



# Billericay Town Council Annual Report 2014/2015

*Billericay – A Great Place to Be*

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014 Cllr. John Buchanan

It is in the nature of a local authority that much of its activity is to keep doing the things that you all, as residents, expect us to do for you, and my colleagues in their reports have described much of that essential work.

But each year Billericay Town Council does some things for the first time, and some things are effectively one-off events which take a lot of effort, with quite a large element of risk! These things are always more difficult to achieve than apparent from the finished result.

For the first time ever in 18 years of existence, the Town Council now owns a property. Cllr. Moira Moore mentions this in her report, but what she didn't say is that it took us over two years to transfer the Jim Shields Garden (or as Essex County

Council call it – Highway Verge in Western Road) from the County Council to the town.

Another first for this year is the installation of new Salt Bins mentioned by Cllr. Ian Davie. As residents you know we have hills, and you told us about all the places where additional salt bins were needed, but at least a year of bureaucratic drag from County Council meant that we only just got them installed before the winter.

In both the above cases we received excellent help from County Councillor Kay Twitchen to move things along.

Our Youth Town Council held elections in October, and many young people became Youth Councillors for the first time. The last six months have been full of new experiences for all of them.

The most significant one-off event of the year was the Great War Commemoration Weekend in August. Cllrs. Jo Clark and Jim Devlin devoted many hours of effort supported by our Town Clerk, Deborah Tonkiss, and others to achieve a truly marvellous exhibition and memorial event.

The Community & Civic Weekend in March felt a bit like the first ever, even though it was the second, because the two ministers who helped organise things last year have both moved away from Billericay. My thanks to Revd Paul Carr & Revd Paul Gambling for whom it was the first time to get involved.

May I encourage you to come along to the Annual Town Meeting at 7pm on Thursday 14th May at 7pm at St. Mary Magdalen church to meet town councillors and let us know what more we can do for you.

## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE Chairman: Cllr. Moira Moore

The Environment Committee assists in the enhancement of Billericay's environment. We do this either by providing additional services, or enhancing services already provided by other councils.

We provide the Christmas lights in the High Street in the winter and in the summer we provide the hanging baskets that bring much pleasure to the residents of Billericay. Basildon Borough Council collects our litter weekly; we provide additional 'litter picks' in areas where residents have highlighted that an extra clean up would be beneficial. We also hold the Billericay in Bloom competition each year – this year was the 17th year of this very popular event.

The Town Council is the custodian of the war memorial in the High Street and we provide two plantings a year. The first is in the summer and was particularly spectacular this year with the planting lasting right through to October. The second planting is in late autumn in support of Remembrance Sunday. The Town Council continues to receive praise from the public for the beautiful flowers at the war memorial. As many residents are aware we provide a public toilet in the High Street car park which, although not used by hundreds of people, is much appreciated by residents and visitors as it is open 24 hours a day for 365 days of the year.

We also look after the Festival Gardens in Crown Road and during the year we implemented a number of changes including major pruning, replanting and terracing of rose beds. Thanks to our sponsors we installed a new stone plinth and a new sign on Norsey Road. We held a rededication ceremony in October when the Town Council Chairman rededicated the garden to the town as a peaceful sanctuary.

Towards the end of the year we formally took over the Jim Shields Garden from Essex County Council.

This is a little patch of green at the corner of the High Street and Western Road. We have plans to improve this area that will be implemented during the coming year.

We organised a weekend of events to remember the start of the First World War. A themed exhibition was held at St. Mary Magdalen Church in early August with a musical event featuring songs from WW1.

We arranged regular town walks in the summer months that, once again, proved popular with local residents and visitors who were guided around our historic town. Look out for publicity regarding this year's walks nearer the time.

### **BILLERICAY IN BLOOM 2014 WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Pam Went**

The prize-giving for Billericay in Bloom was held on Saturday, 5th July at the Canon Roche Centre, where a very pleasant evening was had by the contestants and their families and friends. We were pleased this year to welcome a lot more children, whom we endeavour to encourage.

We did make quite a few changes to categories and rules for the competition this year and had a few worries about the number of entries. However, we were delighted to have a wonderful report from the judges who said the gardens which entered were the best they had seen for some time. They commented



*Barbara Flin's Garden*

on the thought and effort by all entrants which created a fine spectacle for the judges to consider in each category. The overall winner for Best in Show was Barbara Flin.

We were lucky enough to have Ken Crowther, BBC Essex's gardening presenter, and Kay Twitchen, County Councillor, to attend our ceremony. The audience always enjoys the entertaining speeches given by both of them.

