

ECC October Report 2018

Essex surface dressing programme complete for this year

Over 250 miles of Essex roads have been improved this summer with surface dressing techniques which prevent potholes forming.

Surface dressing techniques future proof the road surface to prevent potholes forming but can only be done in warm, dry weather.

This summer the 250 miles of road have been covered by 3,652 tonnes of binder, once this work was done 38,000 tonnes of stone chippings, was then rolled on it to form a new top layer. The technique can be viewed at www.essex.gov.uk/surfacing .

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader, Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: “With this work, other surfacing techniques and regular pothole-fixing crews, the number of potholes on our main roads has come down from 988 in June to 407. That’s a major improvement for the safety and comfort of drivers and riders on our faster roads where most of the traffic is. We will now work to keep that figure low, while shifting our crews’ efforts to fixing more potholes on local roads, whether in villages or town estates.”

Councillor Bentley added: “However, I am not content with our progress so far, I want to accelerate the work, so I am pleased to report we’ve undertaken successful trials with different pothole-repair machines. When we have completed all the trials I will decide how we combine the various repair techniques to get the most potholes fixed providing best value for money for Essex residents.”

Meanwhile works continue into the autumn for Resurfacing, where the top layers of the road are planed off and replaced with entirely new material; and Microsurfacing which adds a thinner new surface on top of the existing road. The right technique is carefully chosen according to each road condition.

Pothole-fixing crews are currently patching over 1,000 potholes every month in Essex.

For further news on Pothole repair please refer to the attached Highways document; I will need you to submit one or two in the most need of repair by this Wednesday.

Improvements to Colchester bus services set to keep the town moving

Changes to where bus services stop in Colchester town centre are set to come into effect on 21 October 2018. The changes will reduce congestion and improve safety, service reliability, air quality and passenger experience in the town centre.

A partnership of local bus operators, Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council have worked together to balance the number of buses calling at different bus stops in the town centre and around the bus station. At present some stops are heavily used leading to buses and passengers being unable to use them safely, while others are relatively underused. Stops currently only used by Colchester's Park and Ride Service will also be shared with other services. The changes also group services using the same road corridors.

The changes are a response to ongoing concerns from passengers, pedestrians and bus operators about safety and the town centre environment and are designed to reduce congestion and delays while improving air quality and passenger safety by reducing pressure on the most heavily used bus stops. The aim is to reduce buses queueing for, or using, the wrong stops and the risk of passengers trying to board the bus from the road instead of the stop.

Steve Wickers, Managing Director of First Essex Buses Ltd said: ““We welcome the changes which we are confident will improve service reliability in Colchester town centre by utilising the limited bus stops more effectively.”

Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, said that Bus services are integral to the County's transport network and provide a vital lifeline for many people. These changes will ensure bus services in Colchester are an attractive choice when travelling in and around the town.

Cllr Martin Goss, Colchester Borough Council's Portfolio Holder for Waste, Environment and Transportation, said that the Borough Council wants to ensure everyone can travel smoothly and safely, and that this change has been firmly driven by the commercial bus operators to better regulate the reliability of their services and further enhance the customer experience.

Detailed information about the changes will be provided at stops, through leaflets on buses and from council offices as well as on line at www.essex.gov.uk/colchester-town-bus-stops , which also includes frequently asked questions and bus operator contacts.

If anyone has any queries or questions about these changes, they are encouraged to contact passenger.tranport@essex.gov.uk

Council launches new fees for Essex foster carers

On Monday 1st October 2018 Essex County Council Fostering service launched its new fee structure which significantly increases its fees, support and training package for foster carers.

This exciting new change will allow fostering to become a more financially viable option for people across Essex and brings the county into line with fees paid by neighbouring local authorities and independent fostering agencies.

The increased fees, when combined with the weekly allowance which foster carers receive for each child in their care, mean that from today, fosters carers could receive up to £479 a week for each child they care for. Foster carers on the specialist therapeutic scheme will receive up to £579 a week.

As well as increased fees, foster carers will also benefit from an increased support system and training. Support will include dedicated resources to manage initial enquiries, specialist therapeutic support for all foster carers, clinical psychologists and mental health coordinators in each local area of the county and respite and peer support for foster carers.

Councillor Dick Madden, ECC's Cabinet member for Children and Families, said that the council has seen a lot of interest in the new offer and applicants have been keen to explore the increased levels of support that Essex now offers to Foster Carers.

Stable foster placements provide the best experience for children in care and this investment in the in-house fostering service allows ECC to continue to support carers to provide the best outcomes for local children.

With demand for Fostering increasing there is a great need for more local carers to meet the needs of children in Essex and provide well-matched placements for all young people involved.

