**The Local Plan – an Inspector reports.**

Readers will know that following further examination hearings in January 2020, the Planning Inspector wrote to the North Essex Authorities (NEAs) on the shared Section 1 of the Braintree, Colchester and Tendring Local Plans.

He concluded that two of the three proposed Garden Communities (the Colchester Braintree Borders Garden Community and West of Braintree Garden Community) are neither viable nor deliverable and therefore the Section 1 Local Plan, in its current form, is not sound.

He decided that the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community is viable and deliverable, and the housing and revised employment targets in the Local Plan are also sound, including the requirement of 920 homes a year in Colchester.

He also gave the NEAs two options for how to proceed: 1) to consult on the main modifications to remove the Colchester Braintree Borders and West of Braintree Garden Communities from the Local Plan, with other necessary ‘modifications’ to make the Plan sound; or 2) withdraw the plan altogether. The Inspector has recommended modifications to the Local Plan that would make it sound.

If CBC continues with the draft Local Plan, residents must be consulted on those main modifications, otherwise the Plan is withdrawn from examination and CBC will be required to start the entire process again.

Since the current Adopted Local Plan expires in 2021, the absence of a new Local Plan to replace the current one carries considerable risks of speculative development by housebuilders, without any local control whatsoever.

Since the Inspector has ruled on the draft Local Plan, it had been proposed to wind up the North East Garden Communities Co. Ltd. (NEGC) by 31st August 2020, as the relationship between the four NEAs will cease due to only one Garden Community being taken forward. NEGC was also instrumental in securing £99 million from the Housing Infrastructure Fund for an A133 – A 120 link road and rapid transport system.

The process for winding up any business is broadly the same as when a person dies. The assets are gathered in, any debts paid and the balance distributed to those entitled. Simple enough!

However, at a meeting of the full Council on Wednesday 15th July the Conservative Group on CBC, with other councillors, blocked the release of the final payment of £350,000 to the NEGC. The company was due to be wound up at the end of August, so that no more expenses were incurred, but that is now on hold until a final agreement is reached.

CBC is currently working hard with the other NEAs to reduce any future liabilities of NEGC that might arise and to repair a previously harmonious working relationship.

Readers will be aware that competing narratives surround these events, so I will leave it to you to decide where the balance of probability lies.

**All change in local government.**

Nothing stands still and events can move very quickly. It is unlikely that many readers paid much attention to the comings and goings of Southend and Basildon Councils. This started with rumours of a reorganisation of local government and confirmed by Simon Clarke (Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government)in a recent speech.

The reorganisation started last year with Dorset being reduced from eight councils into two, Somerset reduced its district councils from five to four and Suffolk reduced it districts from seven to five. This year so far, Buckinghamshire has reduced it numbers from five to two district councils and Hertfordshire wants to scrap its ten districts to replace them with a single unitary authority.

Essex is now caught up in the process. One plan likely to emerge is that the current twelve district and borough councils in Essex will merged into three or four unitary authorities (each having around 400,000 residents), with a single combined authority for the whole of Essex and possibly an elected Mayor of Essex, with a promise of additional funding.

Colchester (pop. 194,000) is looking for partners. Tendring (pop. 148,000) is the most obvious partner for fairly obvious reasons. Both councils will also be working to deliver the joint Part 1 Local Plan, including the garden communities.

Other prospective partners include Braintree (pop. 152,000) with whom CBC and Tendring worked on the said Local Plan and Maldon (pop. 64,000) which has strong coastal connections with Mersea Island.

The Minister requested suggestions by September and a White Paper is due in the Autumn.

“There's nothing new about such a muddle”. Petronius Arbiter, a **Roman** official at the time of Nero, wrote, 'We tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization. '

Watch this space!

**Colchester Borough Homes.**

Some good has come from the Coronavirus lockdown, with some twenty or so rough sleepers having been found permanent homes by CBH working with partners, such as Beacon House, CBC and Essex Police. These bodies provide a much needed safety net for the most vulnerable members of society, with a total of 57 rough sleepers being supported. The work of the CBH Outreach team during the lockdown has been outstanding and deserves special praise. Here is a typical success story, that might interest readers .

AL was a rough sleeper in Colchester. His life was chaotic due to increasing alcohol and multi-drug use, and a relationship breakdown.

