

Cabinet

12th March 2025

Air Quality Action Plan 2025-2030

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Mark Wilkes, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Climate Change

Electoral division(s) affected:

County wide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To seek Cabinet approval to adopt a new Air Quality Action Plan for Durham City.

Executive Summary

- 2 An Air Quality Management Area was declared in 2011 for Durham City as the annual mean air quality objective of 40 µg/m³ was being exceeded. This management area was extended in 2014 and again in 2022. As a consequence of the management area being declared, and to improve air quality across the city, an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was established and adopted in June 2016.
- 3 AQAP's must be reviewed and revised at least every five years. The production of a new AQAP was delayed because of the covid pandemic and because of the pandemic's impact on reducing traffic volumes in Durham city.
- 4 The new AQAP (attached as Appendix 2) has been developed by a cross-department Air Quality Steering Group, chaired by the Head of Community Protection and regularly attended by Cllr Wilkes, portfolio holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change.

- 5 The new AQAP includes a total of 23 actions which have been prioritised according to costs, available funding, timescale and potential benefits to air quality and allocated to lead officers and departments for delivery.
- 6 Progress has already been made towards the actions set out within the AQAP and is summarised in Table 13 of the plan (Appendix 2).
- 7 In particular, facilities have been extended at Park and Ride sites including increased provision of electric vehicle charging points, parking in Durham City has been reviewed to promote use of the Park & Ride services and public transport, improvements have been made to emission standards on buses operating with the AQMA area, improved environmental facilities have been installed at the bus station and provision of Real Time Passenger Information is being rolled out to improve passenger journeys. In addition, the Council continues to promote active travel and alternative travel options as well as use variable message signs to raise awareness of air quality and encourage behavioural change.
- 8 Ongoing progress against the AQAP actions will be captured within the Annual Status Report following the annual review and assessment of air quality in County Durham. The Council is required to submit their Annual Status Report 2025 to DEFRA by end of June 2025.
- 9 The plan has been subject to extensive consultation including a local engagement event as well as both statutory and public consultation. The outcome of the consultation exercise is reflected within the plan and feedback has been taken into consideration in the development of the actions.
- 10 The new AQAP was submitted to DEFRA in December 2024, and they have accepted that it meets their statutory requirements.
- 11 Formal adoption of the new AQAP is now required, and it is proposed that this will be achieved via cabinet.

Recommendation(s)

- 12 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) approve the adoption of the draft Air Quality Action Plan 2025-30 as contained in Appendix 2.

Background

- 13 An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) was declared in Durham City in May 2011 for nitrogen dioxide since the annual mean Air Quality Objective ($40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) was being exceeded at locations across the city centre. This was extended in 2014 to cover the extent of the A690 across the City, from the Stonebridge roundabout in the west to Dragonville in the east. A further short section of Church St in New Elvet was added in 2022.
- 14 The results from the monitoring of nitrogen dioxide up to 2019 shows that the annual mean Air Quality Objective, historically, has been exceeded at multiple locations across the city. These were, however, mainly at localised 'hotspots' on Gilesgate bank, Crossgate (Sutton St & Colpitts Terrace) and Church St (New Elvet).
- 15 To improve air quality across the City, an Air Quality Action Plan was initially established and then adopted by the Council in June 2016.
- 16 The Government Guidance that covers action planning DEFRA Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance -PG22} requires action plans to be reviewed and revised, where required, after a period of not more than 5 years. This, therefore, prompted the review and revision of the 2016 Plan in 2020 but which was delayed by the covid pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on traffic volumes within Durham city.
- 17 The identification and implementation of action measures within the revised Air Quality Action Plan is required to reduce and then maintain the levels of nitrogen dioxide to below the objective.
- 18 The results of air quality monitoring in recent years show that the annual mean Air Quality Objective is now only being exceeded at a single residential location on Gilesgate Bank.
- 19 There are, however, other monitoring sites within the 'hotspot' areas at which the measured annual mean is within ten percent of the Air Quality Objective ($>36 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). This is a level that is identified as being at risk of exceeding the objective.
- 20 There are 23 action measures incorporated within the revised AQAP. These have been prioritised taking into consideration the costs, funding, timescale, benefits to air quality and level of support from the consultation outcome.
- 21 The action measures are targeted towards reducing emissions from traffic sources either directly or indirectly.

