

Chairman's Report – July 2023

General

Levelling-Up

The **Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)** is looking for residents of north rural Braintree District, which includes Great Maplestead, to be part of a **Community Reference Group** for the **Levelling-Up** project in what is officially designated as 'a deprived rural area'.

Members of this group would be involved in conversations about the social barriers of living in a rural village and the impacts these have on accessing local services/schools/employment opportunities and so on.

The **RCCE** also want to hear about ideas and solutions to the problems rural residents face so that the Government's **Levelling-Up** funding can be used appropriately to support local projects and services.

There have already been some expressions of interest from residents to participate in this initiative and further information is being sought from **RCCE**.

Essex Electric Vehicle Charge Point Strategy [Agenda Item 10.7]

In Essex, around half (49%) of CO₂ emissions are from transport and over half of these [so, **25%**] come from cars. Switching to electric vehicles (EV) will help improve air quality, but to encourage EV take-up in the county, residents need access to a reliable, convenient, accessible, and fairly priced network of EV charge points.

The **Electric Vehicle Charge Point Strategy** sets out how **ECC** will work with **local authorities** and partners to enable the placement of charging points in key locations to maximise use – putting the "*The Right Charger in the Right Place*".

The strategy looks at an initial 2-3 year timeframe (up to 2025, so well within the period of this Council's term of office) to specifically address the charging infrastructure for EVs.

Key stats:

- There is potential for **50,000 EVs** in Essex by 2025, rising to **220,000** by 2030
- There are currently **300** registered public charge points in the county. It is predicted Essex will need a minimum of **1,500** by 2025 (an increase of **500%**), rising to **6,000** (an increase of **2000%**) by 2030
- The projected increase in uptake of EVs could reduce car and van CO_{2e} emissions in Essex by around 70% by 2040.

ECC's strategy document states that **villages are key destinations** for charge points, providing essential services to rural areas, where Essex want to promote safe access for pedestrians, cyclists and **also improve public transport connections** (!!).

Priority will be given to:

- Private and public on-street charge points where footways allow, there are no negative impacts on the local environment; **trailing cables are prohibited**.
- Charge points at rural railway stations for commuters looking to make use of public transport for at least some of their journey.
- Community-based shared mobility and digital demand-responsive transit (DDRT), e-car clubs, e-car share, and e-bike schemes to supplement public transport.
- **Communal charge points provided at key facilities and public car parks** such as parish halls, libraries and community centres.

ECC pledges to work with **Parish Councils**, local authority partners and health trusts to explore where opportunities could complement the strategy.

To help develop and refine the strategy **ECC** is holding a **Public Consultation** to consider residents' views. The **Public Consultation** runs until **Sunday 30th July 2023**.

Areas of Responsibility

Footpaths

❖ Report:

- Confirmation of any increase in the £/metre rate for calculating the maintenance grant received as part of our Service Level Agreement with **ECC** is still awaited.
- The footpath cut undertaken the contractor in mid-June was unsatisfactory, with access problems being cited as the reason for their inability to complete the agreed schedule.
- **FP 15** (the one near the Village Hall) was one of those affected; the landowners were asked in writing to cut back the bordering hedge and complied, also agreeing to mow the path surface.
- Following comments from the PRoW Officer at Essex Highways, **FP 11** (the one between Lucking & Little Lodge Farms, and another one that was left uncut by the contractor), was cleared by Cllr. Pike, for which many thanks:



- The part of **FP 26** through the Slype Copse (**not** on the contractor's cutting schedule) has also now been cleared of nettles and overhanging foliage.



❖ Action Plan:

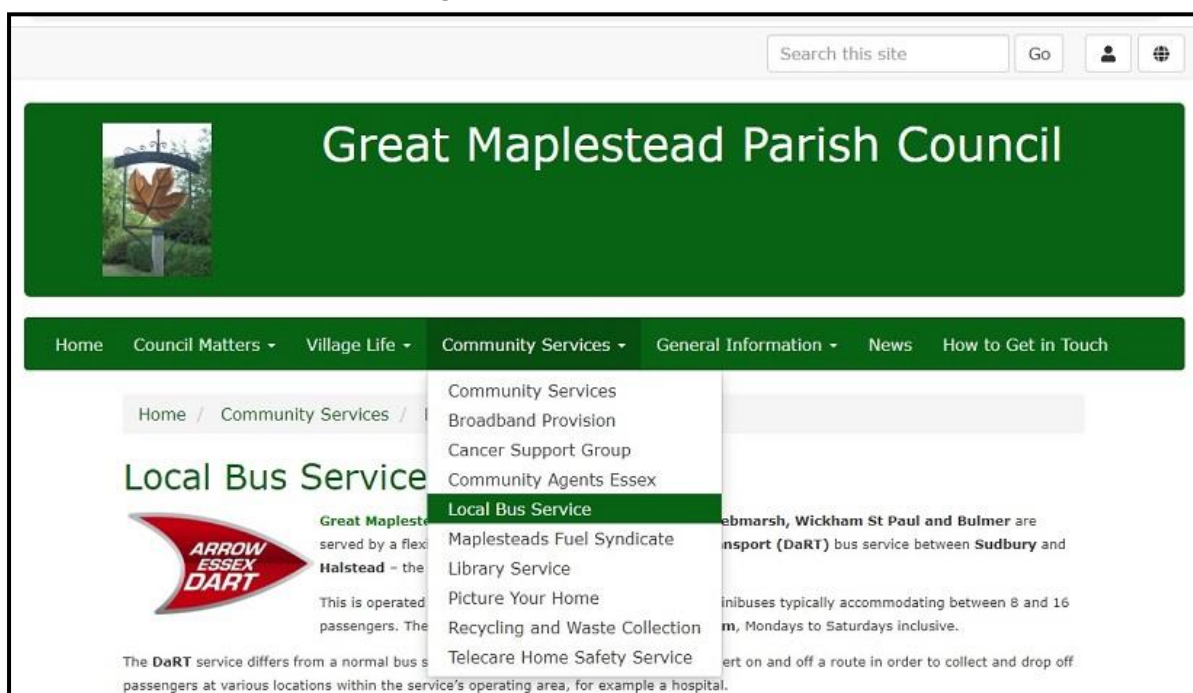
- Because of the problems experienced this summer, the contractor situation will again be reviewed for 2024.
- Any interested/new contractor will be asked to quote not just for mowing/strimming the path surfaces (the statutory minimum cut that is covered by ECC's grant) but also for the clearing/cutting of any bordering vegetation/hedges that may be required for access and to keep the path open and walkable.
- Normally this additional work would be the responsibility of the landowners but, in the wider general public interest, it would be expedient for the Council to have control over the extent and timing of this aspect of the work; any costs over and above the grant amount could come from the maintenance budget
- Interim checks and maintenance will continue to be carried out on an *ad hoc* basis to monitor path conditions/rectify minor problems.

Communications

1. Website/Facebook

❖ Report:

- We've been advised by the Council's website platform that its '**Modern Theme**' – the current '*look and feel*' of the website – will be discontinued in December.
- The main reasons are that this 'theme' has relatively poor accessibility and readability, and several layout bugs that can't easily be fixed. The 'theme' hasn't had updates for a while, and it's one that's difficult for the platform to maintain.
- Switching 'themes' will apparently give us more layout options, a more accessible and readable site, faster page loads, and a better search engine ranking.
- There is currently an opportunity to select an alternative 'theme' – if we do nothing however, our site will automatically be changed to one called '**Fresh**'. Having tried a test version of this 'theme' on our site, it is a look or style that is unsuitable and cannot be recommended.
- An alternative, the '**Bootstrap Theme**', provides loads of layout configuration options, allowing us to change the navigation style and position of the navigation bar, buttons, page lists etc., add a banner image, change the logo position, and so on. There is a range of pre-set colour schemes, or we can choose our own.
- A version of our site, using this theme, could look like this:



Otherwise:

- The **Home** and **News** pages now have information and details about:
 - **ECC's Local Bus Service Consultation**, with links to the survey
 - **ECC's EV Chargepoint Strategy**, with links to the consultation
 - **ECC's Personal Financial Coaching Scheme**, with application details
- Facebook, along with a WhatsApp link, has been effectively utilised to inform residents about the **Bus Service** and **EV Chargepoint** consultations.
- The weekly **Neighbourhood Watch** newsletter updates have continued.
- The **Council's** revised and approved **Policy Documents** have also been uploaded and re-linked to their appropriate pages.

❖ **Action Plan:**

- Following this meeting, the information on the **Parish Councillor** page will need to be updated, along with the responsibilities section and new e-mail links.
- Other documents, such as the **Community & Emergency Information** leaflets will similarly need to be updated and re-linked.
- The Council's Facebook page will continue to share relevant posts with Maplestead Mates in order for its information to reach the widest possible local audience.

2. E-newsletter (Maplestead Magna Carta) [Agenda Item 14]

❖ **Action Plan:**

- **Issue 51** is scheduled for publication **w/c 7th August 2023** (tbc).
- Editorial content for this issue is suggested to include:
 - Local Bus Service Consultation
 - Playing Field: path completion and 'official' opening by the school
 - Footpath maintenance update
 - ECC's EV Chargepoint Strategy
 - Levelling-up initiative
 - Local Planning news/decisions
 - Forthcoming events

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