

Questions and Answers

Health impacts of air pollution

Why do you need to tackle local roadside air pollution? What's the issue?

As air quality in the area exceeds national safe limits, we have a legal obligation to make it compliant as soon as possible.

Public Health England has identified poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health.

Around 40,000 deaths a year in the UK are attributable to outdoor air pollution - which has been linked to cancer, asthma, stroke and heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and changes linked to dementia. The health problems resulting from exposure to air pollution cost the UK more than £20 billion every year (source: 'Every breath we take – the lifelong impact of air pollution' Royal College of Physicians, and of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2016)

The Air Quality Management Source Centre note that the health impacts of air quality in the UK are almost twice those of physical inactivity.

Why the A127?

Is this section of the A127 the only area where air quality is an issue?

Air Quality is a problem across many areas of the UK and is not unique to the A127 in Essex. However, the A127 is a key through road for many businesses and vehicles, and the congestion issues, particularly at junctions around the Basildon area of the A127, exacerbate the air quality problems.

How was this section of the A127 identified as having poor air quality?

Three locations along the A127 route in Basildon Borough and Rochford District were identified by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Pollution Climate Mapping (PCM) model in 2017 as likely to be exceeding national air quality thresholds which is why it is being tackled as a priority area.

We did further testing in April 2018, which found that no exceedances were identified in Rochford District. However, a section of the A127 north of Basildon was identified as exceeding national air quality thresholds and additional exceedances were identified to the south of the A127.

Speed limit changes

Why are you introducing a speed limit change? What difference will it make?

Reducing speeds from 70mph to 50mph can reduce harmful nitrogen oxide emissions from car exhausts by up to 20 per cent, as well as improving road safety and journey time reliability

When will the speed limits be introduced?

We are proposing to implement the new speed limit by March 2020

How will the speed limit be enforced?

By average speed cameras, operated by the Safer Essex Roads Partnership.

What are you doing about the air quality exceedances to the south of the A127?

The 50mph speed limit reduction proposal deals with the exceedances identified on the A127. Other exceedances have since been identified in parts of the business area to the south of it and a separate package of measures is being considered to tackle these. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has directed Basildon Borough Council and Essex County Council to carry out Traffic, Air Quality and Economic Modelling for a Clean Air Zone or other restrictions that could bring the areas of exceedance into compliance in the shortest possible time. Work on that is ongoing.

In peak hours traffic often travels at less than 50 mph. How will cutting the speed limit to 50 mph help?

Pollution is measured over an annual period and takes into account pollution from traffic at all times of the day, not just during peak times. Overall, the best way to tackle the air pollution issue on the A127 to the north of Basildon is to reduce the speed limit.

If the pollution is being caused by queuing traffic, why can't the speed limit remain at 70mph at off peak times?

Vehicles travelling at 50mph produce up to 20 per cent less Nitrogen Dioxide pollution from their exhausts than vehicles travelling at 70mph. That helps improve overall air quality, regardless of the time of day or what the traffic conditions are.

Why are you using average speed cameras to enforce the limit?

We are using average speed cameras as they have been proven to be very effective in reducing the speed of vehicles.

The traffic goes slower than 50 mph in peak time so how will reducing the speed limit help?

Vehicles' engines work most efficiently at around 50mph; vehicles driving below 50mph and above 55mph produce more emissions from their exhausts. While traffic is often slower than 50mph at peak times, having a consistently lower speed limit helps to improve journey time reliability by smoothing the traffic flow, because it reduces the number of times vehicles have to stop and start again. This in turn reduces the time traffic is stationary or moving slowly in queues, and has an air quality benefit as vehicles' engines emit the most NO₂ emissions when they are switched on but not moving or moving slowly (that is why it is so important not to leave your engine running when you are parked).

Why can't we have a variable speed limit and go faster at night?

Vehicles' engines work most efficiently at around 50mph – vehicles driving below 50mph and above 55mph produce more emissions from their exhausts. This means maintaining a speed of 50mph is better for the environment and the air we breathe regardless of the time that vehicles are travelling.

Changing travel behaviour

Essex County Council, as the Local Highway Authority, has a number of projects to help reduce pollution and encourage people to consider swapping some of their car journeys to cycling, walking or public transport, especially for short trips.

What can I do to help reduce roadside air quality in Essex?

- Consider swapping some of your car journeys to cycling, walking or public transport, especially for short journeys.
- Switch your engine off when stationary
- Consider a hybrid or electric vehicle when replacing your car.

I can't swap some of my journeys. How can I drive in a more environmentally friendly way?

- Check your tyres are at the correct pressure
- Clear out any extra weight from your car, including unused roof racks or roof boxes
- Have your vehicle serviced regularly

While driving:

- Drive at an appropriate speed
- Speed up and slow down smoothly
- Change gears at lower revs
- Avoid leaving your engine running
- Don't use air conditioning unless you really need it

Will there be a charge to use the A127?

No. We do not have any plans to introduce charges for drivers to use the A127.

Further Information

Can you improve the Fortune of War junction instead?

We have been instructed by government to improve air quality on the A127 (to the north of Basildon) to within safe levels for NO₂ as quickly as possible. The quickest way to do that is to reduce the speed limit on that section of road from 70mph to 50mph, as reductions in speed limit can cut harmful nitrogen dioxide emissions from vehicle exhausts by 20 per cent. Further improvements to the A127, which could include changes to the Fortune of War junction, are being considered by Essex

County Council as part of their longer-term work to manage traffic across South Essex. A task force of district, borough and county members, along with local MPs, has been set up to look at this. Further information can be found at: www.a127.co.uk

Why can't you add more lanes on the A127 or build a new road from Southend to London?

South Essex's local authorities are working together to agree what new roads, improvements to existing routes and public transport options will be necessary to meet the planned housing, population and job growth for the area. This is in addition to the work currently underway to look at the long-term vision for the A127 and its surrounding roads. Further information can be found at: www.a127.co.uk

How will local roads cope with the thousands of new homes that need to be built?

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Why not ban HGVs during peak times?

Banning HGVs during the day would not have a sufficient impact on NO2 levels on the A127. More than 75 per cent of all HGVs using the A127 already have Euro 6 engines (which meet TfL's ULEZ requirements). As HGVs are vital to maintain the economy of our area, and for supporting local jobs, it is more effective to encourage more companies to join those who have already upgraded their vehicles to Euro 6 engines.

Will you be seeking funding for long term improvements to the A127?

Yes. Funding applications to government will be a vital part of our work to develop the long-term vision for the A127 Economic Growth Corridor.