

County Councillor's Report, April 2021

Play by the rules and keep us on track - residents urged to stay vigilant, get tested regularly and continue social distancing



Essex residents are being urged play their part in keeping the roadmap for the relaxation of lockdown restrictions on track in the coming weeks and months.

Keeping to the social distancing rules and getting tested regularly is more important than ever particularly as lockdown restrictions continue to ease next week, and will also reduce the chance of a third wave of Covid-19.

From Monday 29 March, outdoor gatherings (including in private gardens) of either six people or two households will be allowed, making it easier for friends and families to meet outside. It is one of several key milestones planned for the coming weeks and months, as part of the roadmap to recovery from the pandemic. The Government has emphasised that each step in the easing of restrictions will only be possible if case numbers remain low.

By keeping a minimum distance of two metres between yourself and another person, wearing a face covering where possible and regularly washing your hands, the risk of spreading the virus is greatly reduced.

Taking these precautionary measures is vital even for those who have received the Covid-19 vaccination.

Getting into the habit of regular testing will help stop the spread across the County. [Home testing kits are available](#) for households or bubbles with school-age children to order online or collect. All residents are also able to visit one of [12 Lateral Flow Testing centres](#) located in each district of the County.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex County Council's Director of Public Health, said: "As restrictions begin to be relaxed and people start to socialise again with others, it might feel like the threat of Covid-19 is lessening and that we don't need to follow Government advice as strictly. However, this is sadly not the case.

"There are still many unknowns about new variants of Covid-19 and they may be less vulnerable to the vaccine. The best way to prevent new variants developing is to keep cases low. Therefore, it is crucial that as restrictions are eased, everyone continues to follow appropriate social distancing guidelines, wearing face coverings and washing hands often.

"We are already beginning to see [infection rates levelling off](#), following a strong decline in numbers. The actions we take as individuals over the weeks to come will make a difference in preventing another significant rise in cases. As restrictions ease, cases will inevitably rise and therefore we are

urging people to be as careful as possible and not risk losing the freedoms we are all looking forward to enjoying again.

“With multiple testing routes available, getting tested regularly is a simple habit to form and it will help to stop the spread enormously. And if you are positive and need to self-isolate, there is [financial support available](#). From 29 March, if you are planning to meet with people outside your bubble or household, we urge you to take a lateral flow test before you do so.

“Keeping a two metre distance of those outside of your household will also prevent the risk of being identified as a close contact by Test and Trace and reduce the need for self-isolation.”

The second step out of lockdown, planned for 12 April, will see all non-essential shops open. Pubs and restaurants will be able to serve food and drink outside from this date. However, the Government has said that each step will be assessed before restrictions are lifted. The decision on each stage will be based on data which will inform how and when other services and organisations can resume operation.

New Covid-19 test collection scheme to launch in Essex



From this Monday (29 March) Covid-19 self-test kits will be available for collection at 21 libraries across Essex, making testing even more accessible and convenient.

Residents, who do NOT have Covid-19 symptoms, will be able to collect and take away two boxes of seven tests, to undertake regular twice weekly testing at home to help prevent the spread of the virus.

The self-test kits are simple to use and offer quick results.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health, said: “I cannot emphasise enough how important it is that as lockdown eases people remain vigilant, observe hands, face and space and get tested to make sure we reduce asymptomatic infections as much as possible.

“It is also important that people use the testing channel most appropriate for them to ensure that people we need to get tested can have access to the tests they need.

“We are particularly keen to test people who cannot work from home, and are encouraging residents to take a test before seeing relatives or loved ones outside of their lockdown bubble.

“It is also vital that people upload their results as directed in the test instructions, and that people self-isolate as per the government guidance if their result is positive”.

Essex County Council has received an initial stock of 199,000 tests to start the scheme and further tests, and potentially more libraries will be available as more tests become available from the government.

Anyone in a bubble or household with children aged 0 – 18 should continue to choose the online direct option to get their tests delivered to their home. More details can be found [here](#).

Anyone who is already receiving a regular supply of self-test kits from another source should continue with their existing route to help increase the availability of testing for people not currently covered by other national testing schemes.

For private sector businesses registered with Companies House, a new national workforce testing scheme is available. Those eligible should register [here](#) before 31 March.

Library collection

Please see below the list of libraries available to collect a testing kit from and opening times.

Saffron Walden Library

Saffron Walden Library, 2 King Street, Saffron Walden,

CB10 1ES

Monday - Thursday 9am -5pm, Friday 9am-5.30pm & Saturday 9am-5pm

Chelmsford Library

Chelmsford Library, PO Box 882, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford

CM1 1LH

Monday - Saturday 9am-5pm Sunday 10.30am-1.30pm

Broomfield Library

Broomfield Library, 180 Main Road, Chelmsford,

CM1 7AH

Monday 1pm-5pm, Wednesday 9am-5pm, Saturday 9am-1pm

Dunmow Library

Dunmow Library, 47 White Hart Way, Great Dunmow,

CM6 1FS

Monday -Saturday 9am-5pm

Braintree Library

Braintree Library, Fairfield Road, Braintree,

CM7 3YL

Monday 9am - 5.30pm, Tuesday -Friday 9am -5pm & Saturday 9am-3pm

Additional collection points for take home testing kits

Self-test kits can also now be picked up 7 days a week between 2:30pm - 8pm only at the below locations.

