

Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council, held remotely on Tuesday, 23 February 2021

Present: Chairman: Councillor J G Jowers
Vice-Chairman: Councillor E C Johnson

J Abbott	R J Gooding	Dr R Moore
J F Aldridge	I Grundy	J Moran
B Aspinell	C Guglielmi	M Platt
J Baker	M Hardware	C Pond
T Ball	D Harris	R Pratt
S Barker	A M Hedley	J M Reeves
J Beavis	I Henderson	P Reid
K Bentley	J Henry	S Robinson
D Blackwell	S Hillier	W Schmitt
A Brown	P Honeywood	L Scordis
M Buckley	A Jackson	A Sheldon
G Butland	D J Kendall	K Smith
S Canning	S Lissimore	C Souter
J Chandler	D Louis	J Spence
P Channer	J Lumley	M Stephenson
A Davies	M Mackrory	M Steptoe
J Deakin	R A Madden	A Turrell
M Durham	M Maddocks	L Wagland
B Egan	B Massey	S Walsh
D Finch	M McEwen	C Weston
R Gadsby	L McKinlay	C Whitbread
M Garnett	V Metcalfe	A Wood
A Goggin	R Mitchell	J A Young

Prayers

The meeting was preceded by prayers led by the Right Reverend Hugh Allan O.Praem, the Titular Abbot of Beeleigh and Chaplain to the Chairman of Essex County Council.

The Chairman, Councillor Jowers, formally opened the meeting

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

The Chairman reminded members that although attendance at the meeting was 'remote' they should remain engaged in the meeting and refrain from responding to emails and texts during the meeting.

Members were also reminded to keep their microphone on mute for the duration of the meeting unless they wish to speak, and they should remember to address all remarks through the Chairman.

The Chairman confirmed that he had received a list of members wishing to speak on agenda items in advance and that he would call everyone on that list, however if others wish to speak or to raise a point of order or personal explanation the 'raise hand' function was to be used. He then gave other more advice concerning the management of the remote meeting.

The Chairman advised members that the meeting was being streamed live over the internet via the ECC Democracy YouTube channel in addition to the audio broadcast. Recordings of both would be found on the internet after the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor May.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman reminded Members of the advice they had been given by the Monitoring Officer:

(a) concerning those who may have any arrears of Council Tax outstanding for two months or more that they must make a declaration and were not entitled to vote on the Annual Budget but were not prevented from taking part in the discussion; and

(b) on the need for declarations of interest relating to the Budget debate.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

4. Public Questions

The Chairman welcomed members of the public who had registered to speak in accordance with Standing Order 16.12.8.

Question 1: from Councillor Arabella Brentnall of Boxted Parish Council who asked a question concerning Boxted Bridge. She asked:

‘The Historic and Listed Boxted Bridge spans the River Stour in the heart of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area where, as laid down in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty” and which has” the highest status of protection in relation to these issues” including cultural heritage.

Having allowed it to fall into disrepair, Essex Highways intends to demolish it and build a much larger structure with widening of the junction, because a desk-study showed that “fire engines cannot safely manoeuvre the junction”. In fact they can and have done since the bridge was built in 1897. In flagrant disregard of their own Options Study of 2018, without public consultation, and in unminuted closed meetings, the decision was taken last summer 2020 by Essex Structures to proceed with Option 7(b) of that report, discounted therein because it “would urbanise a section of the AONB and is likely to require planning permission” which would be” unlikely to be granted”.

Questions started to be asked by Boxted Parish Council and other interested parties about perceived irregularities in the decision-making process of Essex Structures. It was always the stated intention of Essex Highways to apply for planning permission for this project, but in January 2021 it was declared by Essex Structures that no planning permission would be sought and that they would exercise their “ permitted rights” under the TCPO 2015.

Without a formal planning application, there is no opportunity to object to this scheme for those bodies who have already expressed support in saving this bridge,- namely the Dedham Vale Society, Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Association of Industrial Archaeology, SAVEbritains heritage and Boxted Parish Council. Huge numbers of local residents wish to save this bridge and vehemently oppose any widening of the road because of their concerns for increased traffic speed, and needless destruction of this wonderfully tranquil spot.

Today, nearly 4000 people have signed an online petition to Kevin Bentley to Save Boxted Bridge.

Having regard to the above, in deciding to use their “ permitted rights” to demolish this historic bridge and build a modern one nearly twice the width, on an enlarged footprint with junction widening, how will Essex County Council demonstrate its compliance with its statutory duty of regard to

conserving and enhancing the beauty of the Dedham Vale AONB under section 85 of the CROW Act 2000?’

Councillor Bentley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure replied:

‘Like many of the 1,600 bridges in Essex that we look after, Boxted Bridge is valued by the local community it serves, not only as a functional crossing point but also for its historical interest. It is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and although not formally a listed structure, has been identified on Colchester Borough Council’s Local List.

The bridge was built more than 100 years ago and as an aging structure that is nearing the end of its natural lifespan, requires future intervention. We have increased the frequency of our inspection regime at Boxted Bridge to every six-months, so we are alerted to changes to its condition early.

Options for managing the bridge have been carefully considered, firstly exploring the option of repairs before determining that the most viable solution is to replace the bridge. The original construction of Boxted Bridge does not lend itself well to the extent of repairs required, without replacing the majority of the structure.

Essex Highways are considering a new replacement bridge that will look visually similar to the existing structure to ensure it is befitting to the area. Recent changes in the design standards publicised following the completion of the Option Study have brought into consideration the resilience and security of the structure as part of the Technical Approval process. We therefore have a duty to adequately address risks identified in the Option Study and incorporate improvements within a new scheme design.

We have been supplied with details via a Councillor of traffic incidents which have caused damage to the bridge and nearby private wall. These are not exclusive to HGVs but apply to different sized vehicles. Our Road Safety Audit has also indicated that larger vehicles cannot safely manoeuvre the junction under the current layout.

Our proposal is to install a structure on wider footprint to address the difficulties a fire engine and other larger vehicles have manoeuvring through the area and reduce the risk of collisions associated with the poor visibility at the bridge and junction. Being visually similar to the existing structure but built to current standards, provides the community with a long-term solution without compromising safety or the AONB.

Signage to warn HGVs that the route is unsuitable for their use will remain in place to deter larger vehicles from travelling on the bridge, just as it does at the moment.

We understand some members of the community are concerned that an improved structure will increase traffic. Due to recent flooding in the area

and while we remain in lockdown due to Covid-19, a traffic survey at this time may not accurately reflect normal traffic flows, however the intention is to undertake an assessment in the future.

Given the level of public interest and feedback received we will submit our proposal through the Essex County Council planning process. In the meantime, we will continue to engage with the local community through the parish council and key interested parties directly. A dedicated Boxted Bridge webpage was created in October 2020 and is updated regularly to keep the community informed of progress, including additional information to explain considerations made to date and answers to frequent questions.'

Question 2: from Mr Lee Scott, a resident of Chigwell who asked a question concerning budget provisions. He asked:

'Given the scale of the Covid crisis, and the diversion of resources in that direction, what budgetary provision has been made for all the other non Covid strategies of the County Council? Given the impact of Covid on the care sector, what is the Council doing to ensure quality and choice are maintained across the County?'

Councillor Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance and Councillor Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care replied.

'I would like to thank Mr Scott for his question. In the main, budgets have been built for 2021/22 using the assumption that the one-off costs of the pandemic would cease for 2021/22, although where it is believed there will be permanent behaviour changes these have been reflected in our planning and where one-off pressures due to Covid arise we will apply the £29m Covid emergency funding that is being provided by government and look to our targeted reserves that we have set prudently to support the mitigation of such risks. With regards to non Covid strategies this budget sets out an investment of an additional £33m across portfolios for 2021/22. The majority of this growth will protect and grow adult social care services meeting the rise in demand for services and levelling up through pay rises for carers.'

Councillor Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care added that:

'Within Adult Social Care we are bursting with ambition – our "Meaningful Lives Matter" programme (supporting better outcomes for people with learning disabilities), the Connect programme – enabling up to 40% more older people to live independently - backed up by care technology – all of which are funded into 2021/22.

We do recognise that the Covid crisis has had a significant impact on care sector. We continue to work with Essex Cares Limited, the Essex Care Association and others to ensure viability of homes in all parts of the county

and the continuing effectiveness of domiciliary care, so that choice and quality can be preserved.'

Question 3: from Mr Anthony McQuiggan, a resident of Galleywood who asked a question concerning the Summer Camp Initiative. He asked:

'Following on from the successful summer camp initiative that was launched across Essex last year, can the Cabinet Member for Children and Families confirm whether there are plans to deliver the programme again in summer 2021?'

Councillor McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families replied:

'Thank you for your question. As you know, last year we ran an extremely successful programme of summer camps in every city, borough and district across the county. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, we still managed to offer 22,850 free face-to-face places to children across the 6-week holidays at a cost of £262k. The feedback we received from families was extremely positive. This scheme not only provided parents with much needed respite following the first period of home-schooling, but also helped those children rebuild their social connections and aid in their mental and physical wellbeing following the first lockdown. We worked closely with our partners across the different Essex communities to provide activities and fun engagement to young people, along with the provision of food and additional family support where needed. This was pioneering work by ECC and Active Essex and was held up by others as a great example of supporting young people and working with the community to deliver the programme.

This year, having now been in two further lockdowns, and with schools being closed for periods of time during the course of the year, we are very keen to look at how we can deliver even more places to families this year. With government plans now in place to start to open up the economy and our communities, it is vital that we support children in the round. We need young people to be active and able to rekindle those social connections.

Government have also taken note of the summer camps programme that we ran last year and in December announced their Holiday Activities and Food Programme for 2021. This saw an investment of £220m across the country for local authorities to provide free holiday provision akin to that which we offered last summer. Essex is receiving £4m of this funding, which will enable us to deliver the programme on a greater scale this year.

As such, this summer holiday, we will offer 12k places to children each day over the summer holiday period (c240k space over the course of the summer). Essex County Council is also funding an expansion of the scheme, working with our community partners to offer a wider range of activities such as in the arts and STEM. These new additions, along with the physical element will provide the most comprehensive holiday offer ever undertaken and will not only be a lifeline for working parents but for children whilst they socialise and spend time with each other over the summer. We also will

commit to further holiday clubs at Easter and Christmas and will continue to provide targeted holiday hunger activity support during the half terms to those families that need it.

We are also mindful of the lost education that children have experienced over the past few months. Studies show that children who attend extra and co-curricular clubs (e.g. after school or weekends) tend to have higher confidence, a greater sense of wellbeing and belonging, better social skills, improved team work experience, all of which will be vital to helping children catch up after the lockdown. Our focus is very much on supporting and nurturing these elements.'

Question 4: from Councillor Holly Whitbread of Epping Forest District Council who asked a question concerning the provision of Health and Adult Social Care. She asked:

'Essex County Council's provision of Adult Health and Social Care provides vital services for some of the most vulnerable residents in our community.

What work is being done to ensure that the best possible service is delivered while providing good value to all local taxpayers?'

Councillor Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care replied:

'I have mentioned in my previous answer a number of ambitious programmes, all are programmes that are designed to enhance the quality of life for the residents we serve, whilst providing value for money. We spend over £600m on social care every year. In doing so we will continue to drive value for money for residents. Only this morning, I learned the latest information and achievements of the Essex Wellbeing Service:

- 207,000 Essex residents supported in the last year
- 382,000 volunteer jobs completed to support people with daily living tasks
- Over 500 new befrienders recruited to support those who are isolated and lonely
- Over 1,000 people trained in mental health first aid during covid-19
- 11,000 Volunteers recruited to support shielding, testing and vaccination across Essex to complement the work of community hubs.

Fundamentally, as the above demonstrates, it is not always about spending money, but how we engage with our communities.'

Question 5: from Mr Andrew Schrader a resident of Basildon who asked a question concerning financial savings. He asked:

'Given the financial pressures on local authorities could the Cabinet Member for Finance please explain how the savings for 22/23 will be achieved?'

Councillor Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance replied:

'I'd like to thank Mr Schrader for the question this morning. As an Essex resident it is entirely right and proper that he should be interested in and concerned about how we propose to deliver savings and continue to deliver value for money to the taxpayer. As is the case every year, it isn't as simple as savings and efficiencies, it is about working in the most effective manner for our residents. ECC continues to be the only Council of its size and scale of spend that falls within the top 10 most effective councils. During the pandemic, we have demonstrated increased agile and flexible working and it's important that we don't stand still but continue to transform the organisation for the benefit of our residents.

Question 6: from Mr Ross Playle, a resident of **Witham** who asked a question concerning flooding. He asked:

'Given all the recent rain, can you reassure me that you will continue to invest in flood prevention measures to help protect residents and people's homes across Essex?'

Councillor Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action replied:

'Many thanks for your question. Yes, we will continue to invest in flood prevention measures to help protect residents and people's homes across Essex. Since the 4th December 2020, a persistent period of wet weather has resulted in numerous flood incidents across Essex. Our flood and water management team have seen a dramatic increase in the number of enquiries relating to ordinary watercourses and flooding to private property. As well as the Team being hard at work dealing with hundreds of reported incidents of flooding, each year Essex Highways also maintains thousands of gullies. In this financial year alone around 100,000 have been cleansed. This is just one way of alleviating issues that lead to flooding, however, this will not prevent all flooding when there are sustained periods of heavy rainfall.

The ECC floods team have invested £1.7m as part of the ongoing programme of flood defence improvements. A further £2.6m will be invested in flood defences next year as part of our ongoing commitment to flood defences in Essex.

As part of the wider capital programme, we will have unlocked over £7,000,000 pounds worth of funding and reduced surface water flood risk to over 1400 residential properties in Essex.

During these busy times, we can offer any property that has been affected by the recent flooding a 'Property Flood Resilience' grant of up to £8k per property. Details on www.flood.essex.gov.uk By the end of March 2021, ECC will have installed 450 Property Level Resilience schemes since the Essex grant initiative began in 2017.

In the last year ECC has also provided advice on 500 planning applications improving Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) on over 62,000 properties.

There are 36,000 properties at risk from surface water/rainfall flooding in Essex. We encourage everyone to check their flood risk at www.flood.essex.gov.uk and take steps to prepare where needed.'

5. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

Deaths

Former Councillor Brian Wood

The Chairman announced the death of former Councillor Brian Wood, who passed away on 18 January at the age of 78.

Members were informed that he had been elected on 4 June 2009 to represent the Division of Canvey Island East. During the four years that he had been a County Councillor, he had served on the Executive Scrutiny Committee, the Member Development Steering Group, the Community Wellbeing and Older People PSC and the South Essex Area Forum.

He had also been a District Councillor since 2004 and was the Mayor of the Borough of Castle Point from 2017 to 2018.

Councillors Pond and Sheldon spoke in remembrance.

Former Councillor Mervyn Juliff

The Chairman announced the death of former Councillor Mervyn Juliff at the age of 87.

Members were informed that he had been elected to represent Great Parndon between 1967 and 1970 and then again between 1993 and 2001. During his time as an Essex County Councillor he had served on the Highways and Transportation Committee, the Education Committee and was a member of the Executive Board as well as many other committees and Boards. He had been the Leader of the Labour Group and had served as Leader of both Harlow Council and Essex County Council.

Members were informed that he had also served as a magistrate and had been involved in many local groups.

Councillor Young spoke in remembrance.

At the request of the Chairman, Members observed a minute's silence.

New Year's Honours

The Chairman informed members that thirty-one people of the great County of Essex have been honoured for their community and voluntary work and public service.

Nine of those individuals have been recognised for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chairman congratulated everyone who had received a nomination, these individuals have made a difference to many and the County of Essex and the country would have been much the poorer without their work.

The Chairman reflected that the New Year's Honours recognise only a small part of the huge contribution made by many who work tirelessly for their communities and he thanked everyone who had contributed positively to the county's response to the current pandemic.

Breaks

The Chairman confirmed that, should the meeting run beyond 11:30, he intended to adjourn the meeting for ten minutes. If this happened a message will be displayed for members of the public and he asked that all members mute their microphones and turn off their cameras.

The broadcasting of the meeting would also be paused.

He anticipated that there would also be a lunch break at around 1:00 pm should the meeting go on that long, and that this break would be for approximately 30 minutes.

6. Receipt of petitions and deputations

The Chairman invited Councillor John Spence to speak and present a petition: concerning fallen fruit from trees causing a nuisance on footpaths.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure, Councillor Bentley responded.

7. Organisation Plan and Budget 2021/22

The Council received the Report on the Budget 2021/22 that was in two parts:

- Part 1 being the Section 151 Officer's report and
- Part 2 being the Organisational Plan and Budget 2021/22.

There were also appendices:

- Appendix A – Essex Organisation Plan 2021/22
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (Organisation Plan and Budget

- Appendix C – Pay Policy Statement
- Appendix D – Budget Consultation Report
- Appendix E – Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy 2021/22

It was noted that there had been an Addendum Report and Replacement Recommendations document required as a result of the National Non-Domestic Rating return (NNDR1) being received from Harlow District Council. The addendum was circulated to all Members since the publication of the original report. It was further noted that the changes to the recommendations did not affect the recommended level of council tax.

The budget motions (1) to note the report of the section 151 officer and (2) the replacement recommendations set in the addendum report circulated to members before the meeting were moved by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Finch, and seconded by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Whitbread.

It was moved by Councillor Mackrory and seconded by Councillor Kendall that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

‘That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended as set out for the reasons and purposes set out below:

1.0 Recognising the enormity of the Climate Change Emergency

1.1 The recommendations of the Essex Climate Change Commission need to be implemented immediately to tackle what is unquestionably an emergency (Climate Change Action portfolio). An additional £2m funding is proposed to:

- Promote a sustainable approach to growth, development and a low carbon future.
- Implement measures to improve the green infrastructure of Essex and increase biodiversity.
- Improve the environmental quality, attractiveness and recreational potential of public spaces in ECC ownership.
- Implement measures to reduce waste, lower energy consumption and improve air quality in identified hot spots and introduce Clean Air Zones.

1.2 This to be funded by drawing down an additional £2m from the £4m Essex Climate Change Commission Reserve in 2021/22 with a further £2m in 2022/23.

- 2.0 The following items, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1, to be funded by a 1% increase in Council Tax (£7.1m) and that the budget recommendation be amended as detailed in the section 151 officer's commentary and statement below.

3.0 Supporting the needs of children and young people with mental health issues

- 3.1 The huge increase in numbers of young people requiring advice and treatment for mental health issues due to Coronavirus is well documented. Current demand is not being met fast enough as shown by waiting times, to the detriment of those young people. Therefore, it is proposed to Increase the Children and Families budget by £2m (Health and Adult Social Care portfolio). This additional funding to enable more vital work with children and young people with mental health issues. Measures to tackle suicide prevention and sexual health conditions will also reduce costly treatment to the NHS. We will promote the benefits of investing in match-funding this significant additional expenditure with the Clinical Commissioning Groups to provide more mental health counselling support in all schools to help identify and address mental health issues at an early age with the intention of reducing demand on services in the future.

4.0 Supporting Essex's young people

- 4.1 An increase of £500,000 in the budget provision for Youth Services (Education and Skills portfolio) for the provision of Youth Service projects including, support, mentoring and respite for young carers, school lunchtime clubs/drop in sessions run by youth workers and outreach work, including detached working.

5.0 Supporting low income families £2.1m

- 5.1 Protect low income families from the 1% increase in Council Tax by adding £2.1m to the proposals being developed for the remainder of the £10m Local Council Tax Support grant for 2021/22 (after recompense for any loss of Council Tax base). This scheme will be developed in partnership with Essex District, Borough and City Councils. In 2020/21 District, Borough and City Councils within Essex have supported approximately 52,300 households by applying up to £150 council tax discount to all Local Council Tax Support claimants, at a cost of £7.9m, funded from the government's Council Tax Covid-19 hardship fund.

6.0 Investing in our infrastructure and keeping Essex safe

- 6.1 An increase of £2.5m in the Highways Capital programme (as a revenue contribution to capital) provision for Road Maintenance (Infrastructure portfolio) to start to clear the massive backlog of footway, cycleway and drainage repairs. Roads Maintenance will be

increased by £1.99m, Footway Maintenance by £390,000 and Surface Water Alleviation by £120,000.

7.0 Reducing Fly Tipping

- 7.1 An increase of £250,000 in the budget provision for Waste Disposal (Environment and Waste portfolio) to tackle the scourge of fly tipping which is blighting both the countryside and urban areas, in particular to pursue and prosecution of offenders. This increase is to be funded from the Waste Reserve in 2021/22.'

It was moved by Councillor Henderson and seconded by Councillor Young that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

'That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended for the reasons and purposes set out below:

Supporting the Community

- 1) An increase of **£600,000** in supporting the community in 2021/22, on a one-off basis to assist the most vulnerable residents across Essex from isolation and loneliness.

This would require an increase in the budget for Customer, Communities, Culture & Corporate portfolio by **£600,000** and a reduction of the same sum in the Transformation Reserve.

- 2) An increase to the Youth Service revenue budget by **£200,000** on a one-off basis to provide a further 8 commissioners for 12 months to help support the additional demand caused during COVID-19 in the most deprived areas within Essex.

This would require an increase in the Education and Skills portfolio budget by **£200,000** and a reduction of the same sum in the Service Improvement Reserve.

Getting Residents Walking

- 3) An increase in the annual Footway Maintenance capital programme by **£1.8m** to get more people walking through out Essex.

This would require an increase to the Infrastructure portfolio budget by **£1.8m**, funded by borrowing, the revenue servicing of which will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Transformation Reserve totalling **£13,000** for 2021/22.

- 4) An increase in the annual Public Rights of Way capital programme by **£100,000**, maintaining levels of spend in line with previous years. This is to ensure that there is improvement and maintenance of targeted routes to

provide adequate and safe paths, allowing children and parents to walk to school.

This would require an increase in the Infrastructure portfolio capital programme by **£100,000**, funded by borrowing, the revenue servicing of which will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Transformation Reserve, totalling **£1,000** for 2021/22.

Highway's Quality Assurance

- 5) Increase to the 2021/22 Infrastructure revenue budget by **£45,000**, on a one-off basis to support an independent review of the criteria assessment used by Ringway Jacobs. The review will assess the quality criteria applied when approving maintenance and repairs, carried out under the existing Ringway Jacob contract to quality assure their remedial work.

This would require an increase in the budget for Infrastructure portfolio by **£45,000** which will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Service Improvement Reserve.

- 6) Increase to the annual Infrastructure revenue budget for three years, from 2021/22 to 2023/24, by **£38,000 per annum**. This is to fund twice yearly, independent inspections of highway repair work carried out under the existing Ringway Jacobs contract, sampling a range of completed repairs across the county.

This would require an increase in the budget for the Infrastructure portfolio by **£38,000 per annum** which will be funded through withdrawals from the Service Improvement Reserve for 2021/22 through to 2023/24, a total reduction to the reserve of **£114,000.**

8. Adjournment

With the agreement of Council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 11:40. The meeting reconvened at 11:50.

9. Organisation Plan and Budget 2021/22 (continued)

The amendment moved by Councillor Mackrory and seconded by Councillor Kendall was put to the meeting and was **lost**.

The amendment moved by Councillor Henderson and seconded by Councillor Young was put to the meeting and was **lost**.

In accordance with Standing Order 16.10.2 (Voting on budget decisions) the Motion as shown in the Addendum Report and Replacement Recommendations document was put to a division by name and **carried** by 52 votes for, 13 against and 4 abstentions.

Those voting for the Motion were Councillors:

J Abbott	A Goggin	V Metcalfe
J F Aldridge	R J Gooding	R Mitchell
T Ball	I Grundy	Dr R Moore
S Barker	C Guglielmi	J Moran
J Beavis	M Hardware	M Platt
K Bentley	J Henry	C Pond
A Brown	S Hillier	R Pratt
M Buckley	P Honeywood	J M Reeves
G Butland	A Jackson	W Schmitt
S Canning	S Lissimore	A Sheldon
J Chandler	D Louis	C Souter
P Channer	J Lumley	J Spence
M Durham	R A Madden	M Stephenson
B Egan	M Maddocks	M Steptoe
D Finch	B Massey	L Wagland
R Gadsby	M McEwen	S Walsh
M Garnett	L McKinlay	C Weston
		C Whitbread

Those voting against the Motion were Councillors:

B Aspinell	D Harris	P Reid
J Baker	I Henderson	S Robinson
A Davies	D J Kendall	K Smith
J Deakin	M Mackrory	A Turrell
		J A Young

Those abstaining were Councillors Blackwell, Johnson, Jowers, and Scordis.

Resolved:

1. That the Section 151 Officer Report be noted.
2. **Organisation Plan, Revenue and Capital Budget**

- 2.1 That the Organisation Plan be approved in the form appended to the report (Appendix A) subject to the changes set out in paragraph 2.18 below.
- 2.2 The net cost of services to be set at **£1,037.9million (m)** for 2021/22 – Appendix A (page 37).
- 2.3 The net revenue budget requirement to be set at **£894.9m** (net cost of services less general government grants) for 2021/22 – Appendix A (page 41).
- 2.4 The total council tax funding requirement be set at **£717.5m** for 2021/22 – Appendix A (page 41).
- 2.5 That Essex County Council's element of the council tax be increased by 1.5% for the adult social care precept, using the flexibility set out by government to raise a precept of up to 3% for the 'adult social care precept'. Therefore, the Essex County Council element of the council tax charge for a Band D property in 2021/22 will be **£1,340.91**. A full list of bands is as follows:

Council Tax Band	2020/21	2021/22
	£	£
Band A	880.74	893.94
Band B	1,027.53	1,042.93
Band C	1,174.32	1,191.92
Band D	1,321.11	1,340.91
Band E	1,614.69	1,638.89
Band F	1,908.27	1,936.87
Band G	2,201.85	2,234.85
Band H	2,642.22	2,681.82

- 2.6 Full Council approve the Essex County Council element of the council tax for each category of dwelling and the precepts on each of the council tax billing authorities for 2021/22, together with the final tax base, as set out in the table below:

Billing Authority	2021/22 Final Tax Base Band D Equivalent	2021/22 Gross Precept £000
Basildon	60,840	81,581
Braintree	53,721	72,035
Brentwood	33,250	44,586
Castle Point	30,965	41,521
Chelmsford	68,580	91,959
Colchester	62,776	84,178
Epping Forest	54,019	72,434
Harlow	27,386	36,722
Maldon	24,959	33,468
Rochford	32,052	42,979
Tendring	48,436	64,948
Uttlesford	38,108	51,100
Total for ECC	535,092	717,510

- 2.7 Agree that, subject to the funding position prevailing next year, the Council intends to raise council tax in 2022/23 to use the remaining 1.5% adult social care precept in 2022/23.
- 2.8 That the proposed total schools budget be set at **£567.4m** for 2021/22 which will be funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, Universal Free School Meals Grant, Pupil Premium Grant, PE and Sports Premium Grant, Sixth Form Grant and the COVID-19 Catch-up Grant. The majority of this will be passed through to maintained schools.
- 2.9 That the underlying balance on the General Balance be set at **£65.5m** as at 1 April 2021 (Appendix A, Annex 1, page 68).
- 2.10 That the capital payments guideline be set at **£290.3m** for 2021/22.
- 2.11 That for the purposes of section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the Council formally determines that the increase in council tax is not such as to trigger a referendum.

Strategic Performance Measures

- 2.12 That the strategic performance measures as set out in Annex 2 (Appendix A) be approved, noting that Annex 2 was not in the information submitted to Cabinet.

Capital Strategy

- 2.13 That the 2021/22 to 2024/25 Prudential Indicators and limits, together with updated limits for 2020/21 as set out in Annexes 3A and 3B of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A) be approved.
- 2.14 That the Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/22 be approved, comprising:

- a. Borrowing strategy, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 85).
 - b. Treasury management investments strategy, as set out in Annex 3 and Annex 3D of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 92).
 - c. Indicative strategy for commercial investment activities, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 95).
- 2.15 That the policy for making a prudent level of revenue provision for the repayment of debt, (the Minimum Revenue Provision policy) as set out in Annex 3C of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 103), be approved.

Pay Policy Statement

- 2.16 The Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix C be approved.

Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy 2021/22

- 2.17 The Flexible Use of Capital Receipt Strategy for 2021/22 (Appendix E) be approved, using the short-term discretion from government to use £1.3m of capital receipts to fund transformation projects that save money or reduce costs.

10. Council Issues

Councillor Finch, the Leader of the Council, presented the report.

It having been moved by Councillor Finch and seconded by Cllr Bentley it was

Resolved

That the Constitution be amended to

1. Increase in the number of proper officers for the purposes of countersigning declarations of acceptance of office by newly elected councillors and that there be an amendment to the constitution to read:

'4.4 Statutory Officers

Full Council has designated the following posts as shown:

Post	Designation
Chief Executive	Head of the Paid Service under Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and a

	proper officer for the purposes of section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972 (declaration of acceptance of office)
Executive Director, Finance and Technology	Chief Finance Officer appointed under section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972
Executive Director, Children and Families	Director of Children's Services appointed under Section 18 of the Children Act 2004
Executive Director, Adult Social Care	Director of Adult Social Services appointed under section 6 of the Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970
Director, Legal and Assurance	Monitoring Officer under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and a proper officer for the purposes of section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972 (declaration of acceptance of office)
Director, Well-being, Public Health and Communities	Director of Public Health under section 73A of the National Health Service Act 2006
Head of Democracy and Transparency	Scrutiny Officer under Section 9FB of the Local Government Act 2000 and a proper officer for the purposes of section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972 (declaration of acceptance of office)

The Post titles as shown in the first column of the above table may be varied by the Chief Executive.'

2. Remote Meetings

That a new paragraph 17.4 be inserted in the constitution as set out below and that paragraphs 17.4 and 17.5 are renumbered to 17.5 and 17.6 and all cross-references are updated.

'17.4 Remote participation

Notwithstanding any provision in the constitution to the contrary, any Member of the Cabinet (including the Leader) may participate in a meeting of the Cabinet and vote on any item of business notwithstanding that they are not present at the place where the meeting takes place, if:

- (a) the agenda for the meeting includes instructions on how members may participate in the meeting remotely
- (b) the Member concerned has been able to hear and, where practical, see the meeting; and

- (c) persons present at the meeting have been able to hear and, where practical, see the member during all or most of the discussion of the item; and
- (d) the Member concerned is able to indicate how they wish to vote
- (e) the Member is not prevented by the Code of Conduct from being present or voting.'

3. Approved Bodies

That the list of Approved Bodies in Appendix 3 of Part 26 of the Constitution be amended as follows:

1. Remove the reference to the Basildon Bus Forum.
2. Amend the reference to the 'Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Anglian (Central)' to the 'Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Anglian (Great Ouse)'.

4. Date of annual meeting 2021

That the annual meeting of the Council for the 2021/22 municipal year be held at 10 am on Tuesday 25 May at such venue or by such remote means as the Chairman may determine.

11. The Leader's Report of Cabinet Issues

Councillor Finch, the Leader of the Council, presented the report.

It having been moved by Councillor Finch and seconded by Cllr Bentley it was

Resolved

To receive the list of urgent decisions taken and the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 15 December 2020 and 19 January 2021.

12. Written Questions

The published answers to the 18 written questions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 16.12.1 were noted.

Members sought points of clarification from the relevant Cabinet Members, details of which are available on the ECC website via [the audio recording of the meeting](#).

The written questions and answers were:

1. By Councillor Beavis of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

‘Could the Cabinet Member please provide a summary of the impact that the Coronavirus pandemic is having on our children? What overall effect has there been on the prevalence of food hunger, child poverty or children’s mental health in Essex?’

Specifically, can the Cabinet Member tell me:

- 1) How many children are defined as living in poverty or living with food hunger in Essex?
- 2) What provision was made for free school meals in the February half-term in Essex and
- 3) What is the impact of Essex children receiving free school meals?’

Reply

‘Thank you for your question. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 crisis has had a huge impact on the lives of families and children and we know that the pandemic has increased the need for help with food across the country, including here in Essex. As would be expected, the government, both national and local, have responded with additional support. A number of financial support packages, such as increases to Universal Credit and the Winter Covid Support Fund, have been made available to help families during this uncertain period.

Here in Essex, we have used this money in a variety of ways. Members will be aware of the detail that has been provided to them. In both the Christmas and February half term holidays, we provided £15 free school meal vouchers per child, per week to around 35,000 young people who were eligible for benefits based free school meals. In addition to this, we have worked with Active Essex and a team of community organisations in order to provide support for around 2800 families most in need across the county, this includes family food boxes, activity packs, family wellbeing packs, food and nutrition education and a week of online activities.

We have also provided three rounds of funding for community food support groups to bid for money to help with the provision of food parcels for people across the county. The feedback to this has been very positive and has allowed the organisations to increase support at crucial times, such as over Christmas and during the cold weather.

Last Summer, we successfully launched our Holiday Camp Activity Scheme, which provided nearly 25,000 places to families across Essex. The young people who attended them, took part in positive and fun activities and were provided with food and where necessary, additional support and supplies.

These schemes have been extremely successful and have had a positive impact on feeding families and supporting them during the global pandemic crisis.

We are already looking at what we can do to ensure the support that continues post-pandemic is appropriate and sustainable and we have some projects already in the pipeline, which include:

- The Holiday Activity Camp Scheme, which were planned before COVID-19 happened and will continue to run again this year, with a greater offer than in 2020. Food will once again be provided.
- Our Working Families programme is currently tackling the issue of affordable childcare and is gathering evidence to pilot a scheme in Basildon, to support parents in their return to work.
- Our “Closing the Digital Divide” laptop scheme has been distributing thousands of laptops to children right across the county and we are working to ensure that this continues post- Covid.
- In Tendring, where we have a disproportionate number of children come into care, we have set up a new multi-disciplinary team in Children Services to specifically target those families who require our support and work with them to build their resilience. We hope if this is successful to expand this work to Canvey.
- We are currently updating our child poverty strategy to ensure that Essex is at the forefront in tackling some of the key issues.'

2. By Councillor Smith of the Leader of the Council

'When meetings of the Council resume at County Hall, once it is both safe and lawful to do so, will these meetings be recorded and uploaded to You Tube with a person translating the meeting into sign language?

Also, after the next elections to Essex County Council, can all members be offered a basic course in sign language so that all councillors can talk with their constituents that use this language to communicate?'

Reply

'We meet regularly with community representatives as part of our commitment to diversity, as well as considering comments made by our residents. We are not aware of any demand for this service, perhaps because people can use the 'closed captions' if they want to, but we will of course keep under review.

I will however refer your suggestion to the Member Development Steering Group and I am sure they will consider it at their next meeting on 1 March, as they consider all suggestions for development opportunities for members.'

3. By Councillor Smith of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'How much did Redrow pay to Essex County Council for the new primary school for the Westley Green Estate? Has this money been spent or is it sitting in a ring-fenced reserve? If it has been spent, which school was this spent on?'

Reply

'I can confirm that ECC has received £1,045,729 (including interest) from Redrow with a further estimated sum of £1,615,844 (plus indexation) that is yet to be received.

This money is to be used as a contribution toward the cost of the new school which is currently anticipated to be in the region of £8.5m. The balance is coming from ECC resources.

The school will be required to solve the need for places in 23/24 academic year, as set out in the Essex School Organisation Service's Ten-Year Plan.'

4. By Councillor Kendall of the Leader of the Council

'The charity 'Crohn's and Colitis UK' is encouraging venues providing accessible toilets to install new signage. This is to help stop the stigma and discrimination towards people with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis and other invisible conditions. There have been instances nationally where such individuals using an accessible toilet have been accused by staff members of being ineligible to use them. The charity signs have two standing figures and a wheelchair user with the wording Accessible Toilet and the logo "Not every disability is visible".

Will the Leader please take action to ensure that all accessible toilets on Essex County Council premises bear these signs?'

Reply

'We are committed to ensuring that everyone in Essex is aware of the many forms of disability. We manage over 350 schools, and they along with our offices and buildings have many accessible toilets. We believe, rather than changing a few signs, that it is through education and national awareness raising that this stigma will be broken. We will continue to train and inform to ensure that our staff and schoolchildren are aware of the important message you wish to convey that not every disability is visible.'

5. By Councillor Kendall of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'There are a number of large highway schemes across Essex that have been waiting many years for the necessary funding to become available for them to be delivered. One such scheme is the solid island roundabout that is needed at the Devil's Head crossroad in my County Division with an estimated cost of £1.2 million. The Local Highways Panel budgets would never be large enough to fund these types of schemes so will the Cabinet Member for Highway's consider creating a separate Highways funding pot which members could bid for? This initiative would help to ensure that there was a realistic prospect of some of these schemes being delivered in the future.'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Kendall for his question. Where schemes are of an order of cost that is greater than can be accommodated by an individual LHP, they are treated as major schemes where initial development work is undertaken and options assessed so that they might be in a position to attract relevant external funding. Examples of these abound in recent years across the County using Local Growth Funding, Pinch Point, Active Travel Funding, and many others. I'm pleased to say in this regard, ECC have one of the best track records in the country for drawing in these external grants, largely due to the commitment we maintain to early scheme development work. It would not however be financially prudent for ECC to borrow more money to fund additional capital schemes in the current financial climate. In the specific example of Devils Head, as Councillor Kendall is aware, these early scheme development works suggested that a solid island roundabout would carry significant cost and not deliver any better outcomes than the scheme we have recently completed in this location. It would also have significantly more impact on the adjacent Common Land.'

6. By Councillor Blackwell of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'In the recent spell of wet weather many roads on Canvey Island were flooded like many other areas of Essex. Many residents are asking why there were no flood warning signs on the roads.

Would the Cabinet Member consider making "road flooded" signs available to the Local Highway Rangers to allow a quicker roll out of these signs.'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Blackwell for his question. The recent wet weather has put great stress on the road network across the county, causing flooding in areas that may not have experienced it to this extent for some time – and we know climate change will make this extreme weather more likely in the future. I would support requests to each of the Local Highways Panels to invest in new flood warning and 'road flooded' signs that can be deployed by the Local Highways Rangers.'

7. By Councillor Harris of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'Would the Portfolio Holder be able to update members with the revised plan for conversion to LED of all street lights, in Essex and in my area of Colchester - Maypole (Berechurch and Shrub End areas) as I was told two years ago it was the intention to have all lights converted in three years. It may be that COVID or costs have amended the plan and timescales?'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Harris for his question. The LED program has been slightly delayed during the pandemic, but we are on course to start installation early in the new financial year. This is one of the largest programmes of its type across the country with a value in excess of £20m to be delivered over 3 years and has required a great deal of preparation with securing orders of the LED lights and engaging the necessary levels of resources. Our communications team will work closely with the project delivery team to keep the public informed.'

8. By Councillor Harris of the Leader of the Council

'Can the Leader of the Council update members with any plans for changes in staffing numbers, and any changes in travel arrangements for ECC staff due to working from home.'

Reply

'The Council does not have at present any organisation-wide plans for significant changes to staffing numbers for the coming financial year. Following the inception of the Council's Organisation Design Programme in 2017, the Council has maintained its programme of continuous review of staffing structures, within functions, as part of the annual process of workforce planning to ensure the workforce is the optimum size to deliver Council services.'

Whilst the current Government restrictions in relation to the pandemic remain in situ, the Council have implemented a workforce protocol that where employees are able to work remotely they are encouraged to do so and where they are required to have physical presence in a Council building, the social distancing measures are to be adhered to. The Council currently has over 50% of its workforce working at home and therefore they are not travelling to Council offices. All other staff who are required to attend Council offices are asked to adhere to Government guidance in maintaining safe travel.'

9. By Councillor Scordis of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'Can the portfolio holder advise why is there a £986,000 underspend on highway maintenance across Essex?'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Scordis for his question. I can confirm that the £986,000 figure is due to overall costs charged through the year-end closure process being slightly lower than expected due to the impact of COVID-19.'

Essex Highways crews are continuing to repair potholes, grit main roads and repair streetlights as usual, to the maximum capability we have. Our crews have had to

social distance amongst themselves and avoid close contact with local residents. Another issue crews faced is many more cars parked on roads as people stay at home, which makes arranging clear roads for surfacing difficult for everyone. COVID-19 restrictions caused these issues and we had to postpone some town centre and estate road resurfacing. We will come back to these roads this year to improve them and our workers will continue their hugely-valued work.'

10. By Councillor Scordis of the Leader of the Council

'Can the Leader of the Council confirm the Council's position on Garden Communities, as his Deputy seemed to be opposed to them at Colchester Borough Council?'

Reply

'As you are aware, Essex County Council has been an active supporter of Garden Communities across Essex and partnered with Colchester Borough Council on the North Essex Garden Communities project and continues to do so on the Tendring Colchester Borders project.'

11. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate

'As we go into the elections, can I ask the Portfolio Holder if the future of Essex libraries will be a safe and secure one?'

Reply

'Yes, Essex County Council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to deliver a comprehensive and efficient free library service to all who live, work or study in the county and who desire to use it. The Essex Future Library Services Strategy commits to continuing to deliver our core offer, whilst also seeking new ways of working to ensure we achieve the following:

- Place books and reading at the heart of our library service offer
- Provide a modern library service and library spaces, which are fit for both now and the future
- Empower and support communities and groups to shape and manage community-run library services that best meet the needs of the community they serve
- Offer a consistently good customer experience
- Have a comprehensive eLibrary offer and embrace digital technology.

A £3 million investment was made to the Library Service to support the strategy.

The Library Service will be attending Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 25th February to update on the service's success and the investment that has gone into the library service since the

commencement of the strategy. This includes investing in a new Library Management System, which will provide access to millions more books. Essex libraries will move to the new system in late spring and it will bring with it a host of innovative and interactive features including:

- a system compatible with all mobile devices
- customers will be able to rate books, post reviews and make recommendations to other customers
- access to a 24/7 renewals line so that items can easily renewed
- an enhanced app with lots of new features, including self service functions
- customer alerts and texts

Other workstream highlights, since the publication of the new library strategy include – working on rebuilding Shenfield library to make it bigger and better for customers, partnership working with Adult Community Learning (ACL) to begin to create a modern, vibrant library in Harlow, new LED lighting in 5 libraries (with up to 20 more to be completed in the next year), upgrade of public computers in all 74 libraries, self-service machines to be upgraded and wifi upgrades in 10 of our busiest libraries.

We are also investing in our people, which has included launching a new apprenticeship scheme and providing them with opportunities to learn new skills, such as how to create engaging online rhyme-time activities.'

12. By Councillor Young of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'West Quay in Wivenhoe has no working street lights, the pavements are falling into disrepair and the safety of the river wall is not known. Essex County Council refused to formally adopt the area five years ago. This leaves residents in Wivenhoe in very unsafe circumstances and at the mercy of an unresponsive developer. This issue of non-adoption causes untold issues to local communities as developers often walk away from their responsibilities, leaving the public at risk as is the case here.

Can I ask the Portfolio Holder if the County's planning officers can work with Districts and Boroughs to collectively seek a solution to areas such as this where adoption has not been possible? We need the collective force of all tiers of Government to get developers to honour their responsibilities to the community.'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Young for her question. Where we are asked to adopt public highway, it does require the developer to have built the infrastructure to the appropriate adoptable standard. Where roads are to remain private the developer will enter into a legal undertaking that the road will remain private in perpetuity and that ECC will not be required to adopt it at a future date. This is in recognition that it is not built to full adoptable standards. It may be that this is the case with the

development in Wivenhoe and I would be happy to look into the issue in further detail with Councillor Young.

One solution, if there is an absent developer, is for the community to make good the assets to allow the roads, footpaths, and such to be improved to an adoptable standard which could then be taken on by ECC. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution where you have a private road and the developer has moved on.'

13. By Councillor Henderson of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'Will the Portfolio Holder please advise what is the Council policy with reference to providing bags of salt to Town and Parish Councils, and please clarify who is responsible for gritting the non-priority roads and footpaths across the County.'

Reply

'As noted in the question, ECC runs the Salt Bag Partnership with the parish, town councils and some local county members (in unparished towns). We provide bagged or small quantities of bulk salt to such councils, during the proceeding autumn. These councils develop their own local snow plan, to clear footways and very minor roads during inclement weather.

To support the response to inclement weather we also have a reciprocal arrangement with the district, borough and city councils for snow clearing on busy footways. This was exercised in recent weeks with most district, borough and city councils. Essex County Council also employ the services of local snow clearing contractors to clear snow from some of the minor roads. We also direct them to any roads/areas where drifting occurs and re-occurs, in an attempt to keep our main roads open.

Minor roads are not part of our precautionary salting network and do not receive regular treatment. When inclement weather does occur, we will aim to respond to any emergencies, in coordination with the Emergency services.

There is also a network of over 1000 salt bins around the county that are checked and re-stocked every autumn, for the public to use on local roads and pavements.'

14. By Councillor Abbott of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'The persistently wet weather through the winter of 2020/21 has led to surface flooding in many locations in Essex including in Witham Northern division where a number of sections of road and footway have been repeatedly flooded in recent months. The same places were flooded in the winter of 2019/20.

Does the Cabinet Member agree that Essex County Council needs to do the best it can to keep drainage assets clear and working but also to plan ahead for likely even

greater stress on the system given that increasingly wet winters are expected as a result of Climate Change?’

