

WRS Board

14th November 2019

Information Report – Air Quality Update 2019

Recommendation

That the Board notes the Report and that members use the contents of the information provided in their own reporting back to fellow members of the partner authorities.

Background

District Councils have a duty to review and assess local air quality within their districts against a set of health based objectives. Under EU Directives the UK was required to comply with those objectives by 2015 and in 2017 Defra published the first of several National Action Plans to demonstrate how it intends to comply.

Report

Local Air Quality Management

The Local Air Quality Management process (LAQM) is the Local Authority role with air quality. That is set out in Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 and subsequent Technical Guidance and Policy documents. There are a number of health based objectives for pollutants but for Worcestershire it is nitrogen dioxide which is the primary pollutant of concern. The objectives for that pollutant are an annual average of 40 microgrammes per metre cubed for a residential property or school and a one-hour average of 200 microgrammes per metre cubed for a property where someone would realistically spend an hour, such as outdoor seating of a café or a playground. WRS reports annually to Defra on behalf of all Districts on the current situation.

Where a breach of the objective is identified there is a requirement for the Local Authority to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). WRS monitors air quality around the district and where an area of concern is identified an assessment is carried out. Following declaration, there is a requirement to produce an action plan and update that plan with progress and report to Defra annually.

There are currently 7 AQMAs in Worcestershire. The focus of Defra Guidance to Local Authorities has been aimed at District and County Councils, together with Public Health colleagues to deliver the measures to improve air quality that are included in their local Action Plans.

It is difficult to predict when the Worcestershire authorities may meet

compliance with the National Objective (such that there is no longer a requirement for an Air Quality Management Area). For most AQMAs the trend is downwards but for some areas the situation is deteriorating. It is unlikely that we will have compliance across all Worcestershire Districts in the next 5 years without intervention.

Local Update

Annual monitoring data for 2018 has been published on the WRS website but the following summarises the results and current situation.

Bromsgrove: Three AQMAs remain in Bromsgrove town at Worcester Road, Redditch Road and Lickey End where levels of Nitrogen Dioxide have not shown any discernable trend other than a slight decrease. In the last year only Worcester Road was showing exceedance. Little progress has been made with Action Plan measures to date although discussions continue with implementation of enhancements along the A38 corridor.

Levels of nitrogen dioxide in Kidderminster Road, Hagley had not exceeded the National Objective in the three years prior to 2018. Thus that year, the Kidderminster Road, Hagley AQMA was revoked by Bromsgrove District Council. However, following revocation the monitoring network was extended with some of the extension funded by the Parish Council. There is one location where it appears there may be higher levels of Nitrogen Dioxide than expected. In line with Defra Guidance, a watching brief is being maintained.

Malvern Hills: The levels of nitrogen dioxide in the District remain very low. Upton upon Severn High Street was the only area that previously gave us concern but that has remained well below the National Objective level.

Redditch: The levels of nitrogen dioxide in Redditch remain very low as a result of the foresight of well planned housing and road layouts. Other Road is the only area of concern in the past but has been consistently just beneath the National Objective. Additional monitoring has been put around a new site of diesel powered electrical generation to ensure this does not have a detrimental impact.

Worcester City: The City historically had a number of AQMAs, with Newtown Road revoked a number of years ago and three AQMAs (Dolday, Lowesmoor/Rainbow Hill and St John's) until June this year when all three existing ones were varied to form one AQMA that matches the administrative boundary of the City. Not all areas within this AQMA have air quality concerns, however it allows management of the wider area for the benefit of all residents rather than just the hotspots of poor air quality which were the old AQMAs plus London Road, The Tything and the Butts which all exceed the national objective.

However the overall trend over the last 15 years is downwards.

Progress on recommendations made by the Worcester City Task and Finish Group on air quality measures to be investigated are to be reported back to their Committee in December.

Wychavon: Port Street AQMA was revoked in May 2018 due to the improved situation, whereas Worcester Road, Wychbold AQMA was declared the same month. The issue is predominantly caused by diesel vehicles making up 44% of the nitrogen dioxide emissions in that locality. Light diesel vehicles and heavy goods vehicles make up the next largest contributors at 26% and 16% respectively. An Action Plan is yet to be drafted but will be developed by a proposed steering group to include contributions from the County Council and Highways England. There are already a number of actions that have been taken by Highways England to improve traffic flow on the M5 and First Buses have retrofitted all buses along the 144 route to Euro VI standard. Proposals to close the lorry park at Shell Service Station, Upton Warren are likely to also have a positive impact on air quality.

Wyre Forest: Action Plan measures for Welchgate, Bewdley AQMA are limited because of the urban topography of the location, a narrow street with high traffic volumes, houses close to the road and traffic lights causing standing traffic. The options that are available are generally politically unacceptable or impractical. Nitrogen dioxide levels along both sides of the street at residential facades remain above the National Objective.

In working with Wyre Forest District Council, WRS have assisted in ensuring road layout proposals of the Churchfields Masterplan have been developed to maximise the opportunities to improve air quality in the Horsefair AQMA, Kidderminster. Whilst it has not been possible to reduce traffic by the required 60-70% of current levels, by making streets one way, levels have been significantly reduced. It is hoped this will have a significant impact on the poor air quality in this location which continues to have the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide in the County.

With increased development proposed around Stourport-on-Severn, WRS have been ensuring air quality impact assessments are being undertaken appropriately as the High Street has previously been considered an area of concern. Pollution at first floor level (where there are relevant receptors) does not currently exceed the National Objective, however the situation is being monitored closely and development proposals scrutinised to ensure air quality is not compromised such that an AQMA is required.

The levels of nitrogen dioxide at Comberton Hill and Chester Road junction in Kidderminster continue to cause concern. The monitoring network has been expanded in this location and a detailed assessment will be undertaken to include modeling of pollution levels along that stretch of road to establish whether there is a requirement to declare an AQMA. The situation is exacerbated by the extensive

proposals for additional housing on the eastern side of Kidderminster.

Reporting

The actual monitoring results for each district are reported annually in an 'Annual Status Report' (ASR) which is submitted to Defra. The report is produced between April and June with the previous year's monitoring data, following adjustment for location (to represent relevant exposure), analytical bias and any missing data (to represent a full year's worth of data). The ASR also provides details of all the current measures in the Action Plan to address poor air quality. All ASRs are available on the WRS website. Link below.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Annual Status Reports for each District, available from WRS website:
<https://worcsregservices.gov.uk/pollution/air-quality/local-air-quality-progress-reports.aspx>
