

29 October 2020

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Air Quality Engagement Officer</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Rosie Welch</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Air Quality Project Update</b>		<b>☎ 507157</b>
<b>Wards affected</b>	Not Applicable		

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2019 Colchester Borough Council received £249,100 in funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for a two-year behaviour change project aimed at reducing air pollution in Colchester. The project's primary objectives are to:

- Raise awareness of poor air quality and its impacts
- Encourage the widespread uptake of 'no idling', switching engines off when parked, waiting and stationary at traffic lights and level crossings.
- Reduce the number of vehicles on the road by increasing the amount of people walking and cycling for short journeys.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Environment and Sustainability Panel with an update on the progress of the DEFRA funded air quality project.

- The presentation to the Panel on 29 October will focus on the CAREless Pollution and Signage elements of the air quality project, highlighting progress to date and next steps.

## 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 We invite the Environment and Sustainability Panel to note the content of this briefing and to provide feedback.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 This report is for information only.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable

## 5. Background Information

5.1 In Colchester there are three [Air Quality Management Areas \(PDF, 334KB\)](#) (AQMA'S) where the pollution levels exceed national guidelines.

5.2 The AQMA's cover the town centre, but also residential areas such as the lower end of Mersea Road, Magdalen Street and Brook Street - a narrow residential street used by over 100,000 vehicles each week as well as being the main walking route for children attending nearby primary schools.

In 2019 CBC received £249,100 in funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for a two-year behaviour change project aimed at reducing air pollution in Colchester. The project's primary objectives are to:

- Raise awareness of poor air quality and its impacts
- Encourage the widespread uptake of 'no idling', switching engines off when parked, waiting and stationary at traffic lights and level crossings.
- Reduce the number of vehicles on the road by increasing the amount of people walking and cycling for short journeys.

5.3 We know from research by Kings College London that small easy changes to driving habits, such as switching the engine off whilst stationary, can [cut pollution by up to 30%](#) and the effects are immediate.

5.4 Phase one of the project included a period of community engagement which ran from October 2019 – January 2020. During this time we spoke to over 3,000 residents, schools, businesses and community group representatives to get a better understanding of what is currently known about air quality and the impact it has on health, whilst also exploring driving habits and how people could be encouraged to take action to lower pollution levels.

5.5 As part of the engagement, production company Lark Rise Pictures was commissioned to produce a short air quality film. The film, along with a summary report and infographic highlighting the key engagement findings and how they are being used to shape the project going forward, are now available on our webpage: [www.colchester.gov.uk/cleanair](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/cleanair).

5.6 At the start of 2020 Colchester Borough Council received a further £59,785 from DEFRA for the signage and traffic light feasibility work, outlined below, which were developed as a result of findings from our community engagement in which 49% of people said roadside reminders would encourage them to regularly switch off their engines and 56% of people said knowing how long they would be waiting at red lights would encourage them to switch off.

### **Progress to date on meeting the project objectives:**

#### No Idling Campaign

In June '20, following a competitive procurement process, Meadows Communication was commissioned to plan, deliver and evaluate a No-Idling Campaign. The campaign 'CAREless Pollution' launched on 8 October 2020 to coincide with national Clean Air Day and will run until April 2021.

The campaign has been informed by the findings from the community engagement and developed in collaboration with a group of local residents, businesses and community group representatives, this co-creation with the community is what sets the campaign apart from others. CAREless Pollution billboard, petrol pump and radio advertising went live on 20

October. A no-idling toolkit, marketing resources, schools pack, events and workshops all form part of the campaign which is being supported by a network of 30 stakeholders who are sharing the information to help widen its reach. We have already had a positive response to the materials and a good take up by the local community.

The campaign launched with a stunt in Culver Square with assistance from the special effects team at the Mercury Theatre. A car filled with coloured smoke was used to demonstrate one of the campaign's key messages that pollution levels are up to 7 times higher inside your car than they are outside and can affect your health. We expect the car to visit other local locations including schools, offices and supermarkets, COVID-19 regulations permitting, during the autumn to continue raising awareness. A presentation on the CAReless Pollution campaign including launch highlights and next steps will be given at the Environment and Sustainability Panel on 29 October.

### Signage Project

The signage project aims to test the effectiveness and long-term impact road-side signage, based on psychological messaging, has on behaviour change around no idling. The signage will be fixed to existing streetlights, the locations of which have been checked for suitability and agreed by Essex County Council and include Brook Street, East Street and the East Gates Rail Crossing. All locations sit within an Air Quality Management Area. A planning application was submitted to CBC and approval was granted on 20 October 2020, the signage is expected to go up in November 2020.

Officers are in liaison with the University of Essex, Anglia Ruskin and the University of Kent to find a delivery partner to provide ongoing evaluation of the signage. A bank of casual staff are in the process of being recruited as research assistants to collect traffic data which will enable us to monitor the effectiveness of the signs. Training of the research assistants will commence in coming weeks.

### Mobile Pollution Sensors

As part of the signage project, mentioned above, CBC received funding from DEFRA to buy portable pollution monitors. The aim is for the monitors to be worn by the research assistants when they are at the signage locations. This will provide us with real-time roadside pollution levels to supplement readings from the diffusion tubes and the traffic count data. This means we can start to build up an accurate picture of how effective the signs are and what impact they are having on pollution levels within the AQMA. A review is currently underway into monitors available on the market. Two portable monitors have been purchased to trial and are currently being tested by residents within the AQMA to assess ease of use before any further financial commitment is made.

### Feasibility Study into Driver Facing Countdown Timers

CBC was awarded a second round of funding in March 2020 for a feasibility study into driver facing countdown timers on red traffic lights. It was following findings from the community engagement in which 56% of people said they would regularly switch their engine off if they knew how long they would be waiting for at traffic lights.

The feasibility study has been carried out in-house in liaison with Essex County Council and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) who are the developers of the SCOOT technology which runs on traffic lights across Essex. The feasibility work has concluded that it will not be possible to integrate a timer onto traffic lights in Colchester. A timer will only work on 'fixed sequence' traffic lights and not SCOOT operated lights.

TRL have advised that there is an alternative option we could consider that would both integrate with the SCOOT system and give drivers a visual prompt (although not a timer) to switch their engine off whilst waiting at a red light. We are currently exploring the detail,

costs and technicalities of this option and will provide a written update once we are clearer on how and if we can take this element of the project forward.

#### Bikeability Study with Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) & Essex County Council (ECC)

We have been working with ARU and ECC to develop a study which explores how the current Bikeability provision could be enhanced to get more children cycling and cycling more often. We have finalised pre and post Bikeability questionnaires for participants and their parents/ carers. There are currently five schools with confirmed Bikeability sessions in October – Home Farm, Lexden, Roach Vale, Kendall and St James Primary. We are hoping more schools will sign up once they have settled into the new term. A follow up focus group will be arranged later in the year before the findings are analysed and recommendations for enhancements made. We hope to share the findings with other local authorities.

#### Monkwick Residents Area

A key objective within the air quality project is to carry out focused behaviour change work with a target resident area to increase walking and cycling. Based on insight from our earlier engagement, mapping work and a review of forth-coming projects/ initiatives we have chosen Monkwick as our resident area. From our research we know that going into town is one of the most common short journeys people make in their cars. Monkwick has an accessible walking/ cycling route into town and if more people were to use it, it would mean less cars driving through the AMQA. We are in the very early planning stages of this element of the project but will be taking an ABCD approach and are soon to start conversations with stakeholders in the area.

## **6. Standard References**

- 6.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.