

Old Road, Harlow, Experimental Closure

Background

For a number of years residents have raised concerns about Old Road in Harlow being used as a shortcut or 'rat run' between Cambridge Road and Gilden Way.

The topic was raised and considered during the planning appeal for the Gilden Park development and Essex County Council set aside money from the developers as part of the appeal decision to help mitigate the issue.

Since then, several changes have been made to the road network in Harlow, including the opening of junction 7a of the M11, which also banned right turns into and out of Mulberry Green. This effectively prevented northwest bound travel from Gilden Way to Cambridge Road. However, there are concerns that the recent network changes and new Gilden Park development have led to drivers using Old Road as a rat run in the opposite direction, from Cambridge Road to Gilden Way.

Essex County Council has considered potential options to help tackle the issue and encourage drivers to use more appropriate routes. Having reviewed the options available, we are now trialing an experimental closure of Old Road.



We recognise there may be divided opinions about the closure. The trial will provide an opportunity for residents to share their views during a six-month consultation

period, before a decision is made about whether to make the closure permanent or not. It will also allow us to fully assess the benefits and impacts.

While representations can only be made during the first six months of the closure being in place, the closure itself and monitoring of the scheme may continue for up to 18 months.

The scheme

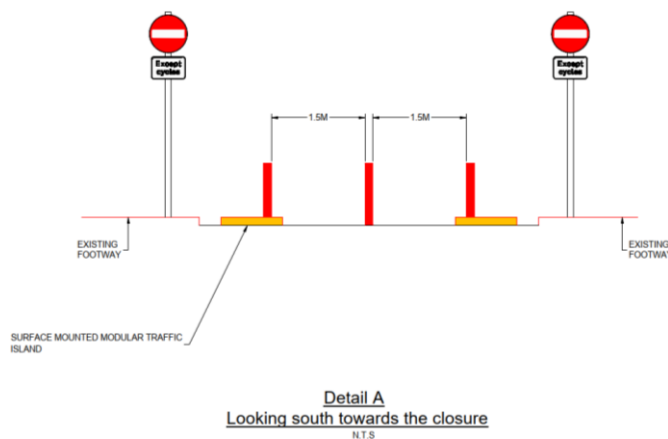
We will implement the experimental closure on Old Road, Harlow, from Monday 19 October 2026. The trial is for a maximum period of up to 18 months.

The closure will be in place on Old Road between the junctions with Hart Road and The Hoo, in the vicinity of the road bridge over the railway line, as shown on the plan above.

As part of the experiment, we will install bollards, temporary traffic islands, road markings and No Entry signs at either end of the closure to prevent motorised vehicles from travelling beyond that point in either direction. Vehicle access to all properties will be maintained but from one direction only.

Access will remain in both directions for people walking and cycling.

We will add short new sections of double yellow lines on either side of the closure to prevent parking in the vicinity of the junction with The Hoo and to ensure access to properties near the closure is not impeded.





To highlight the experiment, letters are being sent to residents and businesses to advise them of the closure and the associated works.

Signs on the approaches to the closure, including on Cambridge Road and Mulberry Green, will notify drivers.

The works associated with the closure are scheduled to start on Monday 12 October 2026 and take up to five weeks to complete. Advance warning signs and other signage will be installed prior to the main works starting.

The majority of work will be carried out during daytime hours (8am to 5pm), Monday to Friday. However, it may be necessary to complete some of the works on Saturdays.

Sharing your feedback

Once the experimental closure is in place, a statutory six-month consultation period will open, allowing comments to be made as part of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) process.

An ETRO is a legal order allowing local authorities to trial new traffic or parking restrictions before deciding whether to make them permanent.

The ETRO consultation will start on Monday 19 October 2026 when the experimental closure starts.

The ETRO notice and associated documents will be published on both our [traffic regulation orders webpage](#) and this webpage.

If you need to view a printed copy of these documents, please call 07761758317 to arrange a suitable time to inspect the documents, quoting the reference number TRAF8572. Documents can be made available for inspection between 8.30am and 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and between 8.30am and 5pm on Fridays at Essex County Council, County Hall E block main reception, Market Road, Chelmsford. Alternatively, documents can be posted upon request.

Anyone who wishes to comment on the proposed scheme, or any subsequent modification, should send their comments by email to:

TrafficRegulation.Order@essexhighways.org or by post to the address above, quoting reference TRAF8572.

Please ensure any comments are sent between Monday 19 October 2026 and Sunday 18 April 2027.

Next steps

Following the end of the six-month Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) consultation period, we will have a period of up to a year to decide whether to make the closure permanent or not.

During this time, we will review and assess the consultation feedback, as well as the benefits and impacts of the closure based on traffic survey data. We will also need to follow formal decision making and governance processes.

We expect a decision to be made by summer 2027, but at the latest by Spring 2028.

