



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
Subject	<b>WITNEY AND CHIPPING NORTON AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN</b>
Wards Affected	Chipping Norton, Witney Central, Witney North & Witney East
Accountable Member	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for Environment Email: <a href="mailto:lidia.arciszewska@westoxon.gov.uk">lidia.arciszewska@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing – Interim Executive Director Email: <a href="mailto:jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk">jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Susan McPherson – Senior Officer Email: <a href="mailto:susan.mcpherson@publicagroup.uk">susan.mcpherson@publicagroup.uk</a>
Purpose	To approve the Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Action Plan, prior to publishing on the District Council's website.
Annexes (published separately in a supplement pack)	Annex A – Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Action Plan Annex B – Defra Appraisal Annex C – Defra Comments & Ricardo Responses to Draft Plan
Recommendation	That the Executive resolves to:  I. Approve the Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Action Plan.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li><li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/	Consultation was carried out during the preparation stages of the plan.

Consultation	This is detailed in Section 4 of the Air Quality Action Plan
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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- I.1** This Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) has been produced as part of our statutory duties required by the Local Air Quality Management framework. It outlines the action we will take to improve air quality in Witney, Chipping Norton, and the wider West Oxfordshire District between 2023 – 2028.
- I.2** Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts. It is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer. Additionally, air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children and older people, and those with heart and lung conditions. There is also often a strong correlation with equality issues because areas with poor air quality are also often the less affluent areas<sup>1,2</sup>.
- I.3** The annual health cost to society of the impacts of particulate matter alone in the UK is estimated to be around £16 billion<sup>3</sup>. West Oxfordshire District Council is committed to reducing the exposure of people in Witney and Chipping Norton to poor air quality to improve health.
- I.4** We have developed actions that can be considered under 10 broad topics:
- Alternatives to private vehicle use
  - Freight and delivery management
  - Policy guidance and development control
  - Promoting low emission plant
  - Promoting low emission transport
  - Promoting travel alternatives
  - Public information e.g. on issues such as anti-idling, wood burning stoves etc.
  - Traffic management
  - Transport planning and infrastructure
  - Vehicle fleet efficiency

### **Witney**

- I.5** In Witney, our priorities are:
1. Bringing the Witney Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) into compliance with the Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) annual mean Air Quality Objective (AQO)
  2. Managing PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure in Witney
  3. Improving accessibility into and around Witney by alternatives to private car – i.e. walking, cycling and public transport

### **Chipping Norton**

- I.6** In Chipping Norton, our priorities are:

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental equity, air quality, socioeconomic status and respiratory health, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Air quality and social deprivation in the UK: an environmental inequalities analysis, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Defra. Abatement cost guidance for valuing changes in air quality, May 2013

1. Bringing the Chipping Norton Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) into compliance with the NO<sub>2</sub> annual mean Air Quality Objective (AQO)
2. Managing PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure in Chipping Norton
3. Improve accessibility into and around Chipping Norton by alternatives to private car – i.e. walking, cycling and public transport

1.7 In this AQAP we outline how we plan to effectively tackle air quality issues within our control.

1.8 Finally, following approval of the final plan by Defra, we are now seeking Executive approval, in order to publish the document on the WODC website.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The AQMAs in Witney and Chipping Norton were both declared in 2005 as NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in both locations were above the national objective of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup>. This was a consequence of similar issues in both towns, namely traffic congestion and street canyons.

2.2 Traffic congestion results in idling or slow moving traffic, where engines are running inefficiently, producing large amounts of NO<sub>2</sub>. This is made worse by the presence of street canyons, where continuous buildings either side of a road trap air pollutants causing them to build up, resulting in high concentrations of this pollutant (please refer to section 2.2 of the AQAP (Annex A) for further information).

2.3 Local authorities who have declared an AQMA are required to produce an AQAP, which demonstrates how the local authority, with its air quality partners, e.g. county council, national highways, will improve air quality in these areas.

## 3. PLAN PREPARATION

3.1 The plan was prepared by experienced air quality consultants, Ricardo. Ricardo has extensive experience with the local air quality management, undertaking air quality work for central and local government, as well as delivering extensive training on air quality management through the EMAQ+ platform.

3.2 To develop the plan, Ricardo carried out the following:

- A review of national, regional, and local planning and policy,
- Source apportionment
- Modelling of scenarios
- Facilitation of stakeholder and steering group engagement
- Compilation of measures which will reduce NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations

## 4. THE DRAFT PLAN

4.1 Following the completion of the items listed in section 3.2 above, a draft plan was compiled and circulated to the statutory consultees, steering group, and the general public for

comment. The public consultation also included a questionnaire. The outcome of this consultation is summarised in Appendix A of the AQAP (Annex A).

- 4.2 In general the plan was favourably received; however, it was clear that there is frustration within the public regarding poor public transport services and active travel provision.
- 4.3 The draft plan was simultaneously submitted to Defra (also a statutory consultee) for approval. The draft was approved by Defra; however, a number of queries were raised during this appraisal, all of which were addressed by Ricardo – please refer to Annex C.
- 4.4 Following the consultation period, all comments were considered and the final version of the plan compiled.
- 4.5 It should be noted that the initially both towns had dedicated AQAPs, however on the request of Defra, which was also echoed by a number of other consultees, the two plans were merged into one, covering both towns and removing a significant amount of duplication.

## 5. THE FINAL PLAN

- 5.1 The final plan was submitted to Defra for approval on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024, and approved on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The associated appraisal document is presented in Annex B.
- 5.2 The plan will now be subject to an annual review, where the progress of measures will be updated and, if applicable, new measures added.

## 6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 The AQAP is a statutory obligation. Consequently, there are no alternative options to the plan presented.

