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ACTION: Phil Turner will change council policy as part of a YA air quality campaign

EXCLUSIVE

By Charles Thomson

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BASILDON Council is to create new woodland following a *Yellow Advertiser* campaign.

Housing developers will be asked to plant trees across the borough as a condition of their planning permission.

Tory council leader Phil Turner ordered the tree-planting scheme after a series of YA reports about rising levels of deadly air pollution.

The change is set to be written into the council's Local Plan, meaning it will become planning policy for the next 20 years.

Cllr Turner said: "This has all come about from the *Yellow Advertiser* bringing the issue to Basildon Council last year. We took that seriously. We have beefed up our policy to tell developers this is a preferred option.

"When developers start developing pieces of land they own, they allocate some land to us for community benefit and then it becomes our freehold. In the past we've opted to use it for playgrounds, football pitches and other community assets.

"Under this beefed up policy, we will make clear that we would like developers to plant woodlands and then make them over to us. If the community is giving over its land - whether it owns it or not - it would be nice to think the developer might want to give something back in the way of a woodland. Planting trees for future improvements in quality of life and air quality is a high priority for us."

Cllr Turner vowed in September 2014 to order the policy change, after the YA revealed respiratory illness was now the biggest health problem facing the borough.

A report by the Basildon and Brentwood Clinical Commissioning Group found the problem was greatest in poor, densely-populated areas with lots of nearby traffic.

The revelation came months after the YA reported that more than five per cent of adult deaths in Basildon are caused by toxic pollutants in the air, according to figures published by Government body Public Health England.

The deaths were caused by dangerous particles known as PM2.5s, most commonly caused by car exhaust fumes.

The Public Health England report said almost 950 life years were lost in 2010 in Basildon as a result of the deadly pollutants.

The borough's pollution fatality rate was the worst in Essex Council's catchment area.

Part of the problem is thought to be caused by air blowing over from neighbouring Thurrock, revealed by the World Health Organisation in May 2014 to be the most polluted place in England.

Planning boss Richard Moore, who is overseeing the Local Plan, confirmed that the plan was one of several planned changes to the document.

He said: "Following the decision to delay the Local Plan, we are now able to look at how we can better strengthen the conservation of the borough's existing natural ideas.

"More fundamentally, however, we can now consider how we can ensure new or extended green spaces and natural areas are provided in the borough, as part of the borough's growth."

Call to reveal details about payouts linked to alleged child abuse

CAMPAIGNERS have urged Essex County Council to come clean about secretive payouts for alleged abuse.

One child abuse survivor said County Hall's refusal to answer basic questions about the payments was "tantamount to a cover-up".

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) and the Taxpayers'

Alliance have joined a *Yellow Advertiser* campaign to uncover details of the historic abuse allegations. The payouts were revealed in a list of 600 council compensation claims paid since December 2013.

Among the hundreds of claims are 10 payouts for "alleged abuse" in 1970, 1974, 1992 and 1993.

One case involved the adult social care department, four were connected to children's social care and five were linked to the vulnerable children and young people department. The authority paid £90,000 for two 1993 cases. Eight more payouts totalled £4,422. County Hall has refused to tell taxpayers anything about why the money was paid.

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Council question ban sparks fury



ANGRY: Mike Andrews

THE public were prevented from asking questions in a council meeting. Residents and councillors spoke of their anger after Basildon Council voted by a majority not to extend a half-hour public question session at the December 18 meeting. Labour group leader Byron Taylor called for the extension, as nine questions were submitted by residents and the half-hour limit was not sufficient to answer them all. He said it was "important that all of the members of the public get to ask their questions". But the Tory group and some Ukip members vetoed the extension. Deputy Labour leader Nigel

Smith said afterwards: "How can politicians, elected by the public, have the gall to vote to ban the public from asking them questions? We work for them. They own us. They own this building. "They pay for these meetings. Our sole job is to represent them. - it is frankly unbelievable." Only six of the nine questions were heard. The last speaker, Mike Andrews, of Outwood Common Road, Billericay, quizzing Richard Moore, cabinet member for regeneration and planning on the local plan. Before leaving the podium, he accused councillors of doing the bare minimum to satisfy the law,

but not caring about residents' opinions. He said: "I think we've all seen how some of the members here take democracy. We've heard lots of arguments about the minimum that law provides, and we've also had a vote to stop the rest of the people here tonight from making their questions. So I won't say anymore, because I would like to provide some more time for some of the other people here to make their questions." He received a round of applause, but mayor Mo Larkin said the public question session was already out of time, so the remaining three questions were not asked.

