

# Place and Resources Overview Committee

## 21 April 2022

# Results of the Draft Air Quality Action Plan Consultation and proposed Air Quality Action Plan

## For Review and consultation

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr L Miller, Customer and Community Services

**Local Councillor(s):** Cllr S Christopher

**Executive Director:** J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author: Janet Moore

Title: Service Manager – Environmental Protection

Tel: 01305 838413

Email: [janet.moore@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:janet.moore@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Report Status:** Public

### 1. Brief Summary:

- 1.1 The Local Air Quality Management regime places a statutory obligation on all local authorities to review and assess air quality in their areas, and to determine whether national air quality objectives are likely to be achieved. Where an exceedance occurs, the local authority must declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and prepare an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) setting out measures it intends to put in place to achieve the objectives.
- 1.2 Air quality throughout the Dorset Council area is generally very good, mainly due to our predominantly rural environment. However, sections of the A35 trunk road that run through Chideock village are close to or exceed the objective level for nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). Vehicle emissions account for the main source of NO<sub>2</sub> here and the topographical features along this stretch of the road further concentrates and raises the emission levels. In 2007 an AQMA was declared in Chideock. The associated AQAP was drafted in 2008.

- 1.3 A review of the AQAP has been overdue and progress has been hampered for a number of reasons including the reprioritising of work required during the period of Covid restrictions. This draft AQAP has been produced as a result of our statutory duty under the Local Air Quality Management regime and will comply with the requirements for an annual review within the provisions of the new Environment Act 2021.
- 1.4 The AQAP outlines the actions that Dorset Council will deliver with its partners to reduce concentrations of and exposure to air pollution. The plan will have a positive impact on air quality however it is recognised that the specific issue in Chideock is related to emissions from vehicles on a trunk road over which the Council has no direct control.

## **2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 To consider the findings from the Draft Air Quality Action Plan consultation and agree the measures contained within the proposed Air Quality Action Plan.
- 2.2 To advise on any further work which your committee would like officers to undertake in respect of the proposed Air Quality Action Plan.
- 2.3 To agree that the proposed Air Quality Action Plan be submitted to the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for comment and approval.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendations:**

- 3.1 The Air Quality Action Plan is required as part of the Councils statutory duty within the Local Air Quality Management framework.
- 3.2 The process to develop the AQAP is prescribed in law and requires a public consultation exercise before submitting to Defra for approval and subsequent adoption by Cabinet.
- 3.3 Whilst Dorset Council is committed to improving the air quality to people in Chideock and across Dorset, as a local authority it is important to consider the cost effectiveness and feasibility of different measures.
- 3.4 The Environment Act 2021 includes provision for additional air quality objectives related to particulate matter which have not been previously included in the national framework. The proposed AQAP reflects this addition.

- 3.5 The proposed AQAP seeks to improve air quality in Chideock and the wider council area.

#### **4. Report**

- 4.1 Under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995, Local Authorities are required to review, assess and report annually against air quality objectives (AQO), to Defra. Where the AQO are not achieved, the authority must declare an AQMA. Following the declaration of an AQMA, the authority must then develop an AQAP which sets out the local measures to be implemented in pursuit of achieving the air quality objectives. An AQMA was declared in Chideock in 2007.
- 4.2 The AQMA has been declared along the A35, due to exceedances of the annual mean Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) AQO, with the main source of emissions being from road traffic. This is exacerbated by the gradient at this location, by congestion and the canyon-like nature of the road (i.e. properties close to the carriageway resulting in reduced dispersion at the building facades).
- 4.3 The A35 is part of the Strategic Road Network. National Highways have undertaken significant supporting work by investigating a number of potential measures at Chideock. These are given below and have been discounted by National Highways at this time.
- 4.3.1 The use of single lane traffic flows. Modelling showed that this proposal would lead to unacceptable levels of congestion, with queue lengths over 4km in both the eastbound and westbound directions. There would be increases in travel times of 467% in the eastbound and 373% in the westbound direction.
- 4.3.2 There have been calls for a bypass in Chideock for many years. This measure would need to be a government decision through the Road Investment Strategy. It is unlikely that it could be implemented in a realistic time frame to positively affect the AQO. There are significant cost and planning implications.
- 4.3.3 Charging zones have also been investigated. National Highways is not permitted to implement charging zones on the Strategic Road Network (by Government) and as such this measure has been discounted.
- 4.3.4 Eco barriers (green screens etc.) have been considered, but properties are too close to the road for them to be physically placed on the footpath.

