

Housing association merger promising 4,000 new homes

A HOUSING association merger will see nearly 4,000 new social homes built in the next five years. Colchester-based Colne Housing has officially announced it will be teaming up with Greenfields Community Housing in Braintree. They will merge on July 1 and become known as Eastlight Community Homes – if shareholders vote in favour of the new name in May. The merged association will be responsible for 12,000 social homes across north Essex and Suffolk. Bosses say the partnership will see up to 1,300 new social homes built on top of the 2,500 already planned

over the next five years. It will also see up to £8 million spent improving existing properties. Greenfields chief executive Emma Palmer, who is expected to take up the same role at Eastlight, said: "This merger is a fantastic opportunity to do so much more for residents and future generations in need of affordable homes. "Our shared vision is to create a trailblazing organisation with empowered residents who have a real say and influence on both their services and our strategic direction." All existing residents in Colne and Greenfields properties have been

informed of the merger and bosses say there will be no changes to any services. The merger came about when Colne, which has 3,200 homes, invited larger housing associations to "explore working together" to address the housing crisis in East Anglia. Chief executive Sara Thakkar said: "Eastlight Community Homes will deliver value for money and better services for the local communities we serve. "We are really proud to be stronger together and look forward to shaping a brighter future." Both housing groups say all tenants, leaseholders and staff were consulted on the merger.



JOINING FORCES: Chief execs Emma Palmer and Sara Thakkar welcome the merger of the two housing bodies
Picture: Steve Brading

Student support teams launched

A SCHOOL has set up specialist support teams to help staff, pupils and parents during the lockdown.

Maltings Academy, in Witham, says the aim is to provide academic support to pupils and boost morale through social media.

The school is open for just a handful of children of key workers, but is setting homework online for hundreds of pupils at home.

The support groups include wellbeing, social media and academic support teams. They are made up of volunteers and led by senior teachers.

Headteacher James Forbes said: "The first couple of weeks of the shutdown were incredibly intense, with huge changes being made on a daily basis. Things are seeming to plateau a bit now and our staff and students are doing some really exciting things.

"We are mindful everyone needs some time to stop and have some calm to process what has happened and so we did not set any work for the Easter holiday, but going completely cold turkey would be dangerous in itself.

"That is why the wellbeing team has put together a package to give our families lots of ideas to keep well."

A120 junction slip road scheme set to be delayed

New consultation means set-back for £10m Millennium Way plan

By Alex Gidden

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LONG-AWAITED plans to install slip roads along the A120 at Braintree look set to be delayed.

Essex County Council's plans to connect the busy A-road with Millennium Way have gone out to consultation for a second time after a revision to the proposals.

An initial schedule put forward when the blueprints were submitted 11 months ago said construction work could begin this spring.

But with the planning application now being put out to consultation again, any hopes of work starting imminently on the slip roads appear to have been dashed.

A spokesman for Essex Highways, which is behind the scheme, said: "A revision has recently been submitted to the council's planning application to build slip roads on the A120 in Braintree from Millennium Way.

"The planning revision involves the realignment of the northern A120 off-slip which has been re-aligned to eliminate the impact upon the B&Q garden centre. The amended proposed road alignment now passes to the south of the B&Q Store avoiding the garden centre completely.

"Subject to planning permission being granted, it is currently anticipated that the slip roads will be procured as a design and build project with tenders being invited in autumn 2020 and construction works on the A120 Millennium Way slips taking place between summer 2021 and winter 2022."

The scheme is expected to cost about £10 million, with Brain-



DELAY-BUSTING SCHEME: Slip roads will connect the A120 with Millennium Way in Braintree to ease congestion

tree Council providing a quarter of the funding.

Highways England will pay £3 million and nearly £5 million will be covered by the Department for Transport.

Work will take place in two phases, with the southern slip road likely to be built first.

County Hall bosses say failure to deliver the scheme will

lead to further congestion in and around Braintree and could harm future growth.

Studies have found the A120 at Braintree is "severely over-capacity" and mile-long queues frequently form at peak times near to Galleys Corner.

It is hoped the slip roads will slash delays and improve air quality in the area.

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