

General Licensing



Committee

Report of Head of Waste, Parks, Leisure & Environmental Health

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To: General Licensing Committee

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Low Emission Strategy

Recommendation(s)

- (a) That the General Licensing Committee make recommendations to the Council for its final approval on the Low Emission Strategy that includes the viability of trials for the proposed transport measures identified in Wallingford and Watlington.
- (b) That the head of service with responsibility for environmental health be given delegated powers to make any minor amendments to the strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for environmental health and the Chairman of the General Licensing Committee.

Purpose of Report

1. To request the General Licensing Committee to adopt the draft Low Emission Strategy (LES) for South Oxfordshire District Council (appendix one). If the committee adopt the draft strategy, work will continue into the feasibility of implementing the measures proposed in it.

Strategic Objectives

2. Building thriving communities - making communities clean and safe by:

delivering new and ambitious air quality action plans to improve air quality across the district, and specifically tackle poor air quality in Henley, Wallingford and Watlington.

Background

3. The Environment Act 1995 places a statutory duty on local authorities to review and assess local air quality. It includes a requirement to prepare and implement an air quality action plan (AQAP) where air quality objectives are not being met.
4. South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) adopted its AQAP in February of 2015. Actions within the plan included the development of a LES and three low emission zone feasibility studies. The council commissioned Ricardo-AEA to prepare the draft strategy and complete the feasibility studies. The work was paid for by government funding.
5. The General Licensing Committee has delegated authority to deal with air quality issues. However, at its meeting on 20 July 2017 in considering a petition, Council resolved that recommendations from this committee on the Low Emission Strategy should be made to Council – see paragraph 19 of this report.

The draft Low Emission Strategy

6. The draft LES covers the whole of the district and it proposes actions that will improve air quality across South Oxfordshire. The low emission zone feasibility studies relate to Watlington, Wallingford and Henley as these towns have air quality management areas (AQMA) in place due to their specific air quality problems. The LES incorporates the findings of the three feasibility studies.
7. The draft strategy includes some actions that are already in our AQAP; these are:
 - provision of electric vehicle recharging points
 - consider a reduction in car park fees for low emission vehicles
 - consider updating the councils' procurement policy to make it greener
 - the inclusion of air quality requirements in planning policies
 - promoting the uptake of low emission vehicles
 - promoting and supporting behavioural change.

It also proposes some new actions and one new target:

- a low emission bus strategy including investigating the potential for a peak time closure of Wallingford bridge
 - a low emission freight strategy including investigating the potential for a freight clearway in Watlington
 - two per cent of cars and small vans to be electric by 2020 and five per cent by 2025.
8. Following the General Licensing Committee decision in December 2015, the draft LES went out to public consultation in February 2016 for eight weeks. Publicity for this included an article on the front cover of Outlook, press releases, social media, an article in In Focus and in South News.
 9. The results of the original consultation completed in February 2016 showed general support for all the proposals, highlighted in appendix two.
 10. Two proposals attracted a lot of comment. The first is to trial the removal of on street parking in areas of Watlington during peak travel times and the second is to

investigate the restriction of traffic to buses only over Wallingford Bridge during peak travel times. These two actions could resolve the air quality problems in these towns resulting in the AQMAs being revoked. If these measures were to be trialled this would be through the use of traffic regulation orders in county council lead trials.

11. In Watlington people were concerned that traffic speed would increase and result in a greater risk of accidents. They also thought that alternative parking would be needed. In Wallingford people commented that the proposal to restrict access to the bridge might cause congestion elsewhere or have a negative economic impact on the town. If the decision is taken to trial these schemes, before implementation we will investigate them further and, where possible, mitigate against the concerns raised. Assuming both trials were to go ