

District Councillors Report

The ward of Wickham Bishops & The Woodhams which encompasses Woodham Mortimer is represented by two District Councillors, Mark Durham and myself, Henry Bass. Under normal circumstances Mark would compile this report, but due to the forthcoming election for Essex County Council and restrictions of the purdah period, it falls to me to write this year's report to the parish council as Mark is a candidate in a neighbouring division.

In the last twelve months, several significant things have happened at Maldon District Council. In June 2016, the system of waste collection was changed to alternate weekly collection. This is rapidly becoming the most common method across the UK as it has significant economic benefits and the recycling rates are greatly improved. Since the changeover, Maldon's recycling rate has reached nearly 58% and we are hopeful that it will get close to 60% which is an excellent result for our collection regime. Another benefit of making householders think more carefully about their refuse is that the total amount of collected waste has dropped by 700 tonnes. This is clearly a significant benefit to the environment and cost saving to the authority.

The green waste collection is extremely popular and it gives residents the opportunity to have their garden waste removed for a very cheap cost. Green bins are still available and if anyone wants to subscribe to this service, please contact the council switchboard. The new refuse vehicles have state of the art GPS tracking and 360 degree cameras which record the entire round. This can even be accessed live by the depot if problems are reported. Certainly the number of alleged missed collection complaints has drastically reduced when residents found out that the contractor has video evidence!

The Local Development Plan has occupied a great deal of time and resource at the council over the last three years. The LDP lays out the housing requirements for the district over the next 15 years as well as things like employment land, gypsy & traveller provision and infrastructure. Due to a previous issue with a planning inspector, the LDP was referred to The Secretary of State in early 2016. This effectively means that the plan is no longer under the control of the district council. The Secretary of State appointed a new inspector to examine the plan and the public hearings were completed this January. It is hoped that subject to some modification, the plan may be agreed by late summer. This will give the council much greater control over the size and location of developments in the district. However, many people will have seen the government's intention to increase house building and political pressure is being felt across the country to increase the number of new houses and the speed of development. The government is now requiring local authorities to review their plans every five years which in itself places further resource pressures on local councils.

Local government finance is also a major concern at the moment. Since the last reorganisation of local government in 1974, councils have received the money they need to provide services from taxes (council tax or rates) and a grant from central government. Since the austerity measures came into force in 2007/8 the government have reduced the amount of grant year on year. To date MDC receives less than 50% of the grant it has been paid since then and in 2015 it was announced that the grant will be completely removed by

2020. This would be replaced by a system of business rate retention which would be kept by local government rather than passed to the treasury. At the moment we have not been told how this will work or how the money will be distributed between the County Council and Districts, but it is fairly certain that the overall amount of money won't increase, so councils are having to look at being more commercial and find ways to generate the funds that it needs to maintain services to the community.

From my attendance at Parish Council meetings, I am aware of a key issues for Woodham Mortimer. High speed broadband is one of the topics that frequently comes up at parish meetings and the rural parishes seem to suffer more than most. Essex County Council are working in conjunction with BT and other broadband providers under the banner of Superfast Essex. A great deal of progress has been made across the county, but clearly Woodham Mortimer is yet to fully benefit from this. We are keeping the pressure on Essex County Council to ensure that as much of the district is provided with fast and resilient high speed broadband as soon as possible.

Another issue is the slow progress of planning enforcement. There has been considerable criticism of the councils record on enforcement, some justified. There is only a small team at MDC and they have to prioritise the many cases that they have to deal with. This can be time consuming as in many are quite complicated. In Woodham Mortimer however, we have managed to conclude the long running issue of the sign at Splendid Car Wash. The illuminated parts have been removed and I understand that a new application has been submitted for a lower and smaller sign.

Both Mark and myself are always available should parishioners have issues that they want addressed. There are of course some things that are out of our control, but we are often able to forward such matters to whichever organisation can help. Our contact details can be found on the Maldon District Council website. www.Maldon.gov.uk

Cllr. Henry Bass