

Report For Parish Councils Regarding News from Essex County Council

Cllr Penny Channer CC – Member for the Maldon Division, ECC 8/12/20

Latest Covid data for Essex on 3 December 2020

Weekly Covid data for Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock) is published every Thursday here: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/local-outbreak-control-plan>

Media outlets are encouraged to use this latest data to ensure the most up-to-date and complete figures are shared with Essex residents.

Cases and rates

In the seven days to 26 November, there were 2,058 confirmed cases of Covid in Essex. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.

As of 26 November, the weekly case rate (the number of cases recorded in the preceding seven days per 100,000 population) for Essex is 138.2. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.

As of 26 November, the highest weekly case rates were in Basildon and Harlow, with rates of 290.6 and 222.7, respectively.

Hospitals

As at 1 December there were 271 beds occupied by confirmed COVID-19 patients in Essex hospital trusts. This equates to 9.4% of trust capacity and is 9% higher compared to bed occupancy one week previous (24 November).

Essex has been granted £7,358,700, the highest allocation of any county in England, to further develop safer, greener and healthier travel and transport locally.

Essex has received transformational funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) for schemes in five towns to improve cycling and walking. All five schemes, in Basildon (Wickford), Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Colchester will now be developed in detail, with the advice of councils, councillors, businesses, cycling groups, access groups and other local groups.

These schemes will change the way residents use and think about their streets - spending more time in more attractive streets, where motorised traffic no longer dominates to the same extent. Not only will this be safer, greener and healthier, but it can also support the local economy by attracting people back to shopping and leisure in our town centres.

ECC will not stop there. This amount of funding reflects Government confidence in our forward-thinking schemes. Everyone understands that as more and more homes are built, our roads and our lungs cannot take the strain. We are not against cars – they are vital in our rural county, but where we can, we should all sometimes choose to leave the car at home. It is up to us to make those choices possible.

The future demands sustainable transport and a different future requires revolutionary thinking. We will be reallocating road space – but only where it makes sense – and we will be consulting publicly on all proposals.

Working closely with district council colleagues and local organisations, Essex Highways built several emergency schemes to carve out extra social distancing space in town centres in the summer. Government and all councils are now keen to develop those successes, learning lessons from those early schemes which have been modified where necessary.

The new measures, centred around cycling, walkable neighbourhoods, and safer school streets will improve the lives of residents by encouraging more active travel, improving physical health and wellbeing, reducing congestion and pollution and making our towns and cities Safer, Greener and Healthier.

News Release - Vision Zero: No more deaths on Essex roads

The Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP) has launched Vision Zero. Vision Zero is the ambition to have ZERO road deaths and serious injuries on roads in the Essex, Southend and Thurrock council areas by 2040.

Councillor Lesley Wagland, Chairman of the SERP Governance Board completely supports Vision Zero, and is urging all leaders of Councils, emergency services and businesses, together with the people of Essex, to prevent unacceptable and avoidable tragedies. As our roads get ever busier, we must not lose sight of what really matters – people's safety. All partners are totally committed to achieving Vision Zero, but it will only succeed if everyone who uses the roads in Essex is prepared to share this vision and work with us to achieve it

We all recognise the enormity of this challenge. To get to zero by 2040, we need to halve the current number of deaths and serious injuries by 2030 which we know will involve many changes and will require the commitment of all communities and organisations, as well as each individual road user.

Essex Climate Action Commission Publishes Interim Report

The Essex Climate Action Commission has published its Interim Report outlining its first tranche of recommendations for Essex.

The Commission, which was established in early 2020, has been asked to provide independent advice on the steps that Essex must take to become a net zero emissions county by 2050. The Commission, chaired by Lord Randall, a former government environment advisor, includes climate experts including academics, scientists, councillors and business leaders as well as representatives from the Young Essex Assembly.

The Interim Report warns of the impacts of an already changing climate in Essex including increased risk of flooding, hotter and more stormy weather, coastal erosion, as well as threats to agriculture and food production. These will only increase if we fail to cut our greenhouse emissions.

Good practice which is already happening across the county is acknowledged including the commitment to planting £1 million worth of trees, building energy efficient homes and schools, switching to LED street lighting and the introduction of more low traffic neighbourhoods.

The report identifies a range of additional short-term actions as well as long-term goals to address the impact of climate change. These are grouped into the themes of transport, the built environment and adapting to an already changing climate. The final report will include recommendations on energy, waste and community engagement.

