

# DfT E-Scooter Trial in Harlow



<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	19 March 2025
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Alastair Gunn Portfolio Holder for Garden Town and Planning
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Tanusha Waters Assistant Director for Planning and Garden Town (01279) 446595
<b>Contributing Officer:</b>	Amy Wright Garden Town District Lead Liaison Officer (01279) 446565
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Forward Plan Number I018164
<b>Call In:</b>	This item is subject to call in procedures
<b>Corporate Mission:</b>	Renew our neighbourhoods
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All

## Executive Summary

- A** Essex County Council (ECC) has approached Harlow Council to ascertain whether the council would consider a Department of Transport (DfT) trial for the use of electric scooters (e-scooters). This report seeks Harlow Council members in principle approval for the trial of an e-scooter scheme in Harlow. Full details of the scheme would be finalised later by the council in conjunction with ECC and their appointed e-scooter operator.
- B** E-scooters are not presently legal for use in the UK, unless under an authorised DfT trial. Trials of e-scooters in Essex enable operators, ECC as Local Highway Authority and the relevant district council to regulate and control the use of e-scooters in a pilot area. This would be in accordance with contractual terms agreed between the operator and councils. Harlow Council would have the opportunity to form part of the project team and will be able to have full influence on how the contract operates in the district including ensuring the safety of all road users i.e. drivers, cyclists, pedestrians and e-scooter users.

Existing Essex based e-scooter trials already operate in Chelmsford, Colchester and Braintree.

- C** E-scooters are a more affordable and quicker means to travel, particularly at peak rush hour times for shorter journeys or as part of a longer journey. For example, they could be used for students accessing Harlow College, for employees/commuters arriving at the train stations or Harlow Town Centre Transport Interchange (bus station) and continuing the journey to work by e-scooter, or for those commuting to the train stations. They can also be used for residents who are unable to access, drive or afford a motor vehicle or store a bike. E-scooters are also encouraged as a more sustainable mode of transport, with the aim of moving people away from using private vehicles for shorter journeys.
- D** There is no present significant outlay to Harlow Council financially to participate in a DfT e-scooter trial run by ECC and an appointed e-scooter operator. The only cost/resource would be officer time, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Garden Town, who would be required to collaborate with ECC and operator to ensure that the contract has appropriate terms. This will enable the council to ensure the scheme is set up and launched sensitively in Harlow.
- E** If feasibility details reveal practical concerns with the implementation or operation of the e-scooter trial in Harlow that could not be reasonably mitigated, then Harlow Council would be able to serve notice on ECC and the selected e-scooter operator to withdraw Harlow from the trial in accordance with an agreed notice period, typically two calendar months.

**Recommended that:**

- A** Cabinet permits an in-principle approval to the implementation of a DfT e-scooter trial in Harlow in line with the safety mitigations as set out within the report.
- B** Cabinet delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder for Garden Town and Planning, in conjunction with the Assistant Director for Planning and Garden Town, through a formal Portfolio Holder decision to agree satisfactory implementation and operational details of the e-scooter trial in Harlow with Essex County Council as the Local Highway Authority and their appointed e-scooter operator.

**Reason for decision:**

- A** To enable officers in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Garden Town and Planning to explore the potential for implementing an e-scooter DfT trial in Harlow. A project group would be established to oversee the implementation and operational details of the scheme to ensure that it is appropriate, safe and effective for the town.
- B** An e-scooter scheme could have multiple benefits for Harlow including the provision of an alternative mode of transport that is significantly cheaper and potentially quicker than other transportation. This is pertinent given the ongoing issue of the cost of living. A

formalised DfT/ECC e-scooter trial would also ensure that any scheme is as safe as possible for users of the operator's e-scooters, and other people on the public highway or authorised sections of the cycle network. Pilot schemes have strict conditions of use for any e-scooter rider and the operator can ensure adherence through vehicle tracking.

- C** Exploring the potential of an e-scooter trial would also conform to Harlow Council's Climate Strategy aims of achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040 by looking at offering residents, employees and visitors an alternative and more sustainable option to travel.

