

I am now in my twelfth year representing you and I am pleased to say the pace of calls and emails does not diminish! While I mention my ECC Cabinet responsibilities later, front and foremost in my mind is the privilege of serving you, and I list below just some of the activities on which I have been engaged across Chelmer Division, covering Beaulieu Park, Boreham, Chelmer Village, Danbury and Little Baddow.

- Infrastructure: I have made visits to/had calls about Beaulieu Station, which should open in late 2025. An impressive facility, where the transport interchange will hopefully ensure joined up public services. The timetable information is expected in summer. The knock-on effects will be considerable. The prospect of substantial parking outside the designated and substantial car parks is leading to much consideration of yellow lines in both the Garden Community and Boreham. Change to traffic flows is anticipated and modelling cannot accurately predict outcomes.
- A12 widening – Much needed but now subject to government review – this will have further impacts both during and after construction.
- J19: This junction sits at the heart of all this, and revised layouts have caused great navigational difficulties and concerns about accidents. I undertook both visits and correspondence earlier in the year and got signage improved. I engaged with emergency services and a drone has subsequently been used to monitor. Very understandable frustrations about pedestrian/cyclist crossing routes can only be resolved if/when the A12 widening proceeds, and the position is further complicated by the proposed Hammonds Farm development.
- Speaking of Hammonds Farm: I have highlighted the infrastructure deficiencies that already exist across the A130, A12 and A414, even before substantial development. Revised government guidelines on planning increase the likelihood that this scheme will progress, in which case it will be important to engage with developers to address as many concerns as possible. We always have to have a second option if our ambitions cannot be achieved.
- St Peter's Hospital: There are times when my Cabinet and local responsibilities coincide, and this has happened with the proposals around St Peter's Hospital in Maldon. A specially convened group has been created to look at potential solutions for health and other infrastructure required, and I sit on this as Chair of the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board. Many residents have contacted me about the importance of local medical facilities; I have pushed back strongly on some proposals, but also inspired constructive dialogue to achieve resolutions. The consultation in early 2024 resulted in over 5,000 responses, and eventually the Mid and South Integrated Care Board agreed to defer their plan for 6 months to enable consideration of other options. This report is due later in the spring.
- On the positive side, I have been able to use this process to point again to the major highways infrastructure deficiency and the need for a strategic solution to relieve the ever-growing traffic volumes through Danbury. These volumes are destined to grow still more as further houses are built and, as I have said, the impact of Beaulieu Station should not be ignored. Sir John Whittingdale and I have created an informal alliance to push for the strategic solution of a new road to the A12; please don't hold your breath, as we know it will take years to create a detailed plan, let alone obtain funding.
- Two last points on wider infrastructure issues: I continue to sit on the Army and Navy Taskforce, where outline planning permission has now been granted; funds had been secured from the previous government, but again the scheme is subject to review by the new one. Secondly, I have been highlighting the folly of leaving the Chelmsford A12 bypass at two lanes, when it is going to be three lanes to the north and south; I pushed this point in relation to Hammonds Farm, but there will be further exacerbation should the Lower Thames Crossing proceed.

- Local Highways issues: Top of the list here is Papermill Lock, the popularity of which led to another spring, summer and autumn of problems. I have worked with city and parish councillors to gain further parking restrictions and a rural clearway is now being trialled. Offroad parking remains important, though the creation of a viable scheme large enough to make a difference is very difficult. When I was notified of revised plans for redevelopment of the bridge, I pushed back hard with the support of Lt Baddow Parish Council, and Essex Highways officers have now gone back to the drawing board.

Across the division, I have handled a considerable number and variety of highways issues. Residents often point to the prospect of an accident as a driving force for new controls/speed limits/crossings, but officials will only act where there is a proven problem. Residents will understandably feel this is locking the stable door after the horse has bolted, but I do recognise that it would be impossible to act without evidence. Among the locations with which I have been involved are White Hart Lane; Colchester Road; Cuton Hall Lane; Montrose Road; numerous roads in Boreham; The Ridge in Little Baddow; and, inevitably, the A414 in Danbury.
- A414 – We know the main road through Danbury is overloaded - hence the need for the strategic answer mentioned above. I have been leading the campaign for a traffic light controlled pedestrian crossing near Well Lane, which would at once help children's safety, smooth traffic flows through the village and assist residents of Danbury Palace further along the road. I had thought I had achieved funding for feasibility and design studies on such a crossing, but at this stage have only got money to do the same in respect of crossing enhancement. I am not giving up on this!
- I have had several requests for parking restrictions and improved signage, along with one for reduced speed limits, at Danbury Common. Unfortunately, the Local Highways Panel process in Chelmsford is overwhelmed by the demands of a growing city with ever increasing traffic volumes, so all changes going down this route, however minor, take far too long and there is far too much bureaucracy to get through. I understand and recognise the frustrations of the householders involved.
- Following ECC's announcement of a new scheme early in 2024 for reporting defects, potholes etc, I have been an active participant, nominating priority roads and defects for repair. The number of schemes already progressed at my request is considerable and, at the time of writing, I have several more coming through the system. Residents have expressed appreciation but also told me they see the impact of the increased funding being dedicated to highway repair. We have over 5,000 miles of roads and the fifth busiest system in the country, so the task is inevitably endless.
- Vegetation: It is ECC policy not to cut verges and hedges etc until the nesting season is over. This is completely different from the City Council policy of letting grass verges and open areas remain untouched right through the summer and I continue to hear from residents about the challenges that creates.

A mild and wet winter and spring meant vegetation grew faster and further than ever and I dealt with several requests for it to be cut back on safety grounds. There was limited success here; the position gets complicated by issues about land ownership, where the owner is responsible for their own hedge maintenance. Even where there is agreement that the action should happen, that action can take a long time and, where it is safe to do so, a bit of DIY can make a difference.
- There were numerous other issues that came up a few times, including safety and lighting, crime, school places/transport/special educational needs. I have dealt with much correspondence on the subject of bus services; I believe we have a better solution in Boreham and that the service through Lt Baddow, which was under threat of closure, remains reprieved for the time being (use it or lose it comes to mind!)

- Cabinet responsibilities: These have increased during 2024. Having previously taken responsibility for Adult Social Care, Public Health and NHS integration, I was asked to take the lead on Children's Services from May. This is a very considerable suite of duties involving a budget of c £1.2 billion, along with various legal obligations. This all creates a heavy postbag, but I trust it is of no detriment to the service I provide to you.
- Locality Fund: In recent years, each councillor has been given £5,000 for grants in support of local schemes in their division, subject to criteria. I am always determined to use every penny and, during 2024/25, grants have already been made for Beaulieu Community Centre; for improvements to the youth club premises by Chelmer Village Hall; for Boreham care home's purchase of a snooker table (requested by the residents!); and for the purchase of nets for Lt Baddow Cricket Club.

Thanks to all residents for your continued interest and support and I look forward to working with and for you in the months ahead.

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