



Gosfield & Greenstead Green Ward

Annual Report 2024/25: Braintree District Council



Braintree District encompasses a predominantly rural area in the north of Essex and is the second largest district by area in the county of Essex. Over half of the residents reside in the three main towns of Braintree, Witham and Halstead, with the remainder living across approximately 60 villages, including six large ones. A population of around 158,000, with a median age of 43, which indicates an ageing population.



Braintree District Council is dedicated to fostering a district of equal opportunity, where communities thrive, individuals prosper, and the environment is cherished. Despite facing unprecedented financial challenges due to inflation, increased service demands, and reduced government funding, our commitment to delivering exceptional services remains unwavering. This report

outlines our achievements and initiatives undertaken during the 2024/25 fiscal year to support residents, communities and businesses across the district.

Financial Stewardship

In February 2024, the Council approved a balanced budget of £19.6 million for the 2024/25 fiscal year, ensuring the continuation of vital frontline services without necessitating cuts.



This prudent financial management positions us favourably compared to many other councils facing similar challenges. However, we anticipate a budget deficit increasing up to £2.3 million per year by 2027/28. To address this, our 'Fit for the Future' transformation program is underway, focusing on optimising resource utilisation, enhancing partnerships, and scrutinising asset management to build sustainable services.

Community Development

Our dedication to community enrichment is evident through various initiatives:

- Councillor Community Grant Scheme: Each councillor was allocated £1,250 to support local community projects, fostering grassroots development and engagement.
- Play Area Enhancements: We completed refurbishments of play areas at Meadowside in Braintree and Oxford Meadow in Sible Hedingham, incorporating inclusive equipment to improve play value for individuals of all ages.
- Skatepark Upgrades: The skateparks at Spa Road in Witham and Weavers Park in Braintree were fully refurbished, providing safe and modern spaces for skateboarders and other enthusiasts.
- Community Infrastructure Grant Fund: We launched a £100,000 fund to assist community groups in reducing their carbon footprint. This initiative supports projects like installing renewable energy sources and implementing energy efficiency measures, contributing to our goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.



BDC TOURISM Braintree District in Essex offers a diverse array of attractions and facilities that cater to a wide range of interests, ensuring an inclusive experience for all visitors. The district welcomes approximately 4 million visitors annually, drawn by its unique blend of shopping destinations, historical sites, and natural beauty.



For shopping enthusiasts, Braintree Village stands out as a premier designer outlet, offering a variety of brands and dining options. History buffs can explore landmarks such as Hedingham Castle, renowned for its Norman Keep, and the 13th-century Crossing Temple Barns, reflecting the area's rich heritage.

Nature lovers will appreciate the district's commitment to preserving green spaces. Local Nature Reserves like Bocking Blackwater and Whet Mead provide serene environments for relaxation and wildlife observation. The John Ray Walk, a 9-mile trail from Braintree to Witham, offers a scenic route through the River Brain valley, celebrating the legacy of the esteemed naturalist John Ray.

Accessibility is a priority for Braintree District Council. Initiatives such as the Braintree District Access Group work to enhance public transport and infrastructure, ensuring that facilities are accommodating for disabled individuals. The council's accessibility statement underscores its dedication to providing services that are usable for everyone.

Braintree District seamlessly combines cultural, historical, and natural attractions with a strong emphasis on accessibility, making it an inviting destination for all visitors.

Housing and Planning

Addressing housing needs and sustainable development remains a priority:



- **Affordable Housing:** We delivered 250 affordable homes, providing quality housing options for residents across the district.
- **Five-Year Housing Land Supply:** The Council demonstrated a 5.8-year housing land supply, ensuring sustainable development and protecting towns and villages from unplanned, speculative development.
- **Neighbourhood Plans:** We collaborated with communities in Steeple Bumpstead, Hatfield Peverel, and Earls Colne to implement Neighbourhood Plans, empowering residents to shape local development.

Economic Development

Supporting business growth and employment opportunities is central to our prosperity agenda:

- **Inward Investment:** In partnership with the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB), we enhanced our inward investment activities, attracting new businesses and fostering job creation within the district.



- **Business Support Services:** We provided tailored support focusing on digital skills, financial management, and business growth, enabling local enterprises to innovate and expand.
- **Green and Digital Business Expos:** Through the Shared Prosperity Fund, we hosted expos showcasing sustainable and digital solutions,

assisting businesses in adopting green initiatives and enhancing digital capabilities.

- **Skills Development:** We delivered a green skills program and organised a district-wide jobs fair, connecting residents with prospective employers and promoting employment in emerging sectors.

Environmental Initiatives

Our commitment to environmental stewardship is reflected in several key projects:

- **Air Quality Strategy:** We developed a local Air Quality Strategy to comply with the latest standards and regulations, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable environment.
- **Fleet Decarbonisation:** The procurement of 14 electric light commercial vehicles marked a significant step toward reducing our carbon footprint and improving air quality across the district.



- **Renewable Energy Installations:** We installed solar panels at Witham Leisure Centre, reducing our carbon footprint and achieving long-term energy cost savings.
- **Climate and Environment Partnership:** Collaborating with North Essex Councils, we established a partnership to address climate change

challenges collectively, enhancing resilience and coordinated action.

- **Community Engagement:** We allocated funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support community infrastructure initiatives focused on decarbonisation, achieving a 5% reduction in carbon emissions across supported projects.
- **Anti-Idling Campaign:** To improve air quality, we launched a campaign encouraging motorists to switch off engines when stationary outside schools, raising awareness about the impact of vehicle idling.
- **Waste Management:** Collaborating with Essex authorities, we developed a new Waste Strategy for Essex, promoting sustainable waste management practices. Additionally, we initiated behaviour change campaigns to increase recycling rates, reduce waste, and encourage reuse among residents and businesses.

Performance Metrics

To measure our success and ensure accountability, we established key performance indicators (KPIs) for the 2024/25 year which are available at BDC's website

Summary

Balancing responsibilities at both District Ward and County Council Division levels requires in my opinion, dedication, efficiency, and an unwavering commitment to serve. My demanding schedule is packed with meetings, responding to many emails and community engagements and I try to ensure that every issue raised is actioned promptly and effectively.

My role is not just about representation but about making a tangible difference in peoples lives. Every decision I make is rooted in what is best for the community and I am relentless in ensuring the promises turn into actions. Ultimately, my work at both levels is all about delivery making a real impact where it matters most.

Cllr. Peter Schwier



AIEMA

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Braintree District Council

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