University of Essex Colchester, Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford, Sandon Park and Ride, Chelmsford, Basildon Adult Community Learning Site and Stansted Airport.

Existing LFT sites

The [twelve existing LFT assisted testing sites](#) DO NOT have stocks of take home self-testing kits. Residents are advised that they should not attend these sites to collect a take home testing kit.

However, if you require an assisted test (going to a test centre for it to be completed there and then, rather than doing it yourself at home) you can book online here- [Getting tested: If you don't have symptoms - Essex County Council](#)

Rapid Covid-19 test centre closures over Easter weekend

Essex residents who access regular, symptom-free, rapid Covid-19 tests are being encouraged to plan ahead due to closures during the Easter Bank Holiday weekend.

All of Essex County Council's twelve Covid-19 rapid test centres will be closed on Good Friday (2 April) and Bank Holiday Monday (5 April).

The centres will, however, be operating normal hours on Saturday and Sunday (3 and 4 April).

Normal service will resume on Tuesday 6 April.

Why should I get tested?

You may be unaware you have Covid-19 if you are showing no symptoms and you could, unknowingly, be passing it on to family, friends and loved ones. The more people that get tested, the quicker we can stop the spread.

What is a rapid lateral flow test (LFT)?

A lateral flow test (LFT) allows people who have no symptoms to find out if they are infected, but not know it yet. It's a rapid test, and you can get a result within 20-30 minutes.

Who can get tested?

If you don't have symptoms and you live or work in Essex you can get a test. We have test centres set up in all districts. See locations listed below.

How do I get a test?

If you live or work in Essex, you can get a test by:

- booking online
- telephone
- email

Note: These tests are only for people who DO NOT have symptoms.

If you have Covid-19 symptoms, you need to book a test with [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Also, you shouldn't get a test if you have recently received a positive test.

Call 0333 772 6144. Lines are open from 8am to 8pm, every day including Saturday and Sunday.

Rapid test centres are [located across Essex](#) and there is one in every district.

What happens if I test positive?

If you test positive, you will need to self-isolate immediately. Find out what you must do and how to get support if you are self-isolating.

What happens if I test negative?

You must remember to continue to follow guidance on social distancing, keep 2m from other people, and remember, Hands Face Space.

Essex businesses benefit from Covid-19 business loans: two days left to apply

Several Essex businesses are eagerly awaiting to re-open next month after receiving support and funding through the Essex Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) which has helped them to prepare for the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

Earlier this year, Essex County Council (ECC) partnered with Let's Do Business Finance to create a new £1.25 million loan fund to help Essex businesses during the current national lockdown.

The CBILS scheme offers loans repayable over up to six years with any interest and fees during the first 12-months paid for by the government and additional business mentoring support from ECC via their Back to Business initiative.

Since the scheme launched in 2021, Let's Do Business Finance has approved four Essex businesses with CBILS loans totalling £600,000. This boost to the Essex economy has safeguarded 327 jobs and created 30 new jobs.

The CBILS has provided a lifeline to these businesses as all four had previously struggled to access the financial support they needed from their banks.

Pasini Leisure runs several independent and local hospitality venues across Essex. They received funding to expand their micro-Brewery, Other Monkeys Brewing, by re-housing the brewery into an iconic building opposite their current Colchester venue, Three Wise Monkeys.

Paul Tonkinson, Director of Pasini, said, "We are incredibly excited to restore the charm of such a rich piece of Colchester's history and reimagine the space into a modern craft brewery. Though we have faced one of the most challenging years in our history as a local and independent operator of

craft bars and pubs, we remain passionate and excited about the reopening roadmap ahead and the expansion of Other Monkey Brewing. Let's Do Business Finance plays a significant part in supporting and enabling us to do that with confidence as we come out of the pandemic."

[There's still £625,000 available for Essex businesses to access](#), but time is running out. The scheme ends on 31 March 2021.

Share your views on Essex Minerals Local Plan

The Essex Minerals Local Plan was launched in July 2014 and sets out policies for minerals development in Essex. It includes the strategy for the most effective use of mineral resources and allocating sites for future extraction.

Essex County Council is consulting on proposed amendments to the Essex Minerals Local Plan and members of the public are invited to have their say.

Proposed changes include:

- That the two 'Reserve Sites' in the Plan (located at Bradwell Quarry in Braintree) are re-allocated to 'Preferred Sites'
- That the policy seeking the safeguarding of mineral resources and infrastructure is amended to reflect current best practice
- Some restrictions are lifted to allow for a greater range of uses for former extraction sites

There are no new sites included in the proposals.

