



## Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item  
**8**

21 March 2024

<b>Report of</b>	<b>The Head of Public Protection &amp; The Head of Sustainability</b>	<b>Author</b> <b>Emily Harrup</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Air Quality update</b>	
<b>Wards affected</b>	<b>Castle and Stanway</b>	

**Please note that since the publication of this agenda, factual errors were noted in paragraph 5.3 of this report relating to the reporting of tonnes and not kilograms, and a corrected report has been published as a supplementary agenda document to this meeting.**

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2023 a recommendation was put forward to the Portfolio holder and approved, to revoke AQMA 2 and 4 and to amend AQMA 1 to include only those areas which do not comply with the DEFRA guidance.
- 1.2 The amended AQMA 1 is Brook Street, Osborne Street and St Johns Street, Mersea Road.
- 1.3 This was following the submission of the 2023 Colchester Annual Status Report to; and approval by DEFRA ,where it was concluded it would be appropriate to examine revocation and amendments to the cities AQMA's due to the improvement of air quality.
- 1.4 This was due to the ongoing and consistent improvement of air quality over the last few years which met DEFRA's criteria for revocation. This is really positive and reflects the positive impact of the Council's projects to mitigate air pollution alongside improvements in vehicle technology.
- 1.5 All of the projects undertaken by the Transport and Sustainability team, given the focus on changing travel habits will have a positive impact on air quality. However since 2018, the team have been delivering projects, funded through 5 successful bids to DEFRA specifically aimed at tackling air pollution. These projects include the award winning CAREless Pollution campaign, and the delivery of a number of new services to support the uptake of eCargo Bikes, alongside general promotion and awareness raising of different ways to travel. As usage of these services grow they will continue to have a positive impact on air quality. This report outlines the impact of some of those projects.
- 1.6 The current DEFRA project being delivered is focused on providing further resources to support a change in travel habits and engagement to promote an uptake of services available both offered by the council and the local community.
- 1.7 Essex County Council with funding from DEFRA have created a new Essex Air website. Several of the Transport and Sustainability team's final reports on DEFRA projects have been shared on the site as well as the CAREless Pollution resources, some of which have made generic so they can be used by other local district, town and parish councils.

1.8 A new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is due to be written which will focus on tackling air pollution in the amended AQMA 1. A steering group including officers from Essex County Council is due to be convened to work on the new AQAP. This will review actions and progress from the old AQAP, and potential physical interventions including any proposed in Essex County Council's draft Air Quality Strategy as well as the ongoing work by the Transport and Sustainably team to encourage and support people to try different ways of travelling.

## **2. Recommended Decision**

2.1 To support:

- the work being undertaken to improve air quality in Colchester.
- staff in their negotiations with Essex County Council to obtain necessary permissions to take projects forward.

## **3. Reason for Recommended Decision**

3.1 To ensure that the Panel is content with the progress made to date and has the chance to feedback on ongoing work.

## **4. Alternative Options**

4.1 There are no alternative options. It is the Council's statutory duty to tackle air pollution in the AQMA's and have an AQAP in place.

## **5. Background Information and projects contributing to air quality improvements**

### **5.1 Background information**

5.1.1 Air quality is a measurement of the type and quantity of pollutants contained within it. Poor air quality can affect health, particularly that of the young and the elderly. It can irritate the lungs, lower resistance to respiratory infections such as influenza, and exacerbate existing respiratory conditions.

5.1.1 Since 2012 Colchester has had four declared Air Quality Management Areas. In 2018 AQMA 3 St Andrews Avenue and Harwich Road was revoked.

In 2023 Portfolio holder approval was given to:

- Revoke AQMA 2 - East Street and Ipswich Road
- Revoke AQMA 4 - Lucy Lane North, Stanway
- Amend AQMA 1 to include only those areas which do not comply with the DEFRA guidance these are Brook Street, Osborne Street and St Johns Street, Mersea Road

5.1.2 Next steps are to update our web pages to reflect the changes in AQMA's, notify DEFRA and provide DEFRA with updated information to reflect on their records and information in the public domain.

### **5.2 Funded air quality projects**

The Council has taken many actions and secured funding to improve air quality and achieve air quality reductions. These are summarised below.

- 2012 – Successful Defra bid to launch a ‘Love your car’ campaign to promote car sharing and eco driving - **£35,000**
- 2015 Clean Vehicle Technology Fund - **£194,000**. This funding enabled the retrofit of 10 commercially operated buses with pollution reducing technology.
- 2016 Adoption of a Low Emission Strategy following receipt of a **£50,000** grant from DEFRA.
- 2017, the Council submitted a **£1.25m** joint bid with ECC, Rochford District Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council to the Defra operated Clean Bus Technology Fund to enable further retrofitting of older polluting buses enabling a further 32 commercial buses to be retrofitted.
- 2018 - Successful bid to Defra to develop a community led CAREless Pollution campaign to encourage reduction in engine idling and raise awareness of air pollution - **£249,100**
- 2019 – Successful bid to Defra for a roadside signage study to test the effectiveness of psychological messages to discourage engine idling plus a traffic light count down feasibility study **£59,785**
- 2020 - Successful bid to Energy Saving Trust/Dft for fleet of ecargo bikes for business use - **£137,453**
- 2020 - Successful bid to Defra for funding for Phase 2 of Careless Pollution and to set up shared transport schemes including an electric car club and 2 ebike/ecargo bike shared hubs **£248,700**
- 2021 - Successful bid to Defra to fund the setting up of a ecargo bike concierge service to transport shopping to shoppers' homes of lockers in outlying car parks to leave them free to spend time in the city centre and travel sustainably into the centre or park outside the AQMA and walk in. **£188,587**
- 2022 - Successful bid to Defra for CAREless Pollution phase 3 including integration of walking and cycling into school tool kit, development of air quality related e-learning module for businesses, 2 dedicated engagement officers, new Cycle Colchester website, new Cycle Colchester map and ebike/ecargo bike short term hire scheme for residents. - **£310,770**