This year lots of children were inspired to enter the competition by asking them for a colouring, painting or collage floral representation. The room was full of their creative and colourful work.

We are very grateful to those organisations and individuals who have continued to sponsor this long standing competition. New sponsors for the competition are always welcome. The changes made in this competition have definitely improved it and we look forward to an even better competition this year.



*Youth Council Choir at Christmas Lights*

### **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Jo Clark**

Once again Christmas came to Billericay. The annual Christmas Lights Switch On courtesy of the Town Council, took place on Saturday, November 29th outside The Chequers public house. This year the weather was very kind to us and the turnout as ever was tremendous with even more people joining us due to our spreading the word via Twitter and our website.

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The Salvation Army entertained us with Christmas carols and songs and were joined by members of the Youth Town Council looking good in festive costumes. The Town Crier, Jim Shrubbs, was there in full voice and ringing his bell and was joined by Father Christmas, courtesy of The Lions, who had a sack full of sweets for the children and was only too pleased to have his photograph taken with any child who wished. As ever the snow came at the right moment courtesy of The Chequers, creating a magical moment.

On the Monday following the Switch On, Cllrs. Buchanan and Clark together with Youth Town Cllrs. Harrison Birch, Tahlia Brown, Sam Hutchinson and Jack Morrison, judged the Best Dressed Shop Window which was won by the Gift Box with four others being Highly Commended.

Our thanks go to all those participants, shops and contributors who support us in these events and continue to bring our community together to make it a wonderful place to be.

#### **WW1 WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Jo Clark**

This year Billericay Town Council, like many communities, organised an event to commemorate the outbreak of WW1. The Town Council with the help of local schools, clubs, societies and Churches Together presented a weekend of interest. The weekend of August 2, 3 and Monday the 4th was chosen. The 4th being the actual day Great Britain entered the war. The Church of St. Mary Magdalen was selected as the venue. It's a lovely appropriate place and is central for visitors to get to.

The Church was filled with a profusion of wonderful floral displays in red and white, by the ladies from



*Windowsill in Mary Magdalen*

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**Chairman: Cllr. Ian Davie**

The Town Council's Planning Committee has had a busy year reviewing a total of 305 planning applications. Most dealt with minor conversions and extensions submitted by homeowners but more substantial projects which could have significant implications for residents in general included plans to build 14 large houses on Green Belt land at Stockbrook Manor and redevelopment of the Rising Sun pub, which would provide 13 one- or two-bedroom flats. Of the 305 applications considered the Committee felt that 115 would detract from the character of the Town or otherwise affect neighbouring properties and so provided reasons for objecting to the Local Planning Authority (Basildon Borough Council). However, Basildon makes the final decision on all applications and eventually granted permission to about half of those objected to by the Town Council.

As a consultee to the Borough Council, the Town Council must respond promptly when details of applications are received; to do so requires that the Committee meets every two weeks throughout the year. These meetings are open to the public and details of Agendas and Minutes are available on the Town Council web site.

The level of opposition throughout the Borough to the Basildon Local Plan, issued for consultation in January last year, has meant a major re-examination

of its key elements by the Borough Council. This means that a revised Local Plan will not be adopted until 2018, before which the Borough Council will conduct another consultation. This delay allows builders to submit speculative proposals for developments on the Green Belt outside the Town's urban envelope. (The Stockbrook Manor application mentioned above is an example.)

Meanwhile, the Town Council has compiled a list of small areas of land within the Town which could benefit from the protection afforded by "Local Green Space" designation. This protection, somewhat similar to Green Belt policies, applies to both public and private land and is intended to maintain the open aspect of the built environment.

During the year the Planning committee contributed responses to several planning-related consultations. One from the Department of Communities and Local Government concerned future provision of Traveller Accommodation. Basildon Council consulted on its Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment; another dealt with the Borough's Neighbourhood Planning Service and Support Policy.

The Planning Committee oversees three Working Parties or Project Groups:

#### **LITTER WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Bob Chapman**

The Litter working party organised three successful litter picks at Outwood Common, Queens Park and in the Town Centre as part of the community weekend. Following requests from residents we have installed one new dog bin at the junction of Crescent Road and Mountnessing Road.

We are very conscious of the litter problem on the railway land along the approach to the station and we are trying to get Network Rail involved with us in working to clear this.

In the coming year more litter picks will continue to be organised. If you'd like to get involved please contact the Town Council office.

