

BUILDING REGULATIONS

PM to cut red tape

The Government have announced a drive to build thousands more homes by cutting building regulations. Plans propose reducing current building control rules, applied to new homes, from over 100, to fewer than 10. Developers would expect to save £60m a year, equivalent to £500 for every new property built. Rules setting out minimum window sizes; dimensions of rooms; strength of front doors; and arrangements for lavatories, lighting, 'phone lines and disabled access will be culled. The Government have also announced that 80,000 pages of "green tape" environmental rules will be removed by March 2015, saving firms £100m a year.

ENERGY

DIY energy fund

Local communities will be offered up to £150,000 each, from Government, to create their own renewable energy through solar panels or wind turbines. Climate Change Secretary, Ed Davey, has launched a £10m Urban Community Energy Fund to kickstart projects in England that could see 1m homes supplied with electricity from "home-made" generation by 2020. Neighbouring households are being encouraged to group together to apply for the funding, which could pay for solar panels, wind turbines or hydroelectric generators that could save families hundreds of pounds a year in fuel bills.

In partnership with RCCE, BDC is already promoting the take up of rural energy projects with parishes and community groups across Braintree and Uttlesford districts. This new funding stream will be promoted alongside WRAP's Rural Community Energy Fund. The next community workshop is on the 14th May in Great Yeldham.

LICENCING

Public health rules questioned

The Local Government Association has said that rules preventing councils from rejecting licensing applications on public health grounds should be scrapped. Currently, councils leave themselves open to prosecution if they reject a licence on public health grounds, but as some areas struggle with high levels of alcoholism, councils are demanding the power to block new clubs, pubs and off-licences on advice from public health experts.

New Laws – Mobile Homes

The Mobile Homes Act 2013 has made sweeping changes to the law on park homes giving better rights and protection to park home owners, whilst ensuring that honest professional site owners can flourish.

As part of the changes, a new licensing scheme is now force, from 1st April 2014, which enables local authorities to monitor site licence compliance more effectively. Authorities now have the tools to take enforcement action, where owners are not managing and maintaining their sites and services, to ensure residents' health and safety are better protected and the value of their homes safeguarded.

HEALTH & SAFETY ENFORCEMENT

Health and safety red tape to be slashed

The Government are spearheading a deregulation bill that will see millions of self-employed people exempted from assessing the risks of their own health and safety at work. Mike Penning, the minister with responsibility for health and safety, said he wanted to stop businesses being bogged down in “overcomplicated and often contradictory regulations”.

ENVIRONMENT

Tree Planting

This season's tree planting activities are now complete, with 109 large trees and over 1000 smaller trees planted across 14 different sites around the District. The planting season involved many local volunteers and school children, Witham Tree Group, Woodland Trust and assistance from BDC Grounds Maintenance teams, and has included replacement trees in Weaver's Park, Braintree, Howbridge Infants and Junior School in Witham, and the old hospital site in Black Notley.

Hoppit Mead Local Nature Reserve

Site Notices and a press release were posted for w/commencing 17th March announcing the Council's intention to designate a Local Nature Reserve for the open space along the river valley at Hoppit Mead in Braintree. It is proposed to establish a “friends group” for this area and Landscape Services staff will be talking to local residents who showed interest at the public consultation event last summer.

OPERATIONS

Partnership Working

Officers have successfully negotiated a 12-month Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the emptying of all litter and dog waste bins and other ad-hoc works including removal of graffiti and fly-posting on Greenfields' land with effect from 1 April 2014. This is supplementary to the contract that Greenfields has with Sodexo for the maintenance of its grounds.

Recycling

We have started to refurbish our recycling banks, with 10 sites to be addressed over the coming weeks, in liaison with relevant Parish Councils, ensuring facilities meet local requirements.

The winners of the Essex Schools Small Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Competition 2013 (run by Essex County Council) were announced in early March and Belchamp St Paul C of E Primary School, Braintree, won second prize. The competition was sponsored by Veolia who presented a cheque for £150 to the School last month. Overall, 2.28 tonnes of electrical equipment was sent for re-use or recycling after collection from the participating schools.

Door-stepping (domestic recycling)

As previously reported, we recruited a new Recycling Advisor in February and another is due to commence this month. These are front-line roles, working directly with our refuse and recycling staff and local residents, to encourage greater participation in recycling and increase recycling performance across the District.

ICDC (Integrated Commercial and Domestic Collections)

As part of the proposed re-routing exercise (commencing February 2015) we have invited Parish and Town Councils to let us know about any local issues that may inform how the new routes are designed.

Transfer of Rural Facilities

As from 1 April 2014, Castle Hedingham Parish Council has taken on the management and maintenance, including control & accountability, of the public toilets as part of a 5-year SLA.

The transfer of the car park, public toilets and allotments at Earls Colne is progressing well and should be completed by the end of May. These facilities will then be owned and managed directly by the Parish Council.

Discussions with Coggeshall Parish Council have recommenced, regarding the transfer of the car park at Stoneham Street.

Vehicle and Plant Workshop

Contractors (Granville Developments) commenced works on the refurbishment of the old Materials Recycling Facility at Lakes Road in March. The building is being converted to a new vehicle and plant workshop that will be shared between the Council and its vehicle procurement and maintenance provider (Riverside Truck Rental Ltd.). Works are due to finish by the end of June, creating new jobs (plans include a workshop apprentice) with Riverside.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Funding

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner has confirmed the 2014/15 funding allocation to the CSP of £16k.

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service has confirmed their contribution of £3k.

CSP Action Planning Workshop

An action planning workshop was held on Friday 7th March with over 30 people, representing 17 partner agencies, in attendance to identify current service delivery, where the gaps are in provision and identify actions for the 2014/15 CSP annual plan against the four priorities: Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, Acquisitive Crime and Drugs Offences. A draft plan will be taken to the Responsible Authority Group on 23rd April.

Domestic Abuse Pilot

To date, the pilot has engaged with 123 victims across the Braintree District, 88 high risk victims, 34 medium risk victims and 1 standard risk. Referrals have been made to a variety of agencies, including Safer Places for outreach support, the IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) service for support during the court process and solicitors to obtain non-molestation orders.

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Cabinet Member – Place

Further information on the contents of this report can be obtained by contacting:

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