



'SPRING IS IN THE AIR!'

On a bright and sunny spring morning a village shop re-opened in Colne Engaine – an air of optimism and enthusiasm pervaded the village. For some of the village children, this would be their first opportunity to 'walk' to a shop from home (page 10).

Are we beginning to move steadily closer to creating and improving sustainable communities? Looking through the pages of this newsletter you can read about a post office re-opening in Greenstead Green, bio-diversity conservation, project funding improving facilities for local communities.

Halstead have set up a working group of Town Council, History Society, Church Conservation Trust, Essex County Council and local representatives, to look at the possibility of locating a museum in Holy Trinity Church. Witham have created the Witham Community Partnership – other projects include Community Woodland and more recently local involvement in the River Walk and Whetmead areas – for more information – www.witham.gov.uk. More on the towns in the summer issue.

If you would like to know more about 'sustainability', come along to the District Council Sustainability Event on 5th June in Braintree to learn about water and energy efficiency, climate change, bio-fuels, carbon footprints etc. Invitations will be sent to towns and parishes.

Editor

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Biodiversity and Parishes – Page 4
- Being Safe Project – Page 8
- CCTV Vehicle – Page 8
- Community Wardens – Page 9
- Heart and Sole Walks – Page 2
- Rural Communities Development Fund – Page 6 & 7
- Tree Warden Event – Page 4
- Town and Parish news – 10, 11 & 12

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This will be a busy and challenging year for the District Council. As you know, we start with the District, Town and Parish Council elections on 3rd May and the count on 4th May. There have been many technical changes, which mean there are some changes to the overall process. All those involved will receive the appropriate training.

From the elections, we will have a new Council which will face a range of challenges. These are just a few of them:

- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill
- Housing transfer
- Financial challenges
- Comprehensive Spending Review 2007
- Lyons' Report on the role and function of local government
- Local Development Framework
- Improving our service and performance

I look forward to another productive year and making a difference to the quality of life in the Braintree District.

Allan Reid
Chief Executive





DIARY DATES - EVENTS

5th June – BDC Sustainability Event – to be held on the same day as “World Environment Day” in Causeway House and under canvas in Weavers Park – energy efficiency, climate change, bio-fuels, water efficiency, carbon footprints. More information will be sent.

2nd July – BDC Planning Enforcement “What we do and why” and Local Government White Paper and Locality Management Pilot Scheme — more information and invitation will be sent.

22nd October – Planning Online – more information and invitation will be sent.

GOOD LUCK RAYNE!

Following Rayne’s success in the Village of the Year Competition 2006, they will now be judged against winning villages in other counties in the East of England. The judges will visit Rayne on Tuesday 24th April.

COMING SOON



Following a successful pilot programme of Health Walks in Coggeshall, Halstead and Witham, Braintree District Council’s Leisure Development Team have placed these walks on a permanent footing.

The walking scheme called “Heart and Sole” encouraged ten people to volunteer as walk leaders. They have been trained in first aid and walk leading and are now ready to commence regular walks starting in March.

Walkers meet once a week for the free, 30 minute walks which is a great way to meet new people. Walking is a proven way to reduce blood pressure, reduce cholesterol and aid weight loss, as well as tackling obesity.

The Heart and Sole walks start at the following places:

- Mondays, 10am, Elizabeth Courtauld Surgery, Halstead
- Tuesdays, 10am, Bramston Sports Centre Witham
- Wednesdays, 10am, Coggeshall Memorial Garden
- Thursdays, 10am, Elizabeth Courtauld Surgery, Halstead

Walks are led by a walk leader and take place along pre walked routes to ensure that each is safe and has been risk assessed.

The team are now keen to find volunteers to lead the walks in other parts of the District.

Volunteers will be trained as Walk Leaders and will also receive training in first aid. Depending on the number of volunteers coming forward, will decide the frequency of the walks, as this can be shared amongst those prepared to lead walks in a locality.

