

COUNCIL MEETING – 16 July 2025

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1. Public Question from Mr S

I ask this question in my capacity as a churchwarden of All Saints' Church, Springfield. We have just been awarded a Gold Eco-Church and we are keenly involved with the stewardship of God's creation. On this sixth anniversary of the Council declaring a climate and ecological emergency, what action has the Council taken on behalf of the people of Chelmsford in the key areas of activity towards achieving the Action Plan targets?

2. Public Question from Mr S

QUESTION RELATED TO WICKHAM HOUSE-RUNSELL GREEN, DANBURY,

I would refer members to the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 3rd June 2025. At that meeting it was resolved that due to lack of resources a different approach was required to deal with the hundreds of empty houses in the Chelmsford area.

The very fact that the Council by its own admission has not got the resources to be able to enforce its own policies is a sad indictment indeed.

In response to questions regarding a moral duty to bring homes back into use, mitigations or caveats for special cases and long term empty homes, it was stated that officers were being "realistic" with what they were able to do.

It was also noted that it was a very resource intensive task to track down owners of long term empty properties and whilst the Council would prefer to be able to do so, there were not sufficient resources or funding available to enable this. Therefore a focus on ensuring homes already in use were at high standards would be preferred.

I will not dwell upon the sorry story of the failure of successive administrations to follow through using the various instruments available to them in relation to Wickham House in Runsell Green which has been empty for over 35 years.

It is clear however that the owner of this particular property IS known, so there can be no issue with tracing them and all of the detailed investigations have already been undertaken in an attempt to bring this property back into use including the approval of application 18/00362/FUL in May 2018 which is now extant.

As pointed out in the Cabinet paper "Empty homes in poor condition can also blight neighbourhoods and become a focus for antisocial behaviour". It is certainly the case that the residents of Runsell Green have, over many years, repeatedly reported concerns regarding safety and incidences of anti-social behaviour which simply have not been addressed.

It is noted that the Potential impact of the recommendations on climate change and the environment is listed as: None
and; Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

In relation to the prioritisation of action to bring back empty homes back into use, perhaps it would be useful for the council to consider that according to Mike Berners-Lee's book *How Bad Are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything*, building a new home has a carbon footprint of 80 tonnes of CO₂ – equivalent to building five brand-new cars. But refurbishing an old house carries much less of a carbon footprint, equating to just eight tonnes in comparison.

Given that CCC has declared both a Housing Crisis and a Climate Emergency one would have thought that the restoration of this property would not only fulfil the intent of those declarations but also provide some additional housing that we are constantly reminded is needed.

The residents have always expressed a wish for the site to be sympathetically developed but have frankly given up hope that anyone is going to do anything.

Danbury has now made its neighbourhood Plan to deliver the 100 houses allocated by Chelmsford City Councils current Local Plan.

Will members agree that following the intensive investigations already completed and the resources already invested it is realistic for officers to consider Wickham House as a special case and that Compulsory Purchase arrangements should now be reconsidered to be required (as resolved and recommended to do so in point 2 of the recommendations) and that the details of this property be brought back to Cabinet to request approval to pursue the Compulsory Purchase Order?

Mark Scofield
Chair-The Danbury Society

3. Public Question from Ms E

On the weekend of 27th to 29th June 25 a number of caravans/trailers descended on the bit of green belt land directly opposite my house. A couple of meters from my gate. About 4 of these caravans look directly into my windows. The temporary stop order 25/00137/ENFA has been completely ignored. More caravans have arrived, sewerage and groundwork's have been ongoing and they appear to have access to electricity and water now. What is going to be done to remove the unlawfully placed caravans and restore the land to green belt. They do not have planning permission.

4. Public Question from Ms H

**Concerned Residents of Runwell Community Group
Chelmsford City Council Meeting
Wednesday 16 July 2025 at 7pm**

Illegal Development of "The Paddocks" Meadow Lane, Runwell.

This document is submitted on behalf of concerned residents of Runwell in advance of the upcoming Chelmsford City Council meeting on 16 July 2025 (the "Meeting").

It addresses both general planning enforcement issues on Meadow Lane, as well as specific, ongoing breaches at 'The Paddocks'. We have set out the primary questions we will ask at the Meeting, however due to the limited time available and because of the seriousness of the current situation, we respectfully request written responses to the full list of questions and clarification on the actions being taken to protect Runwell community.

We request that Chelmsford City Council addresses these matters with transparency, urgency, and public accountability. Thank you for your attention to these serious concerns. Please note that we have provided a copy of this document to Sir John Whittingdale MP for his visibility following a residents meeting with him at his surgery on 11 July 2025.

