

**Scrutiny Panel 4 – Emissions Strategy**

**Responses to Core Questions**

**Steve Miller**

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

**Contents**

Please can you give your views and suggestions on how you think Councillor and public understanding of air quality issues in Northampton can be increased? ..... 2

Are you aware of the causes and impact of air pollution? Please explain. .... 2

Are you aware of and do you understand the actions being taken to reduce air pollution in Northampton? Please provide suggestions of how these actions can be publicised wider..... 3

The themes of the draft Northampton Low Emissions Strategy are Evidence for Change, Creating a Low Emissions Future and Reducing Vehicle Emissions, please provide details of how the actions taken by your organisation contribute to these themes and would your organisation be prepared to fund / contribute to the funding of measures that benefit you / your organisation. .... 3

Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to the Emissions Strategy? .... 3

Please can you give your views and suggestions on how you think Councillor and public understanding of air quality issues in Northampton can be increased?

There is obviously a lack of awareness of Northampton's air quality issues, and this manifests itself in a lack of understanding. Partly, in our opinion, this is because the issue has not been addressed with the level of seriousness that it merits. The town centre has had Air Quality Management Areas for over 10 years, but there is little evidence that any consistent action has been taken specifically to address these issues.

A local education campaign is urgently required. This should communicate why Northampton has air quality problems, what causes those problems, and what we can do, as members of the public to mitigate against this.

We would suggest that this should include :

- Advertising in the town centre
- Engagement with school groups (at assemblies)
- Ensure that information on the website is easy to find and to understand

With regard to councillor understanding, I would suggest that this probably differs depending on the individual councillor. From attending the Scrutiny panels, I can see that the level of understanding varies, but that the councillors are trying to actively engage with and understand the issues.

Within the full council, there does seem to be a general attempt to engage with the air pollution issue, but I think motions such as the one regarding idling vehicles (in December) indicate that there is a requirement to more adequately ensure councillors are up to speed with the issue, to ensure that the issue can be debated with relevance.

Are you aware of the causes and impact of air pollution? Please explain.

We are aware that the Air Quality Management Areas in Northampton are because of increased levels of Nitrogen Dioxide, generally associated with the prevalence of diesel vehicles, sitting in congested traffic.

This can have impacts on the health of the population, and as Public Health England's figures have shown, the frequency of respiratory illness in Northampton is higher than elsewhere in the County.

The Green Party has produced leaflets about the effects of air pollution, and I have attached copies of this publication to these answers.

However, we are also conscious that the levels of Nitrogen Dioxide may well be elevated at locations outside of the AQMAs. Our measurements showed high levels of pollution at Cheyne Walk, Northgate Bus Station, and Spencer Bridge Road.

This indicates to us that the Air Quality problem in Northampton, particularly in the town centre, is a wider problem than is recognised. Currently, there is a focus on the air pollution problem within the AQMAs and this may mean that issues outside of those areas do not get the attention that they require or that, by attempting to tackle the issues within the AQMA, the problem could be moved to an adjacent area.

Are you aware of and do you understand the actions being taken to reduce air pollution in Northampton? Please provide suggestions of how these actions can be publicised wider.

See previous answers.

The themes of the draft Northampton Low Emissions Strategy are Evidence for Change, Creating a Low Emissions Future and Reducing Vehicle Emissions, please provide details of how the actions taken by your organisation contribute to these themes and would your organisation be prepared to fund / contribute to the funding of measures that benefit you / your organisation.

As per our answer to the first question, we consider that there is important work to be done in public awareness, and that this will continue to be critical if wider communities are going to take individual actions that will help to reduce vehicle emissions. We consider that the work we have been doing over the past year is generally to assist with public awareness of the air pollution problem, and we plan to continue this. We would be happy to work with the council to improve public awareness and to suggest examples of good practise in other councils.

Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to the Emissions Strategy?

In response to one of our questions in the last year, the Council responded with the statement that rather than just focus on individual areas, they were going to take a holistic view and deal with air pollution across the town as a whole. This seems to us to be a fair response, but it also seems at odds with the current setup of the Air Quality Management Areas. The following picture shows the rough placement of the Air Quality Management Areas within the town centre (marked red)



As can be seen, all of these are contained within a rough orbital of the town centre around 2km from East to West and 1.5km from North to South. Our measurements over the past year have shown elevated levels at Cheyne Walk, Northgate Bus Station and Spencer Bridge Road. None of these are within the current AQMAs and the Low Emissions Strategy will have limited power to deal with air quality issues within them.

We would suggest that the Town Centre AQMA be expanded to encompass all of the areas within this central area. An example is shown in the diagram below.



This would reinforce the Low Emissions Strategy and really give it jurisdiction across the whole of the Town Centre, and, in our opinion, prevent some of the disconnects that currently sit within the Borough Council management of the AQMAs.

We would also like to highlight the continuing issues with the Kingsthorpe Corridor. This area is responsible for some of the highest levels of air pollution within Northampton, and with the additional houses planned for Kingsthorpe in the near future (Buckton Fields, Northampton University, Kingsthorpe Middle School) the issue in this area is going to get worse. Our measurements have shown illegal limits on the A508 outside of the current Air Quality Management Areas, and we would also suggest that the AQMA in Kingsthorpe should be extended to the North to reflect these problems.