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# Air Quality Update 2026

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Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	9 March 2026
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Tom McCann
Date JMB agreed report:	23 February 2026
Report Author:	Suzanne McLaughlin
Forward Plan Ref:	JPPC

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) of the submission and results of the annual air quality report for Bracknell Forest (BFC). This report is for the monitoring data calendar year 2024.

## 2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTES** the contents of the Air Quality Annual Status Report as set out in Appendix **A** for Bracknell Forest.
- 2.2 **NOTES** the feedback from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the reports as set out in Appendix **B** for Bracknell Forest Council (BFC).

## 3. Implications and Impact Assessment:

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>Work relating to Air Quality monitoring and reporting is funded from the general revenue budget allocated to the Public Protection Service. Several proposals in the action plan continue to require additional funding to implement whilst others are relatively low cost and are covered from the PPP revenue budget.</p> <p>Grant funding from DEFRA has been available and PPP have applied annually up to 2023. Since 2024 this funding stream is no longer available.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>Staff who undertake this work are a shared resource with Wokingham BC under the new IAA with Wokingham.</p> <p>One benefit of the shared service is the ability to have staff that specialise in areas such as this and the service is fortunate to have several officers with significant expertise on environmental matters generally and air quality specifically.</p>
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>Under the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) system local authorities are legally required to assess air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) if</p>

	<p>improvements are necessary.</p> <p>Where an AQMA is designated, one in Bracknell Forest (Crowthorne High Street) and one in Wokingham Borough (Wokingham Town Centre) local authorities are required to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) describing the pollution reduction measures it will put in place. Where the pollutant levels no longer exceed the Objectives then the AQMAs should be revoked.</p> <p>Where a Local Authority no longer has any AQMAs then an Air Quality Strategy is to be produced. Where a Local Authority still has an AQMA these are to be regularly reviewed and must be revised no later than every five years.</p>			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>This is a legal requirement under the Environment Act 2005. Failure to comply with our statutory obligations could present the risk of challenge to the PPP partner authorities.</p>			
<b>Property:</b>	<p>There are no direct property implications arising from this report.</p>			
<b>Policy:</b>	<p>The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) identified Environmental Protection as one of the five Strategic Priorities for the Joint Public Protection Committee.</p> <p>Under this heading the Committee in turn identified air quality as a priority for 2021/22.</p> <p>West Berkshire has declared a climate emergency. They have embedded Air Quality improvements into their Environment Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plans.</p> <p>Bracknell Forest Council's Climate Change Strategy was completed and published in January 2021 and has a target of net carbon zero by 2050.</p> <p>Wokingham Borough Council's Climate Emergency Strategy was dated September 2025 and has a target of carbon neutrality by 2030.</p>			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is		x		No specific groups are affected by the contents of the proposals as there are no decisions being made. Air quality can be particularly harmful to the young, elderly, pregnant and those suffering ill health. Consideration to all

delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				these matters is given in this report and appendices and / or the national clean air strategy.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision has an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		No specific groups are affected by the contents of the proposals as there are no decisions being made. Air quality can be particularly harmful to the young, elderly, pregnant and those suffering ill health. Consideration to all these matters is given in this report and appendices and / or the national clean air strategy.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	x			Under the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) system local authorities are legally required to assess air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) if improvements are necessary. Where an AQMA is designated, local authorities are required to produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) describing the pollution reduction measures it will put in place.  These reports are therefore designed to have a positive impact on the environment.
<b>Health Impact:</b>	x			The Air Quality Objectives have been put in place to protect people's health and the environment.  Although there has been a reduction in air pollution since the 1970s, poor air quality is still the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It shortens lives and reduces quality of life, particularly amongst the most vulnerable, the young and old, and those living with health conditions.  Ongoing monitoring and where appropriate the creation of action plans is designed to improve the quality of lives of our residents.
<b>ICT or Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		None  The Air Quality Status Reports are published on the PPP website.
<b>PPP Priorities:</b>	x			The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) identified Protecting and Improving Health as one of the five overarching themes with Environmental Protection one of the Strategic priorities for the

			Joint Public Protection Committee. Under this heading the Committee in turn identified improved air quality as a priority for 2021- 2024 and in the current Strategic Assessment 2024-2027.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X	None
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Each local authority within PPP is required to submit an Annual Status Report (ASR) to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) each year and a template is provided.		
<b>Other Options Considered:</b>	None – The production of the reports is a statutory requirement.		

