

County Councillor's July Newsletter

Six small recycling centres being remobilised

An Essex County Council spokesperson said: "Following the recent announcement by the Government relaxing social distancing requirements, we are pleased to announce that the six small recycling centres that have remained closed are being remobilised.

"It is our intention to reopen the sites with social distancing measures in place in early July. Full details of opening dates and rules will be made available on www.recycleforessex.org shortly"

Final re-opening plans for Essex Libraries published

Essex County Council (ECC) has today published the final plans for the re-opening of Essex Libraries, following review by the council's Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee yesterday (25 June).

Essex Libraries have been temporarily closed over the past few months in line with Government guidance around COVID-19.

The plans for a phased re-opening of sites will see an initial group of libraries* re-open from 6 July. These sites also provide Registration Services and therefore also allow this important service to be more easily delivered too.

It has also been possible to bring forward the second phase of re-opening and an additional 44 libraries* which had previously been scheduled to re-open on 20 July will now be open from 13 July.

Plans for the remaining 14 libraries* will be regularly reviewed to assess how it might be possible to re-open them in line with current Government guidance around social distancing.

Cllr Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Essex Libraries, said: "We are so pleased to have taken another step forward to re-opening all of our libraries and are looking forward to welcoming people back soon.

"It has been vital to plan to re-open sites in stages in order to ensure that we could carry out appropriate risk assessments and put procedures in place to ensure our customers and employees remain safe.

"I would like to thank everyone involved in getting us to this point and also our customers for their patience."

The services offered at Essex Libraries will look different in order to support new safety measures and social distancing guidelines.

Residents will be able to return and borrow books, as well as have some limited time to browse the shelves.

In line with government guidance, the number of customers allowed in a library at any one time will also need to be reduced to help people stay safe.

To help colleagues work safely, customers will be asked to use the self-service machines to issue and return their items and make payments.

Public computers, printing facilities and additional services such as recycling bags will be temporarily unavailable, but these services will be reviewed frequently so that they can be offered again as soon as it is safe to do so.

Further updates will be published on our website, on social media and in customer newsletters. The plans are available on the [Essex County Council website](#) and remain subject to call-in until Wednesday 1 July.

- The initial 16 libraries that will open from 6 July are: Basildon, Billericay, Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Clacton, Colchester, Dunmow, Epping, Harlow, Harwich, Maldon, Rayleigh, Rochford, South Benfleet and Witham.
- The additional 44 libraries that will open from 13 July 2020 are: Brightlingsea, Broomfield, Buckhurst Hill, Burnham-on-Crouch, Canvey Island, Chigwell, Chipping Ongar, Coggeshall, Danbury, Earls Colne, Frinton, Galleywood, Great Baddow, Great Parndon, Great Tarpots, Greenstead, Hadleigh, Halstead, Hatfield Peverel, Hockley, Hullbridge, Ingatestone, Laindon, Loughton, Manningtree, North Melbourne, North Weald, Old Harlow, Pitsea, Prettygate, Saffron Walden, Shenfield, Sible Hedingham, South Woodham Ferrers, Springfield, Stansted, Tiptree, Tye Green, Waltham Abbey, Walton, West Mersea, Wickford, Wivenhoe and Writtle
- The remaining 14 libraries that will be kept under review are: Great Wakering, Debden, Kelvedon, Holland, Silver End, Fryerns, Southminster, Mark Hall, Stock, Stanway, Thaxted, Vange, West Clacton, Wickham Bishops

Essex County Council thanks education and childcare staff in response to wider opening efforts

Secondary schools, colleges, Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and special schools were able to open to pupils in Years 10 and 12 due to be taking exams next year (Years 10 and 11 for alternative provision settings as they have no Year 12) from Monday 15 June.