The report acknowledges that no one organisation or sector can solve the climate crisis. It states that the public sector must demonstrate leadership and galvanise support from partners, communities and citizens both locally and nationally.

The Commission is expected to produce its full report in summer 2021 with a wide range of cross-cutting recommendations for public sector bodies, businesses and communities across Essex to consider.

£26m from Government Getting Building Fund confirmed for Essex

£26m of Government funding has now been confirmed for infrastructure, housing and workspace projects in Essex to support a stronger economy and help the county to build back better following the impacts of the pandemic.

The funding is part of an £85m package awarded to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) from the new Government £900 million Getting Building Fund.

The Fund is for 'shovel-ready' schemes that will provide much-needed jobs, growth and the groundwork for further investment at this critical time. South East LEP has secured the largest award for any LEP in the UK.

Also included is £2.5m to improve digital connectivity in rural areas of Essex.

This adds to the ongoing Superfast Essex programme which is already planning to spend a further £13.2m to improve broadband connectivity over the next 18 months.

The business cases for the projects were approved by the south East LEP's Accountability Board on Friday 20th November and all the projects are set to be delivered by March 2022.

The 13 Essex schemes are expected to provide more than 20,500 square metres of new commercial space and create significant new employment opportunities for Essex residents.

It is very good news this funding has now been confirmed. ECC is working hard to support its communities and businesses during the difficult times we experience as a result of Covid 19, but we are also conscious of the need to build back better – investing in our long-term economy to create opportunities for the future.

The Getting Building Fund will help us do this, funding a range of improvements to our digital infrastructure and public realm, new workspaces for the future and new homes for those most in need. You can read more about the Getting Building Fund via SELEP website.

E-scooter trials to start in Essex

Safe scooting is coming to Essex as managed pilot trials of e-scooter travel in six locations across the county have a green light to go ahead.

Essex County Council, working with Essex commercial partner Spin and district, borough and city councils and Essex Police is leading on the electric scooter, popularly known as e-scooter, trials as part of its Safer, Greener, Healthier transport campaign.

With pilot approval from the Department of Transport now obtained, and final conversations with the six district, borough and city councils underway, the innovative Essex trials will hopefully see Spin, a company owned by Ford, provide and manage an e-scooter rental system in defined areas of Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Clacton, Chelmsford and Colchester.

These trials will start small scale and be constantly evaluated before any expansion takes place. Essex County Council will have strong feedback channels and be monitoring and adjusting each pilot trial as time progresses.

Safety is of the utmost importance in these trials and Essex County Council, Essex Police and all partners from district, city and borough councils are committed to ensuring the safety of all road-users. Essex Police will continue to enforce the law relating to the operation of e-scooters.

Only Spin scooters hired as part of this trial are legal on Essex roads. Private scooters – because they are unable to get insurance – remain illegal, except on private land.

Current rules are that Spin e-scooters are legally allowed to go anywhere that bicycles are legally allowed to go. Bicycles and e-scooters are not allowed on pavements.

To legally ride a Spin e-scooter you must have a driving licence and relevant insurance. To hire a Spin scooter, you must be 18 and show your driving licence which will be verified by a third-party database. The act of hiring a Spin e-scooter provides you with insurance.

The Spin e-scooters have distinctive orange branding to make them easily recognisable from privately-owned scooters which are usually black in colour.

All users who hire a Spin e-scooter will be given thorough mandatory training before they can hire a scooter, including modules on responsible driving and disability awareness.

Users cannot book a Spin e-scooter until this training is completed. Then e-scooters will be bookable through a web app provided by Spin. There will be incentives and disincentives to promote good use of Spin e-scooters.

Each trial has been co-designed with district, borough and city councils, which will support the unique travel needs of each town. E-scooters will provide a controlled way to assess the popularity, safety and impact upon travel and the environment in these towns.

Geofencing' technology will be used to stop e-scooters being used in areas where they are not permitted. Scooters can operate at a maximum of 15.5 mph and geofencing will be used to create 'go slow' and 'no go' areas.

A key aim is to provide a socially distanced and safe way for people to travel that also reduces the number of short car journeys made - Spin's previous experience in Milton Keynes shows 63 per cent of e-scooter riders used an e-scooter instead of driving.

The trials will be for a maximum of one year once the schemes are running and will be regularly reviewed.