For more information or enquiries contact:
Tony MacDonald, Leisure Development Officer

01376 552525 ext 2313.

walking@braintree.gov.uk



PARISH CLUSTER MEETINGS

With effect from the next round of Cluster meetings, Linda Hadley – BDC Parish Liaison Officer, will be taking on the Cluster meeting co-ordination from Helen Riches. Helen will be concentrating on quality audit within the Policy and Performance Team.



Linda Hadley, Helen Riches and Angela Balcombe

Angela Balcombe, representing the Braintree Association of Local Councils, presented Helen with a bouquet and thanked her for her support over the last six years.

GREENFIELDS COMMUNITY HOUSING

Getting Involved In Greenfields – a new start for Council residents

A clear majority of Council tenants and leaseholders in the Braintree district have voted to transfer their homes to Greenfields Community Housing. This not-for-profit housing organisation will be set up with the help of staff and residents. Transfer won't take place until November 2007, when the housing service will stop being delivered by the Council and start being delivered by Greenfields.

In the meantime, the Greenfields Support Team at the Council is keen for tenants and leaseholders to get involved in Greenfields and have their say about how the housing service is run. Candidates have now been selected for either the Shadow Board of Greenfields or the brand new Community Gateway Group for Greenfields. Profiles of the candidates have been posted out to tenants and leaseholders and two district wide ballots are currently taking place to establish who will eventually have a place on either the Board or Community Gateway Group.

Community Gateway is a new and innovative way of running social housing. It means that tenants and leaseholders can truly have a say in their housing service and how it is delivered. The Community Gateway Group will be a voice for Greenfields residents and pass on tenants' and leaseholders' views to the Board. This will influence decisions made by the Board and ensure tenants and leaseholders are at the heart of Greenfields.

The Greenfields elections results will be announced on Monday 2nd April. In the meantime, the new Chief Executive and Finance Director of Greenfields have now been selected (unknown at time of press). More details in the next edition of this newsletter.

For more information, please contact the Greenfields Support Team on FREEPHONE 0800 7811 344 or email amabh@braintree.gov.uk



SERVICES

LANDSCAPE SERVICES

Tree Warden Event Report



The event held on the 14th December 2006 was well supported and considered a success. For those of you who were unable to attend, Mel Crow gave a presentation on the responsibilities of Landscape Services and introduced the team. This now includes Stephen Lester, Tree Warden Co-ordinator. Thank you to those of you who attended and contributed to the evening.

The questionnaires completed by the Tree Wardens have been reviewed and the following programme of events is being arranged for 2007:

- March, presentation on wildlife and trees
- June, visit to a local arboretum
- Late summer, practical skills session
- November, presentation on plant diseases and mammal pests.

Further details and invitations will follow in due course.

A note on the damage caused by the recent high winds.

Whilst the wind speed was below that of the 1987 storms and the damage caused was less extensive, a number of trees were blown over, including five protected trees, which will be replaced. It is possible that mini storms may become a feature of our changing climate.

Thank you for the telephone calls of 'trees down', it enabled the team to prioritise and make arrangements with the contractors, who did a great job. Reports have still been coming in of damage to trees.

Parish/Town Councils

A Duty to Conserve Biodiversity

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act came into being in March 2006; however the main provisions did not come into force until 1st October 2006.

The Act has a number of implications for both the natural environment and rural communities of England. According to DEFRA the Act is designed to:

"...achieve a rich and diverse natural environment and thriving rural communities through modernised and simplified arrangements for delivering Government policy. The act implements key elements of the Government's Rural Strategy published in July 2004 and establishes flexible new structures with a strong customer focus."

For more details on the full provisions of the NERC Act you may want to visit the DEFRA web-site at

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/bil/>

One of the implications of the Act is the Duty to Conserve Biodiversity which requires 'public authorities' to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity. The Act defines what it considers to be a 'public authority' at Section 40(4), where it includes 'local authorities'. It defines the parish/town councils as local authorities under Section 40(5), in which it also includes County Councils and District Councils.

What is 'biodiversity' – essentially it means 'the variety of life, including habitats and species (both plants and animals) and the way in which these living things interact with one another'. To all intents and purposes biodiversity is wildlife.



