the responsibility of running two separate councils. The outcome of this Review will be fully reported in due course, but I think it's safe to say we came out with a whole host of compliments and a few suggestions where certain procedures could be improved. We can even be proud that some of this Joint Administration's newly introduced initiatives have been taken away by our reviewing councils for implementation in their own workplaces.

The Peer Review report is clear in defining each council's strengths and weaknesses, in my opinion, to ignore such a process is incredibly disappointing and pays little regard to the advice provided that will help us to improve our delivery and approach for residents.