CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK'S REPORT

Date: 8 October 2026

CASUAL VACANCY - CHIGWELL ROW WARD

The Clerk reported that, following the resignation of a former councillor representing the Chigwell Row Ward, a casual vacancy has arisen. In accordance with the relevant legislation, a Notice of Vacancy was published on 28 September 2026, displayed on all Parish Council noticeboards, published on the Council's website, and advertised by Epping Forest District Council.

The notice advises that electors within the Chigwell Row Ward may request an election to fill the vacancy by submitting a request to the Returning Officer at Epping Forest District Council no later than 16 October 2026. Should a valid request be received from ten electors, arrangements for an election will be made by the Returning Officer. If no election is requested by the statutory deadline, the vacancy may be filled by co-option by the Parish Council as soon as practicable thereafter.

The Clerk further advised that interest has already been expressed by members of the public in relation to the vacancy. However, no formal co-option process can commence unless and until the statutory period for requesting an election has expired and confirmation has been received from Epping Forest District Council that no election has been called.

A further update will be provided to Members once the statutory notice period has concluded and the position has been confirmed by Epping Forest District Council.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AND PLANNING REFORM UPDATE

Background

Members may be aware that Chigwell Parish Council previously undertook significant work to prepare a Chigwell Neighbourhood Plan. Following independent examination, the examiner concluded that the Plan did not meet the statutory requirements necessary to proceed to referendum and Epping Forest District Council subsequently resolved that it should not proceed further.

Since that time, the planning policy position has changed considerably. Most significantly, the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 was adopted on 6 March 2023 and now forms part of the statutory development plan for the District.

The Local Plan already contains strategic policies relating to housing growth, Green Belt protection, design, transport, biodiversity, heritage, infrastructure and economic development. Planning applications throughout the district are now assessed against these adopted policies.

Should Chigwell Prepare a New Neighbourhood Plan?

Whilst a Neighbourhood Plan can provide additional local planning policies, Members should recognise that preparation of a new Plan would represent a substantial corporate project requiring significant officer time, Member involvement and external consultancy support.

For a parish the size of Chigwell, the total cost of preparing a comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan could reasonably be expected to exceed £40,000 and may be considerably higher depending upon the level of supporting evidence, technical studies and consultancy assistance required.

In addition to financial costs, preparation would likely involve:

- extensive public consultation
- community engagement exercises
- planning consultants
- evidence gathering and technical assessments
- independent examination
- a public referendum
- formal adoption by Epping Forest District Council.

The process could take between two and four years to complete.

Importantly, a Neighbourhood Plan cannot prevent development already required by the adopted District Local Plan and must be consistent with those policies.

Members may therefore wish to consider whether the Council's resources would be better directed towards influencing development through existing planning consultations and working within the framework already provided by the adopted District Local Plan.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

One potential advantage of a successful Neighbourhood Plan relates to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts.

Parish councils without a Neighbourhood Plan generally receive 15% of the neighbourhood share of CIL.

Where a Neighbourhood Plan has been successfully adopted, that share increases to 25%.

Members should therefore weigh the potential financial benefits against the cost, time and resources required to prepare and maintain a Neighbourhood Plan.

PLANNING REFORMS EFFECTIVE 31 OCTOBER 2026

What Is Changing?

The Government has introduced national planning reforms which come into effect on 31 October 2026. The objective is to ensure greater consistency across England regarding which planning applications are determined by planning officers and which are determined by planning committees.

The key principle is simple:

More planning applications will be decided by professional planning officers and fewer applications will be considered by planning committees.

Schedule 1 Applications

Under the new arrangements, many routine and smaller applications will be determined by planning officers.

These include:

- householder extensions
- garages and outbuildings;
- minor developments
- residential developments of 1-9 dwellings
- smaller commercial applications
- reserved matters applications
- various amendment applications

These types of applications represent a significant proportion of the planning applications currently considered by parish councils.

Under the new arrangements, these applications will normally be determined by officers and will not ordinarily proceed to committee.

Schedule 2 Applications

Larger and more complex developments fall within Schedule 2.

These include:

- developments of 10 or more dwellings
- significant commercial development
- listed building applications
- applications involving council interests
- major reserved matters applications
- other more complex planning proposals

However, even these applications are not automatically referred to committee.

Government guidance states that committee consideration should be exceptional rather than routine. Applications will generally only be referred where they raise significant economic, environmental or social issues, or significant planning issues.

What Does This Mean for Chigwell?

For residents and parish councils, the most important change is that local concern or a significant number of objections may no longer be sufficient to secure consideration by the District Planning Committee. Government guidance states that traditional councillor call-in arrangements and objection thresholds will not operate in the same way under the new national framework.

This means:

- more planning decisions are likely to be made by planning officers
- fewer applications are likely to be debated publicly at Planning Committee
- opportunities to speak at Planning Committee may reduce
- written planning comments become increasingly important

Importantly, Chigwell Parish Council will continue to be consulted on planning applications, and its comments will continue to form part of the planning officer's assessment.

What changes is not the Parish Council's ability to comment, but the route by which applications are determined.

Implications for Chigwell Planning Committee

The reforms are likely to increase the importance of providing robust planning comments based upon adopted planning policy.

Members will be aware that objections cannot be based solely on whether a proposal is liked or disliked. Effective planning representations must identify conflicts with planning policy and material planning considerations.

For example, a strong objection would identify:

- conflict with adopted planning policies
- impact on character and appearance
- design concerns;
- residential amenity impacts
- highway safety concerns
- Green Belt issues

supported by reference to the relevant planning policies. This is a more time-consuming process and may require greater officer input than has historically been necessary.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Epping Forest District Local Plan together with the national planning reforms taking effect on 31 October 2026 represents the most significant change to the local planning environment for several years.

Before committing substantial resources towards a new Neighbourhood Plan, Members may wish to consider whether greater benefit could be achieved through effective engagement with the existing planning system, the preparation of robust planning responses and the identification of clear local priorities for Chigwell's future development.

Clerk's Enrolment onto the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA)

Members are advised that the Clerk has enrolled onto the October cohort of the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). Completion of CiLCA was identified as a requirement of the role upon appointment and represents the nationally recognised professional qualification for local council officers. The qualification is designed to demonstrate competence in local government law, governance, finance, administration and community leadership, ensuring that the Council continues to benefit from high-quality professional advice and best practice.

CiLCA is also of particular importance to Chigwell Parish Council as one of the eligibility requirements for retaining the General Power of Competence (GPC). The GPC provides eligible councils with greater freedom and flexibility to undertake activities, deliver services, support community initiatives, enter partnerships, manage assets and respond proactively to local needs without having to rely upon specific statutory powers for every activity. Retaining this power strengthens the Council's ability to deliver projects and services for residents efficiently and innovatively.

The qualification requires the completion of a substantial portfolio of evidence demonstrating practical application of knowledge across a range of statutory and governance disciplines. This necessitates a significant commitment of time for research, reflection, portfolio preparation and assessment. In recognition of this requirement, and to ensure successful completion within the prescribed timescales, the Clerk will work from home for one day per week for the duration of the course. During this period the Clerk will remain fully contactable and available to support Members, officers, residents and day-to-day operational matters; however, the dedicated time will provide the necessary capacity to focus on completion of the CiLCA portfolio and associated coursework.

This arrangement is temporary and will cease upon successful completion of the qualification. Members are asked to note that investing time in the completion of CiLCA represents an investment in the Council's governance arrangements, professional capacity and ability to retain the General Power of Competence for the benefit of the authority and its residents.

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