RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

LONG TERM BUSINESS PLAN

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June 2016
RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL’S LONG TERM BUSINESS PLAN

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR YEARS 2016 TO 2019

Introduction

Following the reorganisation of local Councils in 1974, the town was without its own Council until the formation of Rayleigh Town Council in 1996 when twenty three members were elected to serve in eight wards. In 2015 the Boundary Commission conducted a review and although the number of Councillors will remain at 23, ward names changed and the number of wards reduced to seven from the 2016 election. The Town Council achieved Quality Council status in 2007, which was re-accredited in 2011. The Town Clerk gained distinction level in the Certificate in Local Council Administration and the Town Council achieved ‘Council of the Year’ in 2014 for Essex.

The Town Council re-built the Sports Pavilion in the King George V Playing Field in 2006 and relocated its office to these premises the following year. The rent that the Town Council pays to the King George’s Trust is used directly to fund expenses for the playing field. The Town Council operates a Committee Structure and holds weekly meetings every Monday evening. We have four Committees (Planning, Environment, King George V Playing Field and Policy and Finance) and nine Sub-Committees (Grants, Financial Regulations, Standing Orders, Rayleigh in Bloom, Christmas Lights, Personnel, Allotments, Lower Wyburns Woodland and High Street Market).

The town has grown in size over the last twenty years and the population is around 33,000 at present with an electorate of approximately 27,000. The District Council’s Core Strategy has made allowance for further housing developments from within and just outside our boundaries. The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning matters and has expressed concerns about the inevitable strain on our busy road network and the need for improvements to be implemented before new housing developments are completed.

Rayleigh is often referred to as a ‘commuter town’ with many residents being attracted by its good rail links to London and the surrounding areas. The town centre Railway Station (which the Town Council adopted in 2015) serves our many residents. We also have very good bus links and 5 large public car parks in the town centre. Rayleigh’s two Senior Schools, both able to accommodate sixth form pupils, and these are currently fed by eight primary schools in the town as well as by primary schools in nearby villages.
Our town centre is within the conservation area with several listed buildings. We have the widest High Street in Essex, which has been greatly improved by the relocation of the general weekly market to the High Street by the Town Council in 2010. We do not suffer from having many empty shops but have lost some of our independent stores and now have more restaurants and licensed premises than 10 years ago. This has led to Rayleigh having a vibrant ‘night time economy’, which is good for the town but can at times lead to anti-social behaviour late in the evening. The introduction of ‘Pub-Watch’ and ‘Behave or Be Banned’ by our licensed premises managers and the work of pro-active licensing officers has been very successful in controlling the behaviour of visitors to our town centre at night.

Aims and Objectives

Rayleigh Town Council exists to improve the social and economic well being of the community and to provide accountable, efficient and effective services; through engagement with the community and to work in partnership with other public service providers, local businesses and the voluntary sector:

To encourage community cohesion, community pride and enthusiasm.

To work with the residents to better understand their needs and in turn explain how we will address those needs within the resources and powers on the Council.

To provide a democratic representational voice for the town.

To support and contribute to the economic and social life of the town and regeneration of the local community, in partnership with residents, other tiers of local, regional and national government, voluntary agencies, groups and individuals to meet the needs and aspirations of the community.

To encourage and promote the economic and commercial vitality of the town and help strengthen and diversify the local economy by where possible source goods and services from the local area.

To preserve the unique identity of the town and to preserve and promote its heritage.

To help to create a socially inclusive and caring community which embraces all its residents, irrespective of age, gender, culture, income, race or religion and which seeks to develop their well being, knowledge, understanding and mutual cooperation.
To organise, promote and manage a variety of events in the town that positively enhances the social, economic, educational, leisure and tourism aspects of its vitality. In addition, to also support and advise in the facilitation of current events and to assist with the bureaucratic nature of such as activities.

To represent the views of residents to local authorities and other organisations

To protect and improve the environment of the town and promote sustainable development of the town to meet the needs of the present residents without jeopardising the needs of future generations.

To be accountable, approachable and visible and to ensure that the resources at the Council’s disposal are used to the most effective degree possible and to the greatest possible benefit to the town ensuring cost effectiveness and value for money.

To continue valuing and developing employees thereby stimulating innovation for the benefit of the town.

To liaise in partnership with the police and other local authorities with the aim that all residents should live in a safe and crime free environment.

Allow the residents to attend Council meetings and to be as informative as possible.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The Town Council’s overall role is to maintain and improve facilities for residents and to attract visitors to the town. We strive to achieve the best for our residents and to make Rayleigh a good place to live, visit and work.

Over the years the Town Council’s main responsibilities have increased to include the following:

Managing Trustee of the King George V Playing Field, which has Green Flag status, and includes the provision of facilities such as the Town Council office, skate park, play and gym equipment, teen shelter, floral gardens, basketball court, public toilets, snack bar, Bowls Club, sports pavilion, football matches and training. We also hire the field for events during the year including Family Fun Days, Bouncy Castle Days and Fireworks displays. All rental income from use of the Pavilion (Town Council, snack bar, hire of Council Chamber to other organisations and Bowls Club) and from events is paid directly to the King George’s Trust and is used solely for the maintenance of the playing field.

Management of four Allotment Sites with over 120 tenants
Management of Lower Wyburns 8 acre Woodlands

Ownership of seven Bus Shelters at various locations throughout the town

Management of the weekly Wednesday Street Market and weekend Markets

Community Speed Watch sessions

Chairman’s Engagements Diary

Town Centre CCTV and general town centre management regarding activities of charities, buskers, beggars etc.

