

Report to the Council 24 March 2015

Committee: Asset & Enterprise Committee

Chair: Cllr Russell Quirk

Since the last Council there have been two meetings of the Asset & Enterprise Committee, 21 January 2015 and 18 February 2015, and a number of key decisions have been made and action undertaken.

The Committee discussed or were updated and action has been undertaken on the following issues:

- Terms have been agreed for the conditional sale of Hallsford Bridge.
- The contracted developer of Bell Mead has submitted a planning application for the provision of 14 residential units 5 of which are to be affordable units.
- A Report was presented to the Committee on the Asset Management Strategy. Action Plan Update.
- The rent review at Harewood Road has been settled and arrears recovered
- Westbury Road car park and the Multi Storey Car Park are now subject to reviews to determine what more valuable uses the assets could be put to.
- The refurbishment and letting of two vacant cemetery lodges to the private rented sector has been progress, 5 London Road has now been let and the refurbishment of the other lodge will be completed shortly.
- An exercise to seek expressions of interest from community groups interested in running Hutton Community Centre has been undertaken and a group has been identified as the preferred provider.
- Work to refurbish and subdivide Old House to provide 5/6 residential units has been progressed. Invitations to tender for the works are to invited week commencing 23 March 2015

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Committee: Audit & Scrutiny Committee

Chair: Councillor Graeme Clark

The Audit and Scrutiny Committee met on 9 March 2015. Task and Finish Groups continued to deliver the Scrutiny work programme.

Audit

Audit Plan 2014/15: The Plan summarised the initial assessment of the key risks driving the development of an effective audit for the Council and outlined the planned audit strategy in response to any risks.

Internal Audit Plan 2014/17: The Committee approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/17 and the Operational Plan for 2015/16.

Internal Audit Progress Report: The Committee noted the progress on the implementation of internal audit recommendations.

Internal Audit Charter: The Committee approved the Internal Audit Charter for 2015/16.

Scrutiny

Call-in of decision 458 of the Asset and Enterprise Committee 18 February 2015, Hutton Community Centre – New Lease

A call-in complying with the requirements set out in Part 4.4 of the Council's Constitution, was received within the permitted timescale following the publication of decision 458 of the Asset and Enterprise Committee. The Asset and Enterprise Committee had resolved that delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Asset Manager after consultation with the Chair of the Asset and Enterprise Committee to negotiate and enter into a lease of the Hutton Community Centre with Essex Boys and Girls Clubs.

The Committee, having followed Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 10 -14 in full, resolved that the decision 458 of the Asset and Enterprise Committee 18 February 2015 be implemented without further delay.

Scrutiny Work Programme: The Committee agreed to amend its work programme for 2015/16, following two referrals under Regulation 6 of the Local Authorities (Committee System) (England) Regulations 2012 to include officer reports on a) the Appointment of an Interim Chief Executive and Designation as Head of Paid Service and b) the Revenues and Benefits – Shared Services Partnership. Further, the Committee agreed

c) to establish a task and finish group to consider Member engagement with the press with regard to the Member Code of Conduct and the reputation of the Council; and d) the withdrawal of the Brentwood Committee Transport item.

The Chair and Vice Chair would like to thank all Members and Officers who worked on task and finish groups throughout the year.

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Committee: Business and Town Centres Committee

Chair: Councillor David Kendall

A Task and Finish Group has met to develop a proposal for the second stage to complete the *Brentwood Business Directory*. This is being presented at the Business & Town Centres Committee on 26 March 2015. The preferred option is to purchase the remaining data records from external supplier and then undertake a telemarketing exercise in-house utilizing the Borough Council's Customer Contact Team.

The Directory will assist us to understand who our businesses are so that we can engage, support and communicate with them effectively to support their growth and development.

Following agreement at the 23 February Business and Town Centres Committee, a Working Group held its first meeting on the 16th March to consider and discuss developing a Borough *Car Parking Strategy*.

