

Report for Resolution

Report to Cabinet
9 November 2011
Report of Head of City Development, Head of Citywide Services
Subject Air quality management area declaration

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Purpose

To advise Cabinet of the outcome of the latest air quality review and assessment and to consider the case for managing air quality issues on an area wide basis

Recommendations

To:

1. declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) for the city centre area of Norwich as shown in appendix 1;
Incorporating the existing St Augustines, Castle, Grapes Hill and Riverside AQMAs;
Including sites on King Street and Bull Close Road that would otherwise have needed to be declared as site specific AQMAs;
2. note that air quality at the existing Grapes Hill AQMA now betters limit values and in the absence of an area wide declaration could be revoked.

Financial Consequences

Declaration of an area wide air quality management area could result in some modest cost savings, e.g. the cost of specific technical work. In addition reduced officer time would produce opportunity cost savings.

Risk Assessment

The proposed approach is intended to provide a more robust approach to air quality management, particularly by broadening the range of interventions that could be applied to resolving air quality 'hot-spots'. There is a potential reputation risk in declaring a city centre air quality management area as it may be perceived as signalling a general deterioration in air quality. This can be mitigated by communicating the key message that air quality issues remain focussed on a limited number of hot spots and the council's good track record in working to remedy these issues. To ensure that the city council can continue to attract beneficial development and implement an effective planning and regeneration strategy for the city centre, it would also be necessary to make clear that an extended AQMA would not result in any particularly onerous cost implications for prospective developers in addressing air quality issues.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future" and the service plan priority to deliver value for money

in line with the principles of Best Value and Gershon and to Inform the development of the third Local Transport Plan for Norfolk.

Cabinet Member: Councillor Bremner – Planning & Transport

Ward: Mancroft, Thorpe Hamlet

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Background Documents

2011 Annual Progress Report

Report

Background

1. The quality of air is important to health and quality of life. All lower tier and unitary local authorities are obliged to review and assess air quality under the Environment Act 1995 in line with the Government's air quality strategy published in 2000 and updated in 2007.
2. The council monitors air quality for four pollutants considered to be of concern to human health: carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and particles (PM10 & PM2.5). Ozone is also monitored, though due to the trans boundary nature of this pollutant and thus the limited effectiveness of action on a local scale, it is not included in the regulations for air quality management
3. In Norwich there were originally three areas identified where measurements and modelling showed that air quality was likely to exceed the annual objective for nitrogen dioxide. These were at Grapes Hill, St Augustines Street and Castle Meadow (see appendix 1 for locations). These areas were therefore declared as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in June 2003 and action plans were developed to improve air quality at these locations. Since 2005 the action plans have formed part of the Local Transport Plan.

Progress in delivering the LTP air quality action plan

4. Interventions at Grapes Hill appear to have improved air quality on a sustained basis and it is considered that this area could now be revoked. At the Castle Area and St Augustines Street measures have been introduced to improve air quality; a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) and one-way system respectively.
5. Monitoring of the LEZ shows encouraging results and was identified in recent Government best practice relating to transport planning and air quality management. It is too soon to say, however, whether the site can be revoked. The St Augustines one-way system is only recently introduced and no 'after' results are yet available. Some initial monitoring results should be available in early 2012.

Review and assessment

6. As well as implementing and monitoring action plans in the original three AQMAs, the council is required to review and assess air quality in the city on a regular basis. As part of this work, in 2008 a detailed assessment was carried out in locations at King Street and Riverside Road. The detailed assessment concluded that an area of Riverside Road should also be declared as an AQMA as monitoring showed that the annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide was being exceeded. This declaration was made in December 2009.
7. Further work has confirmed that there is now a need to declare an AQMA on part of King Street and Bull Close Road. The precise location of these is shown in appendix 1.

Area wide approach

8. The council, working in partnership with the county council, has identified pollution hot-spots in the city and to develop individual action plans accordingly. However many authorities have approached air quality management on an area wide basis. That is they have declared a single AQMA within which there may be several hot-spots where the objective for the particular pollutant is exceeded.

9. There are two advantages in such an approach. Firstly it enables a broader range of interventions to be considered to improve air quality: for example those which are not geographically specific but which may nonetheless help reduce pollution, such as car parking policy. Air quality problems in the city are road traffic related and the county council is supportive of an area wide approach accordingly.

10. Secondly the process of declaring individual new areas is both costly and time-consuming:

- Initial screening assessments are carried out and, based on the results of this, further detailed assessments are undertaken to more precisely determine whether limit values in an area are likely to be exceeded and hence whether an air quality management area needs to be declared.
- The detailed assessments require very specific skills. The council has used consultants to carry them out (AEA Technology).
- On declaring an area, an action plan has to be developed to bring air pollution levels within limit values. The action plans are worked up with the county council who are under obligations to take forward any changes to transport or highway infrastructure arising from the plan.
- The declaration of the areas and development of action plans must be informed by public consultation.
- DEFRA must be notified of each of the above stages, i.e. screening assessment, detailed assessment, area declaration, draft plan, finalised plan as well as ultimately the revocation of an area assuming a plan is successful. DEFRA will comment on all of these which may mean further change and amendment of process or proposals is required.

11. The above process is laid out by statute and therefore cannot be avoided. It has to be repeated for each AQMA identified with subsequent action planning, implementation, monitoring and eventual revocation carried out for each AQMA as well.

12. It is therefore suggested that the council declares an enlarged AQMA which incorporates all of the existing AQMAs together with the King Street and Bull Close Road sites. This would reduce officer time to enable it to be redirected to other priorities. There would also be some modest cost savings in not having to undertake as much repetition of technical work.

13. In considering such an area and working with county officers, it is suggested that the area largely within the old city walls and parts of Riverside/Thorpe Hamlet is declared. The precise definition of the area is shown in appendix 1. On-going monitoring suggests that this should be of sufficient extent to incorporate any possible future hot-spot areas that might otherwise need to be declared as an individual AQMA.

14. Other local authorities have adopted an area wide approach for similar reasons. Its use in the Norwich situation has been discussed with DEFRA who are supportive.

15. Should such an area-wide approach be pursued it would need to be complemented by suitable planning policy which would require new development proposals to take appropriate account of air quality issues, in accordance with the air quality management plan for the city centre. Technical advice – potentially in the form of supplementary planning guidance – would be available to prospective developers to help them address these issues in the most appropriate and cost-effective way, particularly in those parts of the city centre where air quality “hot spots” have been identified. Environmental protection officers are in discussion with planning officers to agree how these matters can best be taken on board within the emerging Development Management Policies Plan.

16. If the council were not to take forward an area wide approach, it would need to declare the King Street and Bull Close locations as site specific air quality management areas and develop two site specific action plans accordingly.

Appendix 1: Plan indicating proposed area wide AQMA

