

MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 15th December 2025

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (7) Cllr Mrs Hawkins (Meeting Chairman), Cllr Clegg, Cllr Spearman, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Mrs Jackman, Cllr Tyler, Cllr Irvine.

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer

Members of the Public (2)

Members of the Press (1)

C25.157 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (3)

Apologies received from Cllr Buckley, Cllr Bedford, and Cllr Mrs Etherington.

C25.158 OTHER ABSENCES (5)

Cllr Stroud, Cllr Lambert, Cllr Ms Wood, Cllr Kinnear, Cllr Born.

C25.159 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 3rd November 2025.

C25.160 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C25.161 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two members of the public were present, one of which asked the Council when the notice board for Upland Road would be returned, to which the Clerk advised it had been received and we were awaiting its installation.

C25.162 DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

On 19th November 2025, the Government launched its public consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, asking members of the public and interested parties for their opinions. The consultation specifically wanted responses from Parish and Town Councils. The consultation ends on 11th January 2026. Originally, Devolution and the election of the Mayor was scheduled to take place prior to LGR, however on 4th December the Government announced this would change, with LGR taking place prior to Devolution.

Attached to the agenda was a summary of both Devolution and LGR, containing links to the relevant documents. The PFO provided a further detailed presentation to Councillors on the four proposals put forward. Councillors noted the consultation was asking a specific set of questions for each proposal, these being:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in Best Value Intervention and in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support?
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Councillors had detailed discussions relating to the following points:

- Debt of Thurrock is an issue, and although Government has recognised this fact, it has stopped short of saying it will cover the debt, and any debt has to be factored into the proposals.
- Would Epping Forest not be better placed to become a London Borough.
- 3 Tier option, which includes Maldon, seems too big geographically.
- How does planning work with the 3 Tier option (noted that that the issue of growth and how this would be accommodated was a factor considered in all the options)
- Concern that the 3 Tier option would result in Epping Forest being the focus of housing growth, given the M11 connectivity.
- Concern that Government has already made it up mind about what they want.
- That there were many factors to consider, including financial viability of the proposals, electorate representation, the grouping in terms of areas of deprivation and what this would mean financially, debt distribution, and getting the balance right between all these factors.
- Concern that the 5 tier option is trying to disguise that Epping Forest would be absorbing other peoples debt.
- The 5 unitary proposal geographically makes the most sense. Noted the 4 unitary proposal (Rochford) proposes the same geographical grouping as the 5, but with less electorate representation.
- The 5 unitary proposal is less financially viable than the 4 unitary proposal.
- Savings don't seem particularly well founded, and it is astonishing how much the Chief Executives are paid given the financial situation of the Councils.
- Politics will be involved in all of the proposals, and we should be mindful of this.
- Local Government is not a business, but is about governance at a local level and providing the best possible service to every one of our parishioners at a reasonable cost
- Epping Forest linked with Uttlesford and Harlow seems to make the most sense.
- We have a voice as a parish council, and all parishioners have their own voice and should be encouraged to respond individually to the consultation.
- None of the proposals indicate where the 'central hub' would be
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- Parish and Town Councils are expected to remain
- Would we be giving the same jobs to the same people
- Concern about the lack of community engagement from EFDC, and cannot recall EFDC asking the Parish Council for their opinion on how they saw the future unitary – never been asked ‘what do you think’.
- Not particularly easy for the electorate to understand the proposals, as they are very complex and lengthy, and this puts people off getting involved.
- None of the District Councillors have attended a Parish Council meeting to explain why EFDC supported the 3 Tier proposal

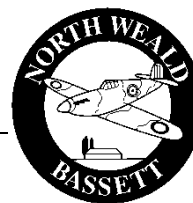
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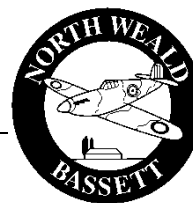
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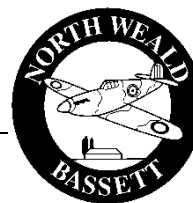
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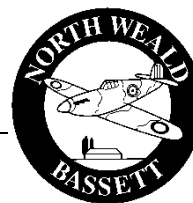
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MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 15th December 2025

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PRESENT:

Councillors (7) Cllr Mrs Hawkins (Meeting Chairman), Cllr Clegg, Cllr Spearman, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Mrs Jackman, Cllr Tyler, Cllr Irvine.

