

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	19 MARCH 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	AIR QUALITY		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR TONY PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	REGULATORY SERVICES	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A report was presented to Committee in November 2017 which outlined the Government's proposals for reducing Nitrogen Dioxide and an overview of the Clean Growth Plan. At that Committee, Reading Friends of the Earth presented a petition calling for further action from the Council to tackle air quality.
- 1.2 This report provides a response to the Reading Friends of the Earth petition and further updates on air quality matters following a successful court challenge to the Government's approach to tackling nitrogen dioxide levels.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the response to the Friends of the Earth petition.
- 2.2 That the Committee note the requirement to submit a feasibility study to the Government by the end of June 2018. Given the limited time to submit information the study be approved by the Head of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport and the Chair of the SEPT Committee.
- 2.3 That the Committee note that the feasibility study submitted to the Government and any funding arising will inform a refresh of the current Air Quality Action Plan alongside changes which are currently being developed/delivered to the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Government published its latest plan to tackle Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) in July 2017. Client Earth, an environmental lobbying group, challenged the plan on the basis that it did not require all local authority areas with identified exceedances to formally submit plans to the Government stating how they would manage air quality within their area and bring about reductions in Nitrogen Dioxide in the shortest possible time. Client Earth won their latest challenge on the 21 February 2018.

- 3.2 Subsequently, the Government requested that thirty three local authority areas including Reading attend a meeting at Westminster to discuss how they will respond. At the meeting the Government confirmed that they would be taking a more formal approach with this group of 'marginal' local authorities which includes Reading Borough Council. Reading was previously modelled out of the requirement to prepare an action plan given the Government's data confirmed that the town will meet legal requirements by 2020. It is worth noting that the modelling indicates that Reading meets the legal requirement by $1\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, so this is a marginal 'pass', which without continued action under the Air Quality Action Plan, could still result in the council having to take action.
- 3.3 The Government have asked Reading to consider all options to identify any additional measures that could bring forward compliance with NO₂ limits in the specific roads identified as soon as possible. They have confirmed that funding will be made available to help the development of these local feasibility studies, as well as funding to support measures identified that would bring forward compliance.
- 3.4 The Government has given the end of June 2018 as a submission date for feasibility studies.
- 3.5 The outcome of the Client Earth court case is welcomed as it may help the Council to achieve its aim of improving areas of poor air quality within the Borough sooner.

4. READING FRIENDS OF THE EARTH PETITION RESPONSE

- 4.1 Reading Friends of the Earth (RFoE) put forward a petition which was signed by over 400 residents. The petition questions and a response to these are outlined below. RFoE's comments are presented in bold text:
- 4.2 **RFoE would like RBC to put in place a new action plan and the resources to cut all pollutant levels to below WHO guidelines by 2020.**

The Council has a current and recently reviewed Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) in place which aims to tackle a broad spectrum of air pollutants. The plan aims to deliver improvements which would significantly reduce current pollutant levels and bring them below the National Air Quality Objectives.

The Council's next steps will depend on the available funding from the Government to support 'marginal' councils such as Reading Borough Council as well as the publication of the Government's draft Clean Air Plan which is due to be published in April/May. This will inform a refresh of the current AQAP alongside changes which are currently being developed/delivered to the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

- 4.3 **Reading's current action plan lists many positive actions but does not quantify the benefits expected from each - or achieved - so it is not clear what effect they will have.**

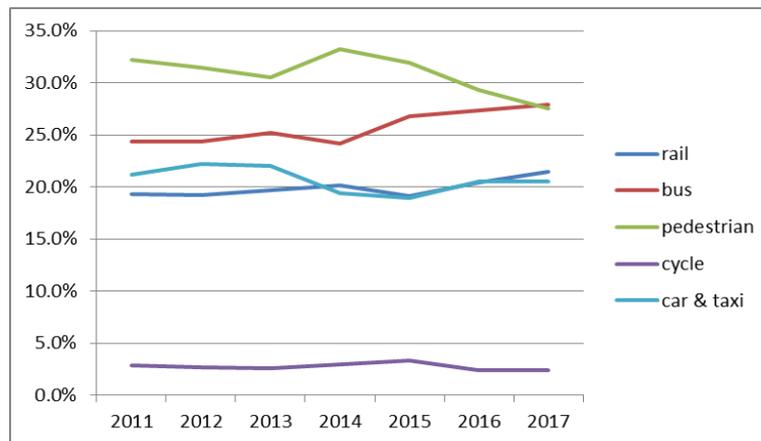
Cleaner air requires some combination of cleaner vehicles and/or fewer vehicles - both should be considered but we note that traffic reduction and modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling can also reduce congestion and greenhouse gases - potentially win, win, win!