It is not interpreted that this Act will impose a new function on parish councils. Instead it is intended that authorities should now maximise opportunities for conserving wildlife resources as a part of what they already do. In other words you must now consider whether the activities that you are already involved in could also include provisions to help conserve biodiversity.

The following are four main areas where parish/town councils could make the biggest difference for local wildlife:

- When you are preparing your Parish Plan
- When you are commenting on planning applications
- When you are managing land
- When you are creating bylaws

For more information and help with the implications of the NERC Act 2006 please contact: Angela Norton, Community Landscape Officer – Tel: 07970 993624 – Email: angno@braintree.gov.uk or the Landscape Services Department of Braintree District Council.



You can download a copy of the newsletter from www.braintree.gov.uk - Parish Pages – under Council and Democracy.

DOES YOUR SPORTS CLUB PAY BUSINESS RATES?

Business Rate Relief for Registered Community Amateur Sports Clubs.

This relief came into effect from April 1st 2004 and enables the local authority to grant Mandatory Rate relief of 80% to sports clubs that have registered with the Inland Revenue as Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs).

The Council has the ability to grant Discretionary Charity Relief and it may be possible for your club to receive an additional 20% off your Rates using the Council's new criteria for granting Charity Relief.

Should your club not qualify for registration as a CASCs, then it is still possible to receive some Discretionary Relief under the new criteria.

For further information on CASCs please visit Inland Revenue's web page at <http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/casc/index.htm> or

E-mail to helpline@cascinfo.co.uk

Tel: 0845 3020203 to the H M Revenue and Customs Helpline or

Contact: Mrs M. J. Kingston, Revenue Manager at Braintree District Council on 01376 557847 for additional information.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

From 1st April 2005 the Government introduced a new way to reduce the rates payable by small businesses. For further information on Small Business Rate Relief Contact the Revenue Section of Braintree District Council on 01376 557755 or e-mail to csc@braintree.gov.uk

If you have any queries concerning your Rateable Value, please contact the District Valuer by telephoning 08456 021507



FUNDING

Rural Communities Development Fund

The winning formula of £200,000 worth of grants from the Council's Rural Communities Development Fund and the hard work and enthusiasm of our Parish Councils has seen local communities benefit from 45 new projects since September 2005.

Whilst the majority of projects funded have provided play and recreation facilities other funding has been put towards bus shelters, parish offices and meeting rooms, local environmental improvements, access improvements, CCTV systems, village signs and notice-boards and even bringing back into use a village pump and a village well.



(Bulmer – extension of footpath at Doe's Meadow)



(Rayne – CCTV Equipment – Village Hall)

'Thank you' from Braintree District Councillors - "The Rural Communities Development Fund has enabled many Parish Councils to embark on some exciting new projects that have benefited the community. We thank you for your dedication and enthusiasm"

But what is important is the difference that these projects actually make to people who live in rural parishes. You have told us that our grants have encouraged more people to take part in and enjoy local play and recreation facilities and that many projects have helped local people to feel safer.

One Bradwell resident, where our grant helped to fund play equipment, said "It has made a real difference for the children and there is a real "buzz" in the village" and Kelvedon Parish Council reported that their project had provided "a boost to morale". These are amongst many comments received that illustrate the wider benefit that projects funded through these grants can have on village life.

Visit the BDC website at www.braintree.gov.uk for information on the district council's services.



We know, too, that you have involved your community in deciding what is needed and this has particularly helped to engage young people in decisions that affect facilities they will use and ways in which they can play a part in their community. Being able to demonstrate, that what you want to provide, is what people really want, and that they have been involved in identifying this, is also essential information to include when applying to this Fund and any other.

Having received your grant from the Rural Communities Development Fund many of you have not stopped there! You have gone on to expand your original ideas for a project and applied for additional funds from elsewhere. We've been delighted to hear how successful many of you have been.

