

TITLE OF REPORT: AIR QUALITY IN HITCHIN**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION****1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on air quality and advise on work being done with a view to declaration of an air quality management area at a location in Hitchin.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and therefore is not referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Good air quality is critical to public health; without clean air, people are more likely to become ill and, in extreme cases, continued exposure to air pollution can cause premature deaths. Good air quality is also important to animals and plants, and particularly for livestock and food produce that will ultimately enter the foodchain.
- 3.2 The Government has a National Air Quality Strategy and has set standards for the different pollutants of concern. Local authorities are required to monitor air pollution levels in their area and submit annual progress reports to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). If the measured levels are found to exceed the published air quality standards, local councils have a duty to identify the areas affected by declaring an air quality management area and to consider how improvements to air quality might be achieved.
- 3.3 There are seven pollutants that local councils have to assess, although in many areas, only two are found to be a significant cause for concern. These are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀). The main sources of NO₂ are road transport followed by the electrical and industrial sectors. The main sources of PM₁₀ are the burning of fuel in homes and businesses, and transport. Both pollutants can cause a range of health effects but are particularly linked to the incidence of respiratory illness.
- 3.4 The air quality objective for NO₂ is that the annual mean should not exceed 40µg/m³ and the 1 hour mean should not exceed 200µg/m³ more than 18 times a year.
- 3.5 The Council has continuous monitoring stations at sites in Hitchin and Baldock and a range of passive sampling tubes for measuring NO₂ at a number of different sites across the District. The monitoring is focussed on areas where there could be long term exposure to high levels of air pollution by residents.

- 3.6 The Council publishes information about the monitoring that it undertakes and the reports that it has to send to the Government on the Council's website www.north-herts.gov.uk. The results of the monitoring are published on a site that is shared with other councils in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire www.hertsbedsair.net.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 As would be expected in what is a largely rural district, in most areas of North Hertfordshire air quality is good. However, there are some locations where pollution levels can be quite high. These are generally associated with roads where there is a lot of traffic.
- 4.2 In Hitchin, the monitoring that the Council has undertaken east of the Three Moorhens PH roundabout along Stevenage Road (A602) has shown that there is a zone where the level of NO₂ is above the accepted air quality standard. The three diffusion tubes and the automatic NO₂ analyser located in this area all measured annual mean average concentrations above the 40µg/m³ objective and 7 exceedances of the hourly mean objective were also measured. Modelling has also been undertaken that predicted that the annual mean NO₂ objective at a block of flats and two houses located alongside Stevenage Road would be exceeded.
- 4.3 It must be emphasised that there is no immediate public health concern for residents of Stevenage Road. Exposure to moderate levels of air pollution is unlikely to have any serious short term effects. But a breach of the standard does mean that the Council is obliged to accept that there is an issue that needs addressing in order to protect environmental quality.
- 4.4 The Council is required to designate an air quality management area in the affected location along Stevenage Road (see Appendix 1) and then to develop an air quality action plan with a view to implementing measures to achieve the required air quality objectives. A report seeking authority for this designation will be presented to Cabinet on the 19th June 2012.
- 4.5 The action plan will be developed within the year following declaration of the air quality management area, following discussion and consultation with Members, Hertfordshire County Council (in particular Herts Highways), and the community. Further work will be necessary to understand the specific causes of pollution at this location, for example the number of heavy good vehicles using this section of road, and this work will affect the types of measures that will be included in the plan. However, there will be a need to build consensus around the measures that are included, as well as understanding any cost implications. The types of measures that have been included in action plans in other parts of Hertfordshire are listed in Appendix 2.
- 4.6 Monitoring is carried out at other areas within Hitchin but the only location where there is currently concern about air quality objectives being exceeded is in the vicinity of the Payne's Park roundabout. The situation at this location is being kept under regular review.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Part IV Environment Act 1995 places a duty on the Council to review air quality in its area from time to time to assess whether air quality standards and objectives are being achieved. Where standards and objectives are not being achieved, a local authority

must designate an air quality management area. Where such a designation is made, the Authority must prepare an action plan with the aim of achieving the required standards and objectives.