## **Other Options**

- A** Do Nothing – Harlow Council could decide not to agree in principle to the operation of a DfT e-scooter trial in Harlow. This would mean there was no legal available option in the foreseeable future to use e-scooters towards securing modal shift targets and transport decarbonisation in Harlow. It would also reduce local residents' and employees' opportunities to access safe and affordable transport modes within the town.
- B** Launch Later - Harlow Council can independently launch an e-scooter scheme at a later date, once e-scooters are legalised for widespread use in England rather than just through pilots. Harlow Council would be required to lead on the administration of this type of launch in conjunction with HGGT Partner councils such as ECC as the Local Highway Authority. This would create a higher staff resource cost to the council than the present DfT trials that are led by ECC. If the council did decide to launch later, then ECC might expect Harlow Council to contribute towards the costs of establishing a new Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to enable the use of cycleways by e-scooters in addition to existing cyclists. It should be noted however that there has not been a Green Paper consultation on e-scooter use in England and at present there is no proposed Bill in motion in Parliament to legalise e-scooters. The only legal way to launch an e-scooter pilot in England currently is through the DfT trials. DfT has extended trials for the use of e-scooters until 31 May 2026, although the expectation is that this will be lengthened again, as it has been in the past. It is not recommended that a decision to launch an e-scooter trial be delayed, as it could help tackle existing congestion on the local road network and offer a convenient and relatively cheap way to travel around town in a carefully controlled scheme.

## **Background**

1. In 2020 the Department for Transport (DfT) announced a proposal to trial the use of electric scooters (e-scooters) in named pilot areas. E-scooters are a form of micromobility which are currently illegal in the UK except on private land or in pilot areas already approved by the DfT. Local authorities were encouraged by the DfT to apply to become a pilot area, and Essex County Council (ECC), initially commenced trials elsewhere in Essex in conjunction with a preferred operator.

2. The DfT historically approved ECC's proposals with legal dispensation for agreed e-scooter trial schemes to be operated from nominated start dates such as in Basildon, Chelmsford and Colchester. DfT trials also operate elsewhere around the country, such as in Liverpool, Norwich, Cambridge and Milton Keynes.
3. Trials are typically up to 12 months and the DfT objective is to deliver high-quality e-scooters trials using several different models, to provide a low carbon transport solution to help councils such as ECC and district councils (such as Harlow) to meet Net Zero targets.
4. The Harlow pilot would help support:
  - A safe way to travel in Harlow, particularly short distances;
  - Affordable travel options targeted at residents and key workers;
  - First / last mile travel options, targeted primarily at commuters who connect to the Town Centre and train stations for example.
  - Accessing employment or higher education;
  - Encouraging sustainable transport use;
  - Opportunities to reduce congestion.

### **Issues/Proposals**

5. ECC has asked Harlow Council whether it would agree in principle to hosting a DfT e-scooter trial, initially for approximately 12 months. Thereafter, there may be an option to extend the scheme if DfT authorises this, usually up to three additional years. Whilst the exact details of the operation of a future Harlow based e-scooter scheme are not yet known, Harlow Council has an opportunity to help finalise a Service Level Agreement (contract) between ECC and a future e-scooter operator for any Harlow pilot. The operator is expected to take on the risk of launching a new hire scheme.

### **Safety of e-scooter pilot schemes**

6. Within any pilot area the only e-scooters that would be legal would be those that are part of the trial. 'Personal' or privately owned e-scooters would remain illegal. DfT/ECC pilot e-scooters offer greater opportunities for safe travel as they are automatically speed limited and the only type of e-scooter that can be legally insured for people to ride on the public highway. E-scooters are monitored and GPS controlled so their movements are fully regulated. They have lights on the back, indicators and larger wheels than privately owned e-scooters, which enhances their visibility, stability and safety. AI technology allows parking to be checked and if conditions are breached, warnings may be issued that can result in a ban. Sensors can even identify if the e-scooter has tipped over allowing the operator staff to remedy this.
7. E-scooter hire is highly regulated and as they are classified as a motorised vehicle under the Highways Act, most schemes require riders to be over 18 years old and hold a provisional or full driving licence. E-scooter users are usually required to complete and pass safety training before they could commence their journey and would be strongly

encouraged to wear a helmet. Tracking technology in any authorised pilot scheme ensure that the users behaviour is monitored for compliance. Penalties and incentives could be introduced to guide behaviour, and training could cover safe and considerate riding.