Building on such resounding success we will be opening the next round of the Rural Communities Development fund in April 2007, with a new priority criteria added – "To Improve the Environmental Energy Performance of a Community Facility" to reflect the need for us all to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.



(Bradwell – Play equipment)

If you have applied to us before we welcome further applications and if you have not yet received a grant from this fund then please do apply this time.

If you are unsure whether your project will be eligible or want to "talk through" an idea first then please don't hesitate to contact:

Angela Verghese: 01376 551414 Ext: 2329 for an informal chat.

We have tried to make the guidelines and application form as straightforward as possible but if you do have any queries when completing the form, then once again, get in touch with Angela.



Guidelines and application forms for 2007 will be sent to you automatically at the beginning of April.

(Castle Hedingham – garden at Memorial Hall)

News of a new award scheme

The Conservation Foundation and a mobile phone supplier have launched a new scheme – 'It's Your Community' to help pay for projects for improving local environments.

Awards of up to £1,000 will be available for projects. Applications forms are available online at www.conservationfoundation.co.uk



PLANNING

The Future of Braintree District to 2025 and beyond

Thank you to everyone who returned questionnaires and took part in the seminars last summer to determine the priorities for the future of Braintree District. The next stage is a consultation on the way these priority issues may be addressed in the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework and in the Sustainable Community Strategy. An 'Issues and Options' document will be available to view on the BDC website early in April with the formal period for comment probably between 19th April and 31st May (these dates are to be confirmed).

In addition there will be a PACT Assembly at Causeway House on 6th June for parish and town councils and partner organisations to discuss further. Please make a note of these dates in your diaries. (Invitations will be sent)

COMMUNITY SAFETY TEAM

Being Safe Project

The Being Safe project is being developed and coordinated by the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership (CDRP) and delivered by Partners from the Essex Race Equality Council, BDC Community Safety Team, Essex County Council and Action 4Men Team.

This project was piloted at the Ramsey College in Halstead on 6th March and will be rolled out to all secondary schools within the Braintree District in the near future.

The aim of the project is to raise and address diversity issues in Schools and the target audience is year 8 students. This compliments the citizenship element of the curriculum and also PHSE and RE.

The programme consists of one day of intensive workshops delivered to 140 students covering the four themes, anti-bullying, homophobia, racism and anti-social behaviour.

There was excellent feedback from the Ramsey College students and on a scale of 0 – 10, (with 0 being 'wished I had done normal lessons' and 10 being 'absolutely excellent and wouldn't have missed it for anything', the overall scale from the students was an '8'.

CCTV Vehicle

Braintree District Council has recently purchased a CCTV Vehicle for the District which is funded jointly with Braintree District Community Safety Partnership (CDRP). The vehicle is managed by the Community Safety Team and will be tasked across the district to specific 'ASB hotspot' locations according to priority on an evidence need basis. This is primarily via the three Police Community Safety Tasking Groups.

The vehicle's surveillance equipment will be used both overtly and covertly to prove and disprove Anti Social Behaviour across the district and is fitted with 'state of the art' digital surveillance equipment. This has the ability to act as a permanent record of events taking place within targeted locations.

Areas in need of surveillance will have previously been raised as an 'ASB Hotspot' through the relevant Area Police Community Safety Tasking Groups. Accordingly all CCTV vehicle surveillance exercises will be monitored via the relevant Community Safety Tasking Groups.

For further information on either project, please contact Braintree District Council Community Safety Team on 01376 551414.



COMMUNITY WARDENS

Dave Walls - north east of the district



A London fireman for 25 years and former referee, Dave Walls loves nothing

better than being out and about in the community. "When I was a fireman I was often based in the station – now I'm always out there meeting people. I walk along the street and people shout 'Dave!' and stop me to chat. It's great."

Dave believes that the Community Wardens have already made a difference simply by being out and about, approachable and visible. By acting as a link between the Police, Council and Community he can help resolve issues, such as cars parking on the yellow lines outside schools. He has managed to help combat this in certain areas.

The communication link works both ways and he feels this is a key part of the Community Warden Service becoming a success.

