

ECC Report April 2017

Council welcomes Government's approval of special needs free schools in Essex

More than 200 new special school places look set to be created in Essex after the Government approved plans for two free schools and encouraged a formal bid for a third.

Under the proposals, Market Field Learning Community, based in Elmstead Market, will open and run Chatten Free School – a new 75-place special free school for children aged 3 to 19 who have autism with severe or the most complex learning needs.

A location for the school has yet to be finalised but it is likely to be in mid Essex, and the academy trust hopes it will be open by September 2018.

The other Essex free school bid to be approved was for a new 70-place all-through special school next to the existing Thriftwood College in Chelmsford and was submitted by SEAX Multi-Academy Trust.

The school, which is expected to open in 2018/19, will be specifically for children and young people with autism who have complex needs and high levels of anxiety.

The Department of Education has also approved an initial expression of interest from Essex County Council about the possibility of another special free school on the former St Peter's College site in Chelmsford.

The council, which hopes the school would create about 70 places for children with social, emotional and mental health needs, will now invite bids from academy trusts interested in running it.

Any final decision on the proposal would be subject to agreement between the Secretary of State and the trust.

The announcements are a huge boost for the county and come as Essex County Council continues with its own record investment in special schools.

About £85million, including £42million from the Essex Schools Forum and up to £43million of capital funding from the council, has been allocated towards creating more special school places in the county over the next three to five years.

An Essex County Council spokesman said: "We are committed to meeting the individual needs of all pupils in Essex and ensuring they receive the best possible education."

"We already have some excellent special schools in the county, however more capacity is still needed to reduce the distance children have to travel to school and meet the needs of the rising number who are being diagnosed with autism.

"The approval of these free schools is a huge boost to our efforts to create a network of special schools that the county can be proud of."

Gary Smith, Executive Headteacher and CEO of Market Field Learning Community, said: "This is fantastic news.

"We aspire to the ideal of an Essex place for every Essex child and this takes us a big step closer towards this aspiration."

Sally Davies, Executive Principal and CEO of the SEAX Trust, added: "We are thrilled that after months of discussions and planning the Department for Education have given the approval to open a new school in Chelmsford for 70 children and young people with autism.

"The Trust has been working in partnership with Essex County Council to identify the level of need and a proposed site, which will also include ten residential places, ensuring that more children can remain in Essex with their families."

10,000 LED streetlights now lighting key routes in Essex

10,000 energy-saving LED streetlights have now been installed across the county.

These are the first phase of a £9.2 million programme to replace 19,000 conventional lights with LEDs on main roads and junctions in Essex.

Converting these all-night streetlights to LEDs will save Essex taxpayers an estimated £600,000 each year as LEDs use less electricity and last longer.

Andrew Cook, Director for Highways and Transportation at Essex County Council, said that the plan to replace streetlights on the busiest roads with LEDs is now past the halfway point. The ones targeted are those streetlights that remain on throughout the night to ensure the biggest energy saving to the taxpayer.

Another benefit will be fewer failures and longer lasting lamps, thus drastically cutting maintenance costs

Braintree, Colchester and Tendring will be next as part of the programme.

The number of streetlights across Essex not working on 31 March 2017 was 3,726 or 2.93 percent of over 127,000 streetlights – a 15 percent reduction since January.

A number of these broken streetlights are waiting to be replaced with LED lights as

the programme rolls out across the county. Green Asset Summit – Realising the value of green spaces in Essex.

Green Asset Summit – Realising the value of green spaces in Essex

Essex County Council and the University of Essex have announced plans to map the impressive 16,712 hectares of accessible natural green space, including 350 miles of coastline, 1,440 local wildlife sites and eight country parks, as spaces which can support health, wellbeing and social care.

The summit brought together health and care providers with the aim of setting up a series of pilot projects, to be launched over the coming months, and will take place in various green locations across the County.

Professor Jules Pretty, University of Essex Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Environment and Society, said: "We now know from a decade of research that nature and green places are good for mental and physical health. Nature provides a health service; it is a valuable asset. Our greatest challenge now is to find ways to encourage behavioural changes across the whole population that would benefit the health of the nation."

