

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS AND SPORT

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING COMMITTEE		
DATE:	3 July 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	RESPONSE TO DRAFT AIR QUALITY PLAN 2017		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Tony Page	PORTFOLIO:	Strategic Environment & Planning
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Following a successful legal challenge from Client Earth, the Government were required to review their draft Air Quality Plan published in 2015, which set out actions to comply with levels of Nitrogen Dioxide in the environment in accordance with EU Directive 2008/50/EC.
- 1.1 The Draft Air Quality Plan 2017 provided more detailed analysis of real world pollution levels, particularly from diesel vehicles following the widely publicised VW emission findings. The principal change to the proposed plan was that DEFRA modelling indicated that more local authority areas would be in breach of Nitrogen Dioxide levels by 2020 and therefore would be non-compliant. Forty areas were named, including Reading. In the Government's technical document which accompanies the consultation, it was indicated that 27 of the 40 areas may need to introduce a Clean Air Zone. Clean Air Zones fall into two categories; Non-charging Clean Air Zones and Charging Clean Air Zones.
- 1.3 This report sets out the Council's response to the draft plan which was submitted on 15 June 2017.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the response provided to DEFRA on the Government's Draft Air Quality Plan 2017.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 A series of EU directives have placed 'limit values' on harmful air pollution on Member States. The original timeline for compliance with values for Nitrogen Dioxide was 2010, but the Government successfully applied for an extension until 2015. When compliance was not achieved in 2015, proceedings were brought against the

Government, who argued that it was not possible to achieve compliance in five cities until 2020 and in London 2025. This was outlined in the Government's draft Air Quality Plan 2015. This plan was challenged by Client Earth and the European Courts of Justice found in their favour, forcing the UK Government to re-draft the plan.

- 3.2 The new draft plan which was published on 5 May 2017, follows remodelling of potential exceedances of Nitrogen Dioxide across local authorities. The new draft plan names forty local authority areas where significant intervention is likely to be required to bring levels down to meet limit values. Reading and Wokingham are named as an agglomeration, with two areas modelled to require intervention; the IDR between Vastern Road and Caversham Road and Cemetery Junction. Neither of these sites has been shown in local monitoring to exceed limit values and this has been flagged with DEFRA.
- 3.3 As part of the draft plan, the extension of Clean Air Zones to those areas modelled to exceed the limit values has been outlined. Clean Air Zones can be charging and non-charging, but in either case, the Council must demonstrate that the approach will bring Nitrogen Dioxide levels within the limit values within the quickest possible time. The Council must consult on any Clean Air Zone and will require final approval from the Government.
- 3.4 The final plan is due to be published on 16 July 2017 and depending on the outcome of the consultation and funding availability, the next steps for Reading will be to carry out a feasibility study to review the best practicable options.
- 3.5 The introduction of a Clean Air Zone encourages appropriate approaches to traffic management to help reduce pollution both by helping to reduce traffic and/or smooth traffic flow, encourage more active travel and support alternative ways of travel. It can help improve the experience for those cycling and walking, improve journey times and encourage the use of public transport. A Clean Air Zone should be considered alongside traffic management plans and projects including the expected benefits of a work place parking levy. The Council's emerging Local Plan may need to be strengthened in relation to air quality measures to ensure that planning decisions support development which increases air quality.

4. THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

- 4.1 The Council's response is appended.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The response to the consultation is in line with the Corporate Plan priorities:

- 1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
- 2. Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active and
- 3. Providing infrastructure to support the economy

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Government opened its consultation on 5 May 2017 and responses are welcomed from any interested party. The council's response to the consultation is based on Officer's professional views on the detail of the draft proposal. Formal community engagement is likely to form part of any proposals to implement the Government's final air quality plan.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The response to the government's draft Air Quality Plan 2017 has no current legal implications. On publication of the final plan on 16 July 2017, the implications for the council should be clear.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Whilst the Government have indicated that funds will be made available to local authorities to investigate and implement any necessary schemes, no firm commitment has been made. This is covered in the council's response to the draft plan.
- 9.2 Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review air quality in their area and designate air quality management areas if improvements are necessary. There is also a requirement to come up with a local plan for improvements. For the implementation of the action plan, the council can bid for capital grants as and when they become available.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 The consultation including technical reports can be found at:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen-dioxide/>