

Release issued in partnership by Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council

Major thumbs up for 'Safer, Greener, Healthier' revolution on town centre streets

Health experts and leading cycling and walking campaigners have welcomed ambitious plans to make Colchester town centre streets safer, greener and healthier.

Responding directly to the current COVID 19 pandemic the plans allow people to self-distance and still travel safely by creating new lanes for cycling and walking in Colchester.

The launch date for this revolution in motion is set for Monday 15th June, with activity taking place in the town from Tuesday 9th June. The project will ensure areas of the Town Centre with some of the highest footfall are safe and healthy places to move through, following the easing of lockdown restrictions and the re-opening of shops and businesses.

Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council have taken their lead from many hundreds of people who have been cycling and walking more on short distances.

As a result, teams from the two councils have been working together to design and implement one of the first projects to make town centre public spaces safer for people. Called 'Safer, Greener, Healthier', the schemes aim to provide bigger, safer spaces for city centre shoppers, residents, workers and visitors to be able to social distance.

A series of interim traffic measures in Colchester to create more shared space for walking and cycling will be introduced starting from 15th June.

20mph limits, temporary barriers and signs providing shared spaces will be introduced on the High Street, Queen Steet/St Botolph's, Head Street, St Johns Street and other town centre roads, and on the vital corridor between the main rail station and town centre, including North Station Road and North Hill.

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

The Colchester scheme, like others planned across Essex, is driven by immediate public health requirements such as social distancing, but in encouraging walking and cycling it will enable healthier and greener ways of getting around.

All the plans have been shared with the local BID (Business Improvement District), health experts, cycling and walking Groups and leaders from all local political parties.

Colchester Cycle Campaign and Walk Colchester said: "We welcome the measures being proposed in the Town Centre and North Station Road that reduce traffic and give extra space for pedestrians to socially distance.

"It is vital to create space in the shopping areas where people can queue to go into stores, as well as eat and drink outside the town centre's many food outlets.

"We look forward to being able to work with Essex County Council as it puts in improvements in future phases of this scheme."

Dr Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health, Essex County Council, explained: “Providing space 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 re-open.

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

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: “We have responded directly to people’s safety and their lead in increasing the use of cycle lands and pavements. While I recognise that many people will still need to use their cars this is a chance for people to think hard about driving over short distances. 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.

“Colchester is one of the first County schemes in the country to use this money to help keep people confidently return to shop and work, as lockdown measures continue to be carefully eased.”

Cllr Mark Cory, Leader of Colchester Borough Council, added: “These strange times give us the opportunity to restart in a safer and greener way. Colchester Borough Council has worked hard during the crisis to keep people safe and now we want to give people the confidence to come back into the town centre, but in a healthier, greener and less polluting way. We are working with Essex County Council on the first steps of an ambitious plan to radically improve cycling and walking access in and around the town centre.

“We face difficulties with the historic nature of the town and the growth in the borough, but we must now ensure that traffic and pollution don’t go back to the same old ways. We are backing the County Council’s plans, which have gained support from cross-party leaders. This is very much seen as a first step, and I hope we can work with the cycling and walking campaign groups to help develop the plans further, making it easier and safer to take the healthy options of travelling in Colchester.”

Bus routes, taxi bays and delivery access in the streets included in the scheme will be maintained wherever possible, although parking may be suspended.

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

Why not log your cycle ride on some of the enhanced routes for National Bike Week at www.cyclinguk.org/bikeweek/7daysofcycling and let others in Essex know what you’re doing too at www.lovetoride.net/essex ?

The total money that could be made available to Essex by Government if other scheme plans are approved is up to £9.6m. People can share comments on the measures with Essex and Colchester councils at SGH.Routes@essex.gov.uk

Please see the full map and scheme details on our website at: www.essex.gov.uk/safer-greener-healthier