8. The ECC appointed e-scooter operator for any future scheme in Harlow would need appropriate insurances including public liability insurance, vehicle insurance and provide a minimum of third-party insurance to users. Personal insurance could be also offered. Since e-scooters are deemed motorised vehicles, enforcement on any matters of lawful use would be referable to Essex Police. Any ban is linked to the hirer's driving license.
9. The e-scooter operator would be required to establish a strong working relationship with Harlow's Community Safety Team and Essex Police. In some operational pilot schemes, members of the public have perceived the use of e-scooters as 'anti-social' even where they are being used in compliance with the conditions of the trial, and especially if they are permitted on shared use ways and cycleways. In part this could be from confusion of whether the e-scooter is part of a legal pilot or a privately owned e-scooter being used illegally. All e-scooters that are part of an authorised DfT trial scheme are trackable. It would be possible for Harlow Council and ECC to ensure that any future e-scooter operator's contract incorporates a process to direct complaints from the public to the operator and ECC rather than to Harlow Council.
10. The ECC Service Level Agreement with any future e-scooter operator will mandate that they always have appropriately trained staff on duty in case of queries or reported issues and they are required to respond to queries within a set period of time. The operator would need to be on call including mechanics who often operate out of a centralised warehouse. The e-scooters are likely to have rechargeable lithium batteries, which would be regularly centrally charged and then manually swapped over by operator staff. This means that associated lithium battery charging would be in accordance with best practice, in a controlled and designated building/ structure.
11. Safety for all road users and pedestrians is paramount and ECC have emphasised that they are committed to ensuring that safe trials are delivered across the County. The bespoke contract ECC would set up with the e-scooter operator for Harlow should allow suitable controls to ensure safety is maximised for users of the scheme and other pedestrians, cyclists and drivers using the local highways and cycleway infrastructure in Harlow.

### **Identifying routes and parking areas**

12. A project group will be established to ensure there are optimal e-scooter parking areas, and routes/ links in the most appropriate areas of the town to make the operation a success. Harlow Council will ensure that any future operator is aware of key stakeholders in the town, who can also be asked to provide feedback to optimise outcomes. The scheme will need to consider any features or concerns that are bespoke to Harlow's geography. Elsewhere in Essex, pilots allow authorised e-scooters to be ridden on cycle

paths, (after an agreed Traffic Regulation Order alteration), shared use ways and roads of less than 30mph, although not on pavements.

13. E-scooters are trackable, which enables e-scooters to be monitored and 'rebalanced' i.e. moved by operator staff from areas of low demand to high demand, to address where they are needed and prevent an accumulation of used e-scooters in one place to preclude streetscene clutter. Algorithms can be used to predict demand peaks.
14. E-scooter trials are likely to map out a pilot area into different geofenced zones that are agreed in advance with ECC and the district council. Some areas may be 'no-go' areas, such as the existing Town Centre in Harlow where there is presently a Public Spaces Protection Order against the use of bicycles, skateboards, scooters or any other self-propelled vehicles between 9.00 hours and 18.00 hours due to historic anti-social behaviour. Other zones might require a slower travelling speed for any e-scooters in use, and different zones will be dedicated to e-scooter parking areas. Usually all hireable e-scooters within a DfT trial will have speed limitations for safety purposes.

### **Cost/ affordability**

15. There would be a range of payment and hire options in any operational scheme, subject to the selected operator. Usually, schemes provide a significant discount to: Blue Light (NHS, police and fire) workers, students, people on apprenticeships, people on low incomes, and people on benefits. The pricing regime tends to undercut car park prices which in turn incentivises users to make sustainable transport choices, which supports reducing carbon emissions and air quality.
16. In comparison with other transport modes, e-scooters within a DfT trial are generally relatively cheap to hire. In Colchester at present for example, a Pay as you go e-scooter and e-bike hire option is £1.00 to unlock then £0.27 per minute. There are also ticketing pass options that presently include: £4.99 for 30 days of unlimited unlocks and 20-minute rides for £2.25; £6.99 for 30 days unlimited free unlocks; or Dott Pro that offers £20 minutes use and unlocks for £1.50 for 30 days fee of £14.99.

### **Encouraging sustainable and active travel in Harlow**

17. E-scooter trials allow the e-scooter operators to capture usage data. This is usually weekly data which is then shared with ECC who can provide feedback to Harlow Council. In addition, Harlow Council would receive from the operator/ECC, survey data analysis around patronage levels and the likely purpose of rides, origins and destination hotspots, and linkages to other transport modes. This data is also issued to the DfT so that the trial outputs can be monitored against their key service indicators. The data analysis assists evidence gathering and insights for supporting the development of sustainable transport initiatives, particularly micromobility schemes (small, lightweight vehicles) and Mobility Hubs (facility enabling change of vehicle or direction of travel).