Reply

‘I thank Councillor Abbott for his question and concur with him on this issue – we are clearly facing wetter winters and a greater level of flooding in all locations including our highways as a result. In recognition of the recent flooding, ECC has committed to invest a further £326,000 immediately to tackle urgent highways flooding issues and the road repairs necessary because of the damage. More broadly, we are doing a number of things to tackle the issue including investment in additional jetting and gully emptying now across the network to clear drains after the recent flooding and in the longer term through the implementation of SUDS and increases in our enforcement and education activity. Sadly, myths abound when it comes to matters of flooding and drainage and you will have seen our recent Highways Highlights publication majored on increasing some of this basic understanding. We are also increasing seeing badly maintained or lost drainage facilities on private land. Historically these would have dealt with a lot of these flooding issues but development and a growing lack of understanding from landowners mean that more often than not we see the results on our highways, with water and silt pouring off of surrounding land and into our drains and ditch networks compromised. I am committed to tackling this issue, but it will require commitment from everyone to see the improvements we all seek.’

15. By Councillor Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action

‘Bellfield in Witham is a piece of land owned by Essex County Council that many decades ago was used in association with the former Crittall Works, but it is now a haven for wildlife in an otherwise built-up area.

Local residents living nearby support Bellfield remaining as a green haven. Witham already has a large amount of housing, commercial and other development underway and so instead of trying to build on this land, would Essex County Council consider allowing Witham Town Council to manage it, as they have offered to do?

The site could then be cleaned of litter and the habitat value could be enhanced with more planting. As a further suggestion, Essex County Council could then include this land in the excellent Essex Forest Initiative.’

Reply

‘Many thanks for this suggestion. This site unfortunately has some significant challenges in relation to its potential use. Officers are considering the approach by the Town Council, alongside other ways in which the site could provide further value. A portion of the site has been allocated for use by the adjacent school, but the remainder has been declared surplus to ECC’s requirements and the priority will be to use the land most effectively. Green solutions, such as the Essex Forest

Initiative, will of course be given consideration.'

16. By Councillor Wood of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'With Harwich Port's bid to become a Freeport, and the amount of business this could bring to Tendring, could the Cabinet Member confirm:

- when the A120 will be upgraded to support this development and
- what other assistance Essex County Council will provide to the port in its bid.'

Reply

'I thank Councillor Wood for his question. Freeport East has the potential to become a valuable asset to the local, regional and national economy and a crucial global connection in UK trade. We are confident that the Freeport East vision, centred on the Port of Felixstowe and Harwich International Port, delivers a unique opportunity for local and regional regeneration through the development of a manufacturing, green energy, digital and innovation hub.

We are committed to working with Freeport East, Highways England, Transport East and other local partners to make sure the surface transport investment required to support a successful and sustainable Freeport is developed alongside their wider plans, with a focus on improved strategic connectivity by road and rail. We also wish to ensure that employment opportunities provided by Freeport East are accessible to local people by sustainable forms of transport, supporting our ambition to level-up coastal communities and decarbonise transport across Essex. We have submitted a letter to the Chancellor and Secretary of State in support of the freeport bid.

With regard to the A120 specifically, Highways England now has a dedicated team in place to progress the upgrade of the A120 from Braintree to the A12, with a preferred route announcement expected later in 2021 or early 2022. We are working closely with Highways England to progress the scheme and unlock an estimated £2.2 billion in gross value through new jobs, businesses, and housing. Upgrading the A120 to a dual carriageway will also dramatically improve journey times and significantly improve road safety for our residents.'

17. By Councillor Mackrory of the Leader of the Council

'The Magistrates Courts Service vacated Shire Hall in 2012 having given at least two years prior notice. The building has therefore remained empty for over eight years. Two years ago, I called in the decision to vary the terms of the lease to exclude community uses but this was unsuccessful. In view of the Essex County Council/Chelmsford City Council discussions on the future uses of this building will the Leader reconsider some community provision within the interior design so that the general public can access and enjoy this iconic landmark building?'

Reply

'The County Council has agreed to extend the contract period under which Aquila must obtain planning consent for an appropriate future use for Shire Hall until August 2021. This continues to represent the best value for money outcome for the taxpayer. If it is not possible to achieve progress in that timescale then other options, such as community use, could be considered and will be discussed with Chelmsford City Council.'

18. By Councillor Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate

'The Council's Art Collection is currently valued at £4.7m for insurance purposes. I understand the collection is largely in storage and out of public view. What plans are there for a permanent display space so that the people of Essex can view the collection which the Council holds on their behalf?'

Reply

'With regards to the art collection that ECC holds, much of it is stored at the Essex Record Office in controlled conditions. A small number of the best paintings from within the collection, particularly those of the Barrett Lennard family of Belhus, are hung up on public display at the ERO, in addition to portraits of past Chairmen which can be viewed at County Hall. We are able to provide access to paintings with notice, and officers have brought paintings down several times for talks in the ERO's lecture theatre, which ensures these get some public visibility. High quality images are also available of many of the paintings on the Art UK website.

There are no plans for a permanent display at present, however, we do have close and productive relations with the education functions of both Chelmsford City Museums and the newly recreated Museums Education Group for Essex, so in the future, once Covid-19 restrictions have passed, there could be the opportunity to mount a display if this was felt at the time to be of interest to Essex residents.'

13. Oral Questions of the Leader, Cabinet Member, a chairman of a committee or the representative of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

A recording of the questions and answers given is available on the ECC website via [the audio recording of the meeting](#).

The questions asked were:

Question asked by:	Question to:	Concerning:
Cllr Pond	Cabinet Member for Economic Development	Loughton Library
Cllr Reid	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Potholes
Cllr Reid	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Impact of COVID-19 on mental health of children and young people
Cllr Beavis	Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action	Proposed new electrical line near Castle Hedingham
Cllr Young	Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action	Creation of new country park.
Cllr Harris	Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action	Queuing at Shrub End recycling centre for household waste.
Cllr Harris	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Request for meeting on highways issues.
Cllr Abbott	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Streetlight in Oak Road, Rivenhall.
Cllr Butland	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Funding for local highways panels.
Cllr Channer	Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate	Illegal encampment in Maldon.
Cllr Mitchell	Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action	Solar together scheme
Cllr Reeves	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Member pothole scheme
Cllr Young	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	Member pothole scheme

14. Closure of Meeting

The Chairman, Councillor Jowers, closed the meeting by thanking his Vice-Chairman, Councillor Johnson; expressing gratitude to all Members and officers who had supported him in the discharge of his duties and paying particular tribute to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Finch. A number of other members spoke in support and a recording of the Chairman's remarks and those of other Members of the council is available on the ECC website via [the audio recording of the meeting](#).

The meeting closed at 15:10

Chairman