Outside of work Dave hasn't left his football days behind - he is still a Secretary of the Essex Senior Football League and is responsible for appointing referees for each game. He lives in Colchester.

Dave Wade – north of the district



A former panel beater, MOT tester and Special Constable, Dave Wade is also Markets Superintendent

He enjoys getting out and about in the District and says "I'm looking forward to the summer, when there should be a lot going on. Attending Parish Council meetings and helping out with fetes and garden parties is all part of the job." He is also hoping his love of stunt kites will come in handy for children's activities during the school holidays.

Although he has only been a Community Warden for a few months he has had plenty of feedback.

"The people I've spoken to are pleased I'm here and think the service is a good idea."

Dave has another part-time job as Markets Superintendent for Braintree and Witham.

He likes to be seen as a friendly face and is especially keen to get to know more elderly and vulnerable residents in his area.

Dave is married with two daughters, three grandchildren, one great-grandchild and another on the way and is a self-confessed "DIY fanatic" and a keen musician, recently auditioning for a BBC television show. He lives in Braintree.

We want to hear from you!

If you have any ideas on how the two 'Daves' can get even more involved in your area and to confirm which parishes they cover, please contact Trevor Lawrence on 01376 332316 or Email Trevor.Lawrence@braintree.gov.uk.

More about the Community Wardens at www.braintree.gov.uk - just follow the Warden link from the front page of the website or click on Environment – Street Scene – Community Wardens.



POLICE NEWS

An increased recruitment Campaign for the Special Constabulary within the District



Special Constables are volunteers from within the Community who give up a few hours of their time on a regular basis to work alongside regular police officers in policing Braintree District.

Separate but linked scheme - Volunteers in Policing (VIPs) - This concept involves members of the Community helping the Neighbourhood Policing Teams and extended police family to enhance the policing services.

Would you like to know more about these volunteer roles?

Contact Mark Schofield, Chief Inspector, Braintree District Commander - Tel: 01376 556201

Email: mark.schofield@essex.pnn.police.uk

PARISH PROJECTS - Are you looking for volunteer help with a project?

The Centenary World Jamboree for Scouts Chelmsford is being held from 27 July 2007 to 8 August 2007. Each day 4,000 young people will work on community projects - a great opportunity to achieve a significant contribution to community needs and activities around Essex.

The "Starburst" programme will run from 29 July 2007 to 6 August 2007, but excluding 1 August 2007 and the organisers are still keen to identify a large number of potential projects which will allow young people to work together to achieve something of lasting benefit to a local community or voluntary group.

More details about Starburst at: www.thejamboree.org Please contact Kimberly Harwood, Event Co-ordinator, Tel. No. 0208 4985468
Email: Kimberly.harwood@scouting2007.org

TOWN AND PARISH NEWS

Colne Engaine - Village Shop Opening

Wonderful news for Colne Engaine as the village shop has re-opened! Wendy and Richard Jones have approached their new role as shopkeepers with enthusiasm and initiative – they are working with other local businesses, such as the local pub, newspaper suppliers, bakers and many others.



(Wendy and Richard with their young assistant who is 'helping' to stock the shelves)

With two young boys, one of whom is attending the village school; it's very much a family business – open from 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Thursday and Sundays, with later opening on Fridays and Saturdays. Wendy went to school in the village and was baptised and married to Richard at the parish church.

They are committed to bringing a valuable service to the local community by delivering to the elderly and housebound. They wish to see the village shop become, once again, one of the focal points in the village.



Percy the Penguin – Talking Litter Bin

Partnership working between the parish, the district and the primary school, has resulted in an idea by Laura La Roche, Colne Engaine Parish Clerk, being put into practice! After reading about 'Talking Litter Bins' in one of the many publications sent to the parish council, Laura contacted Braintree District Council and with help from Mick Galley, Area Street Scene Manager, took the idea further.



