

Speech by Leader Cllr Simon Morgan, to Council on 2 July 2026

Good evening, Chairman, Members and Residents of Maldon District.

Tonight I wish to set out before you my priorities for the year ahead. My starting point in identifying what these priorities are, what matters most to our residents, communities, businesses and the environment, has been the Council's Corporate Plan. So they are not just my priorities, but our priorities. We should all own them

Those of you who are familiar with the phrase: may you live in interesting times will, I am sure, also be aware that far from being a benign exhortation it is in reality meant to be a curse. Interesting times are likely to be times of trouble and turmoil.

The Local Government Reorganisation process has begun which on present plans will see this District Council pass into history in April 2028. However, this is being challenged by the Reform led Essex County Council and we have yet to learn what view the next occupant of Number 10 Downing Street will have on the process.

Whatever subsequently transpires there can be no doubt that this coming year will therefore be one of change, but I believe that it can also be one of opportunity. I see it as my responsibility to lead a council that will provide steady, visible and practical governance, that will protect and enhance the identity of the Maldon District, and continue to deliver outcomes that will seek to preserve and enhance our residents' quality of life.

Put simply I will look to provide strong leadership through this time of change, to stand up for our District, and to deliver for residents. To achieve these aims I fully commit myself to working collaboratively across all political groups and non aligned members of the council.

This is a Conservative led administration, but our rosettes have been put away and we all believe that collaboration between members is fundamental to delivering the best outcomes for our residents.

By working together across the political spectrum with respect and a shared focus on local priorities, I believe that we can deliver improvements for the communities we all serve.

The Government has approved the Five Unitary Authority model for Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex, which this Council supported, and we will continue to provide strong leadership to deliver this. We will also work constructively with partners across Mid Essex, and champion the needs, strengths and identity of our District.

We will maintain our excellent relationships with Town and Parish Councils, support community empowerment, and help local people and organisations build resilience. Change should not mean losing local connection. It should mean finding better ways to work together.

Residents rightly expect us to balance the budget, use public money carefully, and be transparent about the decisions we make. I wish to work closely with the Finance Members Working Group, the Chairs of Strategy and Resources and Performance Governance and Audit to adopt a prudent approach to our finances and, whilst maintaining our high level of service to residents, will do what I can to minimise the burden on council tax and business rate payers as well as reviewing car park charges.

Because the immediate future is uncertain, I believe we should be careful about our use of the reserves and not fritter them away, or, worse still, go into debt pursuing implausible projects

We look to support our communities by seeking to deliver health initiatives that promote good physical and mental wellbeing, central to a good quality of life. We will continue to work with the NHS and our partners to support prevention, early intervention, strengthen volunteering and community networks, and help communities support one another. We will also lobby for government funding to create a possible neighbourhood health centre in the heart of the District at St Peters

Planning plays a vital role in investing in our district, helping us to deliver sustainable growth, protect the qualities that make our communities unique and provide the homes, jobs and infrastructure that residents need.

As regards infrastructure, we must focus on lobbying partners to improve the it within the District, making it more sustainable and accessible

I am pleased to report that we have now received draft work from our consultants which will place the Council in a strong position to consider commencing work on a new Local Plan later this year.

Members will, of course, have the opportunity to make a formal decision on this matter at full Council in September but the preparatory work undertaken to date means that we are well placed to move forward should that decision be taken.

We are awaiting the publication of an updated national planning policy, expected later this year, which will help shape the framework in which we prepare our Local Plan and make planning decisions. Progressing the evidence base and preparatory work for a new Local Plan ensures that valuable local knowledge, community priorities and technical evidence ensures that local communities have a strong voice in shaping the places where they live, work and invest.

However, we need to be honest with each other and with our residents. If we are not to be at the mercy of speculative developments or, worse still, lose our planning rights altogether, we must regain our 5 Year Housing Land Supply as soon as possible and that can only be achieved by granting planning permissions.

Of course, I do not want to see our beautiful District disappear beneath concrete and asphalt but the best way to avoid this is with a 5 Year Housing Land Supply rather than without one.

As well as planning and infrastructure we will look to grow our economy by supporting businesses, town centres and the visitor economy, which are vital to the life of the District.

Maldon District is a fantastic a place to visit, invest and do business, but we must ensure that tourism is sustainable and brings benefits to local communities.

We have a unique story, shaped by the coast, countryside, towns, villages, heritage and people. We must celebrate and protect this identity.

Our natural assets are part of what makes this District special. By protecting our environment, we will care for our coastline, countryside and open spaces, while promoting sustainable approaches that safeguard them for future generations.

Finally, we will focus on ensuring our Residents are able to access efficient, responsive and customer-focused services. We will strengthen performance and accountability, and work in partnership across Essex where that helps deliver better outcomes.

Together, these priorities provide a clear framework for decision-making and investment. They are driven by our Corporate Plan, support a shared narrative for engagement with residents and partners, and they keep our focus firmly on delivery, outcomes and accountability.

Conservatism at its best is about stewardship: leaving things stronger than we found them, protecting what is valuable, and making careful improvements where they are needed.

That is the approach I intend to take as Leader.

We will stand up for Maldon District. We will be responsible custodians of public money. We will support our communities, protect our environment, encourage enterprise and economic growth, and ensure that local voices continue to be heard throughout the reorganisation process.

Above all, we will remain focused on the people we serve.

Maldon District is a remarkable place, rich in history, character and community spirit. It is worth fighting for, worth preserving and worth improving for future generations.

That is my commitment, and I look forward to working with the officers and all Members of this Council to deliver it.

Thank you.

Cllr Simon Morgan Leader of the Council