

ECC Report for the Parish Council Meeting:

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 12th 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

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 Greater Essex CCA will still be formed in early 2026 and GECCA 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 7th May 2026. Any Cllrs who are successful will then be in place until March 2028 – 22 months.

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, and have used up my allowance until May 26. We've also secured an additional winter maintenance team. 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

Gritting Routes

I submitted requests for gritting route extensions for 2 of my Parish Councils.

These were based on the published criteria for such routes – PR1/2, bus route, number of injury accidents, access to housing density:

Pleshey Parish Council would like Back Lane, Pleshey included - the 48 Service appears to meet the criteria for gritting. – **this was accepted**

Officers have confirmed that Back Lane, Pleshey does qualify. We will add Back Lane to the route adjacent precautionary salting route.

They have advised that it is very tight and narrow. When they took the 26T gritter through Back Lane during the daytime, it was tight. If residents do not keep overhanging vegetation trimmed back or park their vehicles in locations where we continue to experience problems getting through safely, we will look to remove this section on safety grounds.

Co-operation from local residents in the matter from October to April is paramount if we are able to continue providing this additional service for them safely

Chignal Parsh Council, are looking for an extension to the salting of Mashbury Road, northwest of Langleys Farm, Chignal Smealey. – **this was refused:**

The Lodge 17 & 18 bus service runs once in each direction over 4 days, so it misses on both the number of times driven and the number of days it is active. I haven't been able to directly find the location of Langleys Farm, however I have found Mashbury Hall Farm, which does appear to include a number of commercial businesses, which we do not automatically account for when looking at WARN (Winter Access Rural Network policy heading), and the number here is significantly lower than the minimum required.

On the third point about the number of users of this section of the network, whilst we do not have complete or recent traffic data; from a survey taken back in 2019 showing the total daily average being 209 vehicles of all types, this can be extrapolated given a +/-10% to work out an Average Annual Daily Traffic flow of up to 230 vehicles per day, which is well below the minimum of 750 AADT to be considered as High Risk. While there are potential gradient and sharp corner issues here, and with the speed limit along here being 60mph, it doesn't negate the driver's ability to drive to the conditions and drive at a more appropriate speed. This route would therefore not meet the criteria as a "High Risk" site.

Our current policy sets out a fair way to cover the required routes which covers 41.87% or 3241.6Km (2014.23 Miles) of our total network. I've also checked in terms of coverage/reasonable access to the gritting routes, approx. 97.3% of residential properties and 91.8% of commercial properties are within 500m of the nearest gritting route (based on Ordnance Survey data).

48 Bus

I am very disappointed by the level of response from within ECC (IPTU) on the 48 bus regular failures. They state that where services fail to operate, there is a financial cost to the provider and this is managed through IPTU's performance management process and KPIs. And that in March, Central Connect will no longer be providing this service and more information is due to go out on this, but have not stated by whom but will be shared as soon as this is ready!

In the meantime have been dealing directly with Central Connect every time there is a failure.

CCC:

Community Governance Review:

This review primarily seeks to consider whether the currently Chelmsford 'unparished' area would benefit from the introduction of a form of recognised community governance in light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Essex. However, other matters, such as electoral arrangements, and the boundaries between the unparished area and adjacent civil parishes will also be included in the review.

Currently this is at the stage where the initial consultation feedback is ready to be considered by the working party (of which I am a member).

The timetable was discussed at the full council meeting of 25th March, and a proposal made to miss out the Governance Committee. I voted against this, but it went through.

The intent is to pull forward the Community Governance Order to put in place a central Chelmsford Parish, before the Unitary elections so that this is put in place before the Unitaries can rule it out!

Chelmsford City Council Scrutiny issue

Allocation of Capped Neighbourhood CIL from the Little Hollows Development

Background

The Little Hollows development generated a significant CIL receipt. Under national regulations, 15% is allocated as neighbourhood CIL, but this is capped according to the number of dwellings in the host parish prior to development. For Chignal Parish, this cap limits the neighbourhood allocation to £160,000.

A Cabinet report presented on 27 January set out how this capped sum should be spent.

Policy Wording

The Cabinet paper stated that the capped CIL 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.”

On its face, this wording permits consideration of projects in adjacent or otherwise impacted parishes, including Great Waltham, Roxwell, Pleshey, Writtle, and Broomfield.

When I sought clarification in the Cabinet meeting, the Leader stated that the funds were not intended for adjacent parishes. In my view, the interpretation contradicts the written policy. The exchange is not reflected in the minutes, and the meeting recording is unavailable due to technical issues.

Allocation Decision

Despite the policy wording, the subsequent agenda item allocated all capped CIL funds to projects in the central unparished area of Chelmsford. No evidence was provided that adjacent or impacted parishes were assessed, consulted, or invited to propose projects.

Examples of funded projects include air-conditioning for staff offices at CSAC (Melbourne Sports Centre), justified on the basis that residents of Little Hollows may use the facility. Equivalent or stronger arguments could be made for facilities in adjoining parishes.

Scrutiny Committee Call-In

A call-in was submitted, and the Scrutiny Committee considered the matter on 16 February. Key points arising from the discussion included:

- Officers and the Cabinet Member accepted that the policy wording is unclear and does not align neatly with national CIL guidance.
- It was confirmed that, in practice, the Council does not intend to make capped CIL available to adjoining parishes, despite the written policy suggesting otherwise.
- No process exists for identifying or assessing projects in adjacent or impacted parishes.
- The Council was unable to demonstrate that any such parishes had been considered.

A recommendation was proposed to refer the decision back to Cabinet to:

- clarify the policy, and
- establish a process for applying it.

This was voted down (6 Liberal Democrat councillors against, 4 Conservative councillors for).

Governance Observations

The current process places all stages of decision-making—project selection, Cabinet approval, and scrutiny—under the control of the same political group. All approved projects are located in wards represented by that group.

The Council now faces a mismatch between:

- its written capped CIL policy,
- national CIL expectations, and
- the actual allocation practice.

The policy remains as written and therefore continues to allow adjoining or impacted parishes to be considered!

Implications for Parish Councils

Given the wording of the adopted policy, adjoining parishes retain a legitimate basis to register interest in being considered for capped neighbourhood CIL where they can demonstrate impact from the Little Hollows development.

Great Waltham Parish Council has resolved to do so and is writing to the Leader and Cabinet Member accordingly. Other parishes may wish to consider similar representations, particularly where local facilities or infrastructure are demonstrably affected

Furthermore, GWPC submitted a written question to the CCC meeting of 25th Feb, requesting they be considered for the capped CIL. This question was not allowed to be tabled as CCC said they did not receive it, but when I queried this, they found it in the spam folder. I raised a "point of order" in the meeting as to how disappointed I was with the fact that they were able to ignore the question, even though it was received before the deadline and that it compounds the previous "technical fault" that also failed to record the Cabinet meeting of 27th Jan!