5.2 The relevant sections of the Environment Act 1995 also make provision for the County Council to comment on the proposed action plan. If it disagrees with the proposed plan, it may be referred to the Secretary of State for resolution.

5.3 Under the Council's Constitution, Cabinet is the body designated with responsibility for the declaration of air quality management areas.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with designation of an air quality management area. There may be costs associated with measures proposed in the action plan but it is assumed that any financial implication would be taken into account in developing the action plan.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010. The Act created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a general duty, described in 8.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.

8.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

8.3 There is clear evidence that air pollution can have a serious effect on people's health, ranging from, at its most severe, premature mortality through to a reduction in quality of life. Air pollution can exacerbate the circumstances of those who already have respiratory illness. The young and elderly can be particularly vulnerable to poor air quality, which can be further compounded by atmospheric conditions generally more prevalent in the winter months, such as fog and low cloud. Although the age profile of the population with the proposed air quality management area is not known in detail at present, responses to the letter sent to residents confirm that there are children living in the area affected, which gives additional support for the need for action to be taken.

9. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

9.1 A letter has been sent to occupiers of properties within, and immediately adjacent to, the proposed air quality management area explaining the need for the declaration. At the time that this report was finalised, three responses had been received from residents, asking for further information. Two residents indicated a particular interest because they have children who have respiratory health issues.

- 9.2 A copy of the letter has been sent to Ward Councillors in Hitchin Highbury and Hitchin Priory wards.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That Members note the requirement to declare an air quality management area in Stevenage Road is to be considered by Cabinet on the 19th June 2012 and that, subject to that decision, there will be further consultation on any action plan required.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Council has duties to review and assess air quality in the district, and to act on the outcomes.
- 11.2 The importance of good air quality for the health of the population cannot be understated and the designation of the air quality management area will reinforce the need to ensure appropriate measures are implemented with the aim of meeting air quality standards and objectives.

12. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 12.1 There are no alternative options for the reasons outlined in the report.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 Appendix 1. Map of proposed Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Stevenage Road
- 13.2 Appendix 2. List of measures included in other air quality action plan in Hertfordshire

