

Your Epping Forest

Our Plan 2023 – 2027



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1. Introduction – Our commitment to you

Councillor Chris Whitbread – Leader of Council

With its ancient forest, market towns and beautiful villages, Epping Forest is one of the most sought-after places in the UK. Close to London, linked by the Central Line and motorways, Epping Forest is the place to be for access to London and the southeast.

We have the forest and so much more. The royal history of Waltham Abbey stretches back over a thousand years. Chipping Ongar was the site of a medieval castle. Roman remains have been found in Chigwell. Loughton and Buckhurst Hill grew with the coming of the railways. Winston Churchill was our MP. Charles Dickens was inspired by our hospitality, and North Weald Airfield was our front-line in the Battle of Britain.

Steam trains run once again on the Epping and Ongar railway line. Families explore our industrial heritage at the Royal Gunpowder Mills. They walk, cycle, and relax beside the river Lee.

From the boutiques and cafes of Loughton and Buckhurst Hill to Epping Forest Shopping Park, and the markets of Epping and North Weald, we are a thriving commercial and retail destination.

Epping Forest is the place to raise your family and grow your business.

We are in demand, but the things that make our district special also bring challenges. The post-covid exodus from London has placed Epping Forest under pressure. As [Bloomberg News](#) reported, people are moving out of the city and Epping Forest is one of the most favoured destinations.

The war in Ukraine which has caused death and destruction to a proud nation by an aggressive invader, has also had a major impact on the global economy. The rise in the cost of living, interest rates and inflation is hitting everyone. Some much harder than others. The eventual length and depth of these challenges are unknown, but our future aspiration remain undiminished.

This Corporate Plan has been developed in the midst of those challenges.

Providing support, direction and guidance to the residents and businesses of our district is fundamental to what the Council does. We know we will have an important role in responding to the current crisis.

Despite this, there are some things that we know will always be important. These feature heavily in our plans. In our hearts is the strongly held belief that low taxation is best for our residents. It affords you the maximum choices over how you spend your income.

We will achieve this by continually striving to deliver an efficient, innovative, and well-run council that always puts the customer first. In doing so, we aim to ensure that the cost to deliver our services reduces whilst quality and value improves.

Employment and economic prosperity have always underpinned our district. Ensuring continued growth in jobs and creating career expanding opportunities are also central to our plans. By maximising the opportunities for existing employers, and at the same time attracting new and exciting investors and wealth creators to the district, we want to be seen as a place that is positively welcoming to businesses.

At its heart, our district is built from many distinct, strong, and diverse communities. These should be celebrated, nurtured, and supported so they are best able to help the people that live here. Working with community groups and partners, we aim to provide housing options and improved health outcomes that meet their needs. A sense of community and belonging is vital to a healthy and happy district. We will be there to help it grow.

The environment and the forest define much of the district. So, it is unsurprising that tackling the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change are a priority, feeding through into everything we do. Growth is inevitable, but we have an opportunity to harness the benefits and minimise the negative impacts on our district through our statutory and democratic roles.

For convenience and the ease of reporting, we have brought all our plans together under the three broad headings of Community, Place and Council but in reality, these are all inter-related.

As your local council, we are afforded a unique opportunity to oversee the wellbeing of the district and its residents. With this custodial role comes the responsibility of making sure that everything we do is for the benefit of our district and our residents. This plan sets out how we intend to do that over the next 4 years.

Councillor Chris Whitbread

Leader of Epping Forest District Council

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2. Our Values and Behaviours

Epping Forest District Council - A good neighbour to our residents, a good provider to our customers, a good employer to our people.

Why are we here?

Epping Forest is our place of work. It is where we grow up and where we grow old. It is our family and our community – it is the people we serve, and it is our home.

- To lead and support our community.
- To help our residents build better lives through
 - equality of opportunity by recognising and treating everyone as individuals,
 - tailoring our services to people's individual needs,
 - helping everyone achieve their maximum potential.
- For people to create happy and healthy places to live, work and play.
- To speak on behalf of our district.

What we do

We work for our district, the people and places that make Epping Forest special and unique.

- Bringing all our skills, expertise, and resources together for the benefit of our community.
- Delivering excellent services as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- Making Epping Forest a better place than it is now.

