

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 and has been displayed on the Council's noticeboards and website. 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 for an election be received, arrangements for the election will be undertaken 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.

Officers are currently awaiting confirmation from Epping Forest District Council following expiry of the notice period and will provide a further update to Members in due course regarding the next steps.

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.

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