

Annual Report 2025/26 - Yeldham Ward

Cllr. Richard van Dulken

This past year has been my 11th consecutive year as your District Councillor for the Yeldham Ward, comprising the three Parishes of Great Yeldham, Stambourne and Toppesfield & Gainsford End.

As a local resident in the neighbouring village of Castle Hedingham I continue to make all efforts to represent the interests of local residents and businesses in the Ward as well as in northern Braintree generally, as well as promoting the rural way of life at the Council and more widely in Essex through my appointments to Essex-wide groups like the Essex Flood Board.

I endeavour to attend the Parish Council meetings and AGM's in each village, to frequent and use local businesses, and meet local residents at local events like the Monday morning "Drop In" at the Great Yeldham Reading Room, farmers markets and sports days etc. I remain a Trustee of the Reading Room and take an interest in the improvement plans for that building as well as of the Recreation Ground facilities.

This year I have distributed the bulk of my 2024/25 Councillors' Community Fund allocation in Great Yeldham (towards the Youth Festival, and an Afternoon Tea and Dance, plus a gazebo for the Mens' Shed) and Stambourne Village Hall for a bingo machine. This current year 2026/7, as well as in 2027/28, there will be a larger allocation of £1,500 pa. available to each Councillor, and there are already plans for some of this to go to Toppesfield.

As always I have dealt with a wide variety of issues for local residents and businesses, and the eternal pothole and other road problems on behalf of us all. Unfortunately, for legal reasons it has not yet been possible to get any resolution to The Slipe in Leather Lane, Great Yeldham.

During the past 12 months I have been pleased to be able to help in a small way with issues relating to the now open Zero 2 Bus Museum in Great Yeldham, as well as with the Mens' Shed, and with Konect Bus services, while I continue to monitor developments - or lack thereof - at the planned new Hedingham Surgery which will eventually be used by many local residents.

At Braintree Council itself I am a Deputy Cabinet member, still a member of the Licensing Committee (including sitting on a number of Taxi panels) plus the Governance & Audit Committee. I represent BDC on several Essex-wide groups:

- Essex Waste Partnership Board
- Essex Flood Partnership Board
- STACC - Stansted Airport Consultative Committee

I have in the past year or two also been appointed to the Pensions Advisory Board of the Essex Pension Fund for Local Government staff in Braintree and Essex generally. And I also take part in the monthly on-line meetings and briefings with the Home Office for the Wethersfield migrant centre.

2025/26 has been a momentous year for BDC and the other authorities in Essex as the

government had just announced that - in our case - Braintree will be merged with Colchester and Tendring into a new “North East Essex Council” of over 500,000 residents, which will have the responsibilities of not only District Councils but those of Essex County Council such as social care, education and Highways. The new “NEEC” will come into being in May 2028 at which time BDC and ECC will cease to exist.

I will remain your District Councillor for an additional year, until May 2028.

Braintree District Council in 2025/6 passed a Budget which does not require an increase in its share of the Council tax (something which few if any other local authorities have managed to do), as well as prepared us for the important changes in the waste and recycling collections from June 2026 which will increase our recycling rates.

Some of the key achievements of BDC in 2025/26 have been:

- £1 million invested in the upgrading of community assets (e.g. the Halstead Leisure Centre)
- Successful transition from the failing managers of our four Leisure Centres to a superior new company called Freedom.
- 229 affordable houses made available.
- 787 flytips cleared, nearly all within a day.
- 338 tonnes of bulky waste collected from homes and businesses
- £167,000 in grants allocated to rural businesses and community groups.
- Development of the Local Plan refresh which is going through the consultation process.