

**Councillor Neil Hargreaves**  
**Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy**  
**Full Council report – 10 October 2023**

In July I attended a Communities and Partnerships briefing at the UDC offices. This is facilitated by UDC officers and includes representatives from organisations such as the Food Bank and from Harlow College at Stansted Airport. It is a sharing of information and potential priorities, which then may inform decisions UDC takes, for example on awarding government levelling up funds, and our own Voluntary Bodies Support grants. A recurring theme is that funds tend to go to those who are most adept at applying, which may not match the balance of needs. There is also a preponderance of applications from the Saffron Walden area. All of the opportunities and schemes are put on the Member briefing emails so perhaps members can assist by promoting interest and applications. We need to put resources where needed but can in practice only respond to what is applied for.

In September I met with officers to consider applications for the latest phase of UK Shared Prosperity Fund. UDC bid for and was awarded £800k for rural economy grants, in what is a replacement for EU funding, to be spent over two years. Applications fitting the criteria included additions of solar panels on a high energy use commercial building in Thaxted, an extension building for a business restoring classic Land Rovers also including solar, and a farm diversification at Takeley involving building a clown mad house as an addition to other successful tourist attractions at the farm.

The grants also cover culture and heritage improvements, and applications are on a rolling basis, with meetings held regularly to avoid delay – government schemes are typically short term and require spending by financial year end, which may be unrealistic unless a project is at an advanced stage.

There is much in the other papers for Council about our commercial property portfolio. One of the successes has been the funding out of the income of £450k towards larger sports facilities. Over three years various grants have been awarded including for Multi use Games Areas at Dunmow and Newport, £100k each towards

projects costing around £170k. The Newport one is just completed and the Sports Committee and Parish Council are very pleased and an opening ceremony is being arranged



Other meetings include the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) in Colchester. I emailed members a while ago with an account of how it works and how schemes are approved or not, and have also met with Stansted PC on their concerns and questions. Decisions on schemes are made by the NEPP board which I will be attending in November, and I have had a prior meeting with UDC officers to take their views and NEPP office feedback on schemes. One scheme is adjacent to the recent serious accident at Takeley which featured on the TV news, including serious vandalism to cars. I think it should go on record that the police send accident reports to NEPP, and I am told that, contrary to much social media speculation, the accident had nothing to do with parked vehicles (fly or others).

Concerning fly parking, the chief executive has convened a meeting of all relevant bodies and those partners with powers and responsibilities on this matter, taking place on 2<sup>nd</sup> November and which I will chair.

Cllr Neil Hargreaves