Monthly Councillor Surgeries

Working in Partnership with other local authorities and groups, responding to consultations and appointing representatives to attend their meetings: Essex County Council Highways/Public Footpaths/Public Transport, Rochford District Council Planning/Development, Chamber of Trade, Town Team, Rayleigh Town Museum, Rayleigh Mount, Dutch Cottage, Rochford Hundred Association of Local Councils, Parish Transport, Public Footpaths, Essex Police.

Town Council Grants Awards Scheme

Town Council Awards for sporting and other high achievement including Young Carers for able bodied and disabled for all ages presented at our Annual Town Meeting.

Winter Salt Bag Scheme

Entry to annual Anglia in Bloom, Green Flag and Essex Playing Fields Association competitions.

Provision and installation of town centre floral displays and adoption of Rayleigh Railway Station.

Responsibility for street furniture including notice boards, benches, seats, litter bins, salt bins, red telephone box, heritage plaques, floral planters etc.
Organiser of the town’s Christmas Lights and major Switch-on event in November each year with a festive market.

Other annual events arranged by Town Council include: Crucial Crew, Community Older Persons Event, St Georges Day flag raising, Annual Town Meeting, Annual Rayleigh in Bloom Presentation evening, Civic Service, School’s General Knowledge Quiz, School Council Meetings, Town Centre Easter Egg Hunts, Remembrance Day Civic Event and Traffic Management.

The Town Council is also responsible for the preservation and promotion of the town’s local heritage and contributes to this by funding the annual rent for the new museum (which opened in April 2016), allowing use of Council Chamber for annual heritage exhibition for many years, arranging the Heritage Plaques scheme, liaising with our local heritage group, compiling and issuing the Town Guide and Heritage Trail leaflet to schools and to outlets for tourism eg. London Liverpool Street Railway Station, London Southend Airport, Southend Visitors Centre, Rayleigh Railway Station, local offices, venues and supermarkets.

Whilst some responsibilities are outside of our jurisdiction we continue to closely monitor the activities of our County and District Councils with ten of our Town Councillors also being elected District Councillors. We also respond to consultations by these and other authorities and are constantly reporting defects to our highways department on behalf of residents and Councillors.

**The Future**

We have often asked Rochford District Council whether we may take over the management/ownership of various facilities that are within our town, such as the listed 200 year old Rayleigh Windmill, Dutch Cottage, Crown Hill Toilets, Open Spaces, Sensory Gardens, Rose and Shrub Beds etc. We have had some success and will continue to express our suggestions and proposals for the future management of facilities within Rayleigh. We will also continue to be pro-active in getting involved in new ideas that will improve the quality of life for our residents and businesses.

Following the Town Council’s participation in the public hearing, the long awaited Rayleigh Area Action Plan was adopted by Rochford District Council in 2015. The Town Council’s main focus for this plan is the redefining of the large area in the centre of the High Street that is currently used as a taxi rank. We have ear-marked reserves in year 2015/16 to allow us to contribute or totally fund new Traffic Regulation Orders and signs/lines etc to relocate the taxis and to be in a position to use this area for regular markets and events. Our intention is that this would enhance the town centre by bringing in more life and thereby attracting more visitors. Like many towns and villages, the loss of some of our independent retail has changed our High Street in recent years and we would like to readdress the balance by offering low cost market stalls to
bring back retail. One of our market stall holders has been able to build on the success of his stall by opening a town centre shop and we are hoping that others may be able to follow this example.

As mentioned earlier, new housing developments are inevitable in and around our town and we will continue to constantly lobby other local government authorities to seek an improved road and public transport network and facilities for our residents.

Town Council Finances
The Town Council’s income is mainly from the precept, which is public money that is charged via Rochford District Council to households within the town. We are very proud that our precept is currently, and has been for many years, the lowest in the Rochford District. We have achieved this in numerous ways. Since the inception of the Rayleigh in Bloom campaign and the Christmas Lights we have raised income by receiving sponsorship from residents, businesses and local organisations. Our annual sponsorship raises approximately £10,000 per year. We also receive income from the High Street market, hire of the King George V Playing Field for events and football matches, rent from use of the Pavilion, rental of allotment plots, sale of Town Crest badges and postcards, insurance claims and grants. The grants we have received for the King George V Playing Field over the years amounts to over £200,000 and we have received many other grants for improvements to allotment and woodland sites.

We recognise that it is very important to obtain good value for money and we achieve this aim by thorough financial controls, such as twice yearly internal audits, annual external audit, financial regulations and tendering for large projects as well as obtaining at least three quotations for all expenditure over £500.00. Our Policy and Finance Committee receives detailed financial records that are scrutinised at Committee meetings and published on our website to ensure transparency. The Town Council commences its examination of its budgets in November each year when our Committees consider a forecast of projected expenditure to the current year end and estimates of expected expenditure and new projects into the following year. We set the Full Town Council budget in January each year and ear-mark reserves for future projects.

The Town Council has long term contracts for the following: Christmas Lights 2016 – 2019, Floral Displays 2015 – 2018, Insurance 2016 – 2018 (with 2 year extension option), King George V Playing Field Premises and Maintenance 2016 – 2020, Woodland Trust Land Management 2015 – 2018, Electricity 2015 – 2017. Our three year plan (as shown in attached table) is to continue to provide all of the existing services at the same or higher level within our budgets and to conduct the following projects: Improvements to play area equipment, increase in number of floral displays in town centre and railway station, replacement of street lights in town centre (depending on results of structural surveys), enhancements to road lay out of High Street Taxi Rank to provide pedestrian/market use, improvements to Lower Wyburns Woodlands, arrange more town centre events and markets.
This plan and the financial forecasts will be reviewed annually.