

Huge daily traffic jams on the A120 near Braintree are blocking expansion of the Earls Colne Business Park, according to the park's Managing Director, Malcolm Hobbs.

Mr Hobbs spoke out as Essex County Council prepares to launch a £10m consultation into proposals to dual the key strategic link between Braintree and Marks Tey.

He revealed that potential business park occupiers have decided against locating there because of unreliable journey times caused by the A120 bottleneck and traffic jams. Thirty businesses are located at the business park, from SMEs to national and international companies, including Milbank Floors, Ford SVP, NC Cammack, Wilkin and Son, Vislink and Baxter Foods. Approximately 1,400 people are employed at the park at present.

Calling on Essex County Council, the Government and Highways England to make improving the A120 "number one" on the priority list, Mr Hobbs said that many more jobs could be created at the business park as a result and the same was true of other sites along the route.

Right now, he said, one of the main impediments to further expansion at Earls Colne Business Park was the lack of available employees within an acceptable drive time. "One of the main reasons we don't expand further is that I don't want to get into a situation where all the different businesses are fighting over the same staff," he said. "But an improved A120 would enable those businesses to source their staff from further afield – opening up employment opportunities here to thousands more potential employees."

Meanwhile, he said, existing employers at the business park are massively affected by unreliable A120 journey times, with bottlenecks leading to "loss of production, delays in delivery and fraying tempers first thing in the morning".

"Studies have proved the economic benefits of improving the A120 would be tangible, to the tune of £1.3bn in extra growth," he said. "It isn't just our business park staff who would benefit tremendously from this. There are lots of areas of employment along the A120 which would benefit and be able to expand better if the road was a better conduit.

“We are talking about a route that is fed from either end by the M11 and the A12, but which goes down to a single lane with mini-roundabouts, traffic lights and junctions across a busy road. Try turning right going against the flow of traffic and you can sit and wait 10-15 minutes for a safe gap in the traffic.

“If you mention ‘Cholesterol corner’, anyone in the Braintree area knows straight away what you are talking about. Especially in the mornings, the queue can stretch four or five miles back towards Colchester; in fact, people are actually choosing to drive through Braintree to avoid the bypass.”