## 4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 Local authorities are required to submit an Annual Status Report (ASR) to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) each year and a template is provided. The overall aim of this document is to report on progress in achieving reductions in concentrations of emissions relating to relevant pollutants below air quality objective levels. It is also where local authorities identify new or changing sources of emissions.
- 4.2 On completion, local authorities should submit their report to the Secretary of State (DEFRA) for consideration, who will provide comments back in a timely manner and to which the local authorities are expected to have regard.
- 4.3 The core requirements of the ASR:
- To report progress on the implementation of measures in the local air quality action plan and other measures and their impact in reducing concentrations below air quality objectives.
  - To provide a summary of monitoring/modelling data (either locally retrieved and/or from the national network) to assess the air quality situation in the area and the likelihood of air quality breaches, and to provide the necessary evidence base for the impact of air quality measures.
  - To report on significant new developments that might affect local air quality.
  - To encourage joint working with other agencies, such as Public Health, and the Highway Authorities.
  - To present information in a public-facing executive summary for the lay reader so that the local public can more easily engage with local air quality issues and measures taken to improve it.
- 4.4 Annually DEFRA set a deadline for submission and there are implications of late submission in respect of whether air quality grant bids will be favourably received. The Service has again completed and submitted the reports for all three authorities within the appropriate timescales.
- 4.5 The PPP understands the importance of DEFRA approving the reports as the data is used by third parties in planning applications, as well as in-house decisions by Highways and Transport Planning colleagues. In addition, the increased significance is recognised as identified actions are now intrinsically linked with Climate Emergency Plans and Environmental Strategies.

## 5. Report Submission

- 5.1 Air quality monitoring and improvement contributes to a number of principal priorities of the PPP and continues to be identified as such in 2024-2025 with synergies directly with climate change and environmental protection. In Summer 2019 all PPP local authorities made commitments with respect to climate change, and air quality continues to be regularly in the news, alongside, the cross-cutting climate change theme.

- 5.2 The Annual Status Report was completed in-house by the deadline of the 30 June 2025. The report was submitted on 17 June and re-submitted on 26 August. The appraisal report was received on the 11 December.
- 5.3 Due to a clerical error the well written and informative reports for Bracknell Forest was not accepted first time around as the bias adjustment factor used was incorrect (0.91 instead of 0.84 for BFC). Whilst this was marginal error and did not affect the overall downward trend of the NO<sub>2</sub> and thus the increase of the local air quality, DEFRA required the reports to be resubmitted with the correct bias correction and altered NO<sub>2</sub> values within 1 month and this was achieved.