The first ever *Brentwood Borough Business Speednetworking event* was held successfully on the 18 March 2015 at De Rougemont Manor attracting nearly 60 businesses. Workshops were also provided on how to recruit an apprentice, and presentations made by Essex County Council on their apprenticeships scheme and from UKTI on export advice. An evaluation of the event and its impact on businesses will be reported at the 26 March 2015 Business & Town Centres Committee.

A free business briefing on *Business Planning – Making your Business Grow*, was held on 25 February 2015 9am to 12.30pm at The Town Hall, Brentwood. This was the second in a series of free briefings planned in partnership with Pro-Actions Ltd, business coaching experts. The briefing outlined the steps that businesses can take to make business planning effective for them and provided an opportunity for networking. The event also provided an opportunity to introduce Brentwood Borough Council's Economic Development Team and our work to support businesses and key priorities. The marketing of the event was supported by the Council's business directory and was attended by 16 businesses. From the 13 evaluation sheets all attendees rated the event as very good or excellent. 100% rated the content, presentation and delivery as very good or excellent. All attendees expressed an interest in one or more of the future events that we are planning and 12 of the 13 businesses providing feedback stated that the briefing would be helpful for the future of their business.

The first edition of the *Brentwood Borough Council Business E-Newsletter* was issued on the 26 February 2015. This is an online newsletter that will be produced by the ED

Team on an adhoc basis when there is significant news and information on business support events and projects that we wish to communicate to businesses. The newsletter was sent out to the 1186 businesses with email on the Brentwood Business Directory and to key business groups and partners. It includes information on the Brentwood Business Speed Networking Event, the Get Your Business Online for Free Event, Essex Means Business: Project Europe Conference, Free Mentoring& Training for Start-Up SMEs in the Tourism and Hospitality Sector and Digital Skills for Growth Programme. The newsletter includes a link for businesses to provide their feedback and ideas for future editions and an opportunity to register to be included on the Brentwood Business Directory. This feedback will be monitored by the ED team and appropriate action taken. As the Business Directory grows the reach of the newsletter will extend.

Firebreak

A Young Persons Firebreak course took place the week commencing 23rd March. The project continues to be one the most effective projects the Community Safety team commission for young people. The project which works with 12 young people helps to build confidence, promote team work and to help the young people learn new skills.

Youth Conference

A Youth Conference took place on 18th March at Doddinghurst Road Church. Year 9 pupils from local schools had the opportunity to take part in a fantastic day where they received presentations from Essex Police on topics such as internet safety, crime and sexual exploitation. They also heard from Essex County Fire & Rescue Service of fire safety. In the afternoon they saw a play about alcohol and drugs which was followed by workshops. The day closed with a talk from an ex gang member and drug addict and how his actions impacted on him, his family, the public and victims.

Community Safety Partnership Newsletter

Each edition of the newsletter will be released after every Community Safety Partnership Strategy Panel Meeting. The next meeting is scheduled to take place Friday 27th March. The newsletter covers key items from the meeting as well as everything the Community Safety Partnership are doing in Brentwood.

Community Safety Commissioning Plan 15/16

The Community Safety Commissioning Plan 15/16 is going to Business & Town Centre Committee Thursday 26th March for approval.

Keep Safe

Essex Keep Safe day is 19th June 2015, the Community Safety Partnership and other partners will continue to promote Keep Safe scheme in Brentwood and hold a 'year on' event. They will also be expanding the project to cover Shenfield at a separate event the same week. Over 400 local residents have signed up to the scheme so far.

Senior Safety Road Shows

There has been 3 Senior Safety Road shows this year, with more road shows to take place over the next few months. The plan is to visit existing local groups, sheltered schemes, Parish Councils and provide crime prevention and safety advice.

Door Chain Project

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Door Chain Project launched in October is going from strength to strength with nearly 50 door chains fitted to vulnerable elderly resident's homes free of charge so far. Feedback received has been fantastic with an 80% return rate and 100% satisfaction. The CSP along with partners MenShed are in discussion and have received funding to install more door chains and possibly install sensor lights to some of the more vulnerable residents.