TIMELINE GRAPHIC

- Works start to implement experimental closure – Monday 12 October 2026
- Experimental Traffic Regulation Order published, and statutory consultation period begins – Monday 19 October 2026
- Statutory consultation period closes – Sunday 18 April 2027 (TBC)
- Scheme benefits/impacts assessed and consultation feedback considered ahead of a decision about whether to make the closure permanent or not – Spring 2027 to Summer 2027
- Decision expected to be made – Summer 2027

Note: If required, we have up to 18 months (until Spring 2028) to make a decision about whether to make the closure permanent

Questions and Answers

How many vehicles are estimated to be using Old Road as a rat run?

We carried out Automatic Traffic Count (ATC) and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) surveys last year to help us assess the number of drivers using Old Road as a through-route. The data showed an average of 275 vehicles a day were using the road as a through-route from Cambridge Road to Mulberry Green

(north-south), while an average of 35 vehicles a day were travelling in the opposite direction (south-north).

What other options were considered to address the rat running issue?

Alternatives such as traffic calming measures were initially considered but were dismissed because we felt they would be ineffective in reducing through-traffic. Other physical engineering measures would not have been possible within the budget available for the scheme.

Why is the closure being delivered as an experimental scheme?

By delivering an experimental scheme (supported by an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order), we can trial the closure before a decision is made about whether to make it permanent. This enables us to fully assess the impacts and benefits of the experimental closure, while also enabling residents to share their feedback, based on their experiences of the closure being in place.

When will the experimental closure be implemented?

The experimental closure will start on Monday 19 October 2026 when the main works are scheduled to start. Advance warning signs and other signage will be installed from Monday 12 October 2026.

How can I have my say on the experimental closure?

The public will have an opportunity to share their feedback on the experimental closure during a statutory six-month consultation period as part of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) process.

The ETRO consultation will start when the main works begin on Monday 19 October 2026 and will close on Sunday 18 April 2027.

The ETRO notice and associated documents will be published on our [traffic regulation orders webpage](#) and on this page.

If you need to view a printed copy of these documents, please call 07761758317 to arrange a suitable time to inspect the documents, quoting the reference number TRAF8572. Documents can be made available for inspection between 8.30am and 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and between 8.30am and 5pm on Fridays at Essex County Council, County Hall E block main reception, Market Road, Chelmsford. Alternatively, documents can be posted upon request.

Anyone who wishes to comment on the proposed scheme, or any subsequent modification, should send comments by email to: TrafficRegulation.Order@essexhighways.org or by post to the address above, quoting reference TRAF8572. If you are objecting to the scheme, please ensure you include the grounds for your objection.

Please ensure any comments are sent between Monday 19 October 2026 and Sunday 18 April 2027. .

When can I have my say on the experimental closure?

You cannot formally comment on an ETRO before it is officially active. Instead, the legal consultation window runs concurrently with the trial, starting on Monday 19 October 2026 and running until Sunday 18 April 2027. You must submit your formal written comments within this six-month period.

What is an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO)?

An Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) is a legal order allowing local authorities to trial new traffic or parking restrictions before deciding whether to make them permanent.

Why is the start of works date different to the start of consultation date?

The works start date (Monday 12 October 2026) is the date any works associated with the planned closure are scheduled to begin. These works will initially involve the installation of signs. The ETRO consultation starts on Monday 19 October 2026 which is when the main works begin (for example, the installation of bollards and temporary traffic islands). The consultation starts on this date because it is when the experimental closure will be implemented.

Will people who are walking and cycling be impacted by the experimental closure?

No, people who are walking and cycling will continue to be able to travel along Old Road in either direction, both during the works and once the experimental closure is in place. Sufficient space will be available for people to walk or cycle safely between the bollards at either end of the closure.

Will there be a diversion route in place for traffic?

In normal circumstances, under a temporary road closure a signed diversion route would be provided for the duration of the construction works. Once the works are complete the road would be re-opened to traffic. In this particular instance, once the building works are complete, the road will remain closed for the duration of the experimental scheme. A decision has therefore been taken not to sign a diversion route as we need to assess the full impact of the road being closed, which includes assessing the alternative routes drivers choose to use.

What happens if modifications are made to the experimental scheme?

If any substantial changes are made to the extents or nature of the closure during the experimental closure period, then the six-month ETRO consultation period will restart from the date the changes are made. We do not expect any substantial

changes to be made to the scheme, but we will ensure residents and other stakeholders are notified if there are any.

When will a decision be made about whether to make the experimental closure permanent or not?

Following the end of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) consultation, we will have a period of up to a year to decide whether to make the closure permanent or not.

During this time, we will assess the consultation feedback, as well as traffic survey data to assess the benefits and impacts of the closure. We will also need to follow formal decision making and governance processes.

We expect a decision to be made by summer 2027, but at the latest by Spring 2028.

Why wasn't the closure implemented as part of the Cambridge Road access improvements scheme?

Over the years there have been numerous discussions about a potential closure of Old Road, Harlow. Most recently, in 2024, plans for a permanent closure were developed as part of the Cambridge Road access improvements scheme. However, complications with the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) and third party funding constraints meant the closure could not form part of the scheme.

How is the project being funded?

The scheme is being partially funded by money remaining from the initial Gilden Park developer contribution. Additional funding has been allocated from funds awarded to Essex County Council by National Highways. These are associated with costs the council incurred in connection with the M11 Junction 7a project.