

Appendix A

East Hertfordshire's Air Quality Action Plan scoping document

Why are we concerned about air pollution?

It is estimated that across the United Kingdom over 40,000 people die prematurely each year because of poor air quality. If this figure was uniformly applied across the country, based on East Hertfordshire's population as a share of the UK population, this would mean an estimated 89 premature deaths in the district. Meeting current national air quality targets nationally would lead to an estimated 17,000 premature deaths, equating to 38 in East Hertfordshire, being prevented along with the saving of three-million working days that are lost for businesses, with workers currently becoming ill or having to take time off to care for sick children because of air pollution¹.

Air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable, such as children, older people and those with heart and lung conditions. It can also impact more generally on health and is linked to several serious health conditions such as cancer, strokes and heart disease.

The impact of early exposure to poor air quality has lifetime effects, such as high rates of obesity, asthma and low lung function. Air pollution harms our health, our economy and our quality of life.

Along with the health benefits, less air pollution can have a significant impact on the global economy.

Where are we on our journey to improve air quality?

There is a positive shift in priorities nationally when it comes to our environment and air quality. Across the country we are seeing a reallocation of road space to more active modes of travel with more people walking and cycling. Harmful emissions from homes and industry are also being tackled through schemes to improve energy efficiency. We are experiencing a significant shift towards active travel, not least in response to the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic, which has seen more people than ever enjoying our streets with lower levels of motorised traffic – and hence air pollution. Most measures that are developed to improve

¹ "Breathing Life into the UK economy" is a report from CBI Economics, September 2020, commissioned by the Clean Air Fund, which quantifies the economic benefit to the UK of meeting WHO Air Quality guidelines. Note: East Hertfordshire estimated based on averaging out the national figures based on the district's population.

local air quality will also contribute to the council's plans to address climate change as most latterly recognised in the Council's unanimous declaration in July 2023 of a climate emergency, building on its formal declaration of its need to act in July 2019.

The scope of our air quality action plan

Our new air quality action plan for East Hertfordshire will cover the period between 2024 and 2029 with the aim of improving air quality and reducing residents' exposure to air pollution. It is being developed in recognition of the legal requirement on the local authority to meet air quality objective limits under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 and relevant regulations made under that part and to meet the requirements of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) statutory process.

In the action plan we will need to outline plans to effectively tackle air quality issues that are within our control. Air pollution results from activities we all contribute to, it is a shared problem and therefore requires shared solutions. The plan recognises that as a district council, we cannot achieve this alone and will need to draw on the efforts of key stakeholders such as Hertfordshire County Council. We will need to continue to engage and work with a wide set of stakeholders, institutions and citizens, so that everyone can play their part. The work the council needs to do is wide-ranging and engagement with our communities and partners will be vital.

Our objective is to protect our residents and those that work in or visit East Hertfordshire from the harmful impacts of poor air quality by reducing concentrations of NO₂ to within legal limits or beyond, in all areas of the district where the population is at risk to exposure. Alongside this objective, East Herts Council is also committed to reducing levels of all pollutants in ambient air, with a focus on PM2.5.

Our priorities for the air quality action plan

East Herts Council's proposed air quality ambitions can be summarised under the following four main priorities;

1. Manage the impact of future growth in East Hertfordshire

- a. Construction and demolition activities can have a significant impact on local air quality. These impacts can be minimised by using the planning system to ensure best practice techniques are employed on all sites.

- b. New or refurbished buildings have the potential to add to emissions from domestic heating and cooling. The council's Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document sets out how we wish to see developers address emissions, whether through curtailing emissions arising directly from construction or indirectly by reducing the energy usage over the lifetime of the new buildings.
- c. Residents moving to new homes will need to travel for work and leisure. These impacts can be addressed by measures required through the planning process for active travel, such as the proposal for the Gilston Garden Village development. Specific actions can be taken to encourage walking and cycling, with the council working with Hertfordshire County Council to further improve public transport provision.
- d. An increased provision of services to meet extra demand such as refuse collections will most likely create additional emissions. Negative impacts can be reduced by designing new developments with due consideration to operational efficiency and ensuring only the cleanest vehicles are used.
- e. New roads have the potential to increase pollutant concentrations unless they are well designed and well placed. East Herts Council needs to work closely with Hertfordshire County Council to ensure that necessary infrastructure improvements are well designed and well placed to minimise any detrimental effects on air quality.