CCTV Upgrade

We are currently completing a major upgrade to the CCTV control room which has replaced the old storage system for CCTV data installed in 2007. The new platform is an Avigilon system incorporating storage and operating software which has been supplied and installed by a local company. The system will enable us to add new high definition megapixel cameras into the CCTV network in key locations including Brentwood High Street, Shenfield town centre and Brentwood rail station and will improve the quality of recorded images from our existing camera network provided as evidence to the Police to help to detect crime incidents in the areas covered by CCTV. We are also currently working to transfer CCTV images from the multi-storey car park in Coptfold Road to the Town Hall CCTV centre to improve efficiency and security for the car park outside normal operating hours.

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Committee: Community Services Committee

Chair: Councillor Karen Chilvers

First Aid Mental Health Training

The two day First Aid Mental Health training was undertaken by Members, Officers and volunteers on the 4 and 11 March. Cllr Barrett was the Member representative for the Council.

Safeguarding

As part of the safeguarding action plan, basic staff awareness training is being rolled out week beginning 23 March 2015. Separate Member awareness training will be rolled out in June after the elections.

Ward Budgets

Members have supported a huge variety of local initiatives through the ward budget process which closed on 15 March. Total spent was £46,647.76

Commissioning Prospectus

The Citizens Advice Bureau, Brentwood Community Transport and Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services were the successful as part of the tendering process to provide the following services to support the Council's priorities

- The provision of a free, confidential, debt management, housing needs and welfare benefits advice service for Brentwood Borough residents
- The coordination of a Community transport provision for Brentwood Borough
- The provision of a coordinated framework which will support Brentwood's voluntary and community sector organisations

Community Event Programme for 2015

The Council's Community Event programme has been set for 2015/16 and will include 7 Family Fun Days, Strawberry Fair, Heritage and Cultural Festival, Lighting Up Brentwood and Shenfield Christmas Fayre

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Committee: Environment Committee

Chair: Councillor William Lloyd

Parks Management

Four management plans were presented to the Committee, which included; King George's Playing Fields, Hutton Recreation Ground, Warley Playing Fields, and Bishops Hall Park. These are detailed plans and identify the issues that need to be addressed over the next few years. This is being discussed further with Thames Chase, and it is hoped that bids can be made through them to fund some of the work required.

West Horndon Park

A bid was received from West Horndon Parish Council for additional funding for the maintenance of the park. The Council have been providing £3,300 for a number of years, but it was agreed that this should cease from April 2016 to ensure there is consistency with funding for Parish Councils.

The Council will also provide the £14,099, which is in a holding account, to enable the Parish Council to carry out additional work as they wish.

Recycling Contract

The Council has just been through a joint tender process with; Basildon, Rochford and Uttlesford, for our recycling contract. The market is in a depressed state, and the best offer means that the Council will have a net loss of £85 per tone. This will put an additional £300,000 pressure on the budget for 2015/16.

Although there was a feeling within the industry that there would be a reduction it was not felt it would be to this extent. The net loss will be approximately £520,000, with £250,000 put in the 2015/16 budget. There was also an estimate of an additional £45,000 in income from the current contract in the first quarter of 15/16, which will now not be achieved. The total net pressure on the 2015/16 budget will therefore be £300,000.

Thames Chase/Shenfield Conservators

There will be ongoing work with the groups, and it is felt that some of the budget for Thames Chase can be redirected to the Conservators. This will assist with important environmental work, but all will be done through partnership arrangements between the organizations and the Council.

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Committee: Finance and Resources Committee

Chair: Councillor Barry Aspinell

Further to the Committee's meeting on 11 February 2015 the following items were debated and their decisions noted below;

Performance Indicators - Third Quarter 2014-15

It was agreed that key strategic performance indicators for 2014/15 would be reviewed focusing on monitoring the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and service plans. These were reviewed by CLB on a quarterly basis and reported to Members by exception.

The key Strategic indicators were to be measured annually and would involve a customer satisfaction survey to gauge how residents and businesses rated the Council's performance.

The report before Members detailed the Operational Performance Indicators agreed for 2014/15 and gave performance details for the third quarter of 2014/15.

Members agreed the following:

1. The Committee notes the Operational Performance Indicators for 2014/15;
2. The Committee notes the performance and contextual information against the Third Quarter Key Performance Indicators 2014/15.

