

## **Report from City and County Cllr Mike Steel**

### **ECC:**

#### **NG Pylons Examination by Govt Planning Inspectorate - update**

We are now in the Preliminary Hearing stage - these are specifically for comments on how the application will be examined – they are not to collect further comments on the actual application. I have made a submission and also spoke at the Essex Open Hearing on 12<sup>th</sup> Feb. I did touch upon all the usual objections and preference for undergrounding, but specifically, in line with the hearings objectives, requested re-examination of the “waltham gap” and further consideration of the impact of having a pylon right next to Chelmsford Road. Chelmsford City Council also attended and will be submitting Local Impact Report - an extensive 100 page report and very much emphasising the damage to the area around the walthams as well as all the other affected parishes along the west of Chelmsford – with suggestions for alternative options.

My North/South West parishes group (which is a joint force of 10 parish Councils in my ECC division) also spoke at the Hearing, majoring on the alternative route to the East of Chelmsford.

Examination stage takes up to 6 months then the Examining Authority writes its recommendation report. This must be completed and sent to the relevant Secretary of State within 3 months of the end of Examination stage. The decision stage is when the relevant Secretary of State then reviews the report and makes the final decision. They have 3 months to make a decision. Once the Secretary of State has made a decision, challenges can be made to the High Court and it is for the High Court to decide if there are grounds for a judicial review.

#### **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Essex**

Mostly, we now seem to have settled on a way ahead:

Greater Essex will still become a Combined County Authority (CCA) in May 2026, but the expected Mayoral election has now been postponed to May 2028. The Government says the delay is to allow LGR to happen before the mayors are elected. However, they still intend to create the Greater Essex CCA in early 2026 and have announced some funding to make that happen. Greater Essex will receive a third of their annual investment funds in both 2026-27 and 2027-28. Without a Mayor, the voting members of GECCA will be three from Essex County Council (ECC) and two each from Southend and Thurrock - until LGR happens. There will be two District-tier leaders as non-voting members

This announcement does not affect LGR which will continue as planned, with elections to new unitary councils in May 2027 with such Cllrs taking control in April 2028 (when ECC and CCC are abolished). The format and number of such unitary councils has still not been finalised or published – so we don't know if Essex will become 3, 4 or 5 Unitaries. Last May, County Council elections were postponed for a year because of the upcoming LGR. County and District Councils were asked if they wanted to postpone again on the basis that an election would take effort away from LGR. Some Districts have asked for postponement (and their own elections will not take place), but the ECC Leader has categorically stated that he will not ask for such postponement. Consequently, ECC elections will be held 7<sup>th</sup> May 2026. Any Cllrs who are successful will then be in place until March 2028 – 22 months. It is important that these elections return a stable and experienced administration as the “exiting” council has an important role to play – making sure services are delivered in the closing stages, and facilitating the creation of the new Unitary Councils

### **Highways**

I don't need to look out of the window to know what the weather's doing — my inbox tells me. This is the time of year when complaints spike, especially about road flooding, potholes, and pavement defects.

Every five weeks, councillors get control of an extra repair team for a week, and I've been using that fully. There are already scheduled repairs across Broomfield and Little Waltham through February and March. We've also secured an additional winter maintenance team, and I'm putting that to work as well. These teams don't cover road drains, so those have to go through the escalation route. In my experience, the persistent drainage issues usually come down to poorly maintained private ditches, which means a long, slow enforcement process. For context, 16,668 gullies were cleared in December alone.

The upcoming budget allocates £145M to road repairs — a significant sum, but we'd need roughly three times that to keep pace with every defect. And while people often say they “pay their road tax,” all of that goes straight to central government, not to the county.

So we make the best use of what we have. In January 2026, the UK government awarded Essex County Council a top-level “green” rating for road maintenance and repairs, recognising effective management of more than 5,000 miles of roads

### **Members Highways initiative**

MHI will run until March 2026. The current ECC administration has budgeted continuation for next year, so I am expecting any jobs in my queue to be carried over.

However, as there is now an election in May, so there is no guarantee that a changed administration will continue the scheme or that I will be the Cllr.

### **Love Your Bus**

I have 2 PCs making submissions by the 31 Jan deadline – Roxwell and Good Easter.

Roxwell are seeking extensions to the 46 route and have consulted other local PCs.

They struggled to get responses from bus companies and I have helped with this. The submission deadline has been extended

### **CCC**

#### **Scrutiny Committee Call-In 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026:**

This stems from a City Council Cabinet agenda item 27<sup>th</sup> Feb – which was looking at how to spend the capped Chignal CIL. Little Hollows development generated a lot of CIL but the 15% that goes to Chignal PC is capped in proportion to the number of existing houses prior to the build. I asked how much was the capped amount and was told £160K. There was a proposal to allow adjacent parishes/wards to use the funds for their projects.

These are the relevant words in the proposal – *“The CIL Cap Balance can only be spent on identified capital projects in the wards that immediately adjoin the Parish where the development has taken place, within the Parish itself, or within a Ward or Parish impacted by the development from which the CIL receipts arose “*

I asked the question as to whether that meant that GW, for example, could ask for some of the funds, and was told by the leader of the council that they were not meant for that. He said it in such an authoritative manner that I didn't push it, but on reflection, I think the words do say that it can. Equally it would apply to Roxwell, Pleshey, Writtle and Broomfield

The next agenda item then went on to the proposal as to where to spend the capped funds, and they were all in the central unparished area.

In my view:

- The answer given to my question was wrong – unfortunately it doesn't appear in the minutes as they don't record such detail, and unfortunately CCC are not able to provide the recording of the meeting because of technical reasons
- The words of the policy clearly state that adjacent parishes can be considered for the funds, but there is no evidence of that ever being considered and all the funds were allocated to Chelmsford centre.

Therefore, after the meeting, I asked for it to be called in – which means that the Scrutiny Committee of 16<sup>th</sup> Feb will re-examine the item.

This is a public meeting, so anyone or PC can stand up and make a statement or ask a question.

I am not optimistic that this will make funds available for adjacent PC, but I felt strongly enough to make a point.

But if any of you think you have projects that meet the criteria of *“impacted by the development “* – let me know.

To put this in context, 1 project getting the funds is air conditioning in CSAC (Melbourne Sports Centre) – I assume they will argue that people living in Little Hollows, use CSAC. You could argue that they also use Broomfield facilities like the allotments, or the VH! Or that many people in Little Hollows drive down Ongar Road in Writtle, or that children from Little Hollows attend GW primary School.