

County Councillor's report May 2019



Generous - Simon Walsh donated light bulbs to Colchester Foodbank

A TOTAL of 3,000 low energy lightbulbs have been donated to six food banks and charities across Essex.

The scheme was started when [Essex County Council](#) was given 3,000 light bulbs from one of its contractors, Signify, as part of their corporate social responsibility work linked to the roll out of LED street lighting.

The Sustainability and Resilience team asked colleagues how best to use the free light bulbs and the bright idea of passing the bulbs to food banks came to light.

Councillor responsible for environment and waste, Simon Walsh, personally delivered 1,150 light bulbs to the Colchester Foodbank.

Other organisations that received the bulbs were Essex Fire and Rescue, Extra Support for Families, The Salvation Army, Walton Foodbank and Virgin Care.

Simon Walsh said: "This is such a positive scheme, as we are lowering the energy use, and thus the energy cost, for some of the most vulnerable members of our society and supporting fantastic charities at the same time. If any other people or businesses have other unused or surplus food and appliances they should contact their local food banks, charity shops or online reuse sites, to reduce waste and redistribute resources to people who could really benefit from them."

A brand new Yoga Festival for Essex

Essex will play host to a brand-new Yoga Festival this summer with an added, unique opportunity to pitch a tent and camp overnight at the stunning Cressing Temple Barns site.

'Yoga Unites' takes place at Cressing Temple Barns on Saturday 8 June and looks set to bring the historic site alive with a wealth of inspiring teachers and live music from Shrinari - a leading duo in the UK's yoga music scene.

The all-day event will offer something for everybody, from beginners to advanced, young and old. 'Yoga Unites' aims to give people from all walks of life the opportunity to try different styles of yoga.

It will feature two open-air stages and smaller, focused classes. Visitors can drop in and out of classes throughout the day or take time out for mindful moments in the beautifully restored Tudor walled garden.

Cllr Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste, said: "We are so thrilled to bring this wonderful new event to the beautiful grounds of Cressing Temple Barns. Yoga is a fantastic way to reduce stress and improve both mental and physical wellbeing. Whether you're seeking calm from a hectic lifestyle or you simply want to try something new, this event offers a great opportunity to get active in a unique and historic location."

Special guest, Kwali Kumara, a fully-registered member of the *Kundalini Yoga Teacher's Association (KYTA)* will be transferring her London classes to Cressing for the day to share the secrets of Kundalini. Festival goers can try out physical kriyas (series of set exercises), chanting and meditation.

Eco-friendly foodies, Fig and Rye will provide nutritious eats from their vintage horse box, and the ever-popular Tiptree Tearooms are also on site.

For those keen to make an early start and benefit from an easy walk to and from the Festival, campers are invited to bring a tent or caravan and stay for one or two nights on the green field close to the barns.

Yoga Unites takes place on Saturday 8 June 2019 between 10am-6pm. Tickets cost £49 and include all yoga sessions. One-night camping costs £85 or two nights £115 (Friday 7 and Saturday 8 June) inclusive of Yoga Unites festival ticket. Tickets are available [here](#) or by calling 0345 603 7624.

Consultation launched into concessionary fares on the Park and Ride services across Essex

Essex County Council wants to hear from Park and Ride users from across the county on concessionary fares for disabled and older users as part of a consultation that launches today, Wednesday 8th May, 2019.

We currently allow concessionary bus passes to be used on the three County Council operated Park and Ride schemes at Sandon and Chelmer Valley in Chelmsford and at the Colchester Park and Ride. These include the Broomfield Hospital shuttle bus service from the Chelmer Valley site. Currently concessionary pass holders travel for free after 9am.

We are consulting on charging older person's bus pass holders a £1.50 return fare on Park and Ride services in Essex.

We are also consulting on making a reduced charge of £1.50 for people using the disability based bus pass before 9am on the Park and Ride services.

Neither of these proposals will affect the use of bus passes on normal local bus services.

This consultation gives you the opportunity to let us know your views about the proposals.

We need to ensure the current service is fit for purpose and best meets the needs of those that use it, while also ensuring value for money for Essex taxpayers. The concessionary pass scheme as a whole costs taxpayers £18m a year in Essex and in the current financial climate it's only right to test whether free travel on Park and Ride – which is discretionary - should continue.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member with responsibility for concessionary fares, said: "We understand that the Park and Ride Services across Essex are important for many people including concessionary pass holders. The ease and convenience of the service make it an obvious choice for travelling into Chelmsford or Colchester.

"We want to ensure that those of you that use the Park and Ride are getting the best possible service and experience for the fare you pay. We also need to demonstrate value for money, which is why we are reviewing free travel for older people's concessionary pass holders.

"I am really keen to hear from you as part of the consultation so that we can ensure we have a service that meets the needs of residents in the most effective way."

The consultation proposes:

- To change from offering free travel on the Park and Ride services in Essex for people who hold the older person's bus pass, to charging a return fare of £1.50. The new charge would apply at all times.
- Before 9am, disability bus pass holders will also be able to pay £1.50 - passholders currently pay full fare before 9am. Disability bus pass users will still be able to travel free after 9am on production of their pass.

Full details of the proposals can be found at the consultation web pages that will go live at 10am today.

The consultation will run from Wednesday 08 May until Wednesday 31 July 2019. It is available [online](#).

Paper copies of the questionnaire will be available from the Sandon, Chelmer Valley and Colchester Park and Ride sites, or by emailing: passenger.transport@essex.gov.uk.

Following the consultation, we will consider the responses and make an announcement of how we intend to proceed later in the year with any changes coming into effect in April 2020.

Almost nine in ten Essex children offered first preference primary school

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 16,100 parents in Essex will today (Tuesday, 16 April 2019) discover the outcome of their primary school place application, with those who applied online getting confirmation by email or via the council's website.

The council has continued to invest in creating school places and a record 89.38 per cent of children due to start Reception in September have been offered their parents' first preference – up from 88.13 per cent last year.

A further 6.18 per cent have been offered their second preference, meaning more than 95.50 per cent have been offered one of their top two preferences. In total, 98 per cent of pupils are being offered one of their parent's preferred schools.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Education, said: "I'm thrilled that so many parents are being offered their preferred primary school place. Starting school is an exciting time in a child's life and I wish all those starting in September the very best for the start of their school days.

"I would also like to pay tribute to the hard work of all council officers and school staff involved in this successful process."

Essex Trading Standards warns residents and businesses about the dangers of counterfeit alcohol

Essex Trading Standards Officers have been alerted to cheap vodka being offered wholesale to on-licence businesses in Colchester.

The fake vodka labelled as Kalinska Imperial Vodka has been tested and found to contain significant levels of methanol and as such it has been condemned as injurious to health.

Kalinska Imperial Vodka is a legitimate brand, but the products concerned have been confirmed as counterfeit.

The legitimate version of this product would only be sold via established wholesale outlets and would have a detailed cap.

There are other significant differences about the liquid and the bottle that can be identified by Trading Standards Officers.

The counterfeit version would make a consumer unwell if they were to drink it.

Licensing Authorities across Essex are aware of the issue. If businesses have any concerns about products that they have been offered for sale either by telephone or in person at their premises, they are asked to report it to trading.standards@essex.gov.uk

Similarly, if consumers have any concerns then they can report the matter directly to the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 03454 040506.

Trading Standards Officers are currently working with the local business community and the National Food Crime Unit to identify the wider supply chain and to protect consumers from any harm.

Simon Walsh

County Councillor for Thaxted Division