The CBH Outreach Team received a referral from a member of the public using a phone app called Steetlink, which they followed up that day. They identified AL and they linked him to support services in Colchester, as well as carrying out daily welfare checks on him.

As the Outreach workers began to build up trust and confidence with AL, they were able to provide support which was not time limited, as most services are. He was referred to a housing provider and was accepted at an interview. Unfortunately, due to long waiting lists he was unable to move-in immediately and this harmed his wellbeing, so his drink and drug use increased again.

Despite this setback the Outreach team continued to support him and liaised with other services to give him all necessary support, and look after his health needs.

The lockdown gave the Outreach team an excellent opportunity to house AL albeit temporarily. They began intensive and targeted work on the street with him despite his chaotic circumstances.

He responded well to this approach and began reducing both alcohol and drug use. The team reconnected him with his family after a long time. He is now receiving all eligible benefits, is drug free and has reduced alcohol consumption.

AL has now moved into a new home, with a package of essential furniture and goods to start a new life. It could not have been easy for him or those who helped him and I thank the Outreach Team for their dedication and wish him every success in future.

**Wheelie bins in Wivenhoe.**

I have a large garden and produce much waste, especially when it rains. So I would welcome wheelie bins. I am also aware that CBC recycling staff must lift many heavy bags in the course of their rounds and that does cause muscle and back stress. Wheelie bins would relieve that.

However, there is a practical issue around bin storage bins and they are not suitable for every household. Wheelie bins would be suitable in some streets in Wivenhoe, but not other, usually those with larger houses, but not for smaller or terraced dwellings where storage is impractical. In the five wards in Colchester that now use them, a pragmatic approach was adopted as to who where they were suitable or not and the roll out largely successful.

Wivenhoe Town Council is currently running straw poll on Facebook and I urge readers to participate. I also urge readers to think about the wider consequences of our wasteful consumer lifestyles when completing the survey.

**Bradwell B.**

The consultation finished on 1st July and I submitted an objection to the proposal primarily on the basis of the economic costs of nuclear energy. Since the cost of renewable energy is falling and supplying an ever greater proportion of our energy needs from local sources, the vast cost of these major capital projects and the time taken to bring them to maturity is harder to justify. Also there there are the legacy costs of storing the spent fuel rods for many thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years in geologically safe conditions.

Bradwell B will also include a long-term and highly radioactive waste store on site for at least 50 years merely to allow waste to cool. The fear is that Bradwell B will pose risks to marine life in the Blackwater Estuary, public health, safety and national security. The question of national security is the most problematic question of all. There is also the nightmarish prospect of a mass evacuation in the event of an emergency and Colchester is within the evacuation zone.

Although the environmental effects can be mitigated and Bradwell Power Generation Company appear to take health and safety very seriously, the most compelling arguments against nuclear expansion are economic. Nuclear energy is capital intensive at all stages. Both in the commissioning costs of building nuclear power stations, running them all the way to the legacy costs of safely storing nuclear waste. We will benefit from the electricity generated, but our children and theirs will have to bear the cost.

Renewable energy on the other hand, is now a mature market that produces an increasing proportion of our energy needs at a decreasing capital cost, with little or no legacy costs. It also has a diverse range of sources, solar, wind, wave and geothermal.

Although nuclear energy has its uses, it is yesterday’s technology and the future lies in renewable energy for domestic and commercial consumption.

Very few people from Colchester worked at the original power station, so it is unlikely that many will benefit from the proposed Bradwell B. This is due to the transport networks in Essex which tend to converge on London, while north to south links are less free flowing.

Bradwell B will also draw skilled construction labour from far afield and thereby distort the labour supply to local construction industry, at a time when we need more homes for people.

If the experience of Hinckley C is anything to go by, there will be considerable social and environmental costs, such as steep rises in house prices so that locals living in rented accommodation were being forced out under s21 (2 months notice and now three) by landlords seeking to capitalise on the influx of highly paid labour.

So that is why I objected to Bradwell B.

Covid 19.

Finally, stay safe and support the NHS. CBC and the NHS are really concerned that a second wave of infections is on its way. Please keep up social distancing to reduce the spread of infections, especially when out socialising. CBC and the police have new powers to close down any shops, restaurants or pubs where social distancing is not being practised, with immediate effect.

So think of fellow residents when out having fun!