Adrian Coggins, Head of Commissioning for Public Health and Wellbeing, said: "Working with the University of Essex, our aim is to better understand how green assets can be used to deliver health and care benefits. The pilot projects we have planned are the first step in unlocking the potential of nature for the benefit of Essex residents. In addition, the summit will look at how we can target specific groups within the wider population who could benefit the most."

The Summit took place at the Essex Business School at the University of Essex on Wednesday 19th April.

- The UK Public Health White Paper 2010 notes that green spaces can improve mental health and the quality of community life. Researchers have observed a link between increasing urbanisation and psychosis or depression; living closer to urban green spaces is also associated with lower mental distress. However, such observations may not indicate a causal relationship and could be explained by other factors. For example, socially deprived areas typically have low levels of green space.
- 67.3% of adults in Essex are classified as overweight or obese,
- 42.1% of adults do not get the recommended amount of physical activity.
- Mental health illness affects appropriately 1 in 4 people in Essex. Almost nine in ten Essex children offered first preference primary school place as records continue.

Almost nine in ten Essex children offered first preference primary school place as records continue

A record percentage of children in Essex have been offered a place at their parents' first preference of primary school, Essex County Council has revealed.

About 16,300 parents in Essex will discover the outcome of their primary school place applications on Tuesday 18th April 2017 with those who applied online receiving email notification.

A record 89.37 per cent of children due to start Reception in September have been offered their parents' first preference – up from 87.40 per cent last year.

A further 6.23 per cent have been offered their second preference, meaning an all-time high of 95.60 per cent have been offered one of their top two preferences – compared with 94.08 per cent in 2016.

The percentage of parents who could not be offered any of their preferences and were instead offered a place at the nearest school with an available place also fell below 2 per cent for the first time.

The trio of records come following a similar feat for secondary school place offers in February and as Essex County Council continues to invest in creating thousands of new school places across the county.

Having already spent millions of pounds creating more than 5,500 new school places during the last two academic years, a further 2,200 more are due to be available from September.

The council has also allocated £230million for creating about 13,000 more mainstream school places in Essex by September 2019.

This year's figures in full:

- 89.37% of parents have been offered their 1st preference
- 6.23% of parents have been offered their 2nd preference
- 1.80% of parents have been offered their 3rd preference
- 0.79% of parents have been offered their 4th preference
- 1.81 % of parents could not be offered any of their preferences and have been offered a place at the nearest school with a place available

Last year's figures:

- 87.4% of parents have been offered their 1st preference
- 6.68% of parents have been offered their 2nd preference

- 2.39% of parents have been offered their 3rd preference
- 0.77% of parents have been offered their 4th preference

2.76% of parents could not be offered any of their preferences and have been offered a place at the nearest school

Find out if your road is set to be resurfaced this year

Residents wanting to know if their road is set to be resurfaced this year are now just a click away from finding out.

The full roads resurfacing programme from April 2017 to March 2018 is now available to check on the highways information map at www.essex.gov.uk/surfacing.

The map allows residents to see every road scheduled for an upgrade superimposed on a map. A colour code then shows what type of road surfacing will be used.

You can click on the works to find out more information, including date range or when the works are scheduled take place. Please be aware works are weather dependent and therefore dates for works can change.

Andrew Cook, Director for Highways and Transportation, said: "We have modernised our information for everyone about the road resurfacing programme for this year. You can now see on our website which roads are going to be completed and which type of treatment will be used.

"This is all part of our move to make highways information more easily available online. We often get calls from the public asking when their road is due to be resurfaced - this interactive map will help keep residents up-to-date with our upcoming road improvements at the click of a button.

"More precise dates will also be available on www.roadworks.org as we get nearer the time and we will continue to directly inform residents living close to the works so you can plan ahead."

You can also find gritting routes, public rights of way, bus stop locations and much more on the highways information map.

Despite a cold snap creating more potholes over the Christmas and New Year period, the number of potholes on local routes is down from June last year (2016).

The number of potholes on local routes dropped from 4,954 in June last year to 4,733 at the end of March 2017.

You can now tell us about a highways issue quicker and easier thanks to our newly improved website at www.essex.gov.uk/highways