

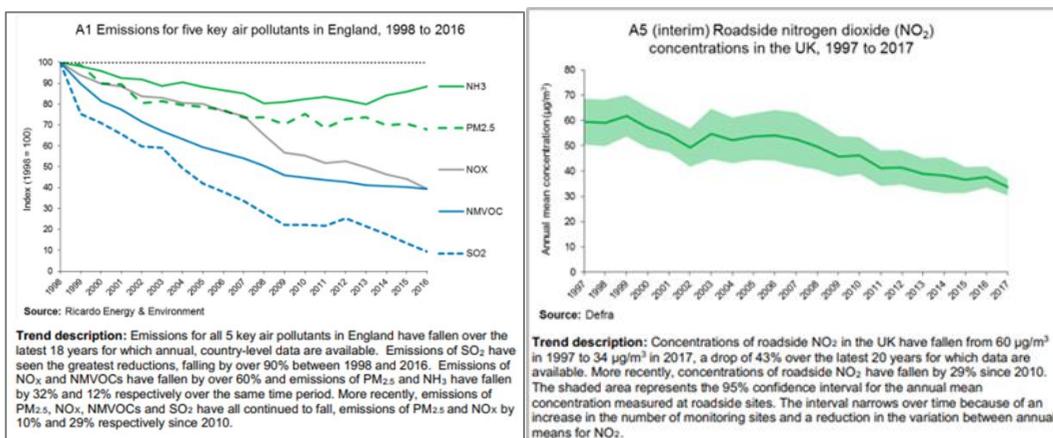
Informative Report on development of a Local Air Quality Strategy

Report Author(s): Frank Harrison

Lucy Tucker

1. Background

- 1.1 This report is provided as an information item, to outline the process required for the development of a Local Air Quality Strategy (LAQS), which will take place following the revocation of the current Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Hitchin, as detailed in the report to Cabinet.
- 1.2 The statutory basis for our work on Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) comes from the Environment Act 1995, which requires Local Authorities to review and assess local air quality and compare pollutant levels against national standards and implementing action plans if objectives are not being met.
- 1.3 For many years the focus for Local Authorities' work on LAQM has been targeted on roadside exceedances for the objectives of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) where significant improvements have taken place. (Particulate matter (PM) refers to that solid matter which has a particulate size in micro-millimetres of the number shown, e.g., PM₁₀ refers to particulates of 10 micro-millimetres.)
- 1.4 The figure below highlights how changes introduced both nationally and locally have led to these improvements in the 5 major air pollutants since 1998.



(Source: [Measuring environmental change - outcome indicator framework for the 25 Year Environment Plan](#))

- 1.5 [LAQM Policy Guidance](#) (DEFRA PG22 para 4.12), states: "Following a revocation, the local authority should put in place a local air quality strategy (paragraph 2.15) to

ensure air quality remains a high-profile issue and to ensure it is able to respond quickly should there be any deterioration in condition.”

- 1.6 Once the AQMAs are revoked, the Council is required to focus their activities on air quality management by developing an LAQS. This document will replace the AQMA Action Plan, carry forward any outstanding measures (as Appendix C1 to this report), and provide a framework for defining further actions as they become necessary within future ASR Reports.
- 1.7 The LAQS is expected to develop an enforcement strategy which prioritises reduction of population exposure, including in areas experiencing disproportionately high levels of pollution.
- 1.8 The driving legislation for the development of the UK Air Quality Strategy (UKAQS) is the Environment Act 2021 which identifies the [AQ Strategy](#) as the mechanism to improve Air Quality. [Part 4 of the AQS](#) refers to Air Quality.
- 1.9 A [policy paper providing a framework for local air quality delivery](#) was issued in 2023, highlighting the approach to developing a LAQS.
- 1.10 The UKAQS needs to be seen within the context of the [25 year Environment Plan](#) where Air Quality is considered alongside managing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, as part of a suite of key Environmental Indicators.
- 1.11 DEFRA has also recently set two new targets, and two new interim targets, for PM_{2.5} concentrations in England for achievement nationally. Exposure to this PM can result in serious impacts to health, especially in vulnerable groups of people such as the young, elderly, and those with respiratory problems.
- 1.12 One set of targets focuses on absolute concentrations of this PM. The long-term target is to achieve an annual mean PM_{2.5} concentration of 10 µg/m³ by the end of 2040 (referred to as the annual mean concentration target or AMCT), with the interim target being a value of 12 µg/m³ by the start of 2028. The second set of targets relate to reducing overall population exposure to PM_{2.5}. By the end of 2040, overall population exposure should be reduced by 35% compared with 2018 levels (referred to as the population exposure reduction target or PERT), with the interim target being a reduction of 22% by the start of 2028.
- 1.13 According to [DEFRA Background Pollution maps](#) issued for Local Authorities, background levels of PM_{2.5} in 2018 range between 9.1 & 11.1 µg/m³. The predicted levels for 2025 ranged between 8.0 and 9.85 µg/m³, thus all areas of North Hertfordshire are predicted to be within the 10 µg/m³ target by the end of 2025, which is already below the Government's 2040 target.
- 1.14 It should be noted that Local Authorities are not under specific regulations for meeting PM_{2.5} targets as part of the statutory LAQM framework, but they are expected to contribute to national PM_{2.5} goals. While there are no regulatory limits for this, the government still expects Local Authorities to use their powers to reduce PM_{2.5} emissions where they have control, and to outline these actions within their LAQS.
- 1.15 The table below shows the key pollutants within current UK Air Quality Regulations, compared to World Health Organisation (WHO) Objectives, highlighting that the new Environmental Targets Regulations only apply to the UK Government and not to Local Authorities. Going forward, a consideration for the Council, is whether to adopt WHO

