

**Report of:** John Copley, Environmental Health Business Manager

**Title:** LOCAL AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT –  
CENTRAL OXFORD AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

**Ward:** ALL

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**Key Decision:** Yes

**Lead Member:** Cllr John Tanner

**Scrutiny responsibility:** Environment Scrutiny Committee

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Executive Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the draft Central Oxford Air Quality Action Plan for public consultation.
2. Agree the programme of consultation outlined in this report and confirm if they wish any particular organisations or bodies to be consulted.
3. Ask the Environmental Health Business Manager to explore carrying out joint consultation with the Oxfordshire County Council on the Air Quality Action Plan and the Local Transport Plan together.

## **Summary**

1. This report outlines the details of the draft Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) for the Central Oxford Air Quality Management Area. The draft AQAP puts forward a range of actions to improve air quality in the central Oxford area. This report also proposes a programme of consultation, in accordance with Government guidance, prior to final approval of the AQAP by Council before submission to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in March 2006.

## **Background**

2. In September 2001, Oxford City Council declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), known as the Central Oxford Air Quality Management Area, covering part of the city centre. The AQMA was

declared for the pollutant nitrogen dioxide and the designated area was extended in September 2003. The Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities that have declared AQMAs to develop an AQAP aimed at improving air quality. Therefore the draft AQAP is specifically aimed at reducing nitrogen dioxide pollution in the central Oxford area.

3. The main source of pollution in the area is from road traffic. Guidance from DEFRA states that, where road traffic emissions are the largest single contributor to pollution in the AQMA, the AQAP should be integrated with the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The next LTP setting out a five-year strategy (2006-2011) for the co-ordination and improvement of transport is currently being prepared by Oxfordshire County Council.
4. The AQMA was declared because assessments of air quality predicted that the national annual mean air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) is not likely to be met by the target date of December 2005. The objective is very challenging however it is not an absolute requirement that it be achieved by December 2005. The Council is required to do all that it can reasonably do to work towards achieving it. The Air Quality Objectives are prescribed in the Air Quality Regulations 2000 as amended.

#### **Draft Air Quality Action Plan**

5. The attached document is the proposed consultation draft AQAP for the Central Oxford AQMA. As the AQMA was declared for nitrogen dioxide the AQAP outlines a package of actions that are considered to be the most appropriate for reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide pollution. Nitrogen dioxide pollution arises primarily from emissions of a mixture of nitrogen dioxide and nitric oxide from combustion processes such as vehicle engines. When mixed with ambient air, nitric oxide is converted into the pollutant nitrogen dioxide. Together, nitrogen dioxide and nitric oxide are commonly known as NO<sub>x</sub>. Actions are therefore proposed that will reduce emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> from road traffic. Nitrogen dioxide is a pollutant of concern because exposure to elevated concentrations can have adverse health effects. It irritates the airways of the lungs, increasing the symptoms of those suffering from lung diseases.
6. An average reduction in NO<sub>x</sub> emissions of 68% is required although the amount varies from street to street. In Queen Street, New Road, St Aldates, George Street and the High Street buses contribute the largest proportion. Whereas in Beaumont Street, Longwall Street, Worcester Street and Hythe Bridge Street cars are the largest single contributor. Actions have therefore been considered on a street-by-street basis.
7. Experience from the Oxford Transport Strategy has shown that actions in one location may also impact on another. In some cases the knock on effect may be a net benefit, in others it may be in conflict and increase vehicle emissions. For example, pedestrianisation of Cornmarket Street and limiting through traffic in the city centre has reduced emissions in

some streets (e.g. Cornmarket Street), but increased emissions in others (St Aldate's, George Street).

8. Proposed actions incorporated in the draft AQAP are based on the recommendations of the Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council Joint Scrutiny Review Group, which reported in November 2004.
9. The draft AQAP makes reference to examples of good practice already adopted by Oxford City Council such as the Work Place Travel Plan and commitments to the use of alternative fuels and emission abatement technology with the Council's fleet of vehicles.