- We want the Council to assess the benefits of:
- Greatly improved facilities for cycling

- 'Clean Air Zones' - charging particularly polluting vehicles - at the river crossings and at pollution hotspots.
- Workplace parking levies to reduce congestion and support public transport
- Reducing town centre car parking
- Road pricing as advocated by Reading Independent Transport Commission

Will the Council assess these benefits?

Greatly improved facilities for cycling - In 2017 the Council introduced the new NCN cycle route 422, re-procured the Readybike contract, and is delivering the EMPOWER incentivisation programme aimed at encouraging commuters to switch to bicycle. Unfortunately it is difficult to assess the benefits of this at the moment. The Council's figures (shown in the below graph) show a decrease in the percentage of cyclists. Although these figures are only for a single day and in the last 2 years these counts have fallen on rainy days which will have impacted the figures.



Clean Air Zones - there would be a requirement for the council to undertake a feasibility into the introduction of a chargeable Clean Air Zone. There are significant costs associated with undertaking such a study as well as costs associated with introducing and managing a scheme at multiple locations. As the Government now must consider what plans the additional thirty three council areas have in place to meet the national objective by 2019/20, it may be that funding becomes available to carry out such a project.

4.4 A new Local Transport Plan.

The Council is in the process of initiating a project to develop and implement a new Local Transport Plan, which will include a review of existing transport strategies and policies including the Parking Strategy. Part of the review will include the development of a parking strategy action plan with the aim of reducing congestion and improving alternatives to the car. Improvements in AQ will be integral to the Local Transport Plan and the plans that support it.

4.5 RfOE want Reading to carry out a 'feasibility study', acquire or allocate funding, and implement effective measures.

The delivery of a feasibility study into options to implement effective measures to improve AQ in Reading is something that the Council would wish to undertake, however, as indicated, there are significant financial implications to carrying out a feasibility study and implementing actions set out in any study. Some funding is likely to be made available by Government, but it is currently unclear what level of support this will be.

- 4.6 The government monitors PM2.5 at its 'urban background' monitor in the middle of the Cemetery, about 100 m south of the A4. Measurements of NO2 at this location are much lower than in town centre locations near busy roads so we don't think the PM2.5 results are valid for the town centre.

We want the Council to investigate levels of PM2.5 in areas that are busiest and assess the risks and take appropriate actions.

The Council acknowledges the harmful impacts of PM 2.5 and agrees that an expanded monitoring network which includes PM 2.5 would be helpful in assessing impacts. However, the cost of increasing the monitoring network to include PM 2.5 is prohibitive. The Council currently has three roadside monitors which are capable of monitoring PM10. It is possible to approximate PM 2.5 levels from these measurements as well as draw conclusions from levels of nitrogen dioxide measured i.e. a reduction in nitrogen dioxide is indicative of a reduction in particulate matter.

The PM2.5 monitor at the background site shows levels have decreased since monitoring began, but have begun to increase in the last couple of years.

Year	Annual Mean PM _{2.5} µg/m ³ (TEOM FDMS)
2010	13
2011	14
2012	12
2013	10
2014	10
2015	7
2016	9
2017	10*

*subject to change pending data ratification

PM2.5 is a transboundary pollutant meaning that the majority of it travels over large distances. Local measures will therefore not be effective in reducing this portion. The locally produced portion of PM2.5 will predominantly be from traffic and smoke from chimneys and bonfires. RBC is actively targeting the reduction of vehicular emissions

of NO₂. Measures that target NO₂ will also be effective at reducing PM_{2.5} from this source.

The Government is currently conducting a consultation on a range of options to improve air quality linked to tackling emissions from wood burning stoves and open fires. These options include:

- Encouraging consumers to switch from house coal by only allowing the sale of low sulphur smokeless alternatives
- switching from wet wood to dry wood
- the introduction of sulphur limits for all smokeless solid fuels
- and new powers for local authorities to take action for persistent smoke offences where local amenity is harmed

Additionally, the Council is reviewing the application of smoke control zones in the Borough, which will also contribute to reducing the local contribution to PM_{2.5} emissions.

5. NATIONAL POLICY CHANGES

- 5.1 The Government has outlined their intention to publish a Clean Air Plan in 2018 which will set out steps for improving air quality by tackling a range of pollutants. There is currently no date set for its publication or details of what the plan may cover.
- 5.2 The Government recently published a call for evidence on 'domestic burning of house coal, smokeless coal, manufactured solid fuels and wet wood'. The outcome of the call for evidence has not been published at the time of this report.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 A revised Air Quality Action Plan alongside changes which are currently being developed/delivered to the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment would contribute to the following strategic aims:

3. Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active;

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 A revised Air Quality Action Plan would require formal consultation.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 No decision is being made in respect of this report and therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications in respect of this report.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. As and when the Government releases its funding streams for various schemes and projects, bids will be submitted by officers.

11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Air Quality Plan 2017 - SEPT Committee November 2017