

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY
3 SEPTEMBER 2013

EXECUTIVE
17 SEPTEMBER 2013

LOCAL AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT
AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2011-2016
AND
2013 AIR QUALITY PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the council's duties relating to local air quality management and work being conducted on a Low Emissions Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Environment Act 1995 – Part IV requires Local Authorities to periodically undertake a review and assessment of air quality in their area.
- 2.2 This process involves assessing current levels of pollution and comparing those levels with the relevant standards.
- 2.3 The pollution standards and objectives for the review and assessment process are now formalised in the Air Quality Regulations 2000 and (Amendment) Regulations 2002. The air quality objectives are derived from air quality standards based upon the best available medical and scientific understanding of the effect of individual pollutants on health. The standards are concentrations below which significant risk to public health are unlikely to occur
- 2.4 Exeter City Council declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2007 (amended 2011) because levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) exceeded government objective levels at various locations. The area covers all of the main traffic routes in the city. This boundary was determined using the NO₂ concentration data, which are highest beside busy roads. Further studies showed that the high NO₂ concentrations are caused by traffic emissions along congested routes.
- 2.5 The 2013 Air Quality Progress Report can be viewed following the link below:
<http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4292&listid=4261>

3. AIR QUALITY ACTION PLANS

- 3.1 Local Authorities are obliged, where an Air Quality Management Area has been declared, to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). This should identify and explain measures that will work towards resolving the exceedence of the air quality objective(s). Exeter's first Air Quality Action Plan covered the period 2008-2011 and drew heavily from the Devon County Council Second Local Transport Plan (2006-2011) in order to reduce traffic emissions.
- 3.2 With the replacement of the Second Local Transport Plan in 2012, the Air Quality Action Plan also required updating. The measures within the new plan had to be proportionate to the funding and resources available and acknowledge the significant upward pressures on NO₂ emissions which will result from proposed development in

the greater Exeter area. In recognition of this, the second Air Quality Action Plan sets four key objectives:-

- To describe the impact of predicted growth and existing plans on NO₂ concentrations within the Air Quality Management Area.
- To identify where further improvements are required, how these could be achieved and where multiple benefits can be realised.
- To provide a process for assessing the air quality aspect of the sustainability of future plans and policies.
- To provide tools to engage local communities in air quality issues alongside wider sustainability issues.

3.4 The second Plan identifies that current plans and policies will have a low positive impact on air quality, although it is accepted that there is some uncertainty associated with this. This is a modest predicted change, but should be set against the background of significant development in the city and therefore significant upward pressure on emissions.

3.5 The second Air Quality Action Plan also proposes three areas of further work. These are the development of a Low Emissions Strategy and feasibility study for a Low Emissions Zone, the development of closer links between air quality and climate change work, and the need to increase understanding of the health impacts of poor air quality. Programs of work in these areas will connect air quality to two key national and local policy imperatives; the low carbon agenda and the creation of local Health and Wellbeing Boards.

3.6 There will be an annual Air Quality Action Plan Progress Report published to advise progress in meeting the second Air Quality Action Plan. Subsequent annual reports will summarise data on the air quality change over the previous year, as well as a series of other key indicators such as the use of sustainable travel modes, car use, completion of developments etc.

4. 2013 AIR QUALITY PROGRESS REPORT

4.1 The 2013 Air Quality Progress Report is a review of 2012 monitoring data which shows that there are no exceedences of the objective levels outside the Air Quality Management Area. In fact there is some evidence for a reduction in NO₂ concentrations, however it is not clear whether this is the start of a long-term trend or simply inter-annual variability as a result of changes in weather etc. As a result, it was decided to maintain the current Air Quality Management Area boundary, although the situation will be kept under review.

4.2 The report identified an increase in SO₂ concentrations in the past year, although the concentrations are well below the objective levels, and do not raise cause for concern. This situation will be kept under review in future years.

4.3 The Progress Report also summarises information on potential new sources of local air pollution. Fortunately, no developments were granted planning permission which required mitigation for adverse air quality impacts during 2012.

