

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

(DRAFT) EXCERPT OF THE MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2022

50. PROPOSED CHANGE TO MAIDSTONE AQMA AND REQUEST TO CONSULT ON NEW AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

The Lead Member for Environmental Services introduced the report and outlined the historical context of the Council's current Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP); the former had been implemented due to the exceedance of the annual mean objective of nitrogen dioxide in that area.

The Lead Member for Environmental Services stated that air quality had improved within much of the original AQMA, and it was therefore proposed that its boundary be reviewed to ensure that the AQAP was targeted towards the relevant areas. The boundaries of the proposed new AQMA had been modelled by air quality consultants using air quality data from 2019, to exclude the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The annual mean objective of nitrogen dioxide levels had been met in all areas of the original AQMA, except for Upper Stone Street.

The Lead Member for Environmental Services stated that whilst the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on air quality levels remained unclear, air quality levels were expected to show continued improvement. The modelling undertaken suggested that it was possible for there to be no exceedances within Upper Stone Street by 2028. A public consultation on the actions taken within the proposed AQAP would take place.

Several Members of the Committee expressed concern at the air quality levels and prevalence of vehicle idling within and around the East Farleigh areas, including East Farleigh School, Farleigh Bridge and East Farleigh Station. In response, the Lead Member for Communities and Engagement stated that whilst displaying anti-idling signs within those areas had been considered, no suitable locations could be identified. The Senior Scientific Officer further advised that displaying the signs required permission from Kent County Council. The Committee were advised to contact the Officers, if they wished to suggest a suitable location. Further reassurance was given that the East Farleigh area was monitored and had low levels of air pollution, in part due to the open space that allowed the pollution to diffuse.

In response to further questions, the Senior Scientific Officer confirmed that the proposed AQMA and associated AQAP had been drafted in accordance with the legislative requirements, including the 40-microgram per 1m³ nitrogen dioxide limit, and the information required by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader advised that it would be outside of both the applicable legislation and good practice to have an AQMA declared across areas that had air quality readings below the 40-microgram per m³ limit. It was reiterated that the Council would continue to work towards lowering air quality levels generally, including continued monitoring across areas that demonstrated air quality readings below the 40-microgram per m³ limit. As the Council continued to work with schools in relation to anti-idling and active travel, the Committee were encourage to contact the Environmental Protection Team Leader if further schools could be identified.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that whilst beneficial, the provision of euro six engines to improve the efficiency of local public transport services was outside of the Council's control. The significant funding required, alongside the financial difficulties faced by many operators was referenced. Specific attention was drawn to the importance of the Council considering measures, such as electric car charging points, that it could assist with.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to:

1. Agree the revocation of the old AQMA in Maidstone, requiring an Air Quality Management Area Revocation Order to be issued;
2. Agree the declaration of the proposed new AQMA in Maidstone, covering Upper Stone Street as outlined in the report, requiring a new Air Quality Management Area Order to be issued; and
3. Agree that permission is granted to hold a public consultation on the proposed actions given in the report to be included in a new Air Quality Action Plan