Priority Questions to be asked at the Meeting

1. Lack of Direct Enforcement Action and Injunction Powers

Can the Council explain why enforcement notices served on "The Paddocks" site on Meadow Lane:

- (i) have not been properly acted upon by the Council whilst the owner/occupier has further breached all planning controls and established a caravan site and rental business with tenants already in situ;
- (ii) why are a Temporary Stop Notice and Planning Contravention Notice considered proportionate given the scale and nature of the breaches;
- (iii) why has the Council not applied to the High Court for an injunction as outlined in its own Enforcement Management Plan;
- (iv) what the specific barriers to enforcement have been; and
- (v) does the Council agree to answer all questions submitted in this document?

2. Collaboration with Agencies

Can the Council advise which agencies it has been collaborating with in respect of the planning control breaches on Meadow Lane which have a direct impact on these agencies and their respective areas of oversight and responsibilities e.g. Environment Agency, Essex County Council, UK Power Networks, Anglian Water, Parish Council, local police, local schools etc.

As indicated above, due to the seriousness of the planning control breaches, we respectively request that Chelmsford City Council provides us with a written response to the following urgent questions.

Section 1: Site Specific Questions Regarding 'The Paddocks', Meadow Lane

1. Flood Risk and Agency Involvement

What has the Council done to investigate the immediate flood risk posed by the illegal development since the initial raised levels of the land took place in March 2025? What agencies have been instructed to carry out the necessary reports to establish the extent to which the flood defence system has been compromised?

2. Earthworks and Land Stability

The raised levels have been carried out without planning permission or certified design. Has the land been compacted and has the newly created embankment been installed in accordance with British building regulations? Any earthworks of this nature fall under the requirements of CDM (Health & Safety Regulations). What investigation has the Council conducted regarding land slippage risks affecting South Hanningfield Way, Church End Lane and the illegally occupied site?

3. Use of Contaminated Material

Photographic evidence shows that uncertified and potentially contaminated materials were used in raising land levels. What has the Council done to investigate contamination, and has the Environment Agency or other relevant bodies been notified to assess potential environmental risks to the land and local watercourse?

4. Limitations of Temporary Stop Notice (July 2025)

The TSN issued on 1 July 2025 did not specify that all development must cease. Why was this allowed, and what has the Council done since to prevent continued development and site servicing works?

5. Council Services Supporting Illegal Occupation

If the site is illegally occupied, why has the Council issued plot numbers and provided additional refuse bins? Does this not effectively legitimise the occupation, and how does this align with enforcement policy or housing obligations?

6. Highway Safety on Meadow Lane

Meadow Lane is now heavily trafficked with both residential and business use (heavy-goods vehicles) and lacks pedestrian infrastructure. The addition of site fencing has worsened visibility at a blind bend. What has the Council done since March 2025 to ensure public safety in this area?

7. Tree Removal and Environmental Impact

The Council has claimed there were no TPO-protected trees on the land, yet this is contradicted by the developer's own appeal. Regardless, the removal of mature trees has serious implications for ecology and surface water drainage. What steps has the Council taken to investigate and mitigate this loss?

Section 2: General Questions Regarding Planning Enforcement on Meadow Lane

1. Consistency of Enforcement

What measures are in place to ensure that all planning enforcement is applied consistently and fairly across all communities, regardless of their status or background?

2. Impact on Local Residents and the Environment

What assessment has the Council undertaken of the impact that ongoing planning breaches and lack of enforcement on Meadow Lane are having on nearby residents in Runwell — including effects on property values, local amenity, mental and physical health and the surrounding environment such as greenbelt/undisturbed spaces, noise, traffic, and drainage?

3. Future Planning Applications

How will the Council approach future planning applications in Meadow Lane in light of a history of planning breaches, and what safeguards will be put in place to protect the Runwell community from further encroachment?

4. Legal and Financial Considerations

Has Chelmsford City Council faced any legal challenges or injunctions that have prevented enforcement on this site? If so, what are the legal and financial implications for taxpayers?

5. Oversight and Governance

Which elected officials or council officers are ultimately responsible for overseeing enforcement actions in Runwell, and how are they being held accountable for persistent failures?

Section 3: Welfare concerns

1. Potential exploitation of tenants

What steps is the Council taking to investigate the possibility that individuals may be living at "The Paddocks" under informal tenancy agreements or as part of an illegal arrangement? Has the Council notified the relevant authorities to investigate the online

rental advertisements for the caravans now illegally on site and potentially unsafe for habitation?

2. Tenant safety and living conditions

Given the site is under enforcement and has no lawful planning permission, what steps has the Council taken to assess whether any occupants – especially children or vulnerable adults – are living in unsafe or unsuitable conditions due to the issues raised above e.g. unstable contaminated land, drainage, unsuitable soil waste disposal.

3. Safeguarding procedures

Has the Council's safeguarding team or social services been notified about possible welfare risks at this site?