



Report from Rt Hon Priti Patel MP Hatfield Peverel Parish Council

Our Ref: ZA91268

April 2025

At the General Election in July 2024, I was pleased to be re-elected to represent the Witham constituency for a fifth term in Parliament. Since then, I have been continuing to make representations on behalf of constituents and campaign on the local issues that matter to communities across this part of Essex.

A12 Widening Scheme and A120 Dualling Scheme:

Both of these strategic road schemes are vital to improve road safety and to facilitate economic growth and development not only in this part of Essex but also in the wider region. I campaigned hard to secure funding from the previous Conservative Government for them to progress and worked with local authorities, parish councils, businesses and residents to campaign for them.

The A12 Widening Scheme was granted a Development Consent Order (DCO) in January 2024 by the last Government and over £1bn of funding was allocated to it. Unfortunately, since taking office, the current Labour Government have refused to commit to taking the scheme forward. Instead of there being shovels in the ground, the Scheme is delayed and at risk of being scrapped. I have raised the matter in Parliament and questioned the Government extensively but they keep refusing to give substantive answers.

Given that the route of the A12 Widening Scheme included extensive works in and around Hatfield Peverel, it is vital that we get certainty as soon as possible so that effective engagement can take place with those living closest to the road.

The Labour Government is also refusing to commit to progress the A120 Dualling Scheme. Working with Essex County Council, I secured funding from the last Conservative Government to support the development of proposals to re-route and dual the road between Braintree and the A12. The road was added to the Road Investment Strategy and the plans were advanced. These have also been stalled by the current Government and I am continuing to question and challenge them over their failure to understand the need for the A120 to be dualled.

The future of rail services:

Over the last 15 years, I have been pleased to work to secure new investment in our rail services, including over £1 billion for new trains, investment in infrastructure, the protection of manned ticket offices, and the development of the new railway station at Beaulieu Park. Since the General Election, the new Government have stated that they want to bring the railways back into public ownership and Greater Anglia services are set to come into public ownership from autumn 2025.

There have been concerns raised about this change and it is unclear what investment plans will be in place for services and for infrastructure. Under the franchise model, clear commitments are given over a multi-year period, which is how we managed to secure new trains and other improvements to services. So far, the Government has refused to provide any substantive information about their plans for our rail services. Despite the change now being around six months away, we do not know what the future plans are for ticket prices, service patterns and frequency, investment in facilities and services, the redevelopment of our current railway stations and funding to improve accessibility.

I have been pressing Government ministers for answers and they have not yet been forthcoming. It is concerning that the Government have decided to run our rail services but have no plan for doing so.

Council funding, elections and local government reform:

Local councils in this part of Essex have had their funding from central Government squeezed and have had more demands and costs imposed on them. In particular, Councils have been forced to pay additional costs as a result of the increase in employers' National Insurance Contributions and central Government has not fully compensated them for this new burden. That means local council taxpayers are footing the bill. This is unfair and I have questioned Government ministers about their ill thought through decisions.

As well as council funding, I know that concerns have been raised about proposed changes local government structures in Essex and the cancellation of elections.

The elections planned to take place for Essex County Council have been postponed as a result of demands from the Government for Essex to adopt a Mayor and to re-organise local government. The current plans are for a Mayor covering Essex to be elected in 2026, with certain powers, yet to be determined, given to the Mayor. This will be followed local authorities in Essex being restructured, with Essex County Council and the existing Borough, City and District Councils being abolished and new unitary councils being established in their place.

Our local councils are being forced to undertake these reforms and at the moment local councils in Essex are looking to develop their own proposals to restructure local government so that there are five councils covering the county as well as the newly established Mayor. The plans are still being developed. I know many residents have raised questions and concerns about these plans and it is important that there is engagement with the public as these changes will have an impact on how local services are delivered.

There remain large numbers of unanswered questions about the powers and responsibilities that the new Mayor will have as well as the size and geographies of the new councils. For example, it is unclear how the new Mayor and councils will work with local health services and public health services, which are also subject to significant reorganisations, how strategic planning decisions will be taken, and how these new structures will support economic growth, investment and new jobs, skills and training opportunities. I am following this issue very closely and am aware that Parish Councils may have questions about how this will impact them too.

Health services:

Since the General Election and the change in Government, I have raised with the new health ministers the issues and challenges with the delivery of health services in this part of Essex. I have pressed ministers to give updates on the funding that will be available for investing in new health facilities in local communities and GPs, including a new health centre for Witham.