objectives, in addition to UK LAQM Objectives, as has already been done by some Local Authorities including Greater Cambridge, in their recent [AQS](#).

UK Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010 (Apply to LAQM)					WHO 2021
Pollutant	Averaging Period	Objective $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	Allowed exceedances	Target Date	Objective $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
NO ₂	24hr mean	200	18/year	01/01/2010	N/A
	Annual Mean	40		01/01/2010	10
PM10	24hr mean	50	35/year	31/12/2004	45
	Annual Mean	40		31/12/2004	15
Environmental Targets (PM) Regulations 2023 (Only apply to UK Government to be achieved by 2040, not to Local Authorities)					
PM2.5	Annual Mean	10			5
		35% reduction cw 2018			N/A

1.16 WHO targets are clearly more restrictive than those defined within LAQM and are guidelines that are designed to protect against any significant long term health effects.

1.17 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have a draft AQ Strategy, due to be reviewed in January 2026. The HCC AQ Strategy also includes the WHO AQ Objectives, and proposes the following 5 outcomes:

- Hertfordshire becomes a place where everyone understands the sources and impacts of air pollution.
- Everyone has opportunity to inform decision making and take action to promote healthier air.
- Hertfordshire becomes a place known for healthier air innovation by working with a diverse set of partners.
- A Hertfordshire wide monitoring and modelling network will provide the data required to make local evidence-based decisions.
- Emissions of and exposure to air pollution will be reduced across Hertfordshire with a particular focus where there are added benefits.

2. Air Quality Strategy Development

2.1. It should be noted that the term Local Authority, in the UK Air Quality Strategy Guidance refers both to first tier County Councils & Metropolitan Districts, and second tier District Councils, highlighting the value of joint working.

2.2. Key priorities in UKAQS include reducing emissions from key sources like transport, industrial sites, and domestic burning, by implementing measures such as clean air zones, environmental permitting, and promoting active travel. Authorities must also improve local air quality monitoring and data sharing, strengthen planning processes to prevent pollution from new developments, and increase public awareness through education and engagement.

These priorities can be summarised within key areas

1. Planning
2. Road Transport
3. Industry & Agriculture
4. Collaboration between Air Quality & Climate Change

5. Public Awareness
6. Health Inequalities
7. Domestic Burning
8. Indoor Air Quality

2.3. The LAQS framework focusses on specific areas within a Local Authorities' control as follows (highlighting the division of responsibilities). Local Government Air Quality Responsibilities are summarised in this Government briefing.

2.3.1 **Planning** - The planning system has an important role to play in improving air quality and reducing exposure to air pollution. Both the development of local planning policies and the determination of individual planning applications are important. Currently, relevant new developments assess air quality at the application stage, with reference to local air quality planning guidance. The new PM_{2.5} targets require a different approach from a requirement to assess solely whether a scheme is likely to lead to an exceedance of a legal limit and instead ensures that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented from the design stage. DEFRA have issued interim planning guidance on this matter.