#### **RECREATION WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Peter Bowditch**

The Lake Meadows Partnership continues to work well with Basildon Borough Council, Billericay Town Council and the Friends of Lake Meadows all contributing to the maintenance and the improvement of Lake Meadows for the residents of our town and our visitors.

The Town Council sponsored aeration system in the lake has improved the water quality to such an extent that the anglers are catching larger and healthier fish



*Carpzilla*

than ever before. Basildon Borough Council has taken action to restrict the feeding of birds that occupy the lake area as this has encouraged unwelcome rodent activity. Volunteers from Essex Wildlife Trust are monitoring the bird breeds spotted on the lake throughout this calendar year and will report back to the partnership with their findings.

The Town Council has, in part, financially supported the activities by way of grants to The Friends of Lake Meadows to assist them with their work in the park. Billericay Town Council has paid for Basildon Borough Council to replant a length of some 80 metres, along the pathway from the cafe to the tennis courts, with rhododendrons and azaleas. This will provide a colourful show next spring and will be able to be viewed from a large area within the park.

During the coming year the Recreation Working Party will be looking at further enhancements to Festival Gardens to improve it for our resident's use.



*Festival Gardens Rededication*

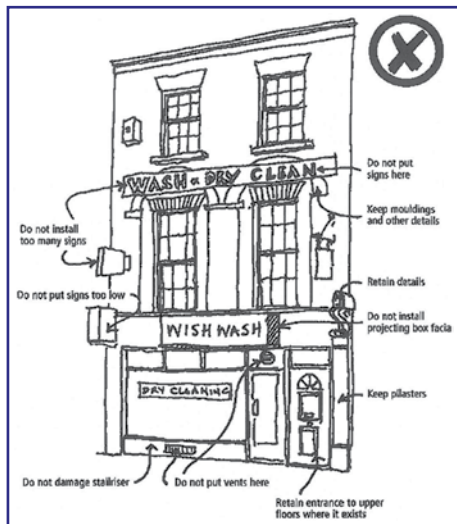
#### **CONSERVATION AREA & STREET SIGNS WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Jim Devlin**

The last year has been a busy one for this working party. We have achieved more success than we could have hoped for in terms of getting street furniture tidied up. County Council has removed redundant posts and signage that we have identified and we now await the painting of some lampposts that have been replaced as part of this operation. We will continue to push forward with ensuring that this tidying up continues.

During the year we have spent a considerable amount of time and effort producing the draft Billericay Conservation Area Shop Front and Design Guide in conjunction with Basildon Borough Council. After the consultation, which ended at the beginning of April, the final version of the Guide will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and will be used by Basildon Council when determining planning applications in the Conservation Area.

This document is vital to the character of the town. It is essential that we maintain what we have, as it is this that makes Billericay different from the bland, could be anywhere, High Streets that are failing across the country. We have a Town Centre that is vibrant and attracts visitors from a wide area, if we are to maintain this we need to carefully protect what we have in the buildings that are here.

The working party will continue to monitor the Conservation Area and flag up to Basildon Council any breaches of planning as they occur.



Bad example of a shop front

**SALT BAGS AND BINS WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Ian Davie**

Despite recent mild winters the Town Council continues to make salt grit mixture available to residents so that they may be prepared for the vagaries of English weather. In November the Council again distributed 2 tonnes of salt grit to 80 recipients eager to spread it on nearby roads and footways – if the opportunity, or need, arose.

In addition to supplying bags of salt, the Town Council has this year installed six wayside salt bins at locations identified by townfolk. Obtaining

permission to install bins on highway verges was no easy task. One proposed site in Jacksons Lane actually belonged to Network Rail, but our budget did not allow for their survey and approval costs. Eventually, with the aid of County Councillor Kay Twitchen, we managed to secure permission to place all six bins on ECC highway land. We then could purchase the bins, employ a contractor to install them, purchase the salt to put in them and find another contractor who was prepared to transport the salt and fill the bins.

These six new bins supplement those already provided by Essex County Council; the Town Council now can consider some additional bins at other sites, nominated by residents, where there are problems in icy or snowy conditions.



Kelvedon Road salt bin

**REPORT ON THE COUNTRYSIDE WALKS GROUP – Cllr. Susan McCaffery**

Having successfully completed and published "Series One" – three walks from Norsey Woods – in March 2014, the Group has since been working on "Series Two", three walks commencing at Queen's Park Country Park. Paul Hudson of Living Landscapes has put together the second three walks, assisted by Neil Sumner and Jeff Forward with input from Councillors



Path to Mountnessing Church

Went and McCaffery.

