

# Annual Assembly 2025 ECC (Broomfield & Writtle) and CCC (Broomfield and the Walthams) report from Cllr Mike Steel

I have now been a County Cllr for 4 years, and a City Cllr for 6 years.  
I was expecting to come to the end of the County Council term in May 2025, but Devolution and LGR has changed that – more on that later.

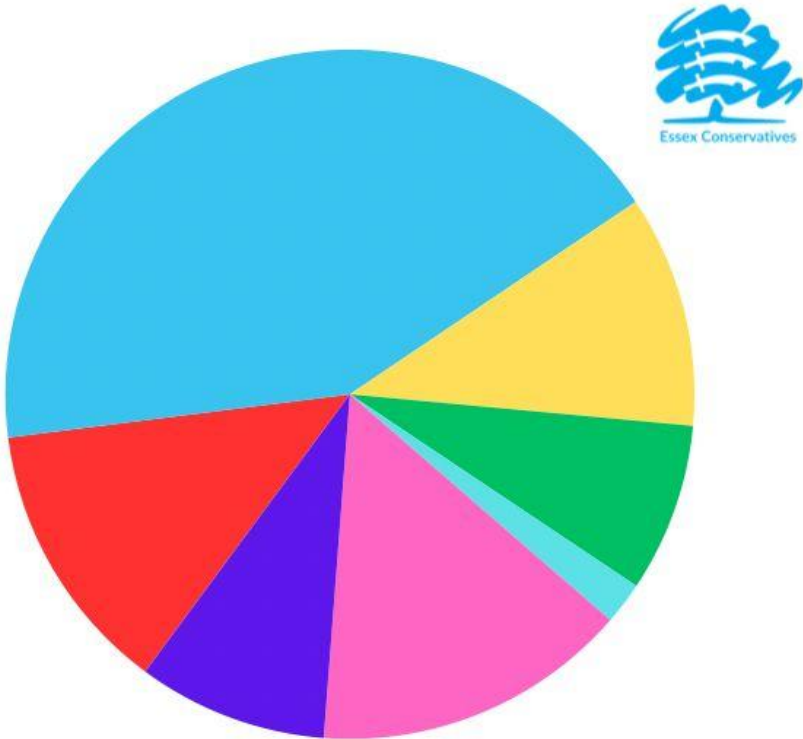
## ECC Budget for 24/25

Gross expenditure for 25/26 is expected to be £2.7Bn, with net expenditure £1.2Bn (after income, and Govt grants). ECC have decided upon a 3.75% increase of rates – which is less than the 5% allowed (without a referendum). Many councils are in financial trouble, but ECC continues to be well run and prides itself on being one of the lower precept councils.

## How your County Council Tax is being spent on in Essex?

### Net Budget 2025/26

*Over 50% of the Budget goes towards social care, supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities.*



**Adult Social Care - 43%**  
*Including older people, learning disabilities, physical and sensory impairment and mental health*



**Children's Services and Early Years - 13%**



**Highways, Maintenance & Sustainable Transport - 11%**



**Waste and environment - 8%**



**Education - 2%**

Being the County Cllr for a rural area, Highway's issues dominate the inbox! Cross County, this is not the case, and other issues such as Social Services, Education and Children's services, are more prevalent in issues raised with the County Cllr.

### Highways

I have made extensive use of the Members Highways Initiative (MHI). For Great Waltham this has included Bury Lane, Brook Mead, South Street, Ford End pavements, North End Mill Lane, Pleshey Road. Each County Cllr gets an allowance, and I have over-used mine. Some haven't used their allowance so the spare capacity has been offered as

“Winter Maintenance” to Cllrs like me and I have made use of it. If there is a road, or pavement defect, you want me to address – send me a photo (if safe to take) and the existing Highways Track-It defect number.

Every year, we also get the benefit of RideLondon fixing a few defects along the route. But not this year! It will return in 2026.

Great Waltham has benefitted from the LHP – with Broomfield and Writtle Completed schemes 23/24

- \* Writtle weight limit signing
- \* GW Littley Park signage
- \* LW traffic review
- \* GW Ford End kerbing

Broomfield and Writtle schemes agreed for funding in 24/25

- \* LCHE226001 – School Lane, Broomfield – SCP – addition of wig wags.
- \* LCHE212007 – Chignal Smealey – implementation of gateways and 40mph marking
- \* LCHE212015 – LW – 20mph past school + wig wags

## **Bus Services**

Great Waltham continues to benefit from the on-demand, rural, electric bus services.

Fares are capped at £3 and concessions apply.

The area covered extends into Braintree in the north and far south as Broomfield Hospital, or Writtle to the West of Chelmsford.