14. CONTACT OFFICERS

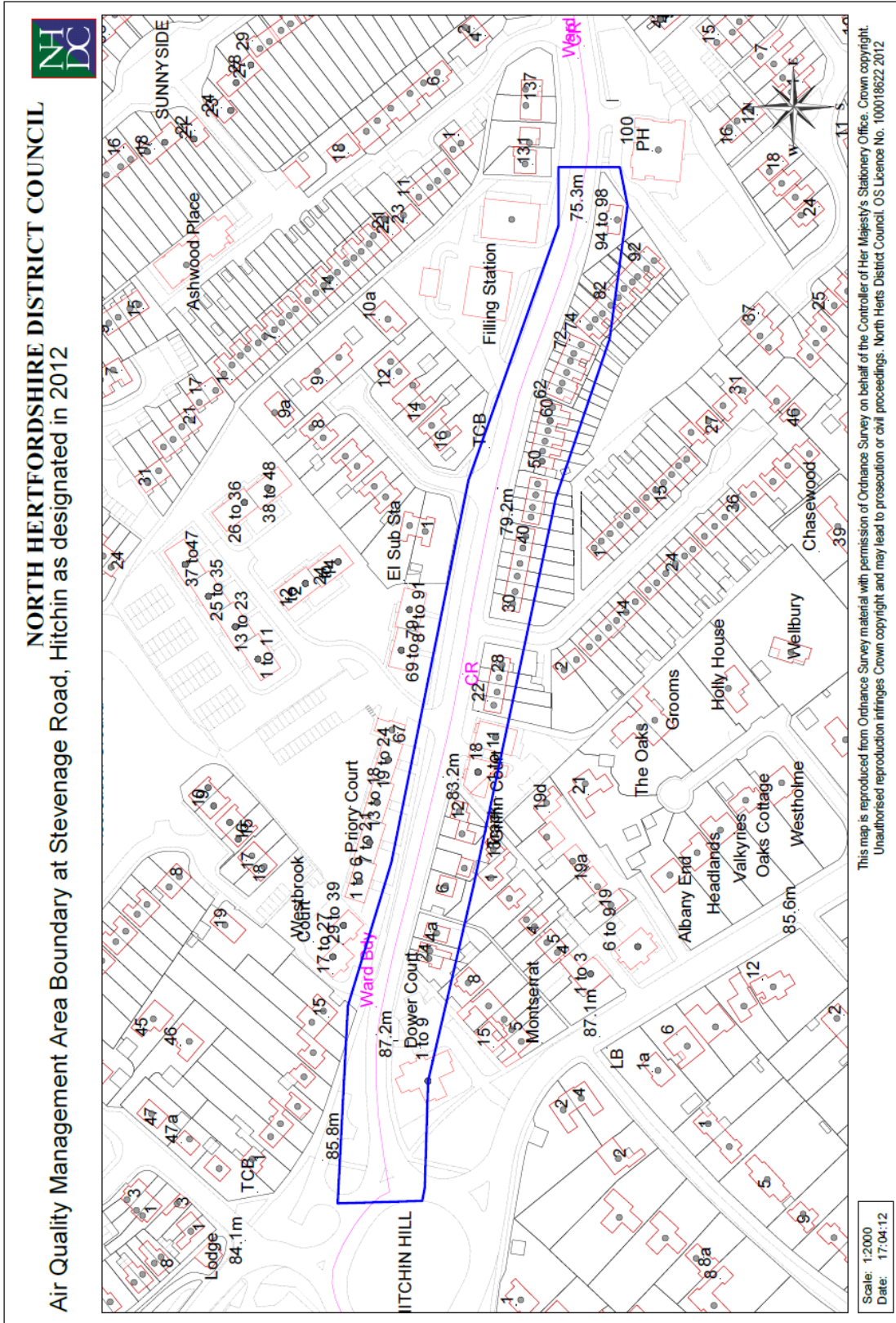
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15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 None

APPENDIX 1. MAP OF PROPOSED AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA



APPENDIX 2. EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS INCLUDED IN OTHER AIR QUALITY ACTIONS PLANS IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Passenger Transport Options

- Investigate the opportunities to improve bus infrastructure along bus routes.
- Investigate the age of buses on routes through each AQMA and encourage operators to introduce highest Euro standard compliant vehicles.
- Investigate the provision of secure cycle parking at railway stations within the vicinity of each AQMA.
- Investigate availability of passenger transport information in the vicinity of each AQMA.

Schools

- Check the status of school travel plans for those schools in the vicinity of each AQMA.
- Investigate safer routes to school schemes for those schools in the vicinity of each AQMA.
- Contact local primary schools with a view to encouraging walking buses.

Cycling

- Investigate cycle parking facilities throughout the towns close to junctions.
- Promote the benefits of cycling.
- Investigate cycling routes within District i.e. what exists, what could be improved.

Walking

- Investigate the quality and provision of footways and pedestrian links in the vicinity of each AQMA.
- Contact local schools to encourage the uptake of 'Streetwise' (child pedestrian skills training).

Signage

- Investigate the provision of signing for cycling at each AQMA.
- Investigate road signage in the vicinity of each AQMA, with consideration to the appropriate routing of through traffic.

Parking

- Investigate the status of on-street parking at each AQMA and determine if parking is contributing to traffic congestion at each junction.

Other initiatives

- Inform local residents of the declaration of the AQMA.
- Encourage the uptake of business travel plans in each area and contact businesses to encourage travel plans.
- Consider the effects of development and where appropriate use section 106 agreements to offset the impact of the development.
- Site specific highway improvements or alterations