The return was limited to a maximum of a quarter of each year group attending per day. Data made available to Essex County Council (ECC) by the Department for Education (DfE) suggests that, on Tuesday 23 June in Essex:

- 70 per cent of secondary, PRU and special schools opened to at least one of the two year groups
- 10 per cent were only open to vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers
- 31 per cent opened to both year groups
- Schools were open to approximately 60 per cent of all Year 10 and Year 12 year groups in some form
- Approximately one in ten pupils in Year 10 and Year 12 attended a school on this day

20 per cent of secondary schools didn't submit a return, meaning we expect the above figures were 5 to 15 per cent higher in reality.

We have seen a rise in figures for primary school wider opening and attendance in Essex. On 23 June, 81 per cent of primary and special schools were open to at least one of the year groups able to return (Reception, Year 1, Year 6). 36 per cent of pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 attended schools, up from 25 per cent on 9 June. 17 per cent of primary schools didn't submit a return, meaning we expect the above figures were 5 to 10 per cent higher in reality.

34,326 pupils were confirmed as attending schools in Essex on 23 June, up from approximately 4,400 across primary and secondary settings before half term and 20,000 on 9 June.

Attendance and opening figures for early years settings – such as day nurseries, pre-schools and childminders – have also been increasing. 34 per cent of all registered early years settings in Essex were open on 16 June (compared to 30 per cent on 11 June), with 5,164 children in attendance (up from 4,081). A further 10 per cent of settings, believed to be open, did not respond to the DfE's survey.

We are encouraging schools to have some face to face time with as many of their children as possible before the end of term. This is after the DfE gave primary schools the flexibility to welcome back pupils in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5, if they have the capacity to do so. However, we recognise this won't be practicably possible for all schools, and any return for these year groups is likely to be on a very part time or one-off basis. Schools' risk assessments will decide their response.

In Essex, we have seen our schools, teachers and parents do an amazing job of supporting pupils as much as possible to continue to learn over the last few months. However, we do recognise the need to help pupils to catch-up on education missed as a result of coronavirus disruption and welcomed last week's announcement of funding for primary and secondary schools to assist with this.

A portion of the funding will be used to give schools access to subsidised tutoring sessions and free coaches for disadvantaged pupils throughout the next academic year. A guide has been produced to help school leaders decide how to use the remaining funding, with the suggestions including summer schools, intervention programmes, access to technology and extra teaching capacity.

We will work with schools and consult on the use of funding once more information is available. While we are aware that a small number of schools in Essex are considering offering some provision during the summer holiday, it remains the case that there is no expectation on schools to open over the summer break. It was confirmed on 23 June that wrap-around care for school age children and formal childcare would restart over the summer.

The government have said they will bring all children in all year groups back to school in September on a full time basis. How this is achieved will depend on 'bubble' sizes and social distancing measures in place at the time, as this will impact practicalities such as building capacity and transport. We are proactively working with schools and partners in anticipation of guidance expected next week.

On 23 June, the Prime Minister announced how the government will continue to ease lockdown restrictions. This includes social distancing of 'one metre plus' where it is not possible to keep two metres apart. We will update schools and settings to reflect the impact these changes may have for them as guidance is released but acknowledge that they will have limited capacity to change their plans before the end of term, even if one metre plus is advised for schools.

New safer, greener, healthier 20mph speed limits and pedestrianisation for busy Saffron Walden shopping areas introduced



Some new interim, signed 20mph speed limits on roads in busy shopping areas of Saffron Walden are being put in place starting from Friday 26 June on main routes around the town centre, including High Street and George Street / Hill Street. These will be in addition to road closures implemented by the Town Council on the 15th June.

Roads which are normally closed to vehicles on market days will also be closed Monday-Saturdays from 7am to 6pm. Saffron Walden Town Council staff will manage those road closures, installing bollards as necessary and being available to remove them if emergency access is required.

In addition to the market road closures, Cross Street (by Dorringtons) will also be closed. (See attached map). Existing on-street parking, waiting and loading bays on the above-mentioned roads are suspended while roads are closed. Disabled badge holders can park in designated bays on the east side of Market St.

Working together, and adding to public safety measures introduced elsewhere, the three councils are introducing these speed limits as part of the continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide a 'Safer, Greener, Healthier' environment for shoppers and other pedestrians and cyclists.

