

ECC

Devolution and Unitary Councils

The White Paper for Devolution (and Unitary Councils) has now been published.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/676028c9cfbf84c3b2bcfa57/English_Devolution_White_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf

It offers a range of Local Govt reforms which ties into the amount of devolved powers from Central Govt. it would be fair to say that it encourages the mayoral approach to a unitary council. For Essex, that would mean splitting it into 3 or 4 unitary councils that then encompass the County level and District level.

The leader of ECC is keen to bring decision making and power closer to the people therefore Essex will be a front runner for devolution. County Councils have until 10th Jan 25 to submit a proposal which in our case, needs to reach agreement with Southend and Thurrock as well.

I attended the ECC extra-ordinary meeting of 10th Jan, which agreed the submission to Govt to be considered for 1st phase devolvement/LGR and postpone ECC elections for at least a year. Govt will respond by around 24th Feb

Highway defect reporting

Residents and road users have more options when reporting road defects following a major update by Essex Highways.

The update comes as users will no longer be able to raise issues via third-party sites, such as Fix My Street, from 1 January 2025 due to the lack of detail they provide inspectors.

The '[Report It](#)' webpage by Essex Highways has been tailored to capture all necessary information. This now includes different types of emergencies and if issues have worsened over time.

The '[Track It](#)' webpage lets users see the progress of reports, from inspection to repair, and whether similar issues have already been raised.

Issues logged through third-party platforms are often duplicates of reports already received via Report It, or unrelated to the roads managed by Essex Highways.

By moving exclusively to Report It, Essex Highways can ensure the 50,000 reports received annually are managed in one place, resulting in a faster and more transparent process.

There is also a major cleansing project under way – to clear out dated enquiries on the system. If you look at Track-It, you need to understand the difference between Enquiry References, and Defect Numbers. The former are the problems logged by the public, which when inspected, get converted to a Defect Number. In many cases there are several Enquiry References for one fault, and the process is that when the inspection occurs, several Enquiries will be closed and one Defect Number raised. But it doesn't always work like that – so a data cleanse project is currently underway.

Highways' Highlights Nov/Dec 24

We have been hit with a couple of major storms over the last few months (Bert and Darragh). Highways responded to 301 emergency calls on 79 tree issues and 222 flooding issues.

In November, we fixed 2,254 potholes, 942 pavement defects, cleared 9,994 drains and fixed 1,228 streetlights.

As you know, I have made extensive use of the Members' Highways Initiative which enables County Cllrs to identify road and pavement issues which matter most to residents. I have submitted 59 separate defects, which will keep the extra team busy until next year, so I have pretty much used up (over-used) my quota. However, a new "*Winter Damage*" Members' scheme has been introduced – it appears that not all Cllrs have been as proactive as me in using the Members' Initiative and there is spare capacity which is being offered for defects that have deteriorated due to winter conditions. I have already submitted some defects for this scheme. Let me know if you have any that might fit – existing track-It ref and photo please (if safe to take).

I say this often, but the problem is that more than three quarters the gross ECC budget goes on Adult Social Care and Children's services, so there is little left for all the other services, including Highways, but I do try to make the most of any initiatives!

Reminder on the gritters as we enter the season for icy roads - you can track the gritting trucks here

<https://www.essexhighways.org/roads-and-pavements/winter-travel/track-the-gritting-lorries>

South Street

I spoke with the owner of the Old School House and they have trimmed their hedge to increase visibility splay from Hatchfields.

I have looked at the White House hedge, and it appears to be around the required 45cm from the highway, so highways are unlikely to act. It would be possible and beneficial if the hedge could be cut back to increase the verge.

Unless one of the PC members wants to approach the owner, I can do so. The clerk has investigated and it seems that a triangle of land adjacent to the road is unregistered, which means we would be asking for the White House owner to trim the hedge back on land he doesn't own, and trim it back on land he does! – along with removing the stones. The owner may think that they have a viable adverse ownership claim on that triangle. On the faded signage, I have escalated these replacements through the standard maintenance process and also added them to my Member Initiative

LHP

The rail on Cherry Garden Road has been installed

Mill Lane

I have requested that the jetting team attend again, and they are doing so on 17th Jan. if there is a concern that debris on the road is causing the problem to reoccur, it needs to be reported to Street Cleaning at Chelmsford City Council, or Uttlesford District Council, depending on where it is.

City Council

Brown Bin Charges

At the 18th Dec 24 City council meeting, the Council presented a few measures to increase service charges to address the expected budget shortfall , next year, of £4M. Car park charges will increase, but the most controversial aspect is the introduction of garden waste collection charges (for brown bins), from March 2025.

- £60 for one brown bin – paid annually in advance – same collection frequency of every other week.
- £30 for a second bin
- For those receiving Council tax Support, the charge will be £45

The subscription runs for 12 months, and households need to sign up in January.

Subscriptions attach to the residence, and there is no rebate if you move.

I did vote against it - it seems like a retrograde step when we are trying to recycle as much as possible and reduce black bin waste. Chelmsford is the last of the District Councils to charge for garden waste. Some DCs have been doing it for over 10 years. I tend to only fill a brown bin every few months but I will probably pay the charge. I discussed the collection process with the LD proposer and apparently, those that pay, will get a sticker for their bin. But you can make arrangements with your neighbours - they were encouraging that. For low users like myself, it would make sense for one of us to pay and a few neighbours use the same bin.

My group questioned the wisdom of charging for garden waste and whether people would put such waste in the black bin. The administration responded that there was evidence from other districts that this was not the case, although it seems to me that there will be some of this – the responsible options for those that don't pay for collection is to compost, take it to the recycling centre or make an arrangement with a neighbour.

I also discussed it with the ECC Cabinet Member for the waste strategy and he did say that all the other DCs had been charging for quite some time and there was no evidence of increased garden waste in the black bins!

Opus Retirement Village 23/01787/FUL

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.

Have always see this an over-development of an area that is already subject to significant new developments.

So, I was pleased when City Council refused it in Feb 2024 – it stated 11 reasons for such refusal.

The developer lodged an appeal which has now been decided and the appeal dismissed.

It appears that the Council chose not to defend a number of the reasons for refusal (the RfR) on the basis of information that was submitted after it made its decision and the planning obligation that was subsequently agreed during the course of the Inquiry. This led to the effective withdrawal of reasons 6-11 by the close of the Inquiry. However, main Issues 5 resulted in the refusal by the Appeal Inspector - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and its effect on the setting of two non-designated heritage assets comprising a World War II pillbox (the Pillbox) and Sparrowhawks Farm.

Local Plan

The new Local plan goes to the Policy Board 16th 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

CCC and ECC report Jan 2025 meeting.

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.

The new Local Plan includes site 14b at Ford End (20 dwellings) but has removed 14a, the Back Lane development. Dandara want to build 50 dwellings on the 14b site, but the Local Plan states 20. That is not to say that they can't submit a plan for 50, but 30 would be outside the Local Plan.

Dandara held a drop in session on 14th Jan at the FEVH. This is not part of the mandatory consultation process, but allows residents and PC to make suggestions at the early stage. But it will still go to consultation as part of the Local Plan, and also the formal application will go to consultation.

I have been discussing with City Council Spatial Planning about how we can get traffic calming, or Average Speed Cameras, on the B1008, funded by S106/CIL. Obviously, the more houses that are built, the more funds available for such measures. (CIL/S106 adds up to £90K per dwelling – affordable dwellings are exempt)