- 4.5 Because of the nature of the road, the proximity of houses to the carriageway and the gradient at this location, the air quality issues at Chideock are not easy to resolve.
- 4.6 The AQAP focuses on Chideock with measures to reduce emissions on the A35. Although the LAQM regime is to achieve the AQO at hotspot locations such as in Chideock, we recognise that long-term exposure to air pollution is a strong driver of health impacts. Measurements for exceedances of AQOs, do not reflect the evidence that there is no 'safe level' for air pollutants such as particulates including PM<sub>2.5</sub>. This AQAP therefore not only provides actions specific to Chideock, but also provides more strategic measures to ensure that emissions gradually reduce across Dorset which importantly should help to ensure that AQMAs are not required in the future.

## **5. The Process**

- 5.1 Defra provide clear guidance for local authorities to develop effective AQAPs. This includes engagement of key stakeholders to review measures in place, evaluate further measures, and look to reduce air pollution emissions through a range of policies and actions.
- 5.2 This AQAP was prepared by Dorset Council, in association with Air Quality Consultants Ltd and with the support and agreement of the following.
- Environmental Protection Team Leader, Dorset Council
  - Service Manager for Spatial Planning Economic Growth and Infrastructure
  - Route Manager, National Highways
  - Technical Lead for Air Quality, National Highways
  - Healthy Places Project Coordinator, Public Health Dorset
  - Transport Planning Manager, Dorset Council
  - Transport Planning Officer, Dorset Council
- 5.3 National Highways are key to the implementation of the transport measures for the A35 within the AQAP and their input is paramount to its success. However, as the aim is for wider collaboration and reductions in emissions more generally across the county, public health, transport, planning and climate change colleagues have also been invaluable in the drafting of the plan. Officers will continue to be fully involved and consulted as the process continues.

## **6. Consultation Results**

- 6.1 The purpose of the consultation was to allow residents, businesses and visitors to Dorset to tell us what they think about our Draft AQAP. It included the proposed measures and actions to improve air quality.
- 6.2 The consultation period ran from 29 November 2021 to 23 January 2022.
- 6.3 171 responses were received, of which over 95% were from Dorset Council residents.
- 6.4 There is a genuine concern for the air quality within Dorset – especially at a local level. Over 70% of responding residents, when asked specifically about the subject on their local area, said they were either concerned or very concerned and of these over 80% thought traffic was the main source of pollution. This was followed by farming (6.8%) and industry (4.8%).
- 6.5 Around 70% of respondents thought that not enough was being done locally to improve air quality. In terms of the biggest cause of air pollution from the participants' households, just under 45% thought it was from their energy use, and just over 35% attributed it to their travel choices.
- 6.6 When asked which measures respondents would consider using to improve air quality in the Dorset Council area, there were four main responses. These were walking more; using a lower emission vehicle; cycling and using the bus. From all the options available, around 20% would not consider using any of the alternative measures.
- 6.7 Highlights
  - 6.7.1 Domestic Fuel Use. Around 80% of respondents said they used mains gas and of these, most used it as their predominant fuel for heating/hot water production. The next highest fuels used were electricity, oil and wood. Regarding wood burning/multi-fuel stoves, about 30% (which equates to 52 respondents) either had one currently (just over half were Defra approved models) or were intending on getting one.
  - 6.7.2 Air Quality in Chideock. Around half of all respondents were aware there was an existing air quality issue in Chideock, with an Air Quality Management Area declared.
  - 6.7.3 Measures from the Draft Air Quality Action Plan. From the five categories set out within the draft Air Quality Action Plan, there

were two highlighted by the respondents as of high importance. These were to continue the collaborative work with National Highways to improve air quality on the A35 in Chideock and to develop policies to support better air quality

