



How Essex Changed the System to Tackle Cycling Inactivity

Residents in Clacton and Jaywick, are the first to benefit from a new £2.3m community-based cycling project led by Essex County Council and Active Essex Local Delivery Pilot. The 'Essex Pedal Power' project is the first of its kind in the county, aiming to level up the cycling landscape and to tackle cycling inequality. At the heart of the project, is a desire to tackle the inequalities that mean only 3% of people in Essex cycle regularly. Most of these male and affluent. The Essex bid for £2.3m to GBF was boosted by an additional £405,000 investment from the Active Essex LDP, creating a total investment of £2.705m.

Essex Pedal Power comes following an intense but successful bid for funding in October 2020. As part of the Government's investment to tackle the worst effects of COVID-19, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government announced a £900m Get Building Fund (GBF) last year to deliver jobs, skills and infrastructure across the country. The investment was targeted at areas facing the biggest economic challenges as a result of the pandemic. The fund was managed by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, with a focus on local economic growth, recovery, and jobs.

Essex County Council took this opportunity to secure much needed investment for Clacton-on-Sea and Jaywick Sands. Clacton has a population of 55,000 and Jaywick just over 5,000. The two neighbouring coastal areas have endured years of coastal deprivation since their more prosperous days as thriving seaside resorts. Today, Jaywick Sands is listed as the most deprived area in England, however it boasts a huge amount of pride and togetherness amongst the local community.

A new dedicated cycling route that will join Jaywick and Clacton, a distance of 3 miles, is in the works. Importantly for the people of Jaywick, the cycle lane would stretch all the way to Clacton train station, opening up opportunities to get to work or education. Similarly, the cycle lane would open up easy cycling access along the beautiful coastline from Clacton to Jaywick, bringing much needed new customers for Jaywick's local shops and businesses.

The Essex Pedal Power project will oversee investment into Jaywick's cycling infrastructure, along with at least £600,000 to provide an initial 1,600 bikes to residents who don't currently own a bike, are inactive and live in the correct postcode.



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The Active Essex LDP is one of twelve pilots in England testing new ways to tackle high levels of physical inactivity in deprived areas. Another LDP in Birmingham, run by The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS), had been running a free bikes scheme for several years called Big Birmingham Bikes. They have distributed over 7,000 free bikes to inactive people living in disadvantaged postcodes with huge success. TAWS and the Birmingham LDP have played a crucial role as expert advisers to Essex. The evidence from their scheme made it clear that the biggest barrier by far is the cost of a new quality bike, therefore, the most important way to increase cycling in low-income communities is to gift the bikes to residents. The recipient has to agree to use the bike once a week and look after it and each bike has a GPS tracker to monitor usage and to discourage misuse.

Essex Pedal Power has demonstrated the positive impact of bringing different systems together. The systems of transport, localities, health, cycling and physical activity have collaborated to co-design an innovative approach to tackling cycling inequality, strengthen communities, and using the bike as a powerful tool to improve health and wellbeing and enable local people to improve their confidence, skills and job opportunities.

Essex Pedal Power will launch officially in Clacton and Jaywick in summer 2021, initially distributing 100 bikes, and then building up to gift another 1,500 bikes over the next two years. There will be comprehensive wrap around support services provided through training of new bike mechanics, learn to ride tutors, and bike ride leaders. New community cycling groups, clubs and hubs are planned, along with a series of community cycling events. There are plans to build a new community all-wheel cycling facility in Jaywick. The long-term plan is to create a fully inclusive cycling community in Jaywick and Clacton, where people of all ages and abilities reap the many benefits that derive from riding a bike. There is a clear aspiration that the initial infrastructure and free bikes programme in Clacton and Jaywick will be scaled up to other parts of Essex in the future.

For further information about Essex Pedal Power, please contact Kerry McDonald at Active Essex (Kerry.McDonald@activeessex.org)