

# Payback initiative aids environment

**PROMINENT SITES:** Offenders to also benefit

**By James Hore**

OFFENDERS doing community service in Essex are to be placed in high-profile locations as part of a "community payback" scheme.

It is also hoped the trial project, being launched this month, will benefit the surroundings as all the work will be done to improve the environment.

Essex County Council will be working in partnership with the probation service and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to give offenders the opportunity to carry out the unpaid environmental work at various "gateway sites".

The work also forms part of the community payback scheme - where offend-

ers do more localised work in response to what people want done in their area.

Offenders from Colchester and Chelmsford will work three days a week on projects such as maintaining verges to help wildlife flourish, trim bushes and improve access to coastal paths.

Work will take place in New Road, Mistley, near the animal rescue centre; at the blue gateway roundabout in Harwich; at St Peter's Chapel and coastal path, Bradwell, and in Brightlingsea.

All participants will receive an NVQ Level 1 in communication and teamwork and can potentially work towards a City and Guilds certificate in highways management.

Bosses say the qualifications will make offenders' CVs more attractive to potential employers.

By the end of the project it is estimated that 120 offenders will have made "visible reparations" to communities as part of their court order.

Tracey Chapman, in charge of environment at the council, said: "Taking pride in our county and how it looks is something all of us can get involved in.

"We're working to improve gateways into Essex, not only to make them more attractive but to increase biodiversity wherever possible following the county's biodiversity action plan.

"It is pleasing to see offenders giving back to the community and gaining valuable work experience at the same time and I hope that working on the project boosts their potential employability."

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