Medium Term Financial Plan Proposals

At its meeting on 14 January 2015, the Finance and Resources Committee received information on initial funding and proposals for the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). In accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework, these initial proposals were presented to Audit & Scrutiny for their consideration. The report before Members considered and responded to the feedback from Audit & Scrutiny.

The report also updated the figures for changes made since January which were a direct result of the on-going work by the Finance Team to review and refine the MTFP figures.

Members agreed the following:

1. Members note the updated position of the MTFP;

2. An outline Strategy be prepared to support final budget proposals to Council, which provides information on how the funding gaps will be addressed;
3. Finance and Resources support the proposal from Audit & Scrutiny for them to commence their Budget Review work in September to include a service review of existing budgets;
4. Members consider the financial position of the Council when proposing a level of Council Tax for 2015/16.

Rent Setting and Service Charges

The report before Members considered the proposed new rent levels for 2015/16, together with the service charge proposals for tenants and leaseholders;

The report included the consideration of the Housing and Health Committee with regards to the proposed rent levels for 2015/16, and sought the recommendations of the Finance and Resource Committee to Ordinary Council on 4th March 2015.

Members agreed the following:

1. Members agree to increase Rent to CPI plus 1% from April 2015;
2. Members agree to freeze the proposed Service Charges for 2015/16 for tenants, however any decrease to service charges will be passed onto the tenant;
3. Members agree that Leaseholder Service Charges be calculated in line with the current reconciliation policy;
4. Members agree to apply the formula rent to all new tenancies from April 2015/16.

Equality Duty

Members were reminded that a report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2012 which set out the new Equality Act 2010 and the implications for Brentwood Borough Council (BBC). The Borough Council had a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 as part of the Public Sector Duty.

The report before Members provided an update on this previous report about how the Council was currently complying with the Equality Act and also set out how BBC would look to meet its Equality Objectives which were set out in Appendix B of the report.

Members agreed the following:

1. Note the updated report on how the Council is currently complying with the Equality Act in Appendix A to the report;
2. Officers develop an action plan by April 2015 to ensure the Council meets its Public Sector Equality and Diversity Objectives in Appendix B to the report.

Revenues and Benefits - Shared Service Partnership

Members were reminded that, as outlined in the 'New Ways of Working' business case presented to Members in February 2013, it was agreed that efficiency reviews of Council services would be considered. As part of this initiative officers had been investigating a number of options for the improvement and delivery of the Revenues & Benefits Service at reduced cost.

It was anticipated that the introduction of Universal Credit would generate savings for the Council and change working structures and practices. However, there had been a number of problems with the implementation of Universal Credit and whilst this was now due to be introduced in Essex from March 2015 on a small scale, there was no definite timescale for full implementation.

The options for the transformation of the Revenue & Benefits service had included exploring internal in house transformation, sharing the service delivery with neighboring Councils and outsourcing.

Following consideration of the above options officers had recognised that the shared service model could engender both savings and improved service delivery in the short to medium term.

Members agreed the following:

1. Delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer to sign the Revenues & Benefits Shared Services Partnership Agreement between Brentwood Borough Council and Basildon Borough Council.
2. Approval be given for funding of £146k to implement this shared service arrangement as set out in 4.12 of the report with a 3 year pay back period.
3. A review of the Revenues & Benefits Shared Services Partnership be undertaken by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee 12 months after the agreement comes into effect.

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Committee: Housing and Health

Chair: Councillor Ross Carter

Garage Development Sites

As part of the Affordable Housing Strategy and following the recommendation of Committee on the 5th November 2014 an initiative to identify the potential redevelopment of garage sites that provide opportunities for new Affordable Housing is being implemented; garage sites across the Borough are often underused and hard to let. Three sites have been identified that, subject to surveys of utilities, provide opportunities for redevelopment. These sites will potentially provide twelve new homes at a cost of £1.64m.