18. All HGGT partner councils including Harlow Council and ECC are responsible for securing the best possible levels of sustainable and active transport use in Harlow. This is consistent with the HGGT Transport Strategy which sets out a target of 50% of journeys in the town to be made by sustainable modes. At present, 23% of car journeys in Harlow are less than 10 minutes in duration. (See Arup's report on Modal Transition for HGGT - Reimagining How to Travel Differently.) This is high compared to other towns in the UK and could be reduced through the introduction of legal and operator-managed e-scooters. Adding e-scooters to Harlow's transport offer will reduce congestion on the local road network which will be important as allocated development sites in the HGGT area are built out and generate additional vehicular trips.
19. Data from the ECC e-scooter Perception Survey 2024 shows that 43% of e-scooter users in existing pilots in Essex have used their car less since trialling e-scooters. E-scooter usage then has been shown to enhance use of other sustainable transport modes, from e-bikes to public transport options. 'Intermodality' when an e-scooter connects into other transport modes, such as buses, has been shown in Europe to allow Mobile phone apps and subscription savings. This is apparently particularly appealing to 18-24 year olds.
20. As an example, a common e-scooter operator called 'Dott' is presently running pilots elsewhere in Essex, the UK, and Europe and has undertaken a Global Rider survey. In 2023 this showed that 26% of their e-scooter rides replaced more polluting vehicle modes, such as cars, taxis, mopeds or motorbikes. The survey also showed that overall, 43% of trips by e-scooters operated by Dott across Europe connect into public transport options, and 13% of these journeys would not have used public transport otherwise.

### **Next Steps**

21. Subject to Cabinet agreeing in principle to the approval of the DfT trial in Harlow, a project group will be established between ECC and Harlow Council to explore the scheme further and to deliver a contract. Only if the final contract and agreed operator can deliver a safe, effective and appropriate e-scooter scheme for Harlow will the pilot go ahead. The final details of which will be agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Garden Town and Planning in conjunction with the Assistant Director for Planning and Garden Town.
22. If the council opts to accept the trial, the only resource requirements would be the officer time for the pilot scheme engagement and regular stakeholder meetings regarding operational issues during the trial.
23. If feasibility details reveal practical concerns with the implementation or operation of the e-scooter pilot in Harlow that could not be reasonably mitigated, then Harlow Council would be able to serve notice on ECC and the selected e-scooter operator to withdraw Harlow from the pilot e-scooter hire scheme in accordance with an agreed notice period, typically two calendar months.

## **Implications**

### **Equalities and Diversity**

There are no equality issues identified at this stage of the process, but this will be considered during the establishment of the pilots, subject to the principle being agreed by Cabinet.

### **Climate Change**

Harlow Council's emerging [Climate Change Strategy](#) aims to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions in the district by 2040. One way to do this is enabling residents, employees and visitors to use safe, fast, reliable and affordable sustainable modes of transport. An e-scooter trial would help Harlow Council achieve Net Zero reductions and address climate change by providing an alternative sustainable transport option for some journeys thereby improving local air quality and optimising opportunities for good health.

### **Finance**

If the council opts to accept the trial, the only resource requirements would be the officer time for the pilot scheme engagement and regular stakeholder meetings regarding operational issues during the trial. All resources are included within the medium term financial plan.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

### **Governance**

The exploration of a trial has no legal implications. CSOs will need to be engaged for full scheme once discussions have reached the stage that a contract has been delivered for council consideration.

Author: Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Improvement and Monitoring Officer

## **Appendices**

None.

## **Background Papers**

Department for Transport and Active Travel England - E-scooter trials: guidance for local authorities and rental operators - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-scooter-trials-guidance-for-local-areas-and-rental-operators/e-scooter-trials-guidance-for-local-areas-and-rental-operators>

Dott- Sustainability GRI Report 2023 - <https://ridedott.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/dott-2023-sustainability-report.pdf>

E-scooter pilots in Essex - [e-scooters - Essex County Council](#)

ECC – E-Scooter Perception Survey – 2024 - <https://letstalkessexsustainabletravel.co.uk/e-scooter-perceptions-survey/surveys/perceptions-and-use-of-e-scooters>



Harlow Climate Change Strategy –  
<https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s25387/Appendix+B+-+Climate+Change+Strategy.pdf>

HGGT Vision 2018 - <https://hggg.co.uk/portfolio/vision-document/>

HGGT Transport Strategy - <https://hggg.co.uk/portfolio/hggg-transport-strategy/>

Reimagining How to Travel Differently – HGGT Modal Transition Delivery Framework -  
<https://hggg.co.uk/portfolio/reimagining-how-we-can-travel-differently/>

### **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

AI – Artificial Intelligence

DfT – Department for Transport

ECC – Essex County Council

GPS – Global Positioning System (a way of tracking a device, in this instance an e-scooter)

HGGT – Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Modal Transition – a change from one form of transportation for a journey to another, for example, switching a delivery van for an e-cargo bike. The HGGT Transport Strategy seeks to encourage more journeys to be made by sustainable transport (or modes) such as bikes, buses and/or walking.

Micromobility schemes- a term for small, lightweight vehicles mostly used for short trips in urban areas. Micromobility vehicles can be human powered or electric, and include bicycles, e-bikes, scooters, e-scooters and skateboards.