5. LOW EMISSIONS STRATEGY (LES)

5.1 The Council was successful in obtaining a DEFRA grant for establishing a Low Emission Strategy to identify and implement measures that will reduce transport emissions of nitrous oxides (NO_x) and contribute towards meeting the EU limit values for NO₂, whilst also reducing emissions of particulates, noise and carbon dioxide

(CO₂). The project will be completed within 18 months from commencement and has the following strategic aims:

- a) To integrate low emission strategies into mainstream policy development for transport and planning within Exeter and to influence policy in the greater Exeter area.
- b) To reduce emissions from the Council-owned fleet and grey fleet, including by increased uptake of low emission vehicles.
- c) To work with partners in the private and public sectors to increase the uptake of sustainable transport choices, including low emission vehicles within the greater Exeter area.

5.2 The Council will appoint a suitably experienced and capable consultant with the aim to commence the project in October 2013 with completion by March 2015. The main project aims are contained in Appendix I.

5.4 In order to develop a successful Low Emissions Strategy it needs to involve, consult and work with a range of stakeholders, including locally based businesses and residents to engage them in contributing to sustainable transport decisions.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Air quality in Exeter is currently stable or possibly improving and the Air Quality Management Area boundaries remain appropriate at this stage. The second Air Quality Action Plan is in place and contains measures which will work towards improved air quality, in the context of delivering sustainable development. The Low Emissions Strategy will be important in achieving this, and in fostering effective partnerships with business, community and Devon County Council. The Action plan also aims to make connections between air quality, carbon and public health policy.

7. RESOURCE AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The second Air Quality Action Plan and management of the Low Emissions Strategy project will be delivered within existing resources. Funding has been successfully bid for and obtained from DEFRA for the delivery of the Low Emissions Strategy.

8. RECOMMENDED

That Executive and Scrutiny Committee – Community:

- 1) note the progress on the Air Quality Action Plan; and
- 2) support the development of a Low Emissions Strategy to fulfil air quality objectives.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT

ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- 1) Exeter Air Quality Action Plan

- 2) 2013 Air Quality Action Plan Progress Report
- 3) 2013 Air Quality Progress Report
- 4) Air Quality Strategy for England – DEFRA
- 5) Air Quality Regulations 2000 and (Amendment) Regulations 2002
- 6) Local Air Quality Management – Technical Guidance – DEFRA
- 7) Local Air Quality Management – Policy Guidance – DEFRA

Appendix I

Objectives for Low Emissions Strategy

There are 3 main project objectives:

1. **To develop an evidence base** for emissions and their impacts for an agreed base year, and evaluate the effects of planned development and current transport policy (as defined in Exeter's Core Strategy and Devon County Council's Local Transport Plan documents).
2. **To engage with Devon County Council, local employers, communities and other partners** within Exeter City Council in order to:
 - a. Establish a steering group and separate stakeholder group.
 - b. Promote potential benefits to stakeholders and nurture partnership working to realise successful outcomes.
 - c. Identify implementation barriers and opportunities to strengthen public awareness of the impact of poor air quality on health and the benefits of sustainable transport options. This will include a review of case studies, developing a local best practice guide, creating partnerships and developing links with community and business groups in order to engage with local communities in making sustainable transport decisions.
 - d. Work with the steering and stakeholder groups to identify viable sustainable transport options, based on the emissions evidence, which could be promoted amongst specific vehicle groups.
 - e. Identify the potential options for a Low Emissions Zone, including the geographic extent, scope and regulatory options for implementation and enforcement. Select a range of Low Emissions Zone options with the steering group for further investigation.
 - f. Quantify the relative socio-economic impacts, barriers, costs and effectiveness (in terms of noise, carbon and local air pollution emissions) of the options identified in steps (d) and (e). Report on the findings of this assessment, cataloguing the decision-making process and supporting information.
 - g. Obtain commitment from employers to take measurable steps to reduce their transport emissions. A target will be set to gain commitments from a specified number of businesses in conjunction with the Devon County Council Sustainable Transport Team who have experience in this area.
3. **Work with partners**, to develop, consult upon and publish a Low Emissions Strategy for the city. This will include stretched but realistic targets for reductions in emissions, and programs of measures which will achieve these (possibly including an Low Emissions Zone, depending on the outcomes of the assessment above).