- 6.8 There was no strong feeling either way on whether the draft AQAP would provide a good basis to improve air quality in the Dorset Council area. Around 100 respondents left further comments of which several wanted more action for Weymouth, Portland and Boot Hill in particular. There were additional comments sharing a common theme around public transport, stating that the provision should be better or commenting that services had been reduced. There was also concern about congested roads in urban areas and that more housing developments may increase vehicle numbers.
- 6.9 Concerns were also raised over issues such as the proposed Portland waste to energy plant and the domestic use of solid fuel stoves.
- 6.10 Chideock Parish Council provided a full and valuable response to the consultation and subsequently met with officers to discuss issues. Additional actions are included in the proposed plan and the Council intends to recommence stakeholder meetings on a six-monthly basis to include relevant partner agencies. These meetings will facilitate discussion on progress with the AQAP

## **7. AQAP measures**

- 7.1 The proposed AQAP includes the following actions.
  - 7.1.1 Action 1 - Continue collaborative work with National Highways to investigate, and where appropriate implement, direct measures to improve air quality on the A35 in Chideock. A number of measures have been fully investigated by National Highways. Dorset Council will report on any changes seen with the permanent speed reduction measure which was implemented.
  - 7.1.2 Action 2 - Promote behaviour change away from single occupancy private vehicle use. Access to efficient public transport will be of high importance in reducing demand for cars, including the provision of buses and bus priority measures in urban areas. Chideock Parish Council have raised the possibility of an off-road pedestrian/cycle link between Chideock and Bridport, which may have the potential to take some traffic off the road network. The feasibility of this option will be investigated, initially by Dorset Council.

- 7.1.3 Action 3 - Promote the use of alternatively fuelled vehicles. The primary objective here is the reduction of carbon and local pollutant emissions from transport. However, this measure does not deliver congestion reduction, or increased levels of physical activity that are generated by measures to encourage active travel modes. Provision of suitable infrastructure to support low emission vehicles is critical to their introduction. The Dorset Council, Transport Action Plan contains longer term actions (2023 onwards) to encourage the use of ultra-low emission public transport vehicles (including taxis), particularly smaller buses and to encourage low carbon freight and logistics (freight strategy to be reviewed and amended by 2022). These longer-term actions are supported.
- 7.1.4 Action 4 - Develop policies to support better air quality. For the planning process, a regulatory framework is in place for new and existing developments to minimise emissions. i.e. a requirement to implement or support actions that make a positive contribution to improving air quality. Air quality assessments for applications are undertaken where air quality is of specific concern. This action will enable us to review of current wording of Policy ENV12 in the new Local Plan, to ensure that air quality gains a high prominence. It also enables the production of a guidance document for developers on air quality, which could take the form of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Good design principles that will reduce emissions (or exposure) can also be included within the SPD. The scope of the guidance could potentially be broadened to incorporate climate change.
- 7.1.5 Action 5 - Control domestic emissions by promoting low emission plant and fuels. Open fires and wood-burning stoves have risen in popularity. Being an additional form of heating in both urban and rural areas; for a minority they may be the sole heat source. In addition, there has been a growth of biomass boilers for home heating. This increase in burning solid fuels in our homes is having an impact on our air quality and now makes up the single largest contributor to UK wide Particulate Matter emissions.
- 7.1.6 Chideock has a long-standing air quality issue which has been given attention in recent years by both the Council (including the predecessor council) and by National Highways, both of which have engaged with communities and elected representatives to explore improving air quality. The Parish Council have been particularly active in voicing concerns and engaging with stakeholders. As a result of further discussions with Chideock Parish Council we intend to include the following additional measures with the AQAP

- Explore the use of targeted road signage to reduce traffic burden through the village.
- Support for a proposed footpath/cycleway between Chideock and Bridport.
- A targeted awareness raising for residents on air pollution impacts and how the local plan / planning objectives and climate control actions work to minimise harmful pollutants.
- Better promotion of the electric charging point within the village
- Support Chideock Parish Council to move forward with some of their own community ideas and measures including working with the University of Bristol on an initiative around monitoring particulate levels in the village.