The [Minerals consultation](#) runs from 18 March until 29 April 2021 and can be accessed online

For any queries regarding the consultation please email the County Planning Team at mandwpolicy@essex.gov.uk

Ambitious environment plans announced by Essex County Council



Ambitious plans for an additional 50,000 trees, more electric vehicle charging stations and county-wide energy saving LED street lighting have been made by Essex County Council as part of its 2021/22 annual plan.

The Council's 2021/22 Budget and 12-month Organisation Plan, approved at Full Council on 23 February, includes £26.8 million investment in LED streetlighting and £7.3 million for greener, safer Active Travel to ensure the Council builds on its commitment for Essex to be a great place to grow up, live and work.

In 2019 Innovate UK awarded Essex County Council, GRIDSERVE, Brunel University and Upside Energy, £5.3M to develop and deliver UK's first Electric Forecourt. The Forecourt, which includes co-location of 24 EV charging bays, multi MW on-site battery storage and solar PV canopy, opened in

December 2020. The project gives the Authority an opportunity to support community engagement, awareness and education activities, promote a low-carbon agenda regionally and the uptake of electric vehicles.

The Council has committed to support funding to plant 375,000 trees by 2025 as part of the Essex Forest Initiative to offset carbon emissions. Two years ago, it planned to spend £1 million with partners over five years for the Essex Forest project. In 2019/20 ECC has worked with partners to plant 36,000 trees with a further 50,000 set to be planted this year. Essex County Council and the local city, district and borough councils aim to plant one million trees collectively over five years.

Mass tree planting of this scale helps to reduce the effects of climate change whilst improving local air quality, encouraging biodiversity and reducing the risk of flooding.

In highways, following the upgrade of 42,000 main road streetlights in Essex already, a large portion of the remaining 85,000 lights will be converted to LED bulbs in 2021/22, bringing energy and cost savings. 60% less energy is used by LED lights, saving thousands of tons of carbon using less electricity, supporting the council's Safer, Greener, Healthier pledges.

There are more projects to encourage cycling and walking in the county. £7.3 million has been allocated for the Active Travel Fund to develop, design and build cycling and walking routes in Basildon (Wickford), Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Colchester. A further £1m will be invested to improve existing cycleways in the county's towns, with funding helping to upgrade, repair and improve existing routes.

The work of environmental interest groups in the county, such as the Rural Council of Essex, the Wilderness Foundation UK and The Essex Climate Commission will continue to be closely supported by Essex County Council this year.

Essex's green credentials include being one of only eight local authorities in the UK to achieve 'Excellent' in the Building with Nature Accreditation, a framework for creating places that really deliver for people and wildlife. The 'Excellent' Award is given for exemplary high-quality green infrastructure covering all stages of policy, planning, design and delivery of developments.

For more about Essex Forest Initiative visit www.essex.gov.uk/the-essex-forest-initiative

Survey launches to help shape future broadband plans

A vital survey to establish the future broadband needs of residents and businesses has been launched by Essex County Council.

Running until Monday 19th April, the [Essex County Council Broadband Survey](#) aims to better understand connectivity needs across the county and identify addresses that should be included in future state-funded broadband rollouts.

Launched by Superfast Essex, the council's broadband improvement programme, the survey invites residents and businesses to share information about their current broadband connectivity, including their provider and download speed, as well as what they use their connection for.

To date, the Superfast Essex programme has worked with network operators Openreach and Gigaclear to extend broadband coverage to nearly 140,000 properties across Essex.

Superfast Essex is now exploring how to support the deployment of gigabit-capable networks, in line with the government's ambition for 85% of homes and businesses to have access to ultrafast (gigabit-capable) broadband by 2025. As part of this, the government has committed to investing £5bn in the hardest to reach parts of the country, where commercial investment is not viable.

The Essex County Council Broadband Survey is designed to help Superfast Essex validate which homes and businesses can currently access a fast broadband service, and those which cannot and therefore should be eligible for future public-funded broadband investment. In parallel to this survey, the Council is also consulting broadband network operators to identify which addresses are in commercial rollout plans for a gigabit-capable service.

To find out more, visit www.superfastessex.org/broadbandsurvey

Library Service to transfer to new Library Management System



Essex and Thurrock Library Services are about to start the transfer to their new Library Management System (LMS).

The new LMS will deliver a modern, interactive experience that will continue to evolve and develop and give residents a system that is fit for the future. Over time the new system will have the following benefits:

- Access to over 6 million new items of stock
- Socially interactive platform
- Users will be able to follow their favourite authors, friends, read press releases on forthcoming titles
- It will enable authors to engage with their readers
- It will display the most popular titles, the current content and latest releases
- It will host virtual book clubs
- It will follow the customer, build a profile and make recommendations
- Customer recommendations – star rating system and post reviews
- Events bookings system

In order to transfer the data and set up the new LMS, the library catalogue and app will be unavailable 6-21 April. During that period customers will be unable to search for items, place reservations or check their account. Customers will still be able to collect any reservations they have previously been notified are available.

More details about how these changes will affect customer can be can found via the Frequently Asked Questions on the website: libraries.essex.gov.uk