### **5.3 Impact of projects**

- 5.3.1 All of the Transport and Sustainability teams’ projects contribute to improving air quality through encouraging and supporting the community to try other forms of transport for some journeys and reduce their use of cars. However it is difficult to quantify the air quality impact of individual projects, as the sum of the whole has contributed to the improvements. We can highlight some data that we have collected in recent years and translated into savings in NO<sub>x</sub> (Nitrogen Oxide and Nitrogen Dioxide, key air pollutants which in Colchester come from tailpipe emissions) compared to if these journeys had been undertaken by an Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicle. Also included are results from evaluation we have undertaken
- 5.3.2 Colchester’s eCargo Bike fleet funded through the Energy Savings Trust and DEFRA have ridden 64,000 miles since launching in 2021 with 34,000 of these miles ridden in 2023. In air quality terms this equates to a saving of 12.8 tonnes of NO<sub>x</sub> overall and 6.8 tonnes of NO<sub>x</sub> in 2023.
- 5.3.3 The 2023 Christmas trial of the eCargo Bike city centre to home concierge service replaced 516 miles of van deliveries with electric cargo bikes, equating to at least 103g of NO<sub>x</sub> saved and fewer vehicles congesting the city centre. It is also important to note that the eCargo Bike depot is based at Hills which is in Brook Street, so all of the activity

being delivered by eCargo Bikes instead of ICE vehicles is positively impacting on air quality in Brook Street.

- 5.3.4 In July 2023 Tier introduced on street eBike hire into Colchester. Since then 22,000 journeys have been made by eBike covering 38,129 miles equating to a NOx saving of 7.6 tonnes. The eScooters have ridden 562,392 since their inception equating to a NOx saving of 112 tonnes.
- 5.3.5 The electric car club car has driven 12,951 over the last year equating to a reduction of NOx of 2.6 tonnes.
- 5.3.6 Phase 2 of the CAREless Pollution campaign encouraging the community to switch off their engine every time they wait was evaluated in May 2023. From street surveys, roaming questions and school gate surveys the following results were gathered
- 34% - 44% of people spoken to were switching off their engine either 'always' or 'most of the time' when stationary.
  - 31%-34% of people spoken to had automatic stop/start engines or an electric car
  - Combining the two sets of statistics meant that around two-thirds of vehicle drivers are taking positive action to reduce air pollution on a regular basis.
  - Within schools encouragingly 60% of people spoken to were aware of the CAREless Pollution campaign, and 39% on street, demonstrating high brand awareness
- 5.3.7 The signage study in Brook St and Eastgates that ended in September 2022 and collected data from 150,705 vehicles tested the impact of different psychologically framed motivating messages to encourage switching off engines. The study showed a peak average switch off rate of 26% - an increase of 11% of drivers switching off their engines. We continue to work with Essex County Council to obtain permission to put the signs up permanently. Essex County Council have raised concerns about the signs that were not issues when the signs were up during the study. We feel this issue is important to resolve especially as Essex County Council are already using the results from the study for example on the new Essex Air website.

## **5.4 What's next?**

- 5.4.1 Work will start on the new Air Quality Action plan by an Air Quality Steering Group with a draft submitted to DEFRA in six months time.
- 5.4.2 The Transport and Sustainability team are working on an overarching strapline and set of key messages to better frame the work of the team, to help describe what we are trying to do and ensure that we can connect and resonate with the public. With so many different elements to the work of the Transport and Sustainability team, we have identified this as a need and are undertaking a strategic messaging exercise facilitated by our communication partner Meadows. Following a workshop with key stakeholders, early thoughts include a strong sense that language should focus on health, positivity and the individual and not climate change and negative outcomes, this also fits in closely with our work around Air Quality where health has always been seen as the key motivator for action.
- 5.4.3 2024 will be focused on delivering our 5<sup>th</sup> successful DEFRA project, which includes community led CAREless Pollution phase 3, a new Cycle Colchester map and website, short term hire ebike/ecargo bike scheme for residents and extensive community and business engagement.

- 5.4.4 The Transport and Sustainability team will also continue to deliver all of the projects outlined in the Transport and Sustainability update.
- 5.4.5 The Transport and Sustainability team will continue to work closely with Essex County Council to attract investment into and keep a focus on Colchester so that further infrastructure projects can be delivered to continue to support further air quality improvements.

## **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 6.1 An Equality impact assessment was completed as part of the recommendations to revoke the AQMA's and reduce AQMA 1.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

- 7.1 [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#). Tackling the climate challenge leading sustainability and improvements in air quality are strategic priorities to Colchester City Council.

## **8. Consultation**

- 8.1 There are no consultation considerations for this paper, although many of the projects referenced have community engagement elements within them and success in promoting sustainable travel will involve engagement and education of others to influence behaviour change more widely.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

- 9.1 There are no specific publicity considerations

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1 None

## **11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 Improvements in air quality will have health benefits, particularly to those who are young, elderly or with respiratory conditions.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

- 12.1 There are no Health and Safety Implications.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

- 13.1 There are no identified risks

## **14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

- 14.1 The report demonstrates improvements in Air Quality

## **Appendices**

