



District Councillor Monthly Report

Lawford, Manningtree & Mistley

July / August 2020

COVID Support

The Support Group managed by Sharon Robinson through Facebook has now closed. Sharon and her volunteers have supported a huge number of local people through the 'Lockdown' period. They have responded to over 500 contacts during the weeks when many local residents were in some form of isolation or shielding.

I am also aware that the offers of support still remain through other live volunteer groups in Manningtree and the surrounding villages.

I extend my sincere thanks to all those neighbours and volunteers who continue to be there for those who need some tangible assistance, or just a little support or reassurance. Those contacts are invaluable.

In the Tendring District there were just over 43,000 residents identified as being in the Vulnerable Group, over 8,000 of whom (due to our demographics) were listed as Category A (Most Vulnerable). TDC staff continue to deliver food and essential supplies to approximately 1,300 homes in the district.

At the height of the pandemic there were a number of TDC staff in isolation. In addition, over 100 Council Staff were deployed into providing mainstream essential services. Many council ground maintenance staff were redeployed delivering essential supplies.

I know from correspondence that some residents were irritated by the lack of TDC grass cutting during this time, but senior managers had implemented emergency planning procedures during the emergency. Many TDC staff were more usefully deployed elsewhere. We support those decisions, but hopefully, usual services are slowly returning to normal.

The latest figures for our district show that we had 423 confirmed cases of Coronavirus resulting in 127 Covid 19 Related Deaths.

Our thoughts and prayers are still with those families who have lost loved ones. Many of those families were also unable to provide the funeral services they would have wished, which is of course an essential part of the grieving process.

The use of Glyphosate

I am aware of the considerable growing concern locally regarding the use of Glyphosate Herbicide to control weed growth. I have been in written and telephone communication with the Tendring District Council head of Public Realm Mr Ian Taylor, regarding this matter.

Rather than me trying to explain the complexities of this situation Mr Taylor has agreed that his written response sent directly to me can be reproduced here.

Dear Alan,

Thank you for your recent email concerning the above, which has been forwarded to me by the Acting Corporate Director, Operations and Delivery who has asked me to investigate the issues raised and to respond directly.

The Council is aware of public concerns over the use of glyphosate as part of its weed control operations and has responded to a number of enquiries on the subject in recent years.

There has been a particular interest in the Manningtree area on this subject recently with requests for information coming from some local town councillors.

I have attached for your information (below) an example of some of the replies outlining the general position of the Council on this subject at the present time. However, I am happy to expand on this a little further with you.

In truth nobody wants to use a harmful product and nobody wants to be seen as closed to alternative products, but at the same time it is extremely difficult to establish clear and unambiguous facts in respect of use of this product and harm associated with it and likewise it is very hard to establish clarity around the claimed effectiveness or costs associated with suggested alternatives.

Many Councils have reacted in response to this subject, but very few have sustained a no-use policy and of those that have, none could say that weed control and cost effectiveness has been improved in their area as a result.

Colchester Borough Council have, like some other Councils before them, committed to ending use of Glyphosate, but have not actually done so. They remain .."pushing towards this end..", or .."phasing out.." and .."working with others to do so.."

Colchester BC does not undertake its own grounds maintenance work which is outsourced to a private contractor. It is not clear if they have instructed their contractor to end use of glyphosate, or if this is part of CBC's.." working with

others..” or that phasing out merely represents very localised small scale projects or functions carried out directly by the Council.

In addition, Colchester BC unlike Tendring DC does not carry out the twice yearly weed spraying function on the highway on behalf of Essex County Council. It is this function that is the highest user of the herbicide and which tends to attract the most complaints.

However, it is also the roads, pavements and footpaths that attract the highest number of complaints when weeds are seen growing or are seen as not under proper control.

As a Council we have investigated alternatives to glyphosate, but we have not so far been encouraged by any product. In our experience they have all proven to be, either messy, ineffective, noisy, dangerous, difficult to use, or a combination of all these things.

