

Blackout may be extended

STREET lamps across Essex could be switched off after a trial in Uttlesford shed new light on how the blackout cuts crime.

An all-party county council group will consider the proposal to extend the scheme, which has seen the district's residential areas in darkness for five hours between midnight and 5am since 2007.

Exceptions were made for locations such as town centres or thoroughfares, key road junctions and accident sites.

Cllr Norman Hume, Essex's cabinet member for highways and transportation, said: "During the trials I have been in contact with many residents expressing their support for part-night street lighting but also others who have raised concerns. I have therefore asked the council's scrutiny board to look into all the facts of the matter."

Evidence has already been gathered via a joint monitoring group consisting of representatives of Essex county and district councils and the police, fire and ambulance services.

Their reports show that crime has fallen and there have been no reported traffic accidents during the times the lights have been switched off.

The number of recorded criminal offences in Uttlesford has dropped by 1.9 per cent since part-night lighting started, with incidents occurring between 11.30pm and 5.30am dropping by 12.6 per cent.

New appeal over village post office

AS Little Hallingbury post office gets ready to reopen on Monday, it has emerged that a rescue plan is under way for Henham's branch.

Last month, villagers in Little Hallingbury volunteered to staff a community shop-cum-post office and parish council chairman Sue Meyer said this week it would open its doors on November 24, the second under a deal Essex County Council has thrashed out with Post Office Ltd.

Meanwhile, local county councillor Ray Gooding has put his stamp of authority on rescuing Henham's sub-post office.

Following the reopening of a counter at Buckhurst Hill, the Tory, who represents the village, said the parish's plight should now be top of Essex's agenda. On July 1, the outlet at Henham's volunteer-run community store fell prey to Post Office Ltd's most recent round of cuts.



LAP OF LUXURY: The £6m Dunmow house, above, is rumoured to have attracted pop star Leona Lewis, left

Does home have the X Factor?



SILVER SCREEN: The cinema room



PALATIAL: A dining room



SPLASH OUT: The swimming pool

CHART-topper Leona Lewis this week denied speculation that a luxury farmhouse near Dunmow has the X Factor as her £6m new home.

The four-year-old property at Philpot End is certainly fit for a pop princess, with 11 bedrooms, a minstrel gallery, games and separate snooker room, a home cinema, home office and orangery as well as a detached barn cottage, indoor swimming pool, tennis court, stables and kennels.

An **Observer** source linked the singing star to the Mountains Farm mansion, which stands in 6.2 acres.

But on Monday, a Modest! Management spokesman for 23-year-old Miss Lewis, who has made much of her humble Hackney roots, said there was "no truth" in the claim.

In fact, the down-to-earth diva, who first found fame as the 2006 winner of ITV's X Factor talent contest, has recently given interviews claiming to have bought the flat in her east London home town that she rented with boyfriend Lou Al-Chamaa before hitting the big time.

The mansion, with a guide price of £6m, is on the market with the

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Chelmsford office of estate agent Savills.

The particulars claim: "Mountains Farm enjoys an unrivalled valley setting situated in glorious rolling Essex countryside."

Ms Lewis has been staying in Los Angeles after her first album, *Spirit*, debuted at No 1 in the Billboard charts, but has been adamant about not making a permanent move to America.

As befits a jet-setter's home, Mountains Farm is within a 10-minute drive of Stansted Airport, and potential buyers of the "substantial and superbly proportioned" house are enticed by the promise of a good range of shops and country pubs in Dunmow, just 2½ miles away.

Savills was tight-lipped about any showbusiness interest and refused to confirm or deny the rumours.

Agent Stephen White, who is handling the sale, said: "We can say that it hasn't been sold. There has been interest but we cannot disclose the names of any potential purchaser."



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