Route "A" of Series Two is to Mountnessing Church and the Wid Valley, approximately 5 miles/8Km; Route "B" is to Stock and Buttsbury Church (7 miles/11Km); Route "C" to Ingatestone via the Wid Valley (8 miles/13Km). The associated leaflets, available from the Town Council office, contain an introduction, a map for each route with written directions and descriptions of flora and fauna of interest to look for on the way, including some photographs.

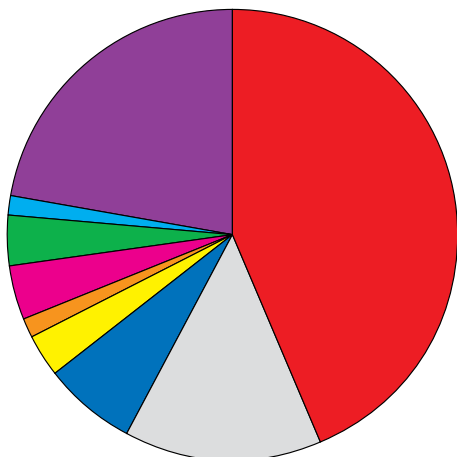
Series Two was printed ready for publication and the first public walk took place during the Civic Weekend. Two further guided walks are planned in the summer.



**FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** Chairman: Cllr. Jim Devlin

This year we are very pleased to announce that our element of the Council Tax, for 2015/16 will remain the same as last year. For a sixth year the Billericay Town Council portion of the Council Tax will remain at £19.80 for a Band D property. There have been some changes to the way Town and Parish Councils are funded which started during the 2014/15 year. In previous years the precept amount was based upon all properties in the Council's area but with the change to a new system of Council Tax Relief the properties receiving this funding no longer counted towards the calculation of the money we received. This would have left a shortfall in income

**EXPENDITURE AND RESERVES 2014/2015**



- Administration & Council Members
- Recreational Facilities
- Public Toilets
- Christmas Lights
- Other Projects
- Publications
- Election
- Youth Town Council
- Earmarked Reserves

which could only have been dealt with by increasing your Council Tax or by cutting the amount we spend. Central Government realised this unintended consequence of the change in legislation and decided to add a sum to the block grant that District Councils receive for them to pass on to the Town or Parish Councils. The problem with this was that the legislation was not clearly implemented and thus

EXPENDITURE AND RESERVES		
2013/14	EXPENDITURE	2014/15
£'000	DESCRIPTION	£'000
114	Administration & Council Members	113
83	Recreational Facilities	37
20	Public Toilets	17
8	Christmas Lights	8
9	Other Projects	4
18	Publications	10
0	Election	9
4	Youth Town Council	4
59	Earmarked Reserves*	57
0	To General Reserve	0
<b>315</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>259</b>

\*Earmarked reserves are for Christmas Lights £2,000, and Building Fund £55,000.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE		
2013/14	INCOME	2014/15
£'000	SOURCE	£'000
246	Precept	246
5	Interest earned	4
4	Local sponsorship	4
60	Outside funding	5
0	From General Reserve	0
<b>315</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>259</b>

there was no mandatory obligation for the District Council to pass this money on. In fact many District Councils have held on to some or all of this money forcing their Town and Parish Councils to cut services or increase their Precept, some by as much as 40%. Billericay Town Council has been fortunate in that Basildon Borough Council has been one of the District Councils to abide by the spirit of the legislation and has passed on the full amount of the money needed to make up the losses caused by the new Council Tax Support System. This has not been a great amount of money as the Town has a low level of Council Tax Support, however our thanks go to Basildon Borough Council for honouring their commitments unlike many District Councils throughout the country.

This year the Town Council, and particularly the Finance and General Purposes Committee, has worked hard to ensure that we live within our means and that we can continue to invest in services and infrastructure with the Town. We have continued to fund services such as the Christmas Lights, Billericay in Bloom and Hanging Baskets during the summer and also been able to invest in facilities in Lake Meadows. Now that we have finally taken control of Festival Gardens, near the Norsey Road railway bridge, investment in improving this small park has been made and will continue in the coming year. The Town Council is the custodian of the War Memorials in the High Street and provides the Public Toilet in the High Street Car Park.

Changes in legislation have meant that the Town Council can at long last enter the modern world and make payments by electronic transfer. Up until just before Christmas the Town Council could only legally make payments by cheque. This change to the law has been a long time coming but it will enable the Town Council to save money, albeit a small amount, on it's banking services.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee oversees a number of working parties some of which like the Assets Working Party have a background role, but others have a role that is more outward facing.

