

Member Questions (1 total)

1.	Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to Cabinet Member Customer & Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	<p>The council (and the public) should be aware that Cheltenham's Air Quality Action Plan expired in 2019. Questions chasing the preparation of the new AQAP have been asked at the January 2020 Cabinet; the February 2021 Council; the April 2021 Cabinet; and most recently at Cabinet in February 2022.</p> <p>At the Cabinet meeting on 15 February 2022, Cllr Max Wilkinson said that the long-delayed new Air Quality Action Plan would be published before the end of March 2022.</p> <p>I can't see any reference to it on the council website: <u><i>When will the AQAP be published?</i></u></p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I thank Cllr Joy for her question as she highlights the issue of air quality in Cheltenham, which is a priority for me as it was for the previous cabinet portfolio holder, Cllr Wilkinson.</p> <p>In 2020 the council had examined data from 21 sites across Cheltenham, consulted with Defra and agreed to change the statutory Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) to rightly focus on the relatively small area where the Air Quality Objective of 40µg/m³ for NO₂ was being exceeded. Therefore, the earlier Cheltenham Air Quality Action Plan was made obsolete by changes to the Air Quality Management Area. This follows common practice by other boroughs such as Sutton and Brighton. However, it did then require a new statutory Air Quality Action Plan focussed on that most polluted area in the vicinity of Swindon Road, Poole Way and the Lower High Street but at a time when all staff were under pressure during the pandemic.</p> <p>Clean Air Cheltenham have nevertheless lobbied for a town wide plan and we agree with them. Air quality affects us all and WHO have recently recommended much lower threshold levels not only for nitrous oxides but for particulate matter as well.</p> <p>So we are maintaining air quality monitoring beyond the statutory AQMA and Cllr Wilkinson told Clean Air Cheltenham in June last year that we would go beyond the statutory minimum, produce a town wide plan, engage with the county council highways authority to tackle the major cause of air pollution which is traffic, and also with other partners like the</p>

NHS and local business. But, he rightly pointed out that this path “would take a little longer” and this has indeed proved to be the case.

Cllr Wilkinson did say in February 2022, that he anticipated both the statutory AQMA action plan and the wider strategy would be published together and that this might happen in March but this has not proved possible. A lot of work has been done for us by consultants but given portfolio changes at both officer and cabinet level, new WHO guidelines and possible changes in levels of pollution as we recover from the pandemic, I would now like to take the time to review this area and make sure that the town-wide plan is right rather than produce an earlier but more limited document. I’m sure I will have all colleagues’ support in doing it right rather than too quickly.

But in the meantime, Cllr Joy can be reassured that we continue to monitor air pollution levels across Cheltenham which are overwhelmingly within the Air Quality Objective level, that we continue to engage with Gloucestershire County Council to pursue strategies such as the cleaner transport plans set out in the Connecting Cheltenham report and that we will do everything in our power and resources to make the air that we all breathe cleaner and safer.