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Matthew Whaley, 34, of Long Riding, had submitted a question about the council's expectations of elected members, regarding "inclusion and diversity". He tabled the question after a tape recording was leaked, in which Basildon Ukip councillor Kerry Smith described gay people as "poofters" and an Asian woman as a "Chinky bird". Mr Whaley said: "I'm extremely angry. We have councillors filibustering to stop members of the public from speaking - it's absolutely outrageous." Residents whose questions were not publicly answered were told they would receive written replies.



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● **MAYOR Mo Larkin urged councillors to be civil at the last council meeting of 2014.**

She told the December 18 meeting, "With the spirit of Christmas fast approaching, please can I ask members not to make personal comments, because I believe the public are fed up with in-fighting between political opponents. Please be respectful to each other this evening."

However, Labour and Tory councillors had a bust-up within an hour, after Tories voted to ban some members of the public from asking questions.

Labour's Andrew Gordon then accused Tory member Tony Hedley of deliberately stringing out his answers in a half-hour scrutiny session, preventing other questions from being asked.

Cllr Hedley retorted that Cllr Gordon suffered from 'verbal diarrhoea'.

● **HOUSING targets for Basildon could be re-thought, Tory planning boss Richard Moore has announced.**

Cllr Moore revealed the update in a December 18 council meeting.

He said: "I can confirm that this council, along with its south Essex local authority partners, is considering revisiting the objectively assessed needs work for the districts and boroughs of south Essex. It could in turn inform whether the housing targets for south Essex local plans need to change."

● **A REPORT submitted by Billericay residents will not be considered by Basildon Council, planning boss Richard Moore has confirmed.**

Cllr Moore previously praised the document, compiled by business analysts for the Billericay Action Group, challenging the maths behind Basildon Council's projected future housing need.

However, in a December 18 meeting, Cllr Moore said: "Representations to inform the development of the local plan must be made within prescribed consultation periods to be in conformity to local plan regulations. As the 'white paper' was submitted to the council some months after the close of the consultation, it is not a legally valid representation."

Councillor joins battle over street name

A UKIP councillor has offered to spend an estimated £25,000 of his own money fighting a street renaming and renumbering scheme.

Frank Ferguson said he would stump up the cash for a legal battle over planned changes on the Five Links Estate, Laindon.

Basildon Council plans to change street names on several roads, against many residents' wishes.

The council backed a motion by majority vote in October, branding the name changes 'unnecessary'.

UKIP and Labour councillors supported the motion, which said residents should be compensated if the unwanted changes went ahead.

When asked by the YA why it was insisting on the changes, Basildon Council said it would 'assist with navigating the estate, especially during emergency situations'.

The YA asked whether emergency services had ever claimed the current names were a hindrance,

but the council said it had received no such complaints.

However, a spokesman insisted the current street naming and numbering were 'deemed not to be logical or coherent'.

The law allows residents to raise objections against street name changes in the magistrate's court.

More than 400 residents have raised complaints.

Cllr Ferguson said Tory council leader Phil Turner has confirmed in a council meeting that the authority would hire a barrister to defend its decision. He told the YA: "I have engaged a solicitor, who told me his costs, if it went to a day hearing, would be around £5,000. I believe the council's costs will be several times this amount, because they will hire a barrister and he will probably hire a legal aide – so if the residents lose, they could face a legal bill of around £25,000."

At a Five Links Residents' Association meeting on Wednesday, December 16, he said: "In order to support the residents in their attempt to have the scheme overturned in magistrate's court, I am prepared to commit my own money to indemnify them against the possibility of costs being awarded against them. This is a measure of my commitment to local democracy. The people affected by this plan have demonstrated their rejection of it by organising and lodging with the court over 420 letters of objection, but the arrogant Tories just will not listen to the people."

A Basildon Council spokesman said: "The council is unable to estimate legal costs at this early stage, before the first hearing. However, we do have a duty to ensure that naming and numbering on the estate is logical and coherent and the council will now wait for advice from the Magistrates Court."

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