

Release issued in partnership by Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council

Epping introduces 20mph speed limit and wider pedestrian spaces on the High Street to help people social distance in the town centre

Epping High Street and a section of Station Road will be given a 20mph speed limit and parking bays will be altered to become pedestrian areas, for a period to enable safer social distancing in the town centre.

Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council have worked together after it was suggested that an interim pedestrianisation, with cycling allowed, would bring a much-needed boost to the stores now they are free to reopen. Work to install the new measures is planned to start on Tuesday 30 June. The changes are paid for by Government as part of national work to re-open town centres safely.

Called 'Safer, Greener, Healthier', these schemes aim to provide bigger, safer spaces for city centre shoppers, residents, workers and visitors to maintain social distance. Measures will be constantly reviewed and altered if required. Some disabled bays and loading bays will be retained and notices advertising the changes will be put up in the High Street.

The Epping 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. Data on streets in UK and elsewhere where the pedestrian experience has been improved shows footfall increasing 20-35 per cent, with sales increases following.

As part of these works to install social distancing measures along Station Road, removal of the zebra crossing central islands, bollards and belisha beacon will need to be untaken. The removal of these islands will allow for the carriageway to be narrowed and the pavement area to be increased. This section of the work is anticipated to take approximately 1 night, weather and other unforeseen factors permitting.

During these works, Station Road will be closed to vehicles between the High Street and Hemnall Street. The closure will be in place from 7pm on the Wednesday 1st July until 5:00am on Thursday 2nd July. Confirmation of the date for the closure and any additional closures will be displayed on advance works noticeboards nearer the time. The closure of Station Road is necessary to carry out works in a safe manner. Unfortunately, some of the works will create noise and traffic congestion and we apologise in advance for any disturbance caused.

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

"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 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."

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said:

"We have responded directly to people's need for safety and the many who are already increasing the use of pavements and cycle lanes. While I recognise that many people will still need to use their cars, this is a chance 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.

“Epping Forest’s is among the first county schemes in the country to use this money to help people confidently return to shop and work, as lockdown measures continue to be carefully eased.”

Epping Forest District Council Leader, Chris Whitbread said: “Long-term, everyone’s wellbeing and livelihood depends on getting business back on its feet.

“Creating safer spaces for people to practice social distancing is crucial to limiting the spread of coronavirus, particularly on our High Streets. These measures will support immediate public safety and assist in the re-opening of shops and businesses.”

Councillor Aniket Patel, Epping Forest Council’s Cabinet Member for Commercial and Regulatory Services, said: “These measures are targeted at areas with high footfall, to ensure that they are safe and healthy places for our residents to move through now that shops and businesses are re-opening. Our Council supports local business and we will continue to do everything we can to help regenerate the local economy.”

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 Month and let others in Essex know what you’re doing too at www.lovetoride.net/essex?

People can share comments on the measures with Essex and Epping Forest councils at SGH.Routes@essex.gov.uk or at <https://efdcsaferspacescovid19.commonplace.is/>

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

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