These sites are being reviewed for development potential by Housing Services, Planning Services and Asset Management with an appropriate development vehicle and funding model in the process of being formulated. There is cross party support for developing affordable housing on garage sites. Ward members have been consulted as part of this process to allow for an outline planning application to be drafted for submission to Planning Services in March/April 2015. Any garage tenants who will be affected by this scheme will be consulted accordingly.

Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme (ELAS)

On the 5th November 2014 the Housing & Health Committee approved and confirmed that Brentwood Council would join the ELAS scheme. We are currently awaiting the final contract to be drawn up by Blue watch for signature, before proceeding with operational implementation. The Chief Fire Officers Association ('CFOA') 'Bluewatch', as the provider of the service to ELAS, has now setup the portal website for landlords to join the scheme. Currently the active consortium includes: Chelmsford, Colchester, Uttlesford, Tendring, Braintree, Epping Forest and Maldon. We are currently waiting for the Local Authorities in the scheme to agree a launch date.

The ELAS scheme is being set up to promote and encourage landlords of privately rented homes to manage their properties to a high standard. It has been identified that evictions from the private sector is our highest reason for people presenting to the Council as being homeless. The housing department is keen to develop good working relationships with private landlords.

A Private Landlords Forum is being booked for the end of May 2015 to discuss ELAS and a deliver a training session on good practice with ending tenancies.

Armed Forces Charter

Approval was granted to develop the Armed Forces Charter at Housing & Health Committee on the 7 January 2015.

Two Housing Officers have been tasked to lead the above initiative and to provide a specialist point of contact for Armed Forces housing advice applicants. A key component of this initiative is to provide time-critical advice and support, maintaining a core service commitment of a personal advice session being offered within seven days of first contact, either at the Town Hall or via a home visit as may be required.

To further develop the armed forces provision a bespoke Armed Forces housing advice handbook is being drafted, to provide relevant applicants with a single information gateway through which they can effectively access Council services. This will be made available in both paper and e-formats. It will also provide a focused signposting pathway to allow more effective access to partner agency services.

As part of this initiative we are now also part of the Essex Civilian Military Partnership Board which includes a number of other Local Authorities, Military Services, Mental Health Foundation Partnership Trust, Essex County Council and Business & Active Essex and it is anticipated that the Partnership Board will continue to include new partners in the future such as Education Authorities, National Health Trust and private enterprise.

A meeting of the Partnership Board was held on the 18th March 2015, where it was identified that the key areas of concern are Housing, Health, Education and Employment and will be the focus for all partners in addressing. As part of this commitment we have also committed to the VIP Tree portal concept which will allow service veterans to register in order to access services and support available under the Community and Corporate Covenants. It is likely that there will be significant marketing of this portal as this will be the first in the Country to go live, marketing will be county wide and is likely to include television, radio, local press, and other social network feeds.

Brentwood tops for food safety again!

For the second year running, Brentwood Borough Council is delighted to be recognised again as second in the UK and the best in Essex when it comes to taking food safety seriously.

According to an investigation carried out by the national consumer organisation, Which?, residents and visitors are better informed when eating out in Brentwood, thanks to the borough being in the top ten authorities for food hygiene enforcement. They looked at 398 local authorities in the UK and, using the latest data submitted to the Food Standards Agency (FSA), ranked how they are performing on food safety enforcement.

Food Hygiene Ratings are part of a national scheme developed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The ratings scheme showcases food hygiene inspection results for food businesses across the borough. Food outlets are given a sticker and certificate to show their rating, and scores are available for anyone to view online.

The rating scheme where '5' is 'Very Good' and '0' is 'Urgent Improvement Necessary', is used for each food premises to provide information on food hygiene standards, to help people to choose where to eat out or shop for food. The ratings are based on information gathered during routine food hygiene inspections carried out by Environmental Health Officers to ensure they meet the legal requirements on food hygiene.

Credit must be given to our food businesses as this is their success too and they should be congratulated for the effort they make to help build confidence in eating out which encourages economic prosperity in the Borough. For the Council, It is great to get recognition from an independent organisation for the second year running that highlights we work hard with the resources we have to ensure that food sold in the Borough is safe and fit to eat by our residents and visitors. We've achieved this through investing in our businesses by giving them the support they need. We successfully accessed grant funding from the Food Standards Agency which has allowed us to provide training to catering businesses at no extra cost to council taxpayers. We also run regular food hygiene courses for local food businesses and these courses have a high pass rate. Over the years we have developed a strong professional relationship with our traders built on trust and expertise. They are encouraged to actively come to us for advice and support, which is what we are here for".