How will we do it?

Working together with the people we serve.

- We will listen.
- Target our resources where they are needed most.
- Make a positive impact on people's lives by
 - making every penny count,
 - striving to improve services,
 - and delivering value for money.
- Working with our partners to focus on health, wellbeing, housing, life-expectancy and equality.

These commitments are enshrined in our values and behaviours:

Trust - We will be open and honest with each other and our customers. We will treat everyone with respect and take responsibility for our actions.

Performance - We will take pride in our work and celebrate our achievements. We will learn from our mistakes and always do what we say we will do.

One Team - We will work together as One Council, supporting each other and our partners to achieve better results for everyone.

Customer - We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do, providing services that are tailored to the different needs of our communities.

Innovation - We will seek new ways of working to improve and change to meet new challenges.

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3. Our Key Objectives

Community, Place, Council

In an unpredictable environment, Epping Forest District Council must maintain agile services and flexible policies to respond swiftly to the changing needs of our community.

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Stronger Communities

We will safeguard vulnerable people. Our teams will support residents in need, providing support and equality of opportunity in a district that is safe for everyone.

- Consistent in our approach, we will strive to ensure all our residents can live in a safe and well-maintained environment.
- Break the cycle of domestic abuse by working in partnerships to reduce violence against women and girls.
- Use our place on the Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership with Essex Police, County Council, Fire and Rescue, and community groups, to deal with emerging local threats and issues.

We will work with our partners to achieve wellbeing and health equity for all our residents.

- We will adopt the Robert Wood Johnson Wider Determinants of Health Model as a framework through which to deliver multi-agency health and wellbeing improvement initiatives
- Focusing our partnerships, resources and capacity in key locations, we will address individual needs to reduce health inequalities across the district
- We will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed in the multi-agency Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026.

We will listen to our communities and work with them when making decisions, developing policies, and designing services.

- We will coordinate our consultation and engagement to ensure residents' views shape the services we provide.
- Strengthen and empower individuals and communities to help themselves.
- Invite families living in council housing to help us develop a resident involvement strategy, with a range of options to support involvement in our decision making.

*The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation works to build a culture of health in society.

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Stronger Place

We will strive to reduce pollution and protect our environment, encouraging jobs, housing, and infrastructure that complements, rather than competes with the natural world.

- Investment and innovation to reduce energy consumption. Adopt cleaner forms of energy. Enable reduction of the council's carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030.
- Reduce, reuse, and recycle more of the waste generated within local homes and businesses.
- Encouraging residents, businesses and other organisations to reduce their own carbon emissions through the engagement actions set out in the Climate Change Action Plan

We will improve existing spaces and create new places for people to live, play, gain skills and do business.

- Providing places for new businesses to start and opportunities for existing businesses to grow.
- Maximising economic investment, potential and growth through partnerships and commercial opportunities.
- Providing affordable homes within sustainable developments, served by transport, leisure, health, and other infrastructure to meet our residents' needs.
- Consultation and engagement with our residents in decisions affecting their place.

We will protect and enhance our green spaces for future generations while providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs.

- Negotiate developer contributions towards green spaces and the environment as part of planning applications.
- Meet standards for good quality homes in sustainable locations enshrined within the Local Plan.
- Protect, maintain, and enhance the ecology, landscape, and heritage of our District.

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Stronger Council

We will be an Employer of Choice

Through the delivery of the People Strategy. We will progress the Strategy and it will be reviewed and reported through the Council's performance processes to members and senior leaders.

The main themes of the People Strategy are:

- Maximising Organisational Capacity And Capability
- Effective and inspirational leadership, values and culture
- Employee experience and engagement

We will improve customer access to our services.

- Generating higher customer satisfaction through better accuracy and faster response.
- Making high-quality digital services the default choice for most residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Understanding and delivering better outcomes through data use, capture, and sharing according to our customers' needs.
- Providing digital solutions within a secure online environment, keeping us and our customers safe.

We will provide the highest standards of financial competence, management and governance.

- Ensuring value for money in the use of resources and delivery of services.
- Maintaining low Council Tax, embracing commercial opportunities, and achieving long-term financial sustainability.
- Optimising decision making and risk management through strong governance and best practice.
- Being accountable through transparent finance, governance and decision making.

