

Release issued in partnership by Essex County Council and Basildon Council

New safer, greener, healthier 20mph speed limits for busy Wickford and Billericay shopping areas introduced from 22 June

Some new interim, signed 20mph speed limits on roads in busy shopping areas of Wickford and Billericay are being put in place starting from Monday 22 June.

In Billericay a 20mph zone will extend along the B1007 High St, from its junction with Sun Street/A129 London Road, northwards to its junction with Norsey Road/Western Road.

In Wickford, a 20mph zone will extend along High St, from its junction with A129 London Road, northwards to its junction with Wickford Station access road.

Working together, and adding to public safety measures introduced elsewhere, Essex County Council and Basildon Council are introducing these speed limits as part of the continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide a 'Safer, Greener, Healthier' environment for shoppers and other pedestrians and cyclists.

The new lower speed limits aim to encourage people to support their local businesses by increasing pedestrian and cyclist confidence when having to avoid other people, particularly where traffic is passing.

The measures will be monitored to assess their effectiveness and may be tweaked or amended as part of the 'test and learn' approach Essex County Council are using across all the Safer, Greener, Healthier measures being introduced to many towns across the county.

The project is funded by part of the initial £1.9m Emergency Active Travel Fund for Essex announced by the government for such schemes.

The Wickford and Billericay schemes, like others being introduced across the county, are driven by immediate public health requirements such as social distancing, but in encouraging walking and cycling it will enable healthier, more sustainable ways of getting around locally.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health at Essex County Council, explains: "Providing a good environment for the public to practice safe social distancing remains a core part of the measures we need to limit the spread of coronavirus. Helping people to social distance in traditionally busy urban areas will help immediate public safety; it will also make it easier as businesses resume trading.

"Walking and cycling are healthy activities in their own right, they can help to lessen traffic congestion and consequently improve air quality, so these new measures are very supportive of societal demand."

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: "Safety is the reason why we are introducing a 20pmh speed restriction on Billericay and Wickford High Streets.

"We want to keep people safe from COVID-19 infection while they visit the shops and businesses on Billericay and Wickford High Streets and this is how we are going to do it.

"While I recognise many people will still need to use their cars, this is a chance for all to think hard about driving for short journeys. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to greatly improve our air quality and our health as well as the life opportunities for the next generation.

"Wickford and Billericay are among the first towns in Essex to get such schemes, we're using this money to help people confidently return to shop and work, as lockdown measures continue to be carefully eased."

Councillor Gavin Callaghan, Leader of Basildon Council, said: "In these extraordinary times anything that we can do to help pedestrians maintain social distancing and remain safe from traffic – all while supporting and stimulating our High Streets – is a big win.

"This trial will help balance the needs of many people and ease our way back into a new normal. Basildon Council is dedicated to finding solutions that work for Billericay and Wickford residents and that keep our borough strong – and this is a great example of cooperation between residents, retailers and the councils.

"We have been holding regular Zoom meetings with local retailers and they are a good way for us to review how these changes are working.

"We remain committed to fully pedestrianising Wickford High Street at weekends and hope this is something that comes out of this period of review."

The total money that could be made available to Essex by the Government if further plans are approved is up to £9.6m.

People can share comments on the measures with Essex and Basildon Councils at SGH.Routes@essex.gov.uk

See more about the Safer, Greener, Healthier measures on Essex Highways' website at: www.essex.gov.uk/safer-greener-healthier