## 6. Bracknell Forest

- 6.1 There is one Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared across the Borough: The Bracknell Road (B3348) and Crowthorne High Street, known as the Crowthorne AQMA.
- 6.2 The major source of air quality pollutants in Bracknell Forest is emissions from road transport. In particular, the contribution from the B3348/High Street and Sandhurst Road Crowthorne have been identified as significant. The main pollutant of concern is Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and to a lesser extent the increased levels of particulate matter.
- 6.3 The levels of Nitrogen Dioxide in 2024 have shown a decreasing trend since 2018.
- 6.4 There were no exceedances of the ratified, bias corrected, annualised and distance corrected diffusion tubes within the Crowthorne AQMA. There were no locations greater than 60 µg/m<sup>3</sup> which further indicates that there are unlikely to be any exceedance of the 1-hour Objective. All of the 2024 sites showed a decrease from the 2023 data. The levels have been reducing in the five years since the lock down year of 2020.
- 6.5 The Particulate Matter PM<sub>10</sub>, is no longer monitored in the Bracknell. When annualised the last measured data for 2022 was 18.5 µg/m<sup>3</sup> and did not exceed the Annual Mean Objective of 40 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. The results also showed no exceedances of the 24-hour Annual Mean Objective of 50 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, which is not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year. The PM<sub>10</sub> level demonstrates a decreasing trend since 2018 when the level was 19.0 µg/m<sup>3</sup>.
- 6.6 Bracknell Forest produced an Air Quality Action Plan in 2014 which was updated in 2016. In 2024 a new AQAP covering the period 2024 – 2029 was approved. The AQAP outlines local measures to improve pollution levels within the AQMAs and more widely across the borough. The AQAP is integrated with the delivery of the adopted Local Transport Plan (LTP 4) to improve local air quality and climate change, through joint working with the Council's Environmental Health, Transport Planning and Planning Divisions.

### Actions to Improve Air Quality

- 6.7 Smoothing the traffic flow and reducing journey times and major highway improvements along the A329/A322 corridor have resulted in the reduction of NO<sub>2</sub> levels. Works to reduce the bottleneck on Downshire Way have now been completed as have other works on the A322 roundabouts.

- 6.8 Since the speed humps along the High Street in Crowthorne have been upgraded and replaced with speed cushions to reduce stop start driving the NO<sub>2</sub> levels have dropped from 41.7 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2011 to 16.9 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2024.
- 6.9 Further upgrades to traffic signals, complementing capacity and junction improvements along the A322, A329 and A3095 corridors have improved journey times, reduced congestion and had a positive overall impact on air quality.
- 6.10 Electric Vehicle Charge point expansion has seen 38 fast chargers installed across 12 council car parks; rapid chargers added at Great Hollands and Birch Hill; planning is underway for 400+ on-street chargers using LEVI funding; and the Berkshire EV Working Group has been formed.
- 6.11 Sustainable Travel Initiatives have seen the launch of a shuttle bus linking Bracknell rail station with the BID area; a cycle hire scheme introduced for BID employees; and refreshed pedestrian/cycle path markings and new signage installed.
- 6.10 Pedestrian crossing enhancements on Temple Way to provide safer links to the new Blue Mountain development, new schools and community facility. Also at Broad Lane, Cambridge Road and Birch Hill Road to enhance pedestrian safety and connectivity.
- 6.11 1212 school pupils have received Bikeability training.
- 6.12 Led Walks and Rides – Sustrans continues to run popular led walks with plans to expand to guided cycle rides.
- 6.13 Nearly 3000 residents and 20 schools/colleges have been involved with the Eco Rewards scheme, with over 145,000 sustainable miles logged.
- 6.14 The Love to Ride online cycling community has expanded and runs challenges, e.g. 2024 Cycle September saw 11 workplaces join in with over 2000 trips recorded of which nearly half were new or occasional riders.
- 6.15 2 staff and 2 community 'Dr Bike' events took place in 2024, which include free bike checks, minor repairs, and maintenance advice.
- 6.16 In September 2024 a cycling festival, in partnership with Trek, Avanti, Sustrans, and The Lexicon, was held to promote cycling in the Borough.
- 6.17 For Walk to School week in May 2024 the council offered free resources to all schools. 19 schools participated in the national walking campaign.
- 6.18 On Clean Air Day (20th June 2024), all schools were invited to sign up to the "Clean Air Pledge". By doing this they were agreeing to distribute educational materials on air quality and anti-idling, and to increase awareness participate in related activities.
- 6.19 In 2025 implementation begins for schemes outlined in the new LTP4 and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- 6.20 Further updates to the EV Strategy and web content refreshed to include guidance on cable gullies and provide clear and relevant local EV information.