The new lower speed limits aim to encourage people to support their local businesses by increasing pedestrian and cyclist confidence when having to avoid other people, particularly where traffic is passing.

The measures will be monitored to assess their effectiveness and may be tweaked or amended as part of the 'test and learn' approach Essex County Council are using across all the Safer, Greener, Healthier measures being introduced to many towns across the county.

The project is funded by part of the initial £1.9m Emergency Active Travel Fund for Essex announced by the government for such schemes.

The Saffron Walden scheme, like others being introduced across the county, is driven by immediate public health requirements such as social distancing, but in encouraging walking and cycling it will enable healthier, more sustainable ways of getting around locally.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health, Essex County Council explains:

"Providing a good environment for the public to practice safe social distancing remains a core part of the measures we need to limit the spread of coronavirus. Helping people to social distance in traditionally busy urban areas will help immediate public safety; it will also make it easier as businesses resume trading.

"Walking and cycling are healthy activities in their own right, they can help to lessen traffic congestion and consequently improve air quality, so these new measures are very supportive of societal demand."

Shara Vickers, Chair of the Saffron Walden BID, said: "We are delighted to see that shoppers are coming back into town using our local businesses since lockdown has eased. The statistics show that Covid-19 is a real catalyst for change so that people want to support the local business community that's been there for them. We are grateful to ECC for their cooperation, swift response and action to make Saffron Walden safe."

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: "Safety is the reason why we are introducing a 20pmh speed restriction in the centre of Saffron Walden. We want to keep people safe from COVID-19 infection while they visit the shops and businesses in Saffron Walden and this is how we are going to do it.

"While I recognise many people will still need to use their cars, this is a chance for all to think hard about driving for short journeys. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to greatly improve our air quality and our health as well as the life opportunities for the next generation.

"Saffron Walden is among the first towns in Essex to get such a scheme, we're using this money to help people confidently return to shop and work, as lockdown measures continue to be carefully eased."

The total money that could be made available to Essex by the Government if further plans are approved is up to £9.6m.

People can share comments on the measures with Essex, Uttlesford and Saffron Walden Councils, please send an email to SGH.Routes@essex.gov.uk

See more about the Safer, Greener, Healthier measures on Essex Highways' website at: www.essex.gov.uk/safer-greener-healthier

Details of the measures can be found on the Town Council's website at <https://saffronwalden.gov.uk/news/a/road-closures-in-saffron-walden-from-15-june-2020/>

Call for support to tackle climate change in rural Essex



A group of 21 English councils, including Essex, has launched a new network to highlight the important role of rural areas in tackling climate change.

The new Countryside Climate Network is calling for its voice to be heard in the climate change debate in an open letter to the Telegraph.

The letter highlights the fact that rural areas are often more likely to suffer the effects of climate change, but can also come up with solutions, and calls on Westminster to listen to what rural communities have to say.

Essex County Council is one of three East of England counties to have joined the network, being accompanied by Cambridgeshire and Suffolk County Councils.

Councillor Simon Walsh, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "I am delighted to be part of this new network to ensure those of us living in rural areas have their voices heard when it comes to the debate on climate change.

"The launch of this network is very timely, as the current pandemic has shown all of us simple ways in which we can reduce carbon emissions and move to a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle. We need to seize this opportunity to make significant changes to protect our planet for future generations.

"I am committed to taking action on climate change issues. Just last month I launched the new Essex Climate Action Commission, which brings together a wide range of experts in the field of climate change to examine how we might be able to find ways to tackle the issues and become a net zero county."

"This new network is a great opportunity to join forces with other mainly rural councils to share information and learn from one another."

Cllr Walsh represents Essex County Council's Thaxted Division in predominantly rural Uttlesford and is also Chairman of the Essex Rural Partnership. Essex has extensive areas of countryside, with 72% of its land area deemed rural.

Simon Walsh

County Councillor for the Thaxted Division

July 2020