An email address has been set up for the general public to give their views on the Spin e-scooter trial. If you have a view or wish to make a point about the Spin e-scooter trials send an email to escootertrials@essex.gov.uk

County Council confirms funding for businesses affected by COVID restrictions

Essex County Council confirmed the 23 November it will allocate £2.2m of the funding it received when the county entered Tier 2 restrictions to allow local businesses to make adaptations to their premises and/or operations. This is in addition to the £29m in business support funding allocated directly to district, borough and city councils.

Feedback from businesses, and in particular the hospitality and leisure sectors along with other local businesses who have been most affected, has been that they want a quick, simple, targeted and consistent approach to be taken in releasing grant funding.

ECC will distribute the £2.2m to district, borough and City Councils so that they can administer a streamlined grant scheme to support local businesses who are impacted by the COVID restrictions. Businesses will need to apply for the grants via their local district, borough or city council websites, from 23rd November onwards. Businesses are advised to check their local district, borough or city council.

A further £2.2m which the council received as part of the Tier 2 restrictions funding was allocated to welfare support for the county's most vulnerable residents.

The grants will address the hardship many businesses have faced as they have either had to close or who have been able to trade but have been severely affected by the restrictions, regardless of whether they pay business rates or not. The ECC funding will allow businesses to adapt their businesses to generate income while restrictions remain in place so they are able to reopen when they are removed. The County Council has also relaxed highways restrictions on businesses adapting outdoor areas across the ECC area.

The ECC funding will award eligible businesses up to £1,500 for adaptations, in addition to the £3,000 in support available from district councils based on their size, their sector and the degree of loss or hardship.

Happy third birthday to the Essex Lottery!

The Essex Lottery is celebrating three years of helping local charities access funding from residents who want to support their county community.

The Essex Lottery is an online lottery created by Essex County Council to support local causes across the county.

Since the Essex Lottery launched three years ago in 2017 over £230,000 has been donated to good causes in the county. This is thanks to the thousands of players who buy a weekly £1 ticket – with 60p of every ticket they purchase going to good causes.

Many of the good causes supported by the Essex Lottery have done great work supporting communities during the lockdown, but at the same time are now struggling due to events being closed down by social distancing protocols.

Currently more than 290 charities and good causes are signed up to benefit from The Essex Lottery – supporting a diversity of causes across Essex from animal welfare, education and arts groups to organisations supporting children, disadvantaged groups and the elderly. Local good causes include community groups, sports clubs, brownies or scout's and school PTAs. Players are able to select the good causes they wish to support.

Prize draws take place every Saturday night when a 6-digit winning combination is picked. Prizes will be given to players with tickets that match the first or last 2-6 numbers from the winning combination. Match all 6 and you win the £25,000 JACKPOT.

Every week there are prizes to be won of free tickets and cash prizes of £25, £250, £2,000 and £25,000 - to players whose numbers match the winning number combination.

To play the Essex Lottery, or apply for Essex Lottery funding, visit: essex.lottery.co.uk or call the Protective winter blanket of support for residents worst hit by pandemic

Essex County Council is wrapping a protective blanket around the most vulnerable this winter, providing warmth, food, emergency grants and support to residents hit by the pandemic.

A government winter grant of £3.8m is being added to £2.4m existing funding to see struggling families and adults through Christmas and the dark days of winter.

The blanket £6.2m package for December to March 2021 recognises the many ways the pandemic has affected people. It includes:

- Free school meals vouchers for all eligible children through the Christmas and half-term school holidays
- Winter warmth packages for vulnerable adults leaving hospital
- Emergency grants for food, heating, energy and water bills and essential household goods for people struggling to pay bills
- Home-Start packages for parents of 0-5 year old children, targeted at the most deprived wards across the county
- Support for carers and people with learning disabilities
- Christmas food and gift hampers for care leavers
- Grants for local community food initiatives nominated by local Essex County Councillors.

The package also provides funding to increase capacity and resource for food banks and food delivery projects, housing and debt advice, mental health, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol support. Both holiday hunger and activity programmes are set to be expanded further to reach even more vulnerable children and support their families.

In addition, an offer for school children during the Easter, Summer, and Christmas 2021 holidays is currently being developed and details will follow.

For information about how to access support during the pandemic see essex.gov.uk/topic/support-for-residents. Essex Lottery support team on 0300 302 32 32

Essex residents encouraged to sign-up to renewable energy and save with the Essex Energy Switch

The Essex Energy Switch is about local communities coming together, supporting renewable energy and saving money on their gas and electricity bills – the more people that register, the bigger the potential saving per household.