Potential measures

- Review the need for further local planning guidance, and review the existing air quality planning guidance. This could include: a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on air quality to ensure consistency in assessing planning applications and asking for mitigation; incorporating construction dust and air quality in a Housing SPD; ensuring that any future Design Codes include consideration of Air Quality (for example in orientation and layout of developments to reduce exposure, or by incorporating renewable energy sources to reduce emissions).
- Ensure that any future review of the Local Plan fully considers air quality, incorporating policies on air quality and health inequalities.
- Consider preparing guidance for the introduction of Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) for new developments to address health inequalities in the longer term.

2.3.2 **Transport and NRMM (non-road mobile machinery)** – Hertfordshire County Council is the Transport Authority. Shared responsibilities between Local Authorities, National Highways, and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) for reporting non-road mobile machinery manufacturers. Significant initiatives are already in place to reduce emissions from road transport by encouraging modal shift to active travel and public transport alternatives, and promoting less polluting vehicles, developing EV charging infrastructure, and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

Potential measures

- Continue to develop existing measures currently in place between NHC and HCC expressed in LTP4 and the Air Quality Action Plan, by allocation of more funding for public transport and active travel.
- Review taxi licensing policy in North Hertfordshire to promote low emission vehicles
- Liaise with HCC for the enhancement of low emission bus fleets
- Promote further measures for consideration within LTP5, including Clean Air Zones and Low Emission Zones.
- Promote funding for schemes that contribute to the Net Zero targets, increase the value of traffic reduction, active travel and health impacts.
- Incorporation of relevant emission standards for NRMM as part of construction and environment management plans for development in [local planning consents](#)

2.3.3 Industrial Emissions –The regulation of Authorised or Prescribed Processes is a shared responsibility between the Environment Agency and both tiers of local authorities, depending on the type and scale of the installation.

[Register for authorised industrial processes](#)

Potential measures

- When undertaking enforcement activity, focus on areas where exposure is highest, and industrial activities are taking place nearby to, or in, residential areas.
- Consider measures to recover remediation costs where appropriate.
- Where information provided for planning and permitting decisions is similar, it should be aligned

2.3.4 Agriculture – DEFRA is the primary body, with local authorities playing a role where emissions affect specific local areas. The Environment Agency also has a role.

Potential measures

- Publicise UK measures to reduce ammonia emissions
- Respond to consultations on actions to reduce ammonia emissions

2.3.5 Shared Measures between Air Quality and Climate Change - It is now well established that there are undeniable links between emissions that contribute both to poor air quality and impact on climate change. This is well reflected in current UK Environmental Legislation, notably:

The most significant [policies and legislation in recent years](#) include:

- [2021 Net Zero Strategy](#)
- [The Environment Act 2021](#)
- [The Air Quality Strategy 2023](#)

- [2023 UK National Air Pollution Control Programme](#)
- [The 25-year Environment Plan 2023](#)
- [Environmental Targets \(Fine Particulate Matter\) \(England\) Regulations 2023](#)

North Hertfordshire Council have approved a Sustainability Strategy 2025-30 covering a broad range of environmental issues including emissions reduction, climate change adaption and biodiversity. This links with the Council priority of Sustainability outlined in the 2024-2028 Council Plan.

Potential measures

- Full details of the actions the Council has taken to date, and measures it proposes to take are presented in The Sustainability Strategy and its appendices, available on this webpage:

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-strategy>

2.3.6 Public Awareness and Communication - NHC will continue to raise awareness of air quality issues and impacts on health to encourage behavioural change, particularly in relation to choices for transport and domestic burning. We continue to engage with HCC on shared issues through:

- Herts & Bedfordshire Air Quality Forum
- Developing Local Cycling and Walking Plans LCWIP
- Promoting awareness of new EV charging infrastructure
- Participation in National Clean Air Day, and Air Pollution Notification System
- Raise awareness in Schools

Potential measures

- Review and update information on NHC Website
- Develop public consultation for the LAQS

2.3.7 Domestic Burning – shared responsibilities between Local & County Council. District Council for infringements of Smoke Control Area (SCA), including use of authorised (exempt) appliances, and authorised fuels; Under The Clean Air Act 1993 wood cannot be burnt in smoke control areas unless you're using an exempt appliance.

- It is the house owner's responsibility to ensure a [wood burning stove meets current regulations](#). (either by reference to an approved [Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme \(HETAS\)](#) installer, or with reference to a Local Authority Building Control Department).

Potential measures for North Hertfordshire Council

- Keep the boundaries of existing Smoke Control Areas (SCA) under review, especially if development has taken place outside of the boundaries.
- Consider whether it would be beneficial to declare a new Smoke Control Area
- Existing SCAs are shown in Appendix C2 to this Report.