Unfortunately, I have not received any commitments from the Government, who are instead embarking on a reorganisation of the NHS. This includes cutting funds from the local NHS Integrated Care Boards, who commission the delivery of local health services. I am concerned about what this will mean for local services and am in contact with the local NHS about this matter. A reorganisations and cuts at this time may compromise service delivery and prevent and defer the much-needed investment we need in new local facilities.

Moreover, I am also continuing to campaign for better services at Broomfield and Colchester Hospitals and am working closely with John Whittingdale MP over the future of St Peter's Hospital in Maldon.

Schools and education:

Supporting young people to get the best start in life has always been a priority for me and in the summer my annual Get Witham Reading event will be taking place once again. This scheme helps encourage children to enjoy reading and improve their literacy skills.

I am also working with local schools to support improvements to learning, helping children with special educational needs and disabilities, and to support pupils into jobs, apprenticeships and careers opportunities as they leave their secondary education.

As well as backing high-quality education in our local classrooms, I continue to campaign for investment in new buildings and facilities. Here in Hatfield Peverel, I have worked to support St Andrew's Junior School with the issues they have faced as a result of RAAC and am pressing the Government to invest in the new buildings they need as soon as possible.

Planning and development:

I am continuing to work with local communities across this part of Essex to address concerns about inappropriate development plans and planning applications. While we need to ensure we have new local homes for local families, it is disappointing to see that since December 2024 the Government have imposed new housing targets on our communities and new planning policies that will lead to over-development.

For Maldon District the housing target more than doubled overnight, for Braintree District it increased by 37% and for the Colchester City area the target was uplifted by 25%. Instead of local communities being able to come forward with suitable sites for development and plans for new infrastructure and public services, our local communities are at risk and the Government have made no secret of their plans to concrete over our countryside. As a direct result of these planning policy changes, a Government appointed planning inspector has already granted planning permission for a large development on a green space outside a settlement boundary and more such developments are likely to be approved in the future. I will continue to highlight the problems with these planning policy changes and targets and work with local communities and our local council to identify appropriate development opportunities and oppose those that are damaging and unsustainable.

Pylons:

The Government and National Grid are pressing ahead with plans to impose over 100 miles of new pylons and overhead powerlines across the East of England, including through parts of the Witham constituency. This scheme has been developed to transmit electricity generated from offshore wind farms off of the coast of the East of England to the rest of the country. However, instead of exploring the options for alternatives that are less damaging to our natural environment and farmland, like an offshore grid or tunnelling, the Government are looking to change the planning rules to make it even easier for these schemes to get planning consent and for the views of local affected communities to be ignored.

I am continuing to raise local concerns with these plans and am making representations to the Government and to National Grid.

Businesses:

Essex is the County of Entrepreneurs and we are fortunate to have so many businesses creating jobs and growth in our economy. However, I know that since the change of Government in July and the Budget in October, firms up and down the country are deeply concerned about the higher taxes and new red tape they are facing.

The increase in National Insurance Contributions is costing businesses hundreds of pounds more in taxes to employ each person and new burdens through the Employment Rights Bill currently being debated in Parliament will pile on additional costs. Changes to the Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief will also hit family businesses and farmers hard.

I am in regular contact with businesses through the Witham constituency and share their concerns that these changes will impact on their investment, growth and job creation plans.

Winter Fuel Payments:

Thousands of households across the Witham constituency have been left worse off as a result of the cruel decision taken by the Labour Government to remove their Winter Fuel Payment. People aged 80 or over lost £300 while those pensioners under 80 lost £200. I opposed these changes and it has been heart-breaking to hear of the effects this has had on individuals in real need and hardship.

Police and crime:

I am in regular contact with district commanders and senior police officers that cover the Witham constituency. It is important that our police respond to crimes quickly and take all steps necessary to investigate and bring offenders to face justice. During my time as Home Secretary when I was in Government, I initiated the national police uplift programme, which has led to 20,000 more police officers across the country and supported our excellent Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst, to increase police numbers in Essex to record levels. Those additional police numbers are making a real difference to making Essex safer every day.

VE Day:

On 8 May we will commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. The war memorials across this part of Essex pay tribute to the courage, bravery and sacrifice made by those who fought and defended our country in the Second World War, the First World War, and other conflicts. We owe our freedom to them and must never forget.

If there are any other issues or matters that I can assist residents, businesses and community groups with, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Member of Parliament for Witham