- 6.21 Held the second Cycling Festival on 8th June 2025, in partnership with Trek, Avanti, Sustrans, and The Lexicon, to promote cycling.
- 6.22 Clean Air Day on 19th June 2025, all schools received anti-idling packs to support assemblies and awareness.
- 6.23 To investigate new solutions for traffic flow along Crowthorne High Street, in the centre of the Crowthorne AQMA.
- 6.24 Work with the Climate Change Team and Transport Working Group to address issues on our extensive walking and cycling network, including encroaching vegetation, and improve community engagement.

### **Commentary from DEFRA**

- 6.25 DEFRA commented that the resubmitted report had sufficiently rectified the issues previously raised. They accepted the conclusions reached for all sources and pollutants.
- 6.26 DEFRA stated there was good quality discussion on the trends of the results for all pollutants as well as good quality graphs showing the trends over the last 5 years.
- 6.27 DEFRA stated there was good quality discussion on the effects of PM<sub>2.5</sub>.
- 6.28 DEFRA stated based on the evidence provided there is justification to revoke the Crowthorne AQMA as compliance achieved for the last 3 years.
- 6.29 DEFRA acknowledged good practice in identifying the reliability of the laboratory used for the analysis of the monitoring.

## **7. Next Steps**

### **Revocation Crowthorne AQMA**

- 7.1 A local authority can, at any time, revoke an AQMA, and provide the justification for doing so. This is due to a change in interpretation of the guidance in the DEFRA LAQM Technical Guidance (TG22, August 2022) from DEFRA, as originally three consecutive years of data was necessary before revocation could be considered, they now state that as long as levels have remained 10% below the Objective level for 5 years then revocation is justified. Where 2020 and 2021, the pandemic years, are a continuation of a downward trend and part of many consecutive years of compliance (e.g., where compliance has also been achieved in 2019, prior to COVID-19) the AQMA may be considered for revocation.
- 7.2 Further to the update at the December 2025 meeting the consultation of the Revocation Report for the Crowthorne AQMA commenced on 11 December for 6 weeks. The responses will be fed back to the June meeting for a determination of the revocation.

### **Future Monitoring**

- 7.3 The monitoring programme for 2026 has commenced. Advice from DEFRA on the implication of the revocations was requested previously and they state it is recommended that where possible to ensure good air quality monitoring is

maintained once the AQMA is removed. To this end the passive diffusion tube network is continuing across the borough / district both within and outside the current AQMA and locations within the revoked AQMAs as well as other locations where there are known hotspot / congestion locations.

## 8. Concluding Observations

- 8.1 The improvements to Air Quality across the three local authority areas is to be welcomed. There are many factors that have contributed to this, but it is clear that the range of interventions made each Council has contributed to this improvement.
- 8.2 Air Quality continues to be high profile area of work and the links with the sources of pollutants and health impacts becoming more apparent during and after the Covid pandemic. The authorities must continue to not only monitor the levels of pollutants but ensure that we continue to progress actions set out within the action plan and continue to raise the profile of improvements in air quality is good for our resident's health.
- 11.3 The evaluations provided by DEFRA are positive and the Committee is asked to both note the reports and the DEFRA evaluation, endorse the proposals set out in the action plan and approve the consultation set out in this report.
- 11.4 The duty on local authorities to both assess and improve air quality is not just a legal requirement but a public demand. The effects on health of poor air quality are indisputable, and Councils have been given a range of tools to tackle the causes.
- 11.5 In simple terms the causes are known but the solutions are wide ranging. The proposals set out in the plans seek to address several approaches ranging from raising awareness, changing human behaviour and matters of infrastructure.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A** – [2025 Bracknell Forest ASR Report](#)

**Appendix B** - Bracknell Forest Appraisal Response from DEFRA

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### Background Papers:

Bracknell Forest Council's LTP4 and supporting documents which can be accessed via the Council's website, at: [Bracknell Forest Local Transport Plan 2025-2037](#)

Defra: National Clean Air Strategy 2019

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019>

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

Report is to not only

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