



Report to High Wycombe Community Board

Date: 9th February 2022

Title: Petition Report: High Wycombe Air Quality

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Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations: That the Community Board considers the petition, notes this report, and determines whether it wishes to suggest amendments to the council's monitoring programme.

It is also suggested that the council works with Defra on inputting into the review of air quality targets which are then expected later in the year, where this petition can also be highlighted.

1 Summary:

The Council has received a petition entitled "Air Quality in High Wycombe". The petition calls for:

- The comprehensive monitoring of all air pollution across High Wycombe particularly in areas around schools and where there is short term exposure to high levels
- The taking of effective actions that will bring all of our town within the safer WHO 2021 levels for air pollution by 2030, following interim targets to achieve this.

This report therefore provides background information on how the council assesses and monitors air quality in line with the governments air quality framework and associated technical guidance.

The council fully supports the goal of reducing air pollution and has a comprehensive network of monitoring and complies with the requirements of government under the local air quality management regime. In addition to the action plans in place, the council has also recently launched a comprehensive climate change and air quality strategy covering the whole county.

2 Background:

In the UK, concentrations of key pollutants in outdoor air are regulated by the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010. These Regulations set: Legally binding limits for concentrations

in outdoor air of major air pollutants that impact public health: sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter (as PM10 and PM2.5), lead, benzene, carbon monoxide and ozone.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for meeting the limit values in England and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) co-ordinates assessment and air quality plans for the UK as a whole.

The Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) process also places an obligation on all local authorities to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas, and to determine whether or not the air quality objectives are likely to be achieved

3 The comprehensive monitoring of all air pollution across High Wycombe particularly in areas around schools and where there is short term exposure to high levels

Buckinghamshire Council (and its legacy councils) have been providing a comprehensive programme of monitoring and assessment across the county for over 20 years. This has also included targeted monitoring in areas that have been modelled to exceed national air quality objectives.

In line with guidance, what initially started as complete monitoring of all prescribed pollutants has been streamlined as certain pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and lead were screened out following many years of being significantly below national air quality limits.

Monitoring of Nitrogen Dioxide using both passive diffusion tubes and chemiluminescent monitors, at 57 sites, is undertaken in the Wycombe area. The council monitors to ascertain compliance with the current National Air Quality Objectives. They are;

NO₂: 40 µg/m³ annual mean

NO₂: 200 µg/m³ (one-hour mean) not to be exceeded more than 18 times a year

PM₁₀: 40 µg/m³ annual mean

PM₁₀: 50 µg/m³ (24-hour mean) not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year

PM_{2.5}: Work towards reducing emissions/concentrations of fine particulate matter

Monitoring locations are chosen based on the parameters in the LAQM Technical Guidance. As road traffic is the main source of pollutants factors that have been considered when identifying locations are as follows:

- Annual Average Daily Flow of Traffic
- Proximity of sensitive receptors such as schools and residential units to busy roads.
- Places where people spend an hour or more such as shopping streets and outdoor seating for cafes/restaurants

The location of monitoring sites is reviewed on an annual basis. Sites that are found to be significantly below national air quality objectives are often removed and are replaced by sites that are in areas that are expected to be close to those same objectives.

Air Quality modelling was also conducted in 2017 in order to determine where emission levels were exceeding national air quality objectives. This modelling was used to determine the extent of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) that were adopted in Wycombe, Marlow and along the M40 in late 2017.

The only school site that was found to be in an area that exceeded national air quality objectives is the accommodation block of Wycombe Abbey School that are positioned alongside Marlow Hill.

Monitoring data collected by the real-time chemiluminescent continuous monitors can be found through the following link https://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/local-authority/?la_id=513

The continuous monitors are located in Wycombe Abbey School (alongside Marlow Hill) and in Stokenchurch (alongside the M40).

The most recent 2021 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), which includes monitoring locations and results from both the continuous monitor and passive diffusion tubes, can be found through the following link: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/environment/air-and-water-quality/air-quality-status-report-2021/>

4 The taking of effective actions that will bring all of our town within the safer WHO 2021 levels for air pollution by 2030, following interim targets to achieve this.

The LAQM review and assessment process obliges Local Authorities who have identified areas that breach the Air Quality Objectives to put plans in place to reduce pollutant concentrations to below those objective as quickly as possible. Wycombe's Air Quality Action plan was published in 2018 and can be found at:

<https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Environment/Air-pollution/Air-quality-management.aspx>

The council has made significant progress with the actions contained in the air quality plan. For example:

- Working closely with Planning colleagues to produce the Wycombe Air Quality Supplementary Planning document which, amongst other things, requires electric vehicle charging points for all new dwellings and non-residential premises, as well as air quality assessments and air quality damage cost contributions for all major developments.
- No unattended roadworks or refuse collections are permitted in any air quality management areas (AQMA) during peak traffic hours.
- The use of generators within the AQMAs or the town centre are no longer permitted.
- Collaboration with Transport for Bucks to introduce smart traffic management along the A40.
- Public transport has been made more attractive by the introduction of card payment facilities and joint ticketing schemes (where tickets can be used across multiple operators).
- All schools have been encouraged to adopt green travel plans.

In November 2021 the UK Government enacted the Environment Act 2021 which will, among other things, enable the following: It introduces a duty on the government to bring forward at least two air quality targets by October 2022 for consultation that will be set in secondary legislation.

The first will aim to reduce the annual average level of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in ambient air. The second will be a long-term target (set a minimum of 15 years in the future), which the government says “will encourage long-term investment and provide certainty for businesses and other stakeholders”.

The new legislation amends the Environment Act 1995 to “strengthen the local air quality management (LAQM) framework to enable greater cooperation at local level and broaden the range of organisations that play a role in improving local air quality”, says Defra. “Responsibility for tackling local air pollution will now be shared with designated relevant public authorities, all tiers of local government and neighbouring authorities.” The environment secretary will be required to review the Air Quality Strategy at least every five years, and to publish an annual progress report to parliament.

Although there was a reluctance to include the new WHO guidelines in the Environment Act 2021, the new targets may be lower than the current limits and, as a consequence of lobbying from several groups, there is a possibility that the WHO guidelines or similar may be adopted as a long term target.

The magnitude of the task to achieve the WHO guideline of 10 µg/m³ annual mean for Nitrogen Dioxide was demonstrated by the recent Covid -19 pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. The effect of reduced car journeys and business activity had an approximately 30% reduction in monitored pollutant levels nationally.

It is therefore important that the national framework is amended in order to facilitate the delivery of further local actions.

5 Next steps:

It is recommended that the High Wycombe Community Board note this report, the existing statutory regime in place to review and assess air quality, the action plan and the current network of monitoring undertaken.

It is also important to note that the council recognises and welcomes the interest from residents and businesses as everyone has a part to play in tackling air pollution.

As a result of the petition, it is also recommended that the council work with Defra on inputting into the review of air quality targets which are then expected later in the year, where this petition can also be highlighted.