

## **Leader's Statement 2018**

Members, looking back at the last 12 months, there have been many successes for this authority. Our long awaited Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted by the secretary of state in July which is possibly one of the most significant milestones for the Council. We have certainly noted a change in the results of planning appeals since the adoption, but it is fair to say that on the odd occasion, we are still getting some illogical decisions.

Since adoption of the LDP, our emphasis has largely turned to the delivery of housing which is a key priority for the Government. Maldon District cannot be accused of not shouldering its burden over the last year. Development has commenced on a number of the strategic sites which will provide a mix of both affordable and market housing for the residents of the District. Growth in employment, commercial and leisure sites has also occurred to meet the needs of the residents in both employment opportunities and also in recreation and health and wellbeing.

With the LDP now in place, the Council has been able to adopt Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), including the Central Area Master Plan, the South Maldon Garden Suburb Master Plan, and Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies guidance.

The Maldon District Design Guide, which was adopted as SPD by the Council last December, became the worthy recipient of the Award for Design Excellence at the national Planning Awards earlier this month. The judges pointed to its ambition, its clarity and usability to achieve high quality design and place-making.

All of the hard work done by the planning department has been against the back drop of changes in national planning policy and the change requirements of the Council, with additional responsibilities to maintain a brownfield register; the self and custom build register, certification of our five year land supply, and the housing delivery test.

The Council's Environmental Health Officers have been working closely with partner agencies and developers to maximise and secure funding towards flood mitigation, particularly in Heybridge, Central Maldon, and the Causeway and we continue to work to ensure those partner agencies consider local residents at every opportunity.

Planning enforcement continues to be a priority for the residents of the District and the Council as a whole. Some serious breaches of planning control have been resolved over the last year; whilst a number of successful prosecutions have been undertaken when people have not been willing to work with the Council. The Council will continue to protect the natural and distinct beauty of the District for its residents.

The Council's Strategic Housing Service has maintained its progress of improving the Council's response to those in housing need and has launched a new housing strategy setting out its aims and actions for the future. As a district we have one of the lowest proportions of households currently becoming homeless and living in B&B and temporary accommodation and have implemented new systems and ways of working as a result of the new Homelessness Reduction Act. Meeting the housing needs of an ageing population is where the Council has a real opportunity to make a valuable contribution towards local people.

The Council was delighted to see its efforts and work with local communities to provide affordable housing attract royal attention and support this year as we welcomed Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal to the District in April. We will continue of course to work with our partners to build on this during the year ahead.

The Council's programme of capital improvements within its parks has been ongoing, with refurbishments to play areas, pathways and car parks all successfully delivered.

Reducing waste and increase recycling is one of the Council's main objectives.

The Waste Team is currently sourcing a company to provide a trial kerbside textile collection service across the District. The aim is to provide every household with a collection of textiles on the same day as their pink sacks and glass bottles. Residents will be encouraged to still support their local charity shops; however if they wish to they can use the new service if desired.

Creating opportunities for economic growth and prosperity across Maldon District remains one of the Council's primary goals. Our Economic Development Team is actively engaging with local businesses and working with partners to deliver the objectives contained in the Economic Prosperity Strategy published in 2013 and will be producing an update this year. As micro enterprises make up 90% of local business, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

(SMEs) and rural businesses will continue to be a focus of our efforts to sustain and grow the local economy and to make Maldon District a better place to live, to work and enjoy.

The Sense of Place branding is now becoming better known, especially through the highly visible and striking hoardings that were erected outside the construction site for the new Blackwater Retail Park. Businesses are being encouraged to take up the branding and the Sense of Place Board is providing business led support for several projects ranging from the visitor economy and events to skills.

In March this year, the Council hosted the New Nuclear Local Authority 'Special Interest' Group Annual Conference. The conference was held at Crowne Plaza Five Lakes Resort and attracted a record number of delegates from across the Country. It was a significant event for the Maldon District. The primary aim of the New Nuclear Local Authority Group is to share knowledge, information and best practice regarding new nuclear facilities, and to provide a mechanism for local authorities to discuss and make representations direct to Government.

The on-going contribution of tourism to the local economy cannot be underestimated. The Promenade Park is still Maldon's main attraction with over half a million visitors per annum, whilst over 40,000 children enjoyed the Splash Park last year.

The Council's event programme continues to be a success with the Promenade Park and Riverside Parks hosting many events, including the Maldon Car Show which is this Sunday, the Smoke & Fire Festival and, for the first time a Burnham Outdoor Cinema, which attracted big crowds.

The Dengie Gateway Project reached its conclusion this year with new and exciting hubs of interpretation panels and audio posts arriving at five locations across the District, aiming to inspire visitors to explore more of our wonderful coastline 'Celebrating our Saltmarsh Secret'.

The tourism website 'VisitMaldonDistrict' goes from strength to strength, seeing thousands of digital visitors a week. The website enables the Council's Tourism Team to join up the many businesses and attractions to showcase this diverse and special District to those who may be less familiar with just how much we have to offer. Our social media presence has been

increased with a new Promenade Park Facebook page and an Instagram account for the tourism website.

During 2018 / 19 we will continue to have a sustained focus on our priority of strengthening communities to be safe, active and healthy, with significant work planned to support the health and wellbeing of our residents. Through a partnership with Essex County Council we have secured funding for additional resource to support that work, and are developing a “Livewell Strategy” to give direction and focus to key health and wellbeing challenges that the District faces, such as obesity, social isolation and loneliness, mental health as well as some of the issues faced by our ageing population.

We proudly continue to support apprenticeships for our young people, which have to date provided 13 successful apprenticeship opportunities, and are delighted that these apprenticeships have resulted in those people either securing full time employment at the end of their apprenticeships, or moving to an advanced apprenticeship. We are currently exploring the best ways of utilising the apprenticeship levy to offer opportunities for the community across a variety of service areas.

We continue to promote active and healthy lifestyles with our partner, ‘Places for People’, high-quality services are provided at the Blackwater Leisure Centre and the Dengie Hundred Sports Centre which welcomed over 564,000 visitors last year (a 10 per cent uplift from the previous year). The Council continues to work with Active Essex delivering sporting activities including the triathlons, cycling and running events, and badminton taster events.

Members however, there is no doubt that the year ahead will present us many challenges and difficult decisions to make. In order to become a financially secure and resilient authority, we must achieve the savings planned from the recently agreed transformation project. Regrettably this will entail some changes to our workforce, but by initiating the new working methods, the day to day work for staff should actually become more interesting and rewarding, whilst improving the service to our residents. We have to find nearly £1.5m of savings in the next two years to bridge the gap between our income and planned expenditure. With the help of our partners, Ignite, we have a blueprint to remodel the authority and achieve these objectives within the necessary timescale.

The entire ethos behind transformation must be to maintain or even improve services to the people of the Maldon District, whilst enabling the council to withstand the pressures on local

government and avoid the tribulations being experienced by some other councils in the country.

This administration will concentrate on providing the essential and value added services for residents in the most efficient and financially resilient way that it can.

Chairman, I commend this statement to the council.

MFL Durham