As part of this development, ECC Fostering service will also be launching the Oasis Network – a new support scheme for foster carers providing support, respite and advice directly from an experienced carer or mentor. The Fostering Service is currently recruiting Oasis Network carers and mentors for all areas of the county.

Earlier this month, the Oasis Network held an event to introduce the service. The event was also live streamed on Facebook Live to provide access to those who couldn't attend.

For more information about the new scheme and to find out how to register your interest to become a foster carer please visit www.essexadoptionandfostering.co.uk

Meet the adopters: National Adoption Week 2018

This year's National Adoption Week runs from 15 to 22 October; during the week Essex County Council will be running an 'introduce the adopters' campaign, showcasing the variety of people who have adopted. This not only busts any myths about the "perfect adopter" but also tells the stories behind the adoptions.

Essex Adoption Service is currently looking for homes for 22 children and welcomes interest from individuals, same sex couples, heterosexual couples, any religious background and ethnicity and applicants old or young (over 21).

Julia, 45, adopted a girl through Essex Adoption and she wants to share the message that a variety of people can adopt; "It can be for everyone and it will change your life for the better". When she attended the adoption information evening there were people from all kinds of backgrounds and in various types of relationship – they were all welcomed as potential new adoptive parents.

Last year 84 children were placed in loving, permanent homes across Essex and although the types of families varied immensely the adopters all had the same qualities and attributes that make a great adopter.

Jenny, 53, adopted two boys through Essex Adoption, and talks about the process to approval with praise: "You need to go into it realising you won't be perfect and you don't have to be perfect but you do need to have life skills and good parenting skills. You need to be willing to learn and to grow."

The adoption process can be an emotional one and needs to be a joint decision from all family members, including children already living in the family. On average it takes just under a year from application to placement but can happen quicker than this.

"I would 100% recommend adoption" says Samantha, 35, who adopted a baby girl, "Usually around her birthday or Christmas we get all emotional and I look at her and think what would have happened if we hadn't got her. The emotional side makes it worth it a million times over."

The training and support provided by Essex Adoption is aimed at supporting all adoptive parents through the process and on their parenting journey. Ian, 36 adopted a baby and speaks incredibly positively about the process. "It is absolutely worth it; if all parents went through the training that adoptive parents went through, the world would be a better place."

Essex County Councillor Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Children and

Families said: "I have nothing but praise and admiration for our Essex Adopters past and present. They have helped change hundreds of children's lives for the better. This National Adoption Week I would like to say a huge thank you to them all for improving the lives of Essex children."

If you want to consider being part of Essex's adoption community then Essex Adoption Service runs monthly information events for interested people to find out more. Visit www.essexadoptionandfostering.co.uk/adoption/ or call 0800 801 530 for more information or to book on to an event. call 0800 801 530.

Task force to define future for the Army and Navy

A special task force is to be set up to look at future options for the Army and Navy in Chelmsford.

The task force will be considering the flyover, roundabout and immediate road network. It will look at the potential options for the junction itself and the alternative sources of funding which relate to them.

The flyover, which is 40 years old, was closed for safety reasons on the advice of ECC a few weeks ago following the discovery of damage to the base of one of the supporting pillars.

Since the closure, engineers have been commissioned to conduct a full and detailed inspection of the structure. This will allow the identification of any immediate work which is required and solutions to enable safe reopening, and provide a detailed analysis so that any further issues relating to the flyover can be understood and addressed. Detailed inspections (known as Principal Inspections) are carried out on a six-year cycle according to national guidance, and this latest inspection has been bought forward three years following the closure of the flyover.

Meantime, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Essex County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet member of Infrastructure, Vicky Ford, MP for Chelmsford, and Cllr Dick Madden, County Councillor for Chelmsford Central, have met in Westminster and agreed to establish a special task force made up of key partners and agencies, including Chelmsford City Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership, to explore the future options for the junction including road infrastructure, planning and finance issues.

Cllr Bentley stated that people want to know what is going to happen to the flyover, so the best way forward will be to collaborate with Vicky Ford MP and Chelmsford City Council and utilising all of the in-house engineering and financial expertise to scope out the options and understand all the pros and cons relating to them. The setting up of this taskforce is very much the right approach and will help address all the highways, planning and financial questions that need answering.

Vicky Ford MP said: "It is important to find a long term solution to the Army and Navy Flyover as well as address the immediate issues. This will be a large project. It is important to take time to get it right, consult expert engineers and consider all options. We have asked the engineers to prepare a draft timetable for the project and the task force will help bring together all those organisations who will be needed to make sure the project is delivered."