

Agenda Item 56.

TITLE	Designation of Two New Air Quality Management Areas
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 24 September 2015
WARD	Emmbrook, Evendons, Norreys, Twyford and Wescott
LEAD OFFICER	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	Pauline Jorgenson Executive Member for Resident Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Council is committed to improving air quality in the borough. The designation of two areas as Air Quality Management Areas allows the Council to develop and implement a mitigation strategy (Action Plan) to improve air quality in these areas and to contribute to the health and wellbeing of people who live and work in the borough.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) designate the areas in Wokingham Town Centre and Twyford Town Centre as identified on Plans 1 and 2 (attached) as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) under Section 83(1) of the Environmental Act 1995;
- 2) agree the spend as profiled in the financial information section below;
- 3) agree that an Action Plan is developed to manage the Air Quality Management Area within 12-18 months of the designation.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Two areas of the Borough in Wokingham and Twyford Town Centres have been identified as having elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) slightly over the maximum requirement set out by the Environment Act 1995 (Annual mean of 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air which is one-millionth of a gram. (µg/m³)). This has triggered a Detailed Assessment and there is now a statutory requirement for the designation of these areas as Air Quality Management Areas. This allows the Council to develop and implement a mitigation strategy (Action Plan) to improve air quality in these areas.

Background

The Environment Act 1995 introduced a system of Local Air Quality Management which requires local authorities to regularly review and assess air quality within their areas. If monitoring indicates that levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) are at or near specified levels, a detailed assessment must take place.

Monitoring that has taken place in 2012 and 2013 identified two areas in Wokingham Borough with slightly elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide. A Detailed Assessment of these areas was undertaken (this included modelling based on traffic data and taking into account known planning developments such as new Station Link Road) and identified a small number of properties within Wokingham Town Centre and Twyford Town Centre where the annual average nitrogen dioxide objective is likely to be exceeded. Monitoring in 2014, and to date in 2015, has confirmed levels have continued to exceed the level of 40µg/m³ (with an annual average for Wokingham between 40 and 52 µg/m³ and for Twyford 54µg/m³).

The Council takes its responsibilities very seriously, and is therefore declaring an AQMA to ensure that we can monitor and seek to improve the situation. This ensures that we comply with legislation that requires us to take appropriate action.

We currently monitor using diffusion tubes in a number of suitable locations. These are analysed monthly and provide an average level. We have installed a continuous monitoring unit in Peach Street which will enable hourly levels to be assessed and help identify any patterns in the levels which will inform our Action Plan.

Implications

Once the declarations have been made the Council must prepare an Action Plan for each location, and this must be submitted to DEFRA within 12-18 months of declaring the AQMA. The action plan will address how the Council will work towards reducing the levels of nitrogen dioxide within the AQMA and will be prepared for consideration by the Council's Executive before its submission in Spring 2017. This should also ensure that decisions made by Wokingham Borough Council do not result in an increase in levels in these areas.

Action Plan

This Action Plan is required to manage and reduce air quality in the identified area and will require multi-disciplinary input from a range of Council departments and stakeholders. Action plans could include improved traffic signalling or infrastructure projects and as the main reason for the air quality issues is transport related pollution. Over the next 12 -18 months the Environmental Health Shared Service as part of the Environment Directorate will lead in the development of this Action Plan. Throughout this period, the Council will continue to assess the air quality in the declared AQMA.

Conclusion

The designation of the AQMA is a statutory requirement and provides the opportunity for a multi-agency approach to deliver an action plan to improve air quality within Wokingham and Twyford Town Centres.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£5,000	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£6,000	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£3,000	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

£10,000 capital per year for 3 years identified in Medium Term Financial Plan and Year 1 secured.

Cross-Council Implications

Land Charges will need to be notified of any properties within the declared areas.

List of Background Papers

The Environmental Act 1995
 Detailed Assessment: Wokingham and Twyford - Local Air Quality Management Progress Reports 2013 and 2014
 The Air Quality Standards Regulations (2007), Statutory Instrument 2007 No 64

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