Foam washing requires hot water and hot water requires diesel powered heating or similar. Anyone using water based products whether it is watering plants, or cleaning streets will be aware of the weight and the difficulty of using large quantities of water in public places, especially over a wide range of distance and particularly in remoter areas of open space, recreation grounds, seafront areas and so on.

Flame retarders are dangerous, both to operators and also increase the risk of starting unwanted fires in public areas. These require diesel power also.

Non glyphosate sprays tend to use variants of acetic acid (vinegar) which appears to be usable for small scale domestic use but can be smelly, or ineffective, or both.

Interestingly, Monsanto, the makers of Roundup the glyphosate product at the centre of health concerns in the USA have launched non glyphosate Roundup for the domestic market. I have yet to hear feedback on its effectiveness compared to the glyphosate-based product and whether there are aromas associated with the acetic acid used.

All of that said, the Council is aware of the concerns and along with colleagues from many other Councils, effective and cost-effective alternatives to glyphosate are under constant review.

However, to add to further complexity in the debate, glyphosate is regarded generally within the scientific industry as a safe product.

It is not a pesticide but a herbicide and should not directly affect wildlife other than by killing the weeds (wildflowers to some) that insects feed on. It does not as far as we are aware, directly kill insects, birds or other wildlife. The product is inert once dry, and drying is quick. The product works by attacking the cell structure of broad leaf plants and is highly effective at doing so. However, even if ingested by humans it is not fatal but is an irritant to skin, eyes etc. if used inappropriately – without the correct PPE.

Health fears around glyphosate tend to be around use by untrained and ill-equipped operators and the effect it has on them over a prolonged period.

There have been no cases we are aware of involving the general population being exposed to it by means of annual or twice-yearly applications.

The decision to ban anything whether it is a product, people, contractors, artwork, circuses, physical contact sports or any number of subjects which arouse divided opinions is always a tricky subject and best made once all facts are presented and research duly undertaken by those elected to do so.

At present the Council is relying on the professional advice of experts including DEFRA, the HSE, BASIS and others to determine the risks associated with this product and to advise accordingly.

Like all Councils Tendring has a duty of care in respect of its residents and visitors and therefore once concerns were raised the use of this product has been under review. However, likewise the Council has a responsibility to act prudently and sensibly with public finances. The use of ineffective and expensive alternatives to glyphosate is costly and will give rise to decisions requiring acceptance by the wider community in terms of how they would like their District to look and what they are willing to pay for.

Without glyphosate, streets will be weedier, sports pitches of reduced quality, footpaths more overgrown and operating costs generally much higher is the view of most local authorities and farmers at the present time.

However, the Council continues to monitor progress in respect of effective alternatives and the science in respect of glyphosate itself.

In summary, glyphosate is effective and relatively inexpensive to use and operate. The health concerns are not without foundation, but are far from proven and tend to be expressed on a one size fits all basis.

The future may bring in a total ban, it may recommend prudent use only, or it may conclude it is relatively harmless under the right conditions and therefore widespread application may continue. We await developments.

I apologise for the long winded reply, but as you are in an area where concerns around use of this product and requests for its withdrawal from use appear to be gaining traction, I thought it may be helpful to include as much information as possible.

I hope the response has been helpful but should you have any further questions, or wish to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

Best regards

Ian

***Ian Taylor
Head of Public Realm***

I thank Ian for his comprehensive response.

Playgrounds

Children's Play Equipment is being released for use in the district and in many parishes now. However, this will only be done after the appropriate safety assessments have been completed.

It must be understood that Coronavirus has not been eradicated although we are seeing positive and encouraging signs. Children using any play equipment must be supervised by parents or guardians, comply with all local requirements, and address personal handwashing / sanitisation before and after use of the equipment.

It is impractical to provide wipes or hand gel in playgrounds. Parents or guardians must take responsibility.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

I'm sure you are all aware by now that the Secretary of State has agreed that the AONB will be extended by approximately 38 square kilometres to include much of the Southern Stour Estuary, including areas of Manningtree, Mistley and Bradfield.