## **8. Complimentary work to support the action plan**

- 8.1 We have recently been successful in a bid for grant funding from DEFRA. We know there is increasing local public concern around PM<sub>2.5</sub> in Dorset, and that, at present, there is little information in relation to current concentrations and how they vary across the County. The objective of this funded project is to increase the level of knowledge of PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and ultimately reduce emissions by changing behavioural attitudes, especially in relation to solid fuel burning. The project is for two years and is in two parts. Firstly, to carry out monitoring in selected locations. This will provide us with a source and level profile. The second part of the project will be public awareness raising and will be implemented alongside the monitoring and will support work being undertaken at a national level. The campaign will encourage solid fuel users to make positive changes to their burning habits.
- 8.2 Defra is currently running three public consultations on measures proposed to make it easier for local authorities to tackle poor air quality in their areas. Dorset Council will consider the proposals and respond accordingly.
- 8.2.1 Under the Environment Act 2021, the Government will be introducing two new targets for PM<sub>2.5</sub> by October 2022. This includes a long- term target aimed at reducing overall population exposure. The consultation is open until 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022.  
<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-environment-policy/consultation-on-environmental-targets/>
- 8.2.2 A consultation on the review of the Local Air Quality Management Policy which seeks to increase engagement and collaboration between councils, partner organisations and the communities that

they serve, with an increased focus on the impact of air quality on people's health. This consultation closes on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/air-quality-and-industrial-emissions/consultation-on-the-review-of-the-local-air-quality/>

- 8.2.3 A consultation on the proposal to designate National Highways as a relevant Public Authority in order to ensure more consistent collaboration with local authorities to reduce road pollution.  
[Consultation on Designation of National Highways as a "Relevant Public Authority" - Defra - Citizen Space](#)

## **9. Financial Implications**

- 9.1 Financial implications will be dependent upon which measures are taken forward to and will be detailed in any specific proposals.

## **10. Climate Implications**

- 10.1 The proposed measures will have a positive impact on our climate objectives. Air quality and climate emergency actions are often interlinked.

## **11. Wellbeing and Health Implications**

- 11.1 Children and older people are more susceptible to the effects of air pollution. In early life exposure can affect lung function and growth. For older people it can increase the risk of heart problems and stroke. People with existing health conditions are susceptible to the effects of poor air quality.
- 11.2 Exposure to poor air quality can exacerbate symptoms of asthma and cardiovascular disease. It also increases the risk of heart problems and stroke for those with existing cardiovascular and respiratory conditions.
- 11.3 Exposure to poor air quality can affect a foetus within the first few weeks, with evidence emerging for resulting low birth weights and premature birth. Therefore, pregnant women are also particularly susceptible to air pollution.
- 11.4 Although air pollution can be harmful to everyone, people who live in more polluted areas are more affected. This tends to include low-income communities as they are more likely to live in areas with poorer air quality due to lower value properties often being in more congested areas. They are also more likely to fit other criteria which indicate poorer health in general, making them more susceptible.

- 11.5 The measures contained in the AQAP seek to reduce air pollution and should have a positive effect on wellbeing and health. Close working will continue with Public Health Dorset to identify opportunities to improve the health of communities by reducing air pollution.

## **12. Other**

- 12.1 The production of an AQAP is a statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021.
- 12.2 Addressing air quality issues involves a number of council services and wider stakeholders. Officers will ensure that appropriate liaison continues to ensure an effective approach.

## **13. Risk Assessment**

- 13.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Dorset Council's existing Air Quality Action Plan for Chideock is overdue for review. New legislation (Environment Act 2021) provides a statutory responsibility that Action Plans must be reviewed on a 5-year basis.

Dorset Council, by producing this AQAP, will be able to be positively held account to this

Residual Risk: Low

## **14. Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 14.1 Completed and appended to this report. Outcomes were as follows:
- 14.2 Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, Rural isolation and Socio-economic deprivation are protected characteristics which would result from positive impacts. The remainder would have neutral impact. No protected characteristic would be negatively impacted by the AQAP. No protected characteristic has been identified to have an unclear impact, which would then require further investigation.

## **15. Appendices**

- 14.1 [Appendix 1 – Draft Air Quality Action Plan](#)
- 14.2 [Appendix 2 – Consultation Response Report](#)
- 14.3 [Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment](#)

## **16. Background Papers**

- 15.1 [Transport action plan - Dorset Council](#)
- 15.2 [Dorset Council Local Plan - Dorset Council](#)
- 15.3 [Environment Act 1995 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- 15.4 [Environment Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- 15.5 [LAQM-TG16-April-21-v1.pdf \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)