

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 12TH APRIL 2010

Agenda Item 10i

CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Nigel Harley**CABINET PORTFOLIO: Enterprise & Culture**

Portfolio covers:-

- District growth and infrastructure (inc. Transport Strategy)
- Economic Development Strategy
- Cultural Strategy
- Built Environment (planning policy)
- Business Support
- Tourism

REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 2ND FEBRUARY 2010 AND ENDING 31ST MARCH 2010**Tourism**

Earlier this month it was announced that the Quadrant Department Store based in Braintree would be taking over the majority of the services previously offered by the Tourist Information Office, which will be closing at the end of this month. This is an excellent example of how partnerships forged between the public and private sectors can bring about effective solutions, easing the cost of tourism from Council Tax bills whilst ensuring that local people do not lose out on valued services.

East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Heart of Essex Meetings

On 12th March, deputising for the Leader, I attended the final meeting of the EERA which is ceasing to exist at 31st March. The work is being taken forward by the East of England Local Government Association, also acting as the Leaders' Board in the East of England, and working jointly with East of England Development Agency (EEDA).

Whilst the Assembly achieved some success such as curbing the unrealistic growth plans of Central Government, it is highly questionable whether this additional layer of governance has really provided sufficient value to the taxpayer. A change of administration in Whitehall could well herald the end of many of these regional structures.

Later in the month I was a speaker at a dinner organised by EEDA bringing together stakeholders in the Heart of Essex, which comprises four Essex Authorities. The principal theme was to emphasise the importance of using our collective voice to ensure that we are recipients of a fair share of Government funding. It is recognised that we are surrounded by powerful economic sub groups, and we will have to take a more proactive position if we are to keep our interests to the fore.

Rivenhall

I believe that most Members will have been disappointed to learn that the Inspector chose to support Essex County Council's position regarding the development of the waste site at

Rivenhall. Having taken the advice of our lawyers, Braintree District Council has decided not to challenge the decision of the Inspector. We can now just hope the Rivenhall is not in the end, the chosen site.

Plans of the National Grid

Members will be aware of the plans of the National Grid to enhance their capacity to supply electricity from the East coast to the London area. The result will be larger and more intrusive pylons which will cross a part of the North East of the District. The consultation process ceased at the end of February and we should learn more of the National Grid's plans this month. Braintree District Council will support a plan for underground power lines.

The Braintree Rail Loop and the A120

I believe that these two pieces of infrastructure must be more prominently featured in the Annual Plan, as they have great significance in the development of the District. With the proposed additional rail stop to the North East of Chelmsford gaining momentum, it is vital to keep the Braintree Loop on the agenda with Network Rail. Meetings are being arranged at both County and National levels on these issues.

Business Development Services (BDS) and Business Link

BDS continues to provide a vital service for new and emerging businesses in the area, and we are looking at ways to maintain funding streams on a more permanent basis to this valued local facility. This has taken on even more importance since we learnt that there will be further restrictions on those seeking to qualify for support from Business Link, which is anyway considered as too remote a service by many local businesses.

Strategy Plan for Culture

An initial survey has been completed on cultural activities in the District. A draft of the Cultural Strategy has been drawn up and will be circulated on the Braintree District Council website in April. The final document is due to be presented to Cabinet in June.

Museum

The Museum received more than 800 visitors at half term while 240 visitors came to the Warner Textile Archive as BBC Essex broadcast a programme as part of a regional contribution to the A History of the World series.

There is a three day programme of activities starting 21st May to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Royal Society and John Ray, one of the oldest members.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:

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