

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 21st June 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal and Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Revocation of Halton's Air Quality Management Areas in Widnes Town Centre – Result of public consultation

WARD(S) Appleton and Central & West Bank

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members on the outcome of a public consultation on the revocation of the air quality management areas in Widnes town centre

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) Members are invited to consider the consultation responses alongside the observations of the council's Environmental Protection Team.
- 2) Members endorse the proposal to revoke the air quality management areas in Widnes town centre.
- 3) A report be presented to the Council's Executive Board recommending that the air quality management areas in Widnes town centre are revoked
- 4) Members note that should the air quality management areas be revoked there will be a requirement for Halton to produce a borough wide air quality strategy.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Board received a report in February 2023 setting out the rationale for revoking the air quality management areas in Widnes Town Centre. Members agreed to proceed with a public consultation on the proposal.

3.2 In summary; The areas were declared in 2011 when traffic congestion in the town centre caused high levels of Nitrogen Dioxide. Levels of Nitrogen dioxide were measured at 49 µg/m³ against a UK legal limit of 40 µg/m³

Since then a number of developments have resulted in a significant improvement in air quality. These include improvements in vehicle emission technology and the opening of the Mersey Gateway Bridge in 2017. This resulted in reduced traffic congestion in Widnes town centre.

Levels of Nitrogen dioxide are now consistently below the UK legal limit.

There are currently 2 air quality management areas which include the Deacon Road, Albert Road and Peelhouse Lane area and the area around Milton Road and Simms Cross.

Although it is proposed that the air quality management areas will be revoked, monitoring of air quality will continue across the borough.

3.3 The public consultation ran for 3 weeks from 17th May 2023 to 7th June 2023. The consultation was promoted through the council website, social media channels and via a press release resulting in coverage in the local media. A dedicated email box was set up to receive responses. Ward members for Central and West Bank and Appleton wards were also notified of the consultation.

3.4 In total 7 responses were received. 1 respondent supported the proposal to revoke the management areas based on the rationale presented. Of the 6 responses that questioned the proposal there were two broad themes to these responses. The first is that the data used was not recent and the second theme was that the respondents still considered the levels to be high and therefore the air quality management areas should be retained.

These two points will be addressed in turn below.

For reference the consultation responses have been produced at appendix 1.

3.5 The observation that the data used for the consultation is not recent is a valid point. However this reflects the fact that the limit is an annual average based on data for a full calendar year. Each year the council submits an annual air quality status report to DEFRA. This contains the previous year's monitoring data.

So the 2022 annual status report contains the data for 2021. This was the data that was used for the February 2023 PPB report and the consultation as this was the latest data available at the time.

DEFRA have now provided the calculation guidance for the 2022 data enabling us to calculate the levels for the calendar year 2022.

This data is set out in table 1 below and demonstrates that the levels remain below the legal limit and confirms the sustained improvement in air quality in the Town centre since 2011.

Table 1. Diffusion tube monitoring data last 6 years – updated to include 2022 data.

Diffusion Tube ID	X OS Grid Ref (Easting)	Site Type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
4	Milton Road	Roadside	37.0	35.0	31.3	25.1	30.1	30.4
5	Milton Road	Roadside	38.0	35.0	32.5	26.2	32.5	32.2
6	Milton Road	Roadside	32.0	32.0	26.4	23.7	29.5	27.3
9	Peel House Lane	Roadside	33.0	33.0	30.0	23.8	26.2	25.2
10	Peel House Lane	Kerbside	39.0	38.0	37.5	30.9	34.8	34.3
12	Deacon Road	Roadside	32.0	30.0	27.2	21.2	23.8	23.4
13	Deacon Road	Roadside	33.0	28.0	28.1	22.0	24.8	22.5

Limit = 40 µg/m³

- 3.6 The second theme from the consultation was that the levels are still high and therefore the air quality management areas should be maintained.