- 22 The action measures are strategic and therefore city-wide rather than focussing on localised 'hotspot' areas. They, therefore, aim to improve air quality across the city rather than at a specific location.
- 23 The action measures together with the progress on implementation to actions set out within the AQAP are summarised in Table 13 of the plan (Appendix 2). Key deliverables include:-
- Improvements to Park and Ride facilities including additional 260 spaces and extended days of operation at Sniperley. Facilities for electric vehicle charging has also been increased on park and ride sites and parking in the city has been reviewed to incentivise use of park and ride services and public transport.
 - The emission standards for buses operating in the area have been improved, including seven DCC bus contracts that are operating within the AQMA area using vehicles that are Euro VI compliant.
 - A successful bid has also been made to secure funding for the introduction of zero emission electric buses and supporting infrastructure on Go Northeast service 21 and Arriva Services X46, 48 & 64.
 - Improved environmental facilities at the new bus station in Durham City which opened in January 2024, including installation of a green wall and photovoltaics.
 - Real Time Passenger Information on buses is currently being rolled out to improve customer journeys.
 - Promotion of active travel including 11 Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plans, implementation of variable message signage to raise awareness of air pollution and promote non-car travel in the city, Winter Wheelers Campaign and continued partnership with 'Love to Ride', who are involved in advertising active travel to the general public.
- 24 Further progress against the AQAP actions will be captured within the Annual Status Report following the annual review and assessment of air quality in County Durham. The Council is required to submit their Annual Status Report 2025 to DEFRA by end of June 2025.

Main implications

- 25 To adopt the revised AQAP is a commitment towards ensuring it is implemented going forward over the life of the plan, which will be until 2030. Since the action measures are targeted towards improving the air quality across Durham City this will be beneficial for residents, especially those in the 'hotspot' locations.

Conclusion

- 26 DCC is required to have, and update, an AQAP detailing what actions it proposes to implement to address air quality concerns identified in its Air Quality Management Area.
- 27 A new AQAP has been developed to replace the original AQAP that was first produced in 2016.
- 28 The new AQAP identifies 23 actions which will fall to several services to deliver.
- 29 The new AQAP has been accepted by DEFRA and must now go through the process of formal adoption by DCC, via cabinet.

Background papers

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Under the Environment Act 1995 (As Amended) requires the Council to establish an Air Quality Action Plan to address elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide within the Durham City Air Quality Management Area. The Environment Act 2021 requires that levels of nitrogen dioxide within the declared Air Quality Management Area are reduced and then maintained to below the annual mean Air Quality Objective.

Finance

It is accepted that there are cost implications for implementing the actions. Some of the action measures, therefore, involve two stages, and progression will be reviewed depending on the outcome of monitoring within the Air Quality Management Area

Consultation

A full consultation exercise has been undertaken in respect of the new AQAP. Details of the outcome of the consultation exercise are contained within the plan.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality and Diversity Impact Screening Assessment (EIA) was carried out as part of the consultation process and the outcomes have been reflected in the AQAP.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Climate Change

Many of the action measures in the AQAP are targeted towards reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide will also be beneficial for reducing carbon emissions. AQAP actions have been incorporated within the latest Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP3)

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

A failure to produce a new AQAP could lead to reputational damage for DCC as it would have failed to fulfil a statutory duty. Additionally, poor air quality has an impact on quality of life for those residents affected and therefore the identification and implementation of reasonable steps to address this risk is essential.

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: Air Quality Action Plan 2025-2030

See separate document