- [Enforce restrictions which apply](#) within those areas. (See [Government Briefing](#) p25)
- Increase public awareness around domestic burning with HCC

Potential measures for County Council:

- Enforce solid fuels regulations by ensuring that fuel being sold for domestic purposes has the “Ready to Burn” logo. Trading Standards should ensure that no retailers are selling coal for indoor domestic burning from 1 May 2023

2.3.8 Indoor Air Quality – dependent upon type of property. Local authorities, as they are responsible for local environmental health and housing standards. Health and Safety Executive playing a role in specific workplace environments.

Damp and mould are key contributors to poor indoor air quality, significantly impacting respiratory health, particularly among vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions. Damp occurs when unwanted moisture enters or remains within a building, often from leaks, condensation, or inadequate ventilation. Mould growth results from sustained damp conditions and releases spores and volatile organic compounds into the indoor environment, exacerbating health risks. Particulate Matter exposures may arise from combustion in open fires and stoves. Chemicals in furniture and upholstery can result in exposures to Non-Methane Volatile Organic Chemicals (NMVOCs).

Potential measures

- Promote increased public education of the significance of indoor air pollution, promoting effective ventilation heating and moisture management.
- Support warm homes initiatives in ventilation improvements
- Promote awareness of health issues around damp and mould

2.4. When considering the specific areas listed above, it is important for the Local Authority to determine an appropriate level of response in proportion to the extent of emissions, their significance in relation to population exposure and subsequent health impacts.

- Consideration should be given to further monitoring for particulate pollution in relation to domestic burning to consider whether further measures are needed.

3. Local Consultation – Who should be involved in the development of the LAQS for North Hertfordshire?

3.1. A LAQS in the UK should involve local authorities (including Environmental Health and Public Health teams), the Environment Agency for industrial sites, neighbouring

local authorities, community groups, residents, and the business and transport sectors. Consultation with these stakeholders is crucial to ensure the strategy addresses local needs, promotes collaboration, and achieves clean air for communities.

- Local Authorities: These are responsible for developing the strategy, assessing local air quality, and implementing the necessary measures.
- Environmental Health: Leads the technical work on air quality and public awareness.
- Public Health: Must be consulted as air pollution significantly impacts public health.
- Transport: Collaboration with transport departments is essential, as transport is a major source of pollution.
- The Environment Agency: Should be involved when large industrial sites or medium combustion plants are causing or contributing to air pollution issues requiring an Air Quality Management Area.
- Neighbouring Authorities: Air pollution does not respect boundaries, so working with nearby local authorities is important for a regional approach.
- Community Groups and Residents: local people and community groups helps build trust, increases understanding of air quality issues, and encourages beneficial behavioural changes like avoiding engine idling or improving home heating.
- Businesses and Transport Sectors: These key sectors are major contributors to air pollution and need to be involved to develop feasible and effective solutions and promote compliance with regulations.

3.2. Liaison will be required with the County Council and neighbouring Districts.

3.3. Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) are in the process of finalising a County Air Quality Strategy, which is due to be going to full council in January 2026, with the appropriate panel meetings due towards the end of 2025. The consultation will start around the end of January and continue until mid-April 2026.

3.4. Thus, the development of the NHC AQS will have to take account of the timeline from HCC.

3.5. Neighbouring Local Authorities, all require to be involved in the consultation process whether they have their own LAQS or not:

East Hertfordshire, Dacorum, Broxbourne, Hertsmere, St Albans, Watford, Three Rivers all have no current LAQS

Welwyn-Hatfield – have a recent LAQS

Stevenage – have a LAQS produced 10 yrs ago

Greater Cambridge, including Cambridge City & South Cambridgeshire adopted an LAQS in 2024.

3.6. Internal officer consultations within HCC and NHC:

The relevant teams /departments at the County Council, are:

Public Health, Active and Safe Travel Team, Highways Strategy & Implementation, Environment & Transport, Air Quality, Sustainable Hertfordshire & Healthy Places and Growth & Environment

Relevant teams /departments within NHC, are:

Climate and Sustainability Officer Group (CSOG); Policy & Strategy Team Leader; Strategic Infrastructure & Projects Manager; Senior Transport & Policy Officer

3.7. Focus Groups – are likely to be provided for wider engagement with local businesses and members of the local community

3.8. Workshops – are a considered option for engagement across NHC including with Elected Members

4 What have other Local Authorities done who have revoked AQMAs in recent years?

The following summary details are for Local Authorities in England that have produced Air Quality Strategies since 2021.