People often ask me why it doesn't go into Chelmsford. The answer is twofold;

- This is a rural bus in-fill service, and journeys into Chelmsford would greatly extend the journey times, and take away from the main objective to add rural services where there is a shortfall
- This is an add-on subsidised service and is not allowed to compete with Govt franchised commercial services.

## **Pylons**

This is the main topic in Great Waltham.

From the outset, I have opposed the pylons.

I have pushed for both ECC and CCC to oppose the pylons.

I proposed a Motion at the May 24 County Council meeting, to oppose the current NGET proposal - the motion was passed (all groups except Labour supported it, but Labour abstained on the vote).

The successful motion asked for the following::

- \* NGET to reconsider their proposal of an exclusive Overhead Line (OHL) solution for Essex as presented in the statutory consultation, on the basis of the devastating effect of 50m of steel lattice pylons on residents, businesses, communities and the local environment, and that they further consider the alternative options from the ESO study and the case for delay from the Hiorns report.
- \* ESO and Govt widen the ESO Options report and not restrict the starting point for all options as Norwich, which has the pre-emptive effect of making the OHL solution the most economical, and restricts consideration of a strategic off-shore grid.
- \* ESO and Govt ensure that the OCSS is brought into consideration along with the extended timetable of the Hiorns report, which would then enable lower impact solutions for the residents, businesses, communities and local environment of Essex'

I arranged for Kemi Badenoch to meet with the representatives of all my Parish Councils (plus a couple more on the route), For me, it is clear that Govt are driving the timescale and criteria, therefore this is not just about objecting to NG (hence my County Council Motion seeks to lobby Govt as well). From a parochial point of view, the Waltham Gap is likely to be near the point of unacceptability and local comments need to add to the list of problems and try and take it over the edge. Whilst the alternative of AC underground may be very disruptive (120m wide trench), the newer HVDC underground technology occupies a 30m trench, but the technology is not mature. Lobbying through Govt (and our MP) may buy time for such technology to mature.

## **Pylons – targeted consultation**

The targeted consultation has now opened for the Essex (and Thurrock) region and will run until 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

Feedback can be provided at [www.nationalgrid.com/norwich-to-tilbury](http://www.nationalgrid.com/norwich-to-tilbury)

Most of these changes have been identified from feedback from the last consultation and NGET have stated that before they make any decisions, they want to consult with those people living near these proposed changes.

The changes can be found here - [Norwich to Tilbury | Document library | National Grid ET](#)

There are also a series of Webinars and events that can be accessed from the website.

I had a call with NGET 26<sup>th</sup> Feb (for the City Cllrs – affects around 6 Cllrs, but only 2 of us attended – myself and Cllr Whitehead). On the call NGET made it clear that this consultation is purely about the changes, and is not about off-shore, or underground options, although I suspect that people will still comment on this. I did ask about these and was told that NGET are operating within the framework of Central Govt, and options such as underground, would only be considered if Central Govt changed the rules – e.g., moved away from the requirement of providing the cheapest solution.

The latest proposal includes just 3 areas around Chelmsford:

- Essex 7 – around Gt Leighs – this is mainly about timing and synchronising with the ECC new Minerals Plan
- Essex 8 – the Waltham Gap – lower height pylons (37m rather than 50m), but wider. From what I can see, this would reduce visibility of the pylons from a distance, but bring one closer to the road (and a house) and so be more intrusive close up.
- Essex 9 – around Margaretting – temp construction laydown area repositioned north of Ivy Barnes Lane

It seems all other areas have not experienced sufficient change to warrant comment.

NGET assured me that the proposals were subject to feedback and if, for example, the Waltham residents would rather have the previous proposal, it would be considered. It is the Waltham Gap which seems to be the major change in this consultation, and is a trade-off between lower height pylons but they are more intrusive (being nearer the road and housing). I will probably comment that we would like the lower height pylons, but in the old positions, in the middle of the fields. I don't know if that is possible, as the lower height pylons may have less span.

I want to emphasise, that whilst we should respond to the latest consultation on the same basis – i.e.. we oppose pylons and want off-shore or underground – but the latest consultation is purely about the small changes in the Walthams area. And we need to decide whether to be silent on those (so accepting the changes) or stating our preference – to me, this means lower height pylons versus proximity to the road.

