



**South
Cambridgeshire
District Council**

REPORT TO: Climate Change and Environment Committee 20th September 2018
LEAD OFFICER: Mike Hill, Director of Health and Environmental Services

2018 Draft Air Quality Strategy Briefing Note

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to present Members of the Climate and Environment Committee with the current draft of the Council's developing 2018 Air Quality Strategy (the Strategy), attached as Appendix 1, for review and comment.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - i) The Climate Change and Environment Committee endorse the new approach to local air quality proposed by the Strategy and outlined in paragraph 11.
 - ii) That the Strategy is further developed, incorporating the Committees comments, and a final draft presented to the next meeting of the Committee, together with a SMART Workplan to deliver the Strategy.

Background

3. The Council's current 2008 Air Quality Strategy has focused primarily on monitoring the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) around the A14 against national objectives for NOX and PM10 particulates. Within this AQMA no exceedances of national objectives have been recorded over recent years and the long awaited upgrade to the A14 is now well underway.
4. Previous district-wide modelling indicated that national objectives, particularly associated with particulates, were unlikely to be exceeded elsewhere and as a result the Council's district-wide air quality network has focused on diffusion tube monitoring for NOx at various locations throughout the district, rather than particulates.
5. A key challenge for the Council has been how to balance the need for sustainable growth with the need to protect the environment, and particularly local air quality, given that, at present time, there are no safe thresholds for many air pollutants, and exposure to any level imposes a health risk to the public,
6. To date, the use of the planning system and appropriate planning conditions has been the Council's primary tool for controlling adverse impacts of major developments on local air quality.

7. However, it is recognised that implementing measures which will actually deliver improvements or mitigate impacts in relation to local air quality are often intangible and difficult to achieve and demonstrate, particularly on major new developments where local planning policies do not categorically state what measures will be required unless national objectives are threatened.

Considerations

8. Many of the new major developments throughout the district, when subject to detailed modelling, have not predicted any significant exceedances of national air quality objectives, primarily because they are being built in rural background areas where current pollution levels are low. This has the potential of effectively allowing a worsening of air quality with action only being taken where national objectives are threatened.
9. Given the high rate of growth throughout the District, the cumulative effect of multiple large concurrent developments could lead to a deterioration of local air quality in the district even though that may not be immediately apparent when looking at modelled forecasts for individual sites, particularly as many of the developments are at outline or pre-application stage. This could impose a health risk to the district's residents.
10. It should be noted that a number of existing and planned developments are cross border straddling South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City. Developments in South Cambridgeshire have the ability to indirectly affect the air quality in Cambridge City, for example South Cambridgeshire residents driving into Cambridge City – air pollution does not respect council boundaries. While cross border discussions between Councils to adapt common positions are well established, it is essential that these are continued and developed further, for example, through development of the Greater Cambridgeshire Air Quality Strategy to complement the proposed Greater Cambridgeshire Local Plan.
11. In recognising the weaknesses of the current approach i.e. the focus on monitoring against exceedances of national objectives, the primary emphasis on the A14 AQMA, the use of planning conditions that do not always demonstrate tangible benefits, a new draft Air Quality Strategy is being developed, which seeks to address these principally by:
 - Seeking to maintain and, wherever possible, improve local air quality throughout the District, rather than focussing on exceedances of national objectives.
 - Adopting a Whole District, rather than AQMA centric, approach to local air quality, particularly in relation to particulates.
 - Constructively using the planning system, in particular the Local Plan process, Supplementary Planning Documents and objective planning conditions using a newly developed and innovative 'Local Air Quality Requirements in South Cambridgeshire'.
 - Continue to strengthen cooperation with Cambridge City Council in all air quality related matters of mutual concern.

12. The 'Local Air Quality Requirements' is a points-based incentive standard intended to encourage the inclusion of low emission measures in all developments. It is intended to inform developers and residents alike, in non-technical language, of the Council's requirements in order to prevent or mitigate the impacts on local air quality resulting from any new developments.

Conclusions

13. With the scale of growth throughout the district there is a need to address the local air quality challenges posed by the cumulative effect of development.
14. The Council's current focus on the A14 AQMA and on exceedances of national air quality objectives will not address this cumulative effect and could effectively allow a worsening of local air quality in the district. Although unlikely to result in exceedances of national objectives this worsening could nonetheless impose a health risk to the district's residents.
15. The draft 2018 Air Quality Strategy seeks to address these air quality challenges by seeking to maintain and, wherever possible, improve local air quality throughout the whole district, rather than focussing on exceedances of national objectives, via a range of mechanisms, principally the constructive use of the planning system and a newly developed and innovative Local Air Quality Requirements.

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