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4. Delivering our plan

We deliver a huge range of services. We also work in partnerships for joined up services. Our list of partners is constantly growing and evolving.

Some of what we do

- Building Control
- Council Housing
- Private Sector Housing (landlords)
- Grants
- Waste and Recycling
- Planning applications, enforcement, and the Local Plan
- Leisure, Arts, Culture, Health, and Wellbeing
- Environmental Health
- Housing Benefits and Council Tax collection
- Community Safety
- Local Democracy and Elections
- Economic Development
- Commercial Property
- Carparks
- Grounds Maintenance (parks, verges, and public spaces)

Public Sector Partners

Central government plays an important role in the regulation of what we do. It also provides significant funding for local projects and services. Other significant partners include:

- Essex County Council
- Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, in association with
 - Essex Police Service
 - Essex Fire and Rescue
- National Health Services, in association with
 - The West Essex Integrated Care Board
- Town and Parish Councils
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Environment Agency
- Lea Valley Regional Park

- The Corporation of London
- Homes England
- The Innovation Corridor – linking London and Cambridge
- The DIZ – Digital Innovation Zone
- NEPP (North Essex Parking Partnership)

We represent the interests of our community further afield too. We talk with neighbouring London boroughs, the Mayor of London, Transport for London, and many other organisations outside our district.

Voluntary Sector Partners

The voluntary sector makes a vital contribution to our community. Local organisations are coordinated and supported by Voluntary Action Epping Forest. The development of council-supported community hubs combines the expertise of the council with other government organisations such as the DWP, and voluntary organisations such as Epping Forest Food Bank and Citizens Advice.

Commercial Partners

We work with commercial partners to deliver many of our services. Major contractors include:

- Qualis – a group of private companies created by and wholly-owned by the Council.
- Biffa – household waste and recycling.
- Places Leisure – leisure centres and swimming pools.

Qualis is one of our most significant innovations. As the sole 'share-holder' of Qualis, it gives Epping Forest District Council a competitive edge and access to private sector know-how.

Qualis is delivering major developments in Epping and Waltham Abbey. It is maintaining the Council's housing for more than 6,000 tenants and their families. Qualis is making commercial property investments to provide further long-term income returns to the Council. Money earned supports public services.

We also support services and keep Council Tax low through commercial partnerships at North Weald Airfield, Epping Forest Retail Park, industrial estates, and retail units. We have innovated beyond traditional income. The arrival of Regus (office lettings) on the top floor of the Civic Offices has created another income stream.

We will continue to develop income from assets such as North Weald Airfield (Masterplan), to support front-line services and keep Council Tax low.

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Partnerships cross boundaries. Epping Forest District Council is working hard with other councils to meet the demand for new housing. 16,000 sustainable new homes are planned across Harlow and Gilston Garden Town by 2033, of which 3,900 are proposed in the Epping Forest council area.

HGGT comprises:

- Epping Forest District Council
- Harlow District Council
- East Herts District Council
- Essex County Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

People need more than houses. HGGT is building sustainable communities. Transport, employment, schools, and health services are all factored in. Infrastructure will include everything from water and electricity to broadband for environmentally friendly communities.

Advocate for our Community

Apart from Epping Forest District Council, many organisations provide local public services. For example

- Essex County Council
 - Highways
 - Social Services
 - Schools
- Utility Companies
 - Gas
 - Electricity
 - Water
 - Broadband
- Open Spaces
 - The Corporation of London – Epping Forest
 - Lee Valley Regional Park
- Public Transport
 - Transport for London buses and trains

We work to engage, influence, and encourage other organisations on behalf of our residents.

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An agile organisation must be flexible to changing circumstances. It must also have targets and results to measure its performance.

Objective Key Results (OKRs) are part of our monitoring and review. They provide objective benchmarks alongside the Scrutiny and Select Committees which oversee, challenge, and hold to account the performance of the Cabinet and the Council.

OKRs need to reflect an agile working environment and changing circumstances. As such, OKRs may evolve, or be replaced as changing circumstances dictate. OKRs will be monitored and reported through quarterly statistics and annual performance review reports to members and the council website ([link to OKR webpage to be inserted here](#)).

New and revised OKRs are introduced from April 2023.