

Paul Gadd County Councillor Update

Saffron Walden Town Council 15/1/24

[Items in italics are left over from previous updates]

1. Education

- a. Manor Oak education land – ECC Education have now confirmed that they have exercised the option – they now have (I think) 6 years to decide whether to build on the land, failing which it would revert to the developer;
- b. *[4/12/23 - I've given you a number of updates on the lack of early years provision in Uttlesford generally and Saffron Walden in particular and my conversations with ECC Education. Cllr Coote and I had another conversation with the ECC early years officer a few weeks ago, and they have now found some of the s.106 monies that we pointed them to. They are still struggling for a site. We have therefore raised with them the possibility of using the Manor Oak site for early years if a separate school site will be provided through the draft Local Plan. I've got another call with ECC Education this week, and Cllr Coote is following up with UDC]* 15/1/24 – we didn't really get anywhere – they don't want to do anything on the Manor Oak site which would prejudice the primary school and we're still struggling for other alternatives; we will keep pressing

2. Council Matters:

- a. Recycling Centre Booking system – we had a presentation in December on the public responses to the ECC consultation on the Recycling Centre booking system; the responses from most districts were either a majority in favour or no overall majority. Uttlesford was a clear exception with a huge majority against, which obviously reflects the previous lack of issues at the Saffron Walden centre. ECC are analysing the results and will publish their conclusions in due course.
- b. Finances remain under huge pressure and ECC are consulting on potential cuts. I, and members of the Independent group on ECC, proposed a motion at the latest Full Council meeting, on 12 December, to write to central Government calling on them to fund local authorities properly, as for example Hampshire and Kent CCs have publicly done in the last year. Unfortunately, the majority councillors voted the motion down. ECC have recently completed a consultation on financial priorities, and the 2024/25 budget will be difficult, particularly following another “disappointing” Government settlement. To give an illustration of the current financial pressures ECC is under, they have just published their proposed 2024/25 plans, and note the effect of the cap on council tax and cost and demand increases leaves an additional £60m of cost reductions will be required this year, as follows (and the 4.99% tax increase this year is the maximum permitted):
“Expenditure pressures on the budget for 2024/25 total £100 million. A 4.99% council tax increase would generate £40.3 million of additional income. Material pressures include:
£42 million (+9.8%) social care inflation, including the impact of increases to the National Living Wage
£31 million of demographic pressure, most significantly impacting demand across Children's Services at £18 million (+14.5%) and Home to School Transport at £11 million (+30.4%)
£17 million (+5%) pay inflation

£11 million (+2.5%) impact of adult social care packages becoming more costly due to changes in need"

- c. We had a presentation from ECC Sustainable Transport officers in November, and changes are proposed to move away from the existing "cars first" policy. However, it looks as though the DfT are being extremely slow in confirming their requirements for Essex Highways' draft new policy, and Essex Highways are still woefully under-staffed in terms of sustainable transport resource, so I fear that it will be a long time until we see significant change. ECC did say that they are trying to change their approach to their existing highways policies, so I will keep pushing;
3. Flooding and drainage issues:
- a. Usually dealt with through Planning and Transport, but just to let Council note that the one new issue from the recent storms was flooding on the Thaxted Rd, seemingly from rain coming from the new development sites. ECC have advised that as the sites are still under development then it is a UDC planning rather than an ECC flooding issue and so I've passed it on to UDC Cllrs Fiddy and McBirnie