For more information on food outlets in Brentwood visit www.brentwood.gov.uk/food or www.food.gov.uk/ratings

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Committee: Licensing Committee

Chairperson: Councillor Gareth Barrett

Following the approach to Parish Councils as previously reported, there have been no notifications of interest in holding a market received to date. The deadline given for responses was 31 March 2015 and therefore there is still an opportunity for parishes to explore this opportunity should they wish to. Ward Councillors are respectfully reminded that they too may submit an expression of interest in which respect the licensing team will be pleased to assist or to answer any specific questions.

The cross party task and finish group to consider the future structure and process relating to the setting of taxi fares and the terms of reference of the Taxi Trade Consultative Group (TTCG) has now been established. This group will commence its work in the near future with a view to informing a report to licensing committee later in the year. The TTCG has expressed a desire to be involved in the process and will be engaged from the outset to ensure that the process is both open and consistent and that their needs, as well of those of residents and the travelling public are considered.

In February of this year the licensing team took an Ice cream trader to Court for continually breaching licence regulations by trading in the High Street Brentwood without a licence. The prosecution against Piccadilly Whip followed a number of months of attempting to seek compliance, with site visits, letters and evidence gathering. Six Counts of trading without a licence were put forward; however no evidence was offered in exchange for a guilty plea on the other two.

Whilst evidence could have been produced for all offences, it was considered that this outcome achieved the aim of bringing the offender to task and sending out a clear message that this type of unlawful activity will not be tolerated, particularly when it poses a risk to pedestrians and impacts on our law-abiding local businesses. The District Judge fined the director of Piccadilly Whip, John Bonnar, £500 for each of the two offences and awarded the full costs requested of £1720.57.

As this is the final Chairperson's report of the 2014/15 Council year I would like to take the opportunity to thank my fellow committee members for their efforts this year, especially those who have been part of the range of Licensing Sub-Committee hearings. I would also like to offer my personal thanks to the Licensing team at the Council who have consistently exceeded my expectations both individually and collectively, and I remain impressed by their efforts to continuously improve their levels of service to the residents and businesses of our town.

Report to Ordinary Council - 24th March 2015

Committee: Planning and Development Committee

Chair: Councillor Phil Baker

As Members can see from the agenda items on tonight's Full Council meeting, the planning service is at the forefront of the Council's activities at the moment. Whether it is through headlines in the local paper or letters from our local MP, planning certainly matters in Brentwood.

Local Development Plan (LDP)

The Local Development Plan (LDP) continues to generate a lot of interest which is great – we want local people to take an active role in shaping their local areas. A lot of work has gone into the LDP and I am indebted to the support and input from the cross-party LDP Members Working Group in seeing this work progress.

The Strategic Growth Options consultation that ended on 17th February has generated around 4000 comments so far from over 700 residents, interest groups and statutory agencies. Our officers are now going through each of the submissions made and will give us their professional opinion on how to address the various points later in the year. A draft Plan will be brought to the Council in the Autumn and will suggest which sites we should propose for development as well as outlining new policies and proposals for key issues such as housing, leisure, employment, transportation and protecting our heritage. The LDP will still need to go through a public inquiry next year before it is approved but we are now moving forward positively with this key document and clearly have local people and businesses actively engaged in its preparation.

LDP Letter to the In-Coming Secretary of State

If we are going to move forward with a LDP that really works for the people of Brentwood, we need to make sure that growth includes new physical and social infrastructure. We cannot be expected to build new homes in the Borough without the essential infrastructure to make it work. New roads, schools, leisure facilities etc will all be needed if we are to move forward with an LDP that local people can support. In Brentwood, we have the additional challenge of meeting these growth demands while having almost 90% of the Borough designated as Green Belt. The people of Brentwood are rightly proud to live in an area with so much valued green space and want to protect it for future generations. Given this extremely challenging position that we find ourselves in, I do find it most disappointing that our local MP, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has chosen not to engage with us pro-actively in addressing the dilemma.

