

**Extract from the
Air Quality Scrutiny Report**

GENERAL FINDINGS

Air Quality Management Area

There is one Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Bromsgrove District which is located at Lickey End, M42 Junction 1 (see Appendix 3). It was necessary to declare an AQMA at this location due to the exceedences of the annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and the AQMA came into force in July 2001.

Following the declaration of the AQMA, Bromsgrove District Council was tasked by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) to liaise with the Highways Agency as the main organisation responsible for this particular area. We therefore felt it vital that we as a Task Group ensured representatives from the Highways Agency in particular were invited to attend.

Initially, we were disappointed with the lack of response from the Highways Agency. However, a representative did attend a meeting and provided the Task Group with very useful information as well as answering all our queries including providing details on Ramp Metering and ATM (Active Traffic Management).

Other Parts of the District with Poor Air Quality

Other locations which also appear to have air quality issues include: New Road in Rubery; Kidderminster Road and Birmingham Road (A456/A491) in Hagley; Davenal House, Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove; Black Cross Public House, Worcester Road, Bromsgrove; and Redditch Road/Buntsford Hill, Bromsgrove.

With regard to Redditch Road/Buntsford Hill, we were pleased to learn that the Council has been awarded a £12,000 grant to enable officers to continuously monitor the area for 6 months to obtain accurate evidence which could be later used to improve air quality in the area.

Health Issues

We obtained some useful information from Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and although we understand the PCT could not categorically state that poor air quality caused respiratory illnesses such as asthma, it was agreed that poor air quality was a trigger and certainly exacerbated such illnesses. Asthma is increasing throughout the country and there is more evidence coming to light supporting a link between asthma and living in close proximity to traffic.

It is understood that diagnosing skills and recording methods of GPs in relation to asthma do vary in different parts of the District and we have tried to address this issue in our recommendations. However, there is still some concern about the asthma prevalence for the three GP practices in Rubery which appeared higher than other areas of the District.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Low Emission Zones (LEZ)

Members of the Task Group discussed the plans of the Mayor of London to introduce a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) across London using a phased approach commencing in February 2008. It is the view of the Task Group that this Council should consider introducing a similar scheme by applying to Worcestershire County Council for certain roads to be within a LEZ. This particular measure is also referred to in Volume 1 of the Government's Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as a possible solution.

The Task Group consulted Worcestershire County Council on this suggestion and we were informed that it was possible to introduce such a scheme. There would be certain steps the Council would need to take such as identifying which roads and vehicles would be covered in the scheme as well as carrying out extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders. However, we believe such a scheme would make a huge difference to people's health as it will help deter the most polluting vehicles and encourage businesses to upgrade their vehicles.

Similar to London, a road user charging order would need to be in operation but it would not apply to cars, only to certain vehicles such as lorries, buses, coaches, large vans and mini-buses that do not meet a particular standard i.e. Euro III (see Appendix 4). The purpose of the scheme would be to deter the use of high polluting vehicles and provide an incentive to businesses to upgrade their vehicles to avoid charges. The scheme could be enforced via spot checks.

Consultation in London showed there was support particularly from residents but also (and perhaps surprisingly to some) a large proportion of businesses. It is believed that studies have shown that an LEZ can significantly improve air quality which can only be of benefit to all those who work and live in the District, particularly in relation to our health such as reducing the risk of respiratory illnesses including asthma. It should be pointed out that health issues caused by air pollution were one of the main concerns voiced by local residents who attended one of our meetings.

We understand that implementing such a scheme could not happen overnight and further investigation would be required as well as extensive consultation. However, the Task Group strongly believe that this Council has a duty to at least consider introducing LEZ by agreeing to investigate it fully, particularly as it could be possible that this scheme might be self-funding.

We should take a bold step and move forward and be the first Council in the Midlands to consider and implement such a scheme which links to the Council Objective relating to Environment.

Recommendation 1	<p>This Council considers applying to Worcestershire County Council for certain roads to be made low emission zone roads therefore limiting access to certain types of vehicles which reduce air quality. Specifically, the Task Group believe the following roads/areas should be low emission due to high NO₂ levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately a 2 mile radius around Bromsgrove town centre ▪ A38 Bypass in Rubery ▪ All roads in Rubery with a weight restriction ▪ A456 in Hagley ▪ A491 in Hagley
Financial Implications	<p>There are no financial implications relating to carrying out a detailed investigation around the idea of introducing a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) and it is possible that if such a scheme was implemented, it could be self-funding as registration and penalty charges might cover any costs including the cost of carrying out spot checks for enforcement purposes.</p>

➤ Bromsgrove Railway Station Improvements

We consulted Worcestershire County Council on whether it was possible that the improvements to Bromsgrove Railway Station and the provision of a park and ride service could have adverse effects on the A38 and the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at Lickey End, M42 Junction 1 due to commuters driving to use the park and ride service. However, officers from County were confident that the total impact would be a reduction in traffic.

To encourage more people to use public transport and therefore reduce traffic on the roads which would lead to improved air quality, the Task Group would like to show its support to the work being carried out to improve Bromsgrove Railway Station. Therefore, the second recommendation is:

Recommendation 2	<p>The Council remain committed to improving Bromsgrove Railway Station including the Park and Ride facility as this will encourage the public to use public transport and therefore reduce the numbers of cars on the roads which are having a negative impact on air quality.</p>
Financial Implications	<p>There are no financial implications relating to this recommendation.</p>