(Laura La Roche, Colne Engaine Parish Clerk and Percy the Penguin outside the school gates)

As a result Percy the Penguin is now wheeled out each day by school staff on a sack barrow, which has been provided by the parish council (a tarpaulin has also been provided to cover him up at night). He is positioned outside the primary school gates and before the school closes each day, he is wheeled back in! The parish council are responsible for emptying Percy.

Greenstead Green - Post Office Opening

To hear about a post office 'opening' and not 'closing' has to be good news! Chris Butler, an arable farmer from Greenstead Green, has made excellent use of a Farm Diversification Grant to restore and re-thatch a 17th century barn, to provide post office services, a shop and a coffee shop.

Having taken on the Post 'Mastership' three years ago, after the village post office closed, it has taken Chris and his wife many hours of research to put together their business plan to bring this service back to the community. Three experienced post office staff are now 'behind the counter' bringing their expertise to the village.

There has been an eclectic approach to stocking the shop and it will therefore sell a wide range of mainly locally sourced produce including the 'basics' of milk, bread and vegetables, as well as a delicatessen offering varieties of cheeses, cold meats etc. They are also licensed to sell alcohol and will stock varieties of local beer and English wines. The Coffee Shop menu includes 'cream teas' with 'real' clotted cream from a local supplier.



(Greenstead Green Post Office Staff)

From the very beginning, Chris says he had excellent help and support from the local parish council and Braintree District Council through all stages of planning, development and licensing. His wish to aim for a sustainable business is enhanced by the fitting of under-floor heating, with a boiler using a fuel of wheat and woodchip from the farm.

The information contained in this newsletter is published in good faith from a variety of sources and may be subject to change.



Community Speed Watch

Castle Hedingham has led the way in the district by joining the Essex Police - Community Speed Watch Scheme. Two teams of volunteers go out twice a week for up to 2 hours and agree "our presence has had an impact, simply our visibility changes behaviour and vehicles slow down"

Other parishes now involved in the Scheme are Bulmer, Feering, Earls Colne, Foxearth & Liston, Gosfield, Hatfield Peverel, White Notley and Faulkbourne.

Contact: Adam Pipe, Essex Police.

Tel: 01245 452944 Email:

Adam.Pipe@essex.pnn.police.uk

Kelvedon

A letter of congratulations from Braintree District Council has been just one of many Jill Hinds, Parish Clerk to Kelvedon, has received since hearing she is to be awarded the MBE.



(Jill Hinds – Kelvedon Parish Clerk)

The award is for services to the community, which apart from Jill's position as Parish Clerk for 28 years, include: helping to run the Junior Drama Group, Booking Secretary for the Village Hall for 30 years, Member of Kelvedon Players, Member of the WI, Member of the Council for Protection of Rural Essex, Trustee of the Rural Community Council of Essex and more!

When a letter arrived from the Office of the Prime Minister, Jill placed it with the pile of post to take to the Parish Council Office. Knowing Jill had been put forward for an award by the local community, her husband suggested she open that particular letter before leaving home. To her surprise, Jill found the letter was a personal letter asking if she would accept an MBE. The presentation will be a very proud moment for Jill, her family, friends and colleagues. This award is a well deserved thank you from the community.

RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF ESSEX

BEST KEPT VILLAGE AND VILLAGE OF THE YEAR

The deadline for entering the 2007 Best Kept Village and Village of the Year competitions is 30th March 2007.

The Rural Community Council of Essex runs three other competitions - Best Kept Churchyard, Best Community Magazine and the Augustine Courtauld Award for best community project. The deadline for entering the Best Kept Churchyard competition is 30th March 2007. The Best Magazine competition took a break in 2006; details of a 2007 competition will be announced shortly.

The Augustine Courtauld Awards, presented on 21st February included three winners from Braintree District - Toppesfield, Gestingthorpe and Helions Bumpstead

For further information or to enter the competitions contact The Rural Community Council of Essex on 0844 477 3938 or email competitions@essexrcc.org.uk

Have you any ideas for future articles in the newsletter?

Contact Linda Hadley – Tel: 01376 551414 Ext: 2343 or Email: Linda.Hadley@braintree.gov.uk