### **Devolution and Unitary Councils – an update and overview**

The point of devolution was a simplistic devolution of powers (such as bus franchising) from Central Govt to the County Council, which would bring decision making closer to the electorate. Whereas, Local Govt Reform (LGR)/Unitary Councils is about replacing Essex County Council (ECC), 2 existing Unitaries (Southend and Thurrock) and 15 District Councils (such as Chelmsford City Council CCC) with 3, 4, or 5 Unitary Councils – which cover all the responsibilities of ECC and the District Councils. So, instead of there being one County Council responsible for Roads, Social Care, Education, Children's services, etc) with 15 District Councils (Planning, Waste Collection, Housing etc), Essex would be split into a small number of Unitary Councils, each having responsibility for all these services. So, CCC will need to merge with some of its neighbouring towns, yet to be determined). The number of Unitaries hasn't been determined yet – it is aimed at around 500,000 people per unitary. The other change will be that there will be a directly elected Mayor, not for each Unitary, but a single one across all of Essex. The Mayor will also take on the role of the Police Commissioner. In order to do this, the May 2025 County Council elections have to be postponed by a year. The reality is that a year isn't enough and further legislation will be required to postpone further. So, the best prediction at the moment is that:

**May 2025** – ECC elections postponed by at least a year. Further extensions will be required and Cllrs will probably serve another 3 years until March 2028

**May 2026** – elections for cross-Essex Mayor

**May 2027** – CCC elections postponed for a year

**May 2027** - Unitary Councils “shadow” elections, ready to take control in March 2028. They will spend their first year setting up the organisation and budgets,

**March 2028** - ECC, Southend & Thurrock Unitaries and all the 15 District Councils abolished and replaced by TBD Unitary Councils

For me, this means that I was expecting to have to stand again for ECC in May 2025, but I won't and I probably have a 3 year extension. As a City Cllr for Broomfield and the Walthams, I would have also had to stand for election in May 2027, but I will likely get a year extension on that. I know many people feel that this is a suspension of democracy, but the overriding factor seems to be that if we don't sign up to this approach, we will have it done to us!

I reserve judgement on the whole concept! Chelmsford City Council, whether under the Conservatives, or Lib-Dems, is one of the better managed authorities, with good services and low debt. Many of the other councils carry a large debt and this is likely to be shared out. However, I can see the benefit of Unitaries, after all as an ECC, CCC, and PC Cllr, I personally operate as one. But, this is all going to be a big upheaval, and you might have detected that I'm not a big fan of the direction we are going in!

### **City Council**

I would like to remind GWPC that there are 3 City Cllrs for Broomfield and Walthams, and it is frustrating from my point of view, that I seem to be the only one that engages with the PC!

### **Local Plan**

The new Local plan went to the Policy Board 16<sup>th</sup> Jan for ratification to go out to consultation.

New housebuilding targets have been allocated by the Labour Govt, which increases the annual build rate from the current 913pa to 1,454 pa. Chelmsford had almost completed their plan so have taken advantage of the "transition" arrangements whereby they can complete the current process (rather than start again) on the basis that they can meet 80% of the new target. The updated plan commits to 1,210 dwellings pa, so that it gets a reduction on the new targets for the next 5 years.

In terms of my City Council ward, the only change is the addition of site 14b at Ford End (20 dwellings). The initial draft also had 14a (20 dwellings) at Back Lane but public feedback supported removing this.

City Council are consulting on the:

- Chelmsford Local Plan - Pre-Submission (Regulation 19) Document
- Review of the Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan: Pre-Submission Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA).

City Council Planning prefer receiving comments online, using the specially designed Consultation Portal. Using the Consultation Portal helps to record comments accurately and process them quickly. Go to

[www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planningpolicyconsult](http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planningpolicyconsult) to:

- Read the consultation documents
- Make your comments
- Sign up for alerts to future consultations.

Otherwise, representations should be made on a specially designed response form available online at [www.chelmsford.gov.uk/lp-review](http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/lp-review) or a paper copy can be provided by phoning (01245) 606330.

My own perspective on this is that this development offers the opportunity to get an Average speed Camera (ASC) through Ford End. I believe that we have come to the end of the road with ECC Highways, and they will not sanction and operate an ASC through Ford End. However, with this development, we might get the opportunity to get one, and we should encourage the development as long as we get S106 to install the ASC and provide funding to SERP to operate it for several years. I also think that a few extra dwellings in Ford End, add to sustainability – the school is not single entry, so we need to enhance that.

### **Other Developments**

The Bloor Homes development (512 dwellings) is slowly progressing through the planning process. It appeared in the last Local Plan, and it appears unchanged in the latest one. It has been approved, as a planning application, in principle, and the S106 agreement is nearing final approval – this includes contributions to Education, Health, and Highways .

So, we are probably feeling that there is enough development going on in our area, than we can accommodate, especially from a highways point of view. So it is a relief that the Opus Retirement Village 23/01787/FUL was refused - Erection of an Integrated Retirement Community (Use Class C2) comprising; a Village Care Centre, 58 bedroom care home, 45 care suites (comprising one and two bedrooms), 100 care apartments (comprising one and two bedrooms), wellness spa, open space and associated works including car parking, access, hard and soft landscaping and associated engineering works.

The developers took this to appeal and I am pleased to say that it