The levels of nitrogen dioxide are now consistently within UK legal limits and can no longer be considered high. There is no longer an obligation on Halton to declare an air quality management area given the current levels.

It is acknowledged that there was a considerable drop in pollution levels in 2020 during the height of the pandemic. Although levels have increased post the pandemic they have not returned to the same levels observed prior to the pandemic and are far lower than the level of 49 µg/m³ measured in 2011 when the management areas were originally declared.

It is acknowledged that pollution levels can vary significantly from year to year due to metrological conditions. Therefore DEFRA guidance to local authorities on revoking air quality management areas recommends analysing several years' worth of data to ensure any improvement is sustained. The 6 years of data set out above demonstrates a sustained improvement in air quality.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Given the improvements in air quality it is proposed to revoke the air quality management areas as there are no further outstanding actions required to reduce emissions to within legal limits in those areas. Monitoring in those areas will however continue. Furthermore, from 2023 the Government will require that local authorities that do not have an air quality management area must produce an air quality strategy to set out how they will proactively monitor and improve air quality in their area. These measures will mitigate the risks of revoking the air quality management areas.

4.2 The original decision to implement the air quality management areas was taken by Executive Board. It is therefore considered appropriate to seek Executive Board approval for the revocation.

4.3 There is no formal statutory consultation process to revoke the air quality management areas however government guidance suggests public consultation is good practice. This consultation has now taken place. Once the areas are revoked DEFRA will be informed via the online local air quality portal and the areas will be removed from the list of active air quality management areas.

4.4 If members endorse this proposal a report will be presented to the councils Executive Board recommending the air quality management areas in Widnes Town Centre be revoked.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Air quality within the air quality management areas has improved and is now within UK legal limits.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Although it is proposed to revoke the air quality management areas monitoring of air quality will continue in those areas to ensure air quality remains within legal limits. Furthermore should the air quality management area be revoked there will be a requirement for the borough to produce an air quality strategy setting out how the council will proactively monitor and improve air quality. There are therefore no significant risks from this proposal

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Although there are no direct climate change implications from this proposal there is an accepted link between fossil fuel emissions and climate change. The demonstrated improvements in air quality within the air quality management areas can be attributed to reduced vehicle emissions in these areas.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.

Appendix 1

Consultation responses

1 The table of information you have published does show a decline in readings, however the latest information you have published in this article is not very recent and shows a stepped increase over all roadside readings. Do you not think that with this stepped increase it would be prudent to also publish the latter information for latter years and also take a spot check and publish this to show the readings are still down at an acceptable level rather than publishing old data which makes it look better than it possibly is?

2 I think that revocation is the right move. The air quality is massively improved. The air quality index supports this move with sustained good quality stats. Traffic flows are massively improved now with the new roadways and the Mersey Gateway achieving a 90% diversion of traffic that passes through the borough away from the town centres. Traffic passing through from other boroughs now bypasses the AQM sites entirely.

3 Despite some reduction in emissions, emissions are still considerably high in some areas and close to the legal limit. As well as the fact that Covid seemed to stunt the impact of the action plan over the last few years as after Covid many of the numbers went back up to around the same or sometimes higher than what they were pre-Covid. Because of this I don't think it would be sensible to remove the plans just yet, particularly until progress is back to be sustained as it would be too easy at this point for numbers to go back to the levels they were.

4 The figures may be under 40 but they are still high. The measures should be kept in place for a further ten years

5 Hello, Looking at the breakdown of the data on https://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/site/graphing?site_id=WID2 it looks like almost 6 months of data is missing for nitrogen dioxide measurements. I know this isn't an official Halton website so it might just be them not having the data. Also the reports still look high for nitrogen dioxide?
Thanks

6 Any management of air quality is a positive step for the council and as such I support keeping the management in place plus the recorded levels are subject to wind and seasonality

7 Having spoken with neighbours who go to Widnes we would like to see the rover tong (SIC) and controls stay in place