2. Support healthier lifestyles for residents

- a. Measures to encourage active travel such as walking and cycling can support residents maintain an active lifestyle, which has additional health benefits beyond those achieved through improving air quality.
- b. Reducing the need to travel promotes car free neighbourhoods which in turn provide good quality outdoor spaces that can encourage residents to be more active, this has further benefits in terms of improved mental health and wellbeing.
- c. Ensuring that outdoor spaces are protected from pollution sources not only makes them more pleasant to use but reduces residents' exposure.

3. Reduce the impact of traffic on air quality and congestion

- a. The council will support national schemes to encourage the uptake of cleaner vehicles, such as improved electric charging networks and we will continue to actively enhance our local charging infrastructure as much as possible to help encourage improvements in vehicle stock on the roads.

- b. Using the cleanest possible vehicles for public, private and freight transport can have a significantly positive impact on pollution concentrations so we will work within these areas to help enable and bring forward the necessary changes. Switching our own fleet from diesel vans to e-vehicles demonstrates that a transition to an entirely e-fleet is possible.

4. Reduce our own impact on air quality

- a. We have switched our own fleet of diesel vans to electric vehicles and we will now continue to make steps towards greening our contractors' fleets wherever possible. Greening of our own fleet sets a good example for other fleet operators; at the same time seeking higher environmental standards from council suppliers and contractors can accelerate this move significantly.
- b. Council owned buildings are emissions sources which need to be minimised to ensure we are leading by example delivering energy efficient low emission services. Annually the council publishes its own emissions figures, along with the sources of emissions and the resulting activities it will need to consider to move towards its net zero carbon target.

Action themes within the action plan

In order to deliver these four priorities, we propose to focus our work on the four main themes below. Focusing on these themes will have greatest impact on the reduction of emissions in East Hertfordshire based on the emissions sources identified and the powers within East Herts Council's remit.

- Promoting travel alternatives.
- Promoting low emission transport.
- Providing public information, awareness and education.
- Policy guidance and development control.

A. Promoting travel alternatives

This will include working with our partners on measures such as:

- increasing active travel through support of walking and cycling campaigns
- looking into bikeshare schemes
- provision of on street bike storage

- promotion of lift-share schemes
- supporting work on school travel plans and investigating the possibility of 'school streets'
- encouraging workplace travel plan provision
- identifying changes that can be made to reduce the number of delivery and servicing vehicles serving council administrative buildings.

B. Promoting low emission transport

This will include working with our partners on measures such as:

- encouraging residents to switch to electric vehicles, notably by seeking cost-effective ways to install more e-v chargers in council car parks
- exploring the potential to install on-street e-v charging points, such as on lamp columns
- encouraging businesses to look into the potential for freight consolidation.

C. Providing public information, raising awareness and education

This will include working with our partners on measures such as:

- delivering anti-idling campaigns
- delivering behavioural change campaigns
- expanding / promoting air text service
- developing communications plans to raise awareness of air pollution effects and the measures residents can take to reduce air pollution effects
- creating a new interactive standalone air quality website
- promoting uptake of grant and loan funding among individual households, social landlords and private landlords for energy efficiency retrofitting projects such as replacement of boilers, insulation and the like.

D. Policy guidance and development control

This will include working with our partners on measures such as:

- reducing emissions from our own activities
- promoting adherence to our Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document and Climate Change Strategy

- encouraging use of zero emission heating sources such as electric heating, ground source and air source heat pumps
- adopting a construction code of practice
- explore domestic solid fuel and bonfire policy options aiming to reduce diesel generators on construction sites wherever possible.