Cllr Simon Walsh, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, is encouraging residents to register for the initiative from and potentially save hundreds of pounds on their energy bills.

Registering for the Energy Switch is quick, easy and helps you avoid searching for the best deals as all the hard work is done for you.

Since the scheme launched in 2014, more than 17,500 people across the county have saved an average of £230 per household on their energy bills - more than £4.1 million across the county overall.

This year it is an even better offer as suppliers will provide 100 per cent renewable electricity.

Registration for the Essex Energy Switch is free and only takes five minutes. Once the registration window closes, energy companies will bid at an auction to see who can offer the lowest energy tariff.

Once the winning bidder has been selected, anyone who has registered will be contacted by them directly with more details and information on how to switch.

Anyone that registered or switched their energy supplier through the Essex Energy Switch last year, will need to register again this year.

Once registered, there is no obligation to switch providers. Registering can be done online at www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch or by calling Big Community Switch registration line on 0800 048 8439 to register and receive correspondence by post. Lines are open Mon-Fri, 8:00am - 5:30pm, please have a recent energy bill to hand.

Solar energy to give Essex a brighter future

The Essex Climate Action Commission has called for solar panels to be installed on every appropriate available roof in Essex by 2050.

The recommendation includes all domestic, industrial and commercial properties in the county.

Using solar energy to help Essex reach its goal of becoming net zero by 2050 was supported by 100% of all commissioners who voted at the meeting.

The recommendation was just one of many which came from commissioners during their meeting to discuss how changes to the way we think about energy and waste can help the county reduce its carbon footprint.

During the meeting, commissioners talked about how advances in technology and a fast-growing industry have meant that solar panels are now being created to replicate and blend in with regular roof tiles.

Commissioners revealed their ambition for Essex to be able to produce enough renewable energy, such as wind and solar, to meet its own needs by 2040.

Essex residents can switch to 100% renewable electricity now by taking part in the Essex Energy Switch. It's so quick and easy to do and previous participants saved an average of £230 per household on their energy bills.

The Commission also recommended Essex accelerated the shift to low carbon heating measures such as heat pumps and solar thermal panels.

Taking advantage of the Green Homes Grant is a fantastic opportunity for residents to tap into government funding to reduce energy bills and make Essex greener.

All 29 recommendations relating to energy and waste proposed by the Commission were approved by commissioners.

Residents can find out more about the Green Homes Grant which can be used to install solar thermal panels to heat water, energy efficiency measures and heat pumps at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-green-homes-grant-scheme>

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Transformational Army and Navy Sustainable Transport Package to encourage safer, greener and healthier travel in Chelmsford

A final shortlist of options for the Army and Navy junction is set to be confirmed early next year as the drive continues to transform the way people travel in Chelmsford.

Essex County Council is looking to provide a long-term solution at the junction that not only creates an effective and attractive gateway to the city, but also minimises any environmental impact and provides people with safer, greener and healthier alternatives to travelling by car, in line with the vision outlined in the Chelmsford Future Transport Network Strategy.

The Army and Navy Taskforce, which is overseeing the development of the project, were updated on the latest progress last Friday (4 December) and told that a decision of a final shortlist of options is expected to be made in early 2021.

Work is continuing to assess and refine four options for the junction - a hamburger roundabout, enlarged roundabout, two-way flyover and separate T-junctions.

Each option has been upgraded to include significantly improved walking and cycling facilities at the junction, while proposals are also being developed for the expansion of Sandon Park and Ride and a potential new park and ride site in Widford. The sustainable transport improvement measures are a crucial aspect of the project and part of a continued drive to encourage more people to walk, cycle or use the bus to get around the city.

We are determined to ensure the final scheme does not simply reduce congestion and delays in the shorter term but creates a lasting and sustainable legacy for years to come.

We want to reassure people that despite the continued challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, our hard work is continuing and we are busy compiling the robust evidence needed to secure Government funding.

We understand people want a solution at the Army and Navy junction as quickly as possible, however we must also follow Department for Transport processes and ultimately ensure we achieve the right scheme for Chelmsford.

We expect to be in a position to confirm the final shortlist of options early next year and to consult with the public on those options around June.

Construction of the final scheme is currently expected to start in winter 2023/24 and be completed in winter 2025/26, but is subject to funding, planning and other processes.

For more information about the project and to sign up for the project e-newsletter, please visit www.essex.gov.uk/armyandnavy.