While we have responsibility for preparing a balanced and sound LDP, we do not, unfortunately, have all of the powers or resources to deliver the infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of the proposed growing population. Our LDP will rely on partnership working with central government and other key agencies. This is why we have prepared a letter to send to the Secretary of State to flag up the dilemma we face. We need assurances from the Minister that more new homes in Brentwood will need an increase in road capacity, new schools, sports and leisure facilities and improvements to our public realm and streets. This is the least that our community deserves and I will continue to make sure this point is addressed at every stage of the LDP process.

A Modern Planning Service

As highlighted in the Modern Planning Service and Planning Fees and Charges reports on tonight's agenda, I have been working extensively with officers to streamline our planning service so that efficiencies and savings can be made. By moving from the weekly list to an electronic system that allows Members to get more involved at an earlier stage in the planning process, everyone benefits. Members can find out what's going on with specific applications earlier so they can keep their local residents and businesses informed at an earlier stage - and so avoid unnecessary confusion about what planning proposals are coming forward. Officers also benefit as they will be spending less time on lengthy, bureaucratic processes - and more time providing our customers with a professional planning service.

Consequently, the provision of a better service means we can charge more for our non-statutory fees for planning and building control advice. I have requested that moving forward, our planning and building control fees are annually reviewed to make sure that the rates we charge are fair and reflect the quality of the service provided. These increased fees will be used to continue to improve the services we deliver to our residents and developers alike ... which will be a beneficial outcome. All in all, I think that this is an excellent result for Brentwood.

Crossrail

Council officers and representatives from Crossrail, Network Rail, Costain and Essex County Council continue to work closely to make sure that as far as possible, the works necessary to progress the development of Crossrail is undertaken in a way that minimises the disruption to local people and businesses as much as possible. Regular monthly meetings of officers from all of the key partners meet as part of the Transport Liaison Group in order to keep the dialogue going during this key construction phase. A revised "Crossrail Questions and Answers" document is due to be published by Crossrail this week and will highlight how the various issues affecting local people and businesses are being addressed. My colleague, Cllr Clark, also chairs the Crossrail Working Party which brings industry experts and local people together to discuss and

resolve key issues relating to Crossrail's development. This week for example, we have Crossrail's Operations Director coming to our Working Party to address various issues with the scheme as it develops in the Borough. I acknowledge that everything isn't perfect with the implementation of the Crossrail works, but I am convinced that without our efforts to bring Crossrail and its partners to the table to discuss how things are progressing, the disruption for local people and businesses would have been a lot worse on the ground with our efforts to improve parking being proactively addressed.

Planning Applications

Finally, I just want to bring Members' attention to our latest figures relating to planning applications. So far, for 2014/15, we have received almost 1500 planning applications. As the development industry moves out of recession, this figure is likely to rise over the coming years.

With regards to "major" planning applications (10 houses or more), we determined 21 cases of which over 70% were decided within the 13 week statutory timeframe. The Brentwood target is to determine 50% within 13 weeks so we are well ahead of that. In terms of "minor" applications, 75% of the 164 applications decided were within the 8 week target (Brentwood sets a 70% standard for these). Of the "other" 604 smaller planning applications determined in 2014/15, 84% of these were dealt with within the 8 week target – compared with a Brentwood standard of 80% for this.

I am proud of the fact that our performance figures are consistently exceeding national standards in terms of the delivery times for planning applications. As we move forward with the implementation of a more modern planning service as mentioned earlier, I expect that these performance figures will continue to improve as officers spend more time planning and less time printing and photocopying. In my mind, this is a clear justification for having promoted the decision to change the way all of us deal with the planning service – including removing the weekly list. Brentwood's planning service is now a service equipped to deal with the increasingly challenging environment that local government finds itself in with committed personnel rising successfully to that challenge - my thanks go to them all.

Better Performance = Better Service = More Income = Better Brentwood