4.1 East Suffolk Council

- East Suffolk Air Quality Strategy (2021)
- District-wide air quality improvement post AQMA revocations
- <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Environment/Environmental-Protection/Air-Quality/AQ-Strategy-2021.pdf>
- Aims: Raise Public Awareness/Reduce Emissions of PM_{2.5}/Promote Active Travel/Document measures across Council that improve AQ

4.2 Greater Cambridge (Cambridge City & South Cambs)

- Greater Cambridge Air Quality Strategy 2024–2029 (2024)
- Joint strategy post Cambridge AQMA revocation
- <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/i3eh0kvd/greater-cambridge-air-quality-strategy-2024.pdf>
- Priorities: Meet legislative requirements on AQ/ Improve AQ & Health/ Aim to achieve WHO AQ targets
- 4 Key Priority Areas: Regulatory Policies & Dev Control/ Infrastructure Improvements/Community Engagement / Promotion & Monitoring

4.3 North East Lincolnshire Council

- NELC Air Quality Strategy 2025 (2025)
- Post-2024 AQMA revocations, long-term clean air plan
- <https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/assets/uploads/2025/06/NELC-Air-Quality-Strategy-2025-FINAL.pdf>
- 7 major topics: Transport/Public Health/Planning & Infrastructure/Strategies & Policy Guidance/Air Quality Monitoring/Raise Public Awareness/ Funding Air Quality Improvements

4.4 North Kesteven District Council

- Air Quality Strategy 2024–2029 (2024)
- Strong focus on health and active travel integration
- [Air Quality Strategy 2024 to 2029 | North Kesteven District Council](#)
- 5 Key Areas: Env& Public Health/ Planning & Infrastructure / Transport & Policy Devt / Housing /Climate Action Plan

4.5 North Northamptonshire Council

- Local Air Quality Strategy 2024–2029 (2024)
- Borough-wide plan, climate & planning linkages
- <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/environment/air-quality>
- 10 Policies & Actions: EV Charging Network/ Off-street EV charging/ Future on-street EV charging/ EV charging superhubs/ Smart charging technologies/ EV charging for new Devs / Schemes for shared EVs etc / EVC at Council offices / Seek private funding for EVC network / Promotion of EV uptake

4.6 South Derbyshire District Council

- South Derbyshire Air Quality Strategy 2024–28 (2024)
- Includes targets for emissions, monitoring & engagement
- <https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/assets/attach/12096/SDDC-Air-Quality-Strategy-2024-28.pdf>
- Priorities: Reduce sources of pollution/ Prioritise Health Benefits / Mitigate impacts of poor AQ on health /Balance bet CC & AQ measures

The following Local Authorities have Draft Air Quality Strategies after AQMA Revocations:

4.7 North Devon Council

- [North Devon Council Air Quality Strategy](#)
- Build on AQ improvements, continue to reduce emissions, raise awareness, integrate AQ into wider policies
- Links to Corp Plan/ 6 main themes: Domestic Burning / Industrial Emissions /Transport / Agriculture /Indoor AQ / Communicating AQ Information

4.8 New Forest Council

- [New Forest Draft Air Quality Strategy](#)
- Areas for Actions: Public Awareness/Reducing Health Inequalities/Improving understanding of particulate pollution/Wood Burning &indoor Air Quality/Road transport Emissions/Impact of new developments

Hertfordshire Local Authorities

4.9 Welwyn Hatfield

- [Air Quality Strategy 2023](#)
- Areas for action: Links to Climate actions; AQAP measures; Domestic Burning & Smoke Control; Agriculture; Indoor Air Quality; Referenced PM_{2.5} emissions reduction targets.

5 Timescales

5.1 The timescales for delivery are highly dependent upon the scale of consultation.

5.2 The County Council Air Quality Strategy is not expected to be adopted before April/May 2026, following public consultation.

5.3 It may be feasible to consider an initial targeted consultation, involving officers within NHC and HCC, and Members within NHC in order to develop a set of measures for wider consultation. This could be considered to take place during the period January – March 2026.

5.4 A final set of measures for wider consultation could be finalised in April 2026, with wider public consultation, & workshops over the summer period May-July.

5.5 Thus, a final set of measures for inclusion within a final draft Air Quality Strategy could be produced for September 2026.