

Park's loos open again

DINGY public toilets in Colchester's Castle Park have reopened after a revamp.

New porcelain toilets and sinks as well as new mirrors and better lighting have been introduced at the public toilets next to Hollytrees Museum.

The revamp follows negative feedback from park visitors.

Annie Feltham, councillor

responsible for leisure, said: "Castle Park is one of the many jewels in Colchester's crown, and I am pleased these toilets are now up to the standard of the rest of the park."

What's our train like?

A RAIL company is looking for views on a new type of carriage.

Greater Anglia is running a class 321 demonstrator train on various routes on its network.

The carriages have new seats, air conditioning and are quieter.

Passengers are asked to carry out an online survey for the chance to win an iPad.

To take part visit greateranglia.co.uk/class321.

Charity in sailor search

A CHARITY is looking for a sailor to help it run trips.

The Pioneer Sailing Trust, based in Brightlingsea, runs youth projects on a restored smack boat.

A crew member is needed to help run trips this sailing season.

For more information, visit pioneersailingtrust.org.uk or e-mail admin@pioneersailingtrust.org.uk

Uni students donate food

STUDENTS at Essex University have collected 380kg of donations for Colchester Food Bank.

Members of the university's V Team, a volunteer group, collected food at Colchester Waitrose on Saturday.

They also collected £95 for the food bank on the day.

Government inspector says council can't prioritise retail areas

We'll fight to save our town centre

By JAMES CALMAN

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TRADERS and councillors have vowed to battle new laws they fear could suck the life out of Colchester's town centre.

A consultation has been launched after a Government inspector said Colchester Council policies which block developments harmful to the town centre could go against national guidelines.

The finding has raised new fears that stores traditionally found in high streets could instead open in retail parks and shopping centres such as Tollgate in Sturway.

Ron Levy, secretary of Colchester Retail/Business Association, said: "The town centre is the heart of Colchester.

"If the heart dies, the body dies, so we must do everything we can to protect it."

Last year, the council ran a limited "focused review" to ensure its local plan was in line with Government policy, including the new National Planning Policy Framework.

The council's plan has a hierarchy which ranks the town centre as more important ahead of district centres, such as the centres of Tiptree and Wivenhoe, or out-of-town retail parks.

Under this plan, major retail developments which would damage the business of town centre would be rejected.

At a hearing last month, Government inspector Simon Emerson said the hierarchy was "at



■ We'll fight to protect our town centre - Bill Frame in Colchester's High Street. Inset: An aerial view of Tollgate retail park. Picture: STEVE BRADING CO91033



odds" with Government policy and suggested the council's entire retail plans should be thrashed out at a later date.

The new Government framework classes all centres - town centres, village centres, local centres and out-of-town centres - as equal. It also blocks attempts to favour one over another.

The council has now proposed to withdraw its retail policies from the focused review and instead include them in a full review of its local plan, which is due to take place next year.

In its response to the Government inspector's report, the council insisted: "Our policies

The town centre is the heart of Colchester... so we must do everything we can to protect it

War of words over state of high streets

RESIDENTS are being let down by a council which claims to have regenerated high streets across the borough, according to an opposition councillor.

Stephen Canning, a Braintree district councillor, has claimed the Tory-led authority has rejuvenated high streets in the area. But Malcolm Fincken, who

represents Halstead on the district council, said he had surveyed Halstead town centre and found 12 empty shops.

He added: "Some of them very large shops, and that's a higher number than there was a year ago. I am sure it is a similar story in Braintree and Witham."

Mr Fincken also criticised the

council for deterring shoppers by increasing car parking charges.

But Conservative Mr Canning praised the Government and Braintree Council for their support of small businesses.

He said: "Braintree Council too has been a strong supporter of small businesses through its support of the three town centres

introduced in 2011 to ensure red tape did not block developments which would have a positive effect on the economy.

Lawyers acting for the Tollgate Partnership, in submissions to the focused review, have insisted the hierarchy is "not consistent with national policy".

The partnership has claimed it had to turn down an approach for a John Lewis department store because it would not have secured planning permission.

However Mr Levy insisted the framework did allow councils to offer extra protection to town centres.

Visit colchester.gov.uk/local plan to see the consultation, which runs until March 31.

HAVE YOUR SAY
E-mail gazette.letters@nqa.com

and the Ignite Enterprise Agency. "These have led to fantastic success stories, such as the birth of the Braintree Jewellery Village, businesses like Shake Express experiencing a 50 per cent rise in year-on-year sales and the introduction of new independent retailers."

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