### **Consultation**

10. Oxford City Council is responsible for the air quality management process and developing the AQAP; most of the actions that will be required relate to traffic management and transport planning (which are both functions of Oxfordshire County Council). Where a district council is preparing an AQAP the County Council is required to submit to the district council a statement of their proposals (exercisable under their functions) and the timetable for implementing each of the proposals.
11. The Environment Act 1995 requires that consultation is carried out on all aspects of the Local Air Quality Management process. It is a statutory requirement to consult with DEFRA; the Environment Agency; the Highways Authority; Oxfordshire County Council; Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils; the Government Office for the South East and the NHS Executive.
12. In addition it is proposed that all Area Committees and Environment Scrutiny are consulted during the August and September 2005 committee cycles. The bus companies, bodies representing local business interests and other organisations and local interest groups will also be consulted on the AQAP. In addition consultation will be carried out via the Council's website and public displays.
13. It is proposed that consultation is carried out over a 12 week period in the autumn of 2005 to coincide with Oxfordshire County Council's consultation on the LTP. Officers will explore carrying out joint consultation with the County Council on the AQAP and LTP together. Following consultation, a report will be taken to the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006 Executive Board for Members to consider any relevant responses and agree amendments with the recommendation that Council adopts the final AQAP at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2006. The final AQAP will then be submitted to DEFRA for their approval.

### **Council's Vision**

14. This work reflects the Council's Vision of improving performance and working with others to deliver shared goals. It specifically contributes to the

strategic priority of improving the quality of the environments where people live and work and the Community Strategy theme of working to create a better living environment.

## **Resources**

15. It is considered that consultation on the draft AQAP and preparation of the final document can be carried out within existing financial and staffing resources. The specific actions set out in any finalised Air Quality Action Plan may have some financial implications that cannot be quantified at this stage. The cost effectiveness of the options will be considered where appropriate and will be included in the final report. Local authorities are not expected to undertake a full cost benefit analysis, or a detailed analysis of the cost-effectiveness of every policy option.
16. As an indication of some of the funding requirement, Oxfordshire County Council have advised that the proposed allocation of capital spending necessary to deliver actions in the AQAP is £50,000 in 2006/07, and £200,000 in 2007/08. This is subject to decisions made by Department for Transport on the settlement. In addition, £200,000 has also been agreed for bus gate camera enforcement in 2005/6.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:

The Environment Portfolio Holder

The Environmental Health Business Manager

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Business Manager: (Jeremy Franklin).

The Finance and Asset Management Business Manager: (Andy Collett).

## **Background papers:**

Air Quality: Planning for Action (guidance on the development of AQAP and Local Air Quality Strategies), NSCA 2001

Stage 3 Review and Assessment of Air Quality, Oxford City Council. January 2001

Stage 4 Review and Assessment of Air Quality, Oxford City Council. July 2003

Local Air Quality Management Detailed Assessment, Oxford City Council. June 2004

A Breath of Fresh Air: Environment Scrutiny Review of Air Pollution, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council Joint Scrutiny Review Group. November 2004

## **Glossary**

**Air quality:** usually refers to the concentration in air of one or more pollutants.

**Air quality objectives:** policy targets of what the Government intends should be achieved in the light of the air quality standards.

**Air quality standards:** the concentrations of pollutants in the atmosphere, which can broadly be taken to achieve a certain level of environmental quality. Air quality standards are based on the assessment of the effects of each pollutant on health.

**AQAP:** Air Quality Action Plan.

**AQMA:** Air Quality Management Area.

**DEFRA:** Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

**LAQM:** Local Air Quality Management

**LTP:** Local Transport Plan

**NO:** Nitric Oxide

**NO<sub>2</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide.

**NO<sub>x</sub>:** Nitrogen Oxides a collective term referring to nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and nitric oxide (NO).

**µg/m<sup>3</sup>:** microgrammes per cubic metre.