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C25.159 MINUTES

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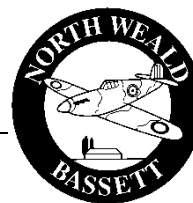
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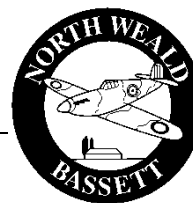
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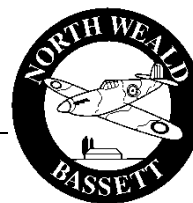
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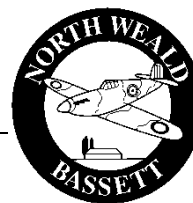
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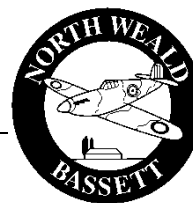
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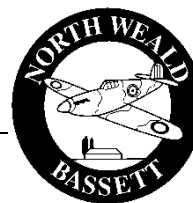
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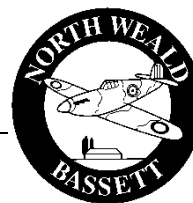
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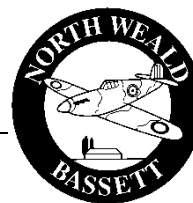
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C25.159 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 3rd November 2025.

C25.160 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C25.161 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two members of the public were present, one of which asked the Council when the notice board for Upland Road would be returned, to which the Clerk advised it had been received and we were awaiting its installation.

C25.162 DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

On 19th November 2025, the Government launched its public consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, asking members of the public and interested parties for their opinions. The consultation specifically wanted responses from Parish and Town Councils. The consultation ends on 11th January 2026. Originally, Devolution and the election of the Mayor was scheduled to take place prior to LGR, however on 4th December the Government announced this would change, with LGR taking place prior to Devolution.

Attached to the agenda was a summary of both Devolution and LGR, containing links to the relevant documents. The PFO provided a further detailed presentation to Councillors on the four proposals put forward. Councillors noted the consultation was asking a specific set of questions for each proposal, these being:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in Best Value Intervention and in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support?
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Councillors had detailed discussions relating to the following points:

- Debt of Thurrock is an issue, and although Government has recognised this fact, it has stopped short of saying it will cover the debt, and any debt has to be factored into the proposals.
- Would Epping Forest not be better placed to become a London Borough.
- 3 Tier option, which includes Maldon, seems too big geographically.
- How does planning work with the 3 Tier option (noted that that the issue of growth and how this would be accommodated was a factor considered in all the options)
- Concern that the 3 Tier option would result in Epping Forest being the focus of housing growth, given the M11 connectivity.
- Concern that Government has already made it up mind about what they want.
- That there were many factors to consider, including financial viability of the proposals, electorate representation, the grouping in terms of areas of deprivation and what this would mean financially, debt distribution, and getting the balance right between all these factors.
- Concern that the 5 tier option is trying to disguise that Epping Forest would be absorbing other peoples debt.
- The 5 unitary proposal geographically makes the most sense. Noted the 4 unitary proposal (Rochford) proposes the same geographical grouping as the 5, but with less electorate representation.
- The 5 unitary proposal is less financially viable than the 4 unitary proposal.
- Savings don't seem particularly well founded, and it is astonishing how much the Chief Executives are paid given the financial situation of the Councils.
- Politics will be involved in all of the proposals, and we should be mindful of this.
- Local Government is not a business, but is about governance at a local level and providing the best possible service to every one of our parishioners at a reasonable cost
- Epping Forest linked with Uttlesford and Harlow seems to make the most sense.
- We have a voice as a parish council, and all parishioners have their own voice and should be encouraged to respond individually to the consultation.
- None of the proposals indicate where the 'central hub' would be
- 3 unitary proposal sets out an idea for how the Neighbourhood Development committees could be created – the committee would be set up to ensure links and a method of local representation

- Neighbourhood Development Committees will be political bodies, with elected representatives being voting members. None of the proposals suggest that Parish Councils will have any voting rights, albeit they are expected to be involved to a certain degree.
- Parish and Town Councils are expected to remain
- Would we be giving the same jobs to the same people
- Concern about the lack of community engagement from EFDC, and cannot recall EFDC asking the Parish Council for their opinion on how they saw the future unitary – never been asked ‘what do you think’.
- Not particularly easy for the electorate to understand the proposals, as they are very complex and lengthy, and this puts people off getting involved.
- None of the District Councillors have attended a Parish Council meeting to explain why EFDC supported the 3 Tier proposal

Due to the complexity of this matter, and to allow further time for review and evaluation (for both Councillors and Members of the public), it was **AGREED** to hold a further Extraordinary meeting on Monday 5th January 2026, 7.30pm, to consider this matter further, and to also ask our District Council representatives to attend the meeting to explain their recommendation for a 3 Tier proposal.

It was also **AGREED** that the Clerk would contact Councillors with links to any webinars or events that Councillors can sit on to find out more about the proposals, and that the PFO would post regular links on social media for residents information and to try and raise awareness of this important subject.

Meeting closed 8.31pm

Signed

Date