

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF A BENCH AT ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL BUS STOP – FENCEPIECE ROAD- COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ASSETS COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: 16 April 2026

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a structured, evidence-based assessment of whether Chigwell Parish Council should support or promote the installation of a public bench at a bus stop on Fencepiece Road. The assessment considers passenger usage data, resident consultation feedback, site feasibility, environmental and anti-social behaviour (ASB) risks, and the statutory responsibilities of the Parish Council and partner authorities. The report is intended to assist Members in determining whether it is appropriate to progress the matter to Essex County Council or to take no further action currently.

2. Background

In January 2026, a request was raised by a member for officers to explore whether a bench could be installed at the bus stop located on Fencepiece Road, following informal reports that members of the public had expressed a desire for seating. The identity and number of those making the request were not known. Full Council subsequently agreed that the Parish Council would not fund a bench but requested officers to undertake a feasibility assessment to establish public need, local sentiment, and relevant data before any further action was considered.

The bus stop is managed by Essex County Council as the highway authority. The land adjacent to the stop appears to be owned or managed by Epping Forest District Council, and the only services using the stop are operated by Transport for London. The location lies close to the administrative boundary between Chigwell Parish and the London Borough of Redbridge.

3. Parish Council Powers and Role

Parish councils do not have direct statutory control over bus stops or associated infrastructure, including benches, shelters, or poles. Responsibility for such infrastructure rests with the relevant highway authority, in this case Essex County Council, regardless of the operator of the bus services. As a result, Chigwell Parish Council has no power to install, relocate, or remove bus stop infrastructure without the consent of the highway authority and, where applicable, the landowner.

However, parish councils have a legitimate role through their general powers relating to public amenity, wellbeing, and community representation. This includes assessing local evidence, consulting residents, and deciding whether to support or oppose proposals that

would require third-party approval. A parish council is equally entitled to determine that it will not promote a proposal where the local context indicates that progression would be inappropriate or disproportionate.

4. Research and Assessment

Passenger Usage (TfL Data)

Transport for London boarding data for the relevant bus stop, covering the period January 2025 to January 2026, provides a clear picture of usage patterns. Elderly and disabled passengers account for approximately 75 boardings per month, equating to two to three passengers per day on average. This level of use is consistent throughout the year and is most evident during inter-peak and morning periods, indicating a genuine but modest accessibility consideration.

Please note- this data alone does not prove seating need through disability or age.

In contrast, school-age passengers represent the dominant user group at this stop, with over 4,000 boardings recorded across the same period. This usage is significantly higher than that of elderly and disabled users and is concentrated around school travel times. While youth use is not inherently problematic, it is a material factor when assessing the suitability and risk associated with installing fixed seating in a sensitive residential environment.

A nearby bus stop serving a care setting is used more frequently and does not have a bench, demonstrating that seating provision is not a standard feature even at locations with vulnerable user groups. The Parish Council does not currently operate a transport strategy that would otherwise guide infrastructure prioritisation.

5. Site Feasibility and Local Context

The only feasible location for a bench would be on the grass verge directly adjacent to residential frontage along Fencepiece Road. The site is constrained by established tree roots, regular verge parking by nearby residents, and proximity to a parish boundary feature, making land use particularly sensitive.

An existing public waste bin located near the site suggests that the land may be owned or managed by Epping Forest District Council, although this would require formal confirmation. The surrounding area has recently experienced incidents of graffiti and property damage, indicating existing localised ASB. The environment is residential in character, with limited natural surveillance, no nearby CCTV, and minimal street lighting.

6. Resident Consultation

Initial consultation letters were delivered to residents occupying properties immediately adjacent to and overlooking the proposed site, with responses invited by the end of

February 2026. Feedback received indicates strong and concentrated opposition from those most directly affected.

The occupier of the property directly fronting the potential siting location has raised strong objections, citing concerns regarding congregation, increased ASB, noise, and loss of residential amenity. An adjacent household expressed tentative support in principle, subject to further consideration; however, this property has recently been affected by damage and graffiti in the immediate vicinity, reinforcing concerns about local ASB.

Responses from other nearby residents show that objection outweighs support within the immediate area. Overall, local feeling is predominantly opposed, particularly among households closest to the proposed location.

7. Risk Assessment

The installation of a bench at this location presents several identifiable risks. From an accessibility perspective, there is potential for footway obstruction and non-compliance with recommended clearance standards. From a safety and security perspective, seating in a low-surveillance residential area may act as a focal point for loitering or nuisance, particularly where youth usage is prevalent and mitigation measures such as CCTV or enhanced lighting are absent.

Research into environmental criminology recognises that ASB arises from the interaction of people, place, and situation. However, benches can function as “opportunity points” where conditions include residential frontage, existing ASB, youth presence, and limited visibility. Local evidence suggests that such risk at this site is credible. Additional considerations include long-term maintenance responsibility, potential vandalism, and public liability should an installation fail or become unsafe.

8. Conclusion and Recommendation

The evidence demonstrates a modest accessibility need for elderly and disabled users of the bus stop. However, this must be carefully balanced against the significantly higher level of school-age use, strong and material resident opposition, recent ASB incidents in the immediate vicinity, and the absence of mitigating infrastructure such as CCTV or improved lighting.

On balance, it is considered that the potential risks and adverse impacts associated with installing a bench at this location outweigh the accessibility benefits at this time.

Recommendation

That the Community Services and Assets Committee resolve not to progress a request to Essex County Council for the installation of a bench at the Fencepiece Road bus stop. This recommendation is based on direct residential impact, relatively low elderly and disabled passenger demand, and credible environmental and anti-social behaviour risks. The decision

should be recorded as evidence-led and proportionate, with the option to review the matter should local circumstances materially change in the future.

Data Protection Statement

In preparing this report, officers have taken steps to ensure compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. Specific residential addresses and personal identifiers have therefore been omitted from this public report. Detailed correspondence records are retained securely within officer files and can be made available to Members on request where appropriate.

Prepared by:

Jason Selvarajah MSc
Clerk & Proper Officer
Chigwell Parish Council