This is great news and my thanks go to those (including Carlo) who for many years have campaigned for this result. This should provide greater protection and perhaps some increased funding for our area. More details will follow.

Planning

High Street Manningtree - The developer currently restructuring and extending the old Nat West Bank building in Manningtree had submitted a revised application to change the use of the ground floor High Street facing section from Commercial to residential.

In making this application the developer has reneged on his commitment to the District and Town Councillors.

Carlo, Val and I 'called-in' the application so that the application would be heard by the Planning Committee and it was our intention to present opposition submissions to the committee.

However, the application has been refused by Planning Officers, therefore it will not appear on a Planning Committee agenda. Although this is essentially good news, I am concerned regarding some of the Planning Officer's comments and I feel that an appeal may well be imminent. I hope I'm wrong as further loss of commercial or retail premises in our High Street is to be avoided.

Anchor Public House – The owner of the Anchor Public House in Mistley has submitted a planning application for a change of use from a Public House status to Residential. The intention being to convert the existing building to

two residential units. We will be interested in the opinion of the Parish Council concerning this application.

High Street, Mistley – I'm sure we are all enjoying the fantastic view of the river, resulting from the demolition of the old maltings buildings on Mistley Quay. However, the temporary footpath constructed on behalf of the developer is inadequate and becoming anything but temporary.

I consulted with TDC Planning Enforcement and it seems that action from TDC is not possible and the matter should now be progressed by Essex County Council.

I have heard back from their Strategic Development Engineer who has stated that the contractor went in without prior discussion with Essex Highways about the work that would be required adjacent to the highway.

I am informed that, "The Structures Team at Essex Highways is now involved while the Development Management Team have been liaising with the contractor following the slippage. The Structures Team will be coming up with a design to permanently re-instate the damage caused by these works before building works on the site can commence.

GP Surgery - A planning application was submitted to build an additional first floor on the GP surgery in Edgefield Avenue, Lawford. A local resident and I spoke against the application at the Planning Committee Meeting.

The surgery is a converted ground floor bungalow, in a line of bungalows, backing onto other bungalows. The detail of the application provided no further surgery space on the first floor, but there were, in my view, other negatives regarding loss of privacy, shadowing etc.

The application was approved.

Library

It was good to hear that the Essex County Council opened the next tranche of libraries from the 13th July. This group includes the Manningtree Library. I hope the many local people who have vehemently stated these last few months that our library would never reopen will be relieved.

Lawford Recycling Centre

The Essex County Council Recycling Centre has now re-opened as planned. There are some minor restrictions, involving the number of visitors allowed in the site and social distancing between visitors and staff.

The considerable number of Facebook-Rumour generated e-mails received by Carlo, Val and myself, demanding that the decision to close the centre be reversed, were not helpful. There was no evidence that ECC had ever said the centre was to close permanently.

Local Government

The government has stated its intention to bring forward a White Paper in the autumn to look at reforming the tiers of local government in England. We understand from the sparse information available at this time, that the proposals will include Parish, District and County Council structures and powers.

More detail is expected in the next few weeks.

Anti-Social Behaviour

There has been a notable increase in instances of unacceptable driver behaviour and ASB around the parishes during the lockdown. This has resulted in public car parks adjacent to playing fields in Mistley and Lawford being closed. The police have increased their patrols and their visible presence in the parishes over the last couple of weeks.

Abandoned Boats

I am informed by the Manningtree Sailing Club that old small boats are being abandoned on a small stretch of land at The Walls. These craft represent a potential danger if they drift loose at higher tides.

Enquires to date have failed to establish a landowner. Both the District and County Councils have confirmed that the parcel of land does not belong to them.

Enquires continue.

Alan Coley – District Councillor

14 July 2020

District Report on Behalf of:
Alan Coley, Carlo Guglielmi & Val Guglielmi

In an emergency which requires TDC's assistance residents can contact the council's Control Centre on 01255 222022, available 24/7.

General Information: If anyone witnesses any fly tipping occurring, please contact TDC's Waste Management Team on 01255 686768.