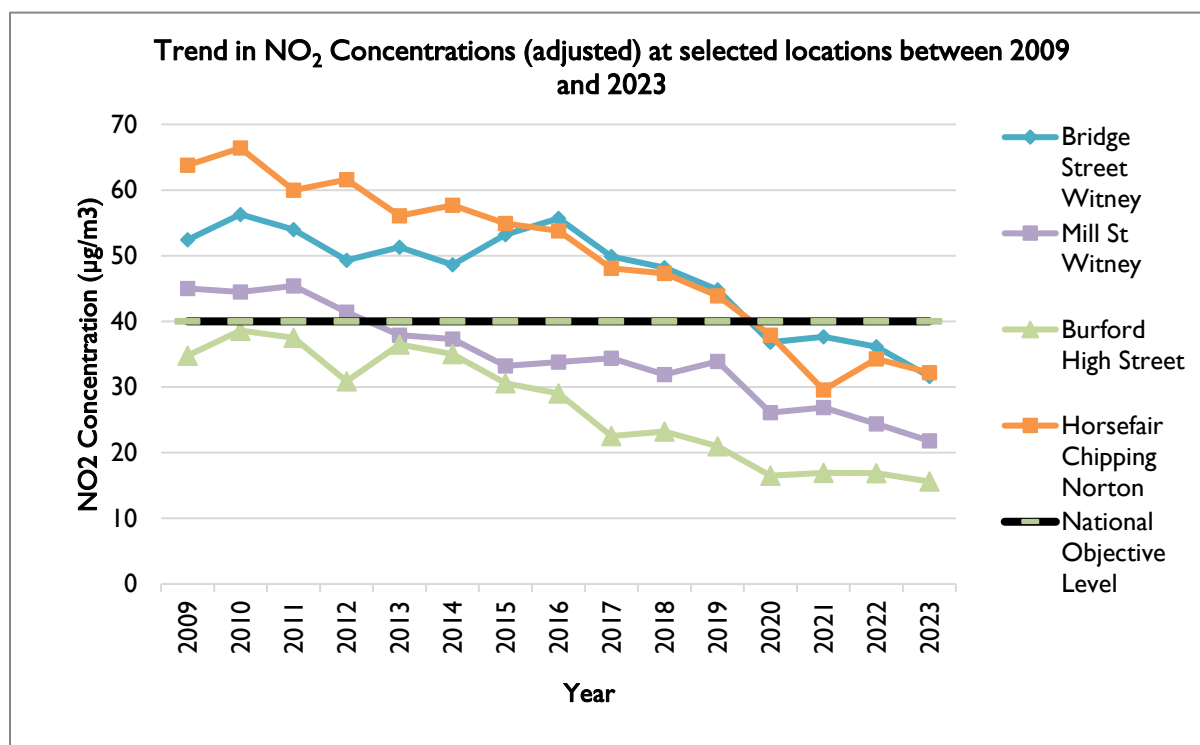
## 7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The AQAP presented forms a comprehensive document detailing NO<sub>2</sub> pollution in the Witney and Chipping Norton AQMAs, and listing measures in place or in the pipeline which will improve air quality in these locations. Many of the measures are already in place in county or district policies and strategies, many of which are further supported by Neighbourhood Plans.
- 7.2 Approval of the AQAP by the executive, will demonstrate the council's commitment to reducing air pollution within both these towns.

## 8. AIR QUALITY UPDATE 2024

- 8.1 Since the commissioning of the AQAP in 2022, air quality in both towns has remained below the UK objective. The Covid pandemic saw concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub> fall significantly across the UK, following the sharp decrease in vehicle usage. Since the removal of all restrictions towards the end of 2021, there has been a slight increase in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations across the district, but these have never returned to pre-pandemic levels. This is illustrated in Figure I.

Figure 1 Trend in NO<sub>2</sub> Concentrations (adjusted) at selected locations between 2009 and 2023



- 8.2** Predictions based on raw 2024 data collected to date, suggests the annual average NO<sub>2</sub> concentration for the current year will be lower than 2023. If this is proven to be the case, it is likely Defra will be expecting revocation of these AQMAs in 2025 or 2026. Revocation of an AQMA is expected when concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub> have been no higher than 36µg/m<sup>3</sup> for three consecutive years.
- 8.3** The continuing downward trend in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations we are seeing across the district, is thought to be due to a combination of factors, including the continuing popularity of working from home and an increase in uptake of low emission and ultra-low emission vehicles.
- 8.4** Following the publishing of the Environment Act 2021, local authorities who do not have a designated AQMA, are required to put in place a local air quality strategy. Consequently, should both the AQMAs in West Oxfordshire be revoked in the next couple of years, this AQAP will form the basis of West Oxfordshire’s Air Quality Strategy.

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** Approval of the AQAP has no financial implications. In addition, as most of the measures listed are already policy/strategy items, the cost of implementing these measures will be the responsibility of the respective policy/strategy holders.
- 9.2** There are a small number of measures which fall outside policy and strategy, e.g. public awareness campaigns, and town council projects. The cost of implementing these measures

will be either covered by existing budgets, or via third party funding. They will not incur additional costs to WODC.

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**10.1** The Council is meeting its statutory obligations for air quality management. There are no legal implications associated with the approval of the AQAP.

## **11. RISK ASSESSMENT**

**11.1** A risk assessment is not applicable to this submission.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**12.1** There are no equality implications associated with the approval of the AQAP.

## **13. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**13.1** The AQAP sets out measures to improve air quality in Witney and Chipping Norton. As poor air quality in these locations is related to road transport, the majority of measures listed relate to either reducing the number of vehicles on the road or increasing the number of low emission vehicles. Similarly, road transport is a major contributor to climate change, and consequently any measure which improves air quality by reducing traffic emissions, will also have a positive impact on climate change.

## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

(END)