
To: Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board 3

Date: 4th November 2020

Subject: Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To update Members of the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board on the Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
- 1) Consider the content of the briefing note
 - 2) Make recommendations to the appropriate Cabinet Members to be considered as part of the Cabinet Report

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 The City Council is under Ministerial Direction to “implement the local plan for NO₂ compliance....so that compliance with the legal limit for nitrogen dioxide is achieved in the shortest possible time”. This Direction, issued in February 2020, is entitled the *Environment Act 1995 (Coventry City Council) Air Quality Direction 2020*. The Direction also requires that a Full Business Case for the local plan be submitted to the Secretary of State by 19th June 2020, although the Government’s Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) has agreed, in writing, to the date for FBC submission to be moved back to 31st October 2020. The information submitted at the end of October will be a draft, subject to Cabinet approval in December. This will enable JAQU to instigate their internal review processes ahead of submission of the final FBC.
- 3.2 Schedule 1 of the Direction sets out the detailed package of measures that the Minister is instructing the City Council to implement. This reflects the Council’s preference not to proceed with a Clean Air Zone. The package of measures includes a segregated cycle route between the city centre and Coundon, engagement measures with schools, businesses and local communities aimed at encouraging active and sustainable travel, and a series of highway schemes aimed at reducing congestion and facilitating dynamic traffic management on the routes into the city centre from the west. This includes Holyhead Road, where NO₂ levels are at their highest.
- 3.3 The Government has provided £24.5 million in grant funding for the implementation of this package. In addition, the Council has secured a further £5.8 million in grant funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority’s Transforming Cities Fund for the B4101 Spon End scheme, which forms one of the highway schemes within the package.
- 3.4 Engagement work undertaken on the A4600 corridor in 2018-20 (funded through early measures from JAQU) resulted in increased active travel and mode shift. In schools, car journeys for school travel reduced by 8.5%, transferred to walking, cycling and scooter. Local residents reduced single occupancy car trips by 11%, with an increase in walking and bus trips of 9%.

- 3.5 There are a range of other projects that complement this package of measures by encouraging the uptake of zero emission vehicles. These include the installation of one of the most extensive networks of electric vehicle charging points in the country, with around 250 charging points installed to date and funding being secured for a further 100. The Council has also worked with National Express and Transport for West Midlands to secure funding for ten electric buses, which entered operation within the city in August 2020. This project includes the installation of solar panels and battery storage at the bus depot, meaning that the power used to run the buses is generated on site. With regard to commercial vehicles, the Council has also secured funding from Highways England for the E-Fleet project, and is in the process of procuring 70 electric vehicles, mostly vans, that will operate as part of the Council's fleet, but will also be available for local businesses to borrow and trial on a "try before you buy" basis.
- 3.6 The main LAQAP package was approved by Cabinet on 21st July 2020 (papers <https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s47594/Coventry%20Local%20Air%20Quality%20Action%20Plan.pdf>). Since then, officers have been working on the delivery programme of the package, and significant progress is being made. This can be summarised as follows.
- 3.7 The Coundon Cycle Route has been to consultation, and on 7th September 2020 the Cabinet Member for City Services approved that it be taken forward. Preparatory works are underway, and a substantive start on scheme construction is programmed for November 2020. The first phase of the scheme will be open in mid-2021.
- 3.8 The engagement programme is in development. Clearly, the impact of COVID-19 upon the operation of schools and businesses has meant that the original plan of starting the engagement programme in September 2020 has been delayed. The engagement programme will fully commence in early 2021 and will run through to March 2024, beyond compliance, to ensure behaviours are embedded for the longer term.
- 3.9 With regard to the highway schemes, Balfour Beatty has been appointed as the programme manager for these works and design work has commenced. Once detailed designs have been prepared, then there will be consultation with local communities, and at that stage there will be the opportunity for a review of the proposals and any amendments to the package of measures to be made. Substantive changes to the package will require to be submitted to Government as a variation to the package that the Council has been directed to deliver, and any such submission will need to have a robust evidence base demonstrating that the amended local plan will still achieve compliance with NO₂ legal limits within the shortest possible time.
- 3.10 The target date for delivery of the measures outlined in the local plan is March 2024, although the infrastructure measures are planned for construction well in advance of that date, with the Coundon Cycle Route being completed in mid-2021 and the remaining highway measures by late 2021 or early 2022. This timetable is dependent upon the successful completion of a range of statutory processes including land acquisition and Traffic Regulation Orders, as well as on the outcome of the consultation in early 2021.
- 3.11 In summary, the City Council is making good progress with the delivery of the package of measures contained in the local plan, in line with the Ministerial Direction. There are significant risks to the programme for delivery, and there may be a need to request approval from Government for changes to the package as the design and consultation progresses on individual schemes. The submission of the Full Business Case does, however, represent a significant milestone in the delivery of the Local Air Quality Action Plan.

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