**ICT WORKING PARTY – Cllr. Jim Devlin**

The ICT Working Party has been focusing on making improvements to the Council's website and in helping improve our communication with residents. During the year the Council started using a Twitter account to help inform residents of what was happening not only with the Town Council but also passing on information from other organisations such as the Police, Fire Service and both Essex and Basildon Councils. The Town Council's Twitter feed is @BillericayTC. Follow us to keep up to date with what the Council is doing.

We are trying to make the website more informative and the first place that residents would look for

information. To help us help you, any comments that you have on our website would be gratefully received by this working party. Please contact the Town Clerk at the address or email shown on the cover.

This year the demise of Windows XP has meant that the Council has had to purchase a new machine for use during Planning meetings as paper copies of planning applications are no longer used. This also has necessitated in investing in a projector so that the Planning Committee can carry out its work. However this investment will result in less paper so there is a trade off in cost.

**TOWN GUIDE & TOWN CRIER WORKING PARTIES – Cllr. M Wilson**  
**Town Guide**

The Council is in the process of producing the next edition of the Town Guide which will be published in

October of this year. As always we rely on our clubs and societies to tell us about their activities in order for it to be a true reflection of life in Billericay. So please look out for our requests to hear from you about your organisation and please try to include a relevant photograph.



**Town Crier**

Four more editions have been produced celebrating everything from our first Community Weekend, the events commemorating the anniversary of the First World War to the re-dedication of the Festival Gardens. Our Community News section continues to grow thanks to your contributions, keep them coming.

**COUNCILLORS ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS  
MAY 2014 – 12 MARCH 2015**

NO. OF MEETINGS	23	7	7	8		
COUNCILLOR	PLANNING	FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES	ENVIRONMENT	COUNCIL	WPs/PGs	TOTAL
Cllr A Adshead*	12		4	4	10	30
Cllr T Arnold				2		2
Cllr J Bellringer				7		7
Cllr P Bowditch	16	5	7	8	26	62
Cllr T Bown	Currently on an extended leave of absence due to health issues					0
Cllr J Buchanan	18	5	7	8	48	86
Cllr R Chapman			6	6	3	15
Cllr J Clark	15	5	4	8	34	66
Cllr I Davie	21			7	13	41
Cllr M Dear	13	6		6	13	38
Cllr J Devlin	18	7	3	7	23	58
Cllr C Dyer		4	4	5	4	17
Cllr S McCaffrey	18			7	21	46
Cllr M Moore	19	6	7	8	29	69
Cllr R Rapley		4		4	4	12
Cllr D Spencer	19		3	6	10	38
Cllr T Stansfield		1		5	3	9
Cllr P Went			7	6	9	22
Cllr E Willis				2	1	3
Cllr M Wilson		5	6	4	9	24

\*Cllr Adshead has been in office since August 2014



**Report for 2014-2015**

During the last year the youth council has been involved in several different events. Our first event was live music in March last year. It involved us getting young talent within the local area to perform so they could gain experience performing in front of people. People turned up from the schools to support the performers and there was also a DJ. Overall, everyone who came really enjoyed themselves and it was a really good night.

We had a Cake Sale in the reading Rooms in Billericay High Street. This was very successful and we sold lots of our cakes.

A few weeks later we held the Essex Urban Games in Lake Meadows. This was where football freestylers, cheerleaders and basketball freestylers came to get children involved in several activities. In the skate park there was also a tournament. This year we had a professional photographer who came and recorded the activities.

We also went through an election process to recruit new members of the council from the two senior schools in the area, Mayflower and Billericay. Fresh faces meant fresh new ideas and this proved invaluable when we had our first Mother's Day craft and gift event. Those children who came made a card, decorated a butterfly suncatcher and a trinket box and received a rose to give to their Mums.

As you can see we had a busy last year and hope to continue contributing to the community.

**BILLERICAY TOWN COUNCILLORS**

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Marion Wilson	25 Parklands, Billericay, CM11 1AS	01277 626321	marion.wilson@billericaytowncouncil.gov.uk	E
CHAIRMAN:	Cllr John Buchanan			
TOWN CLERK:	Deborah Tonkiss Billericay Town Council The Loft, Crown Yard, High Street Billericay, Essex CM12 9BX	Telephone: Fax: E-Mail: Website:	01277 625732 01277 634784 townclerk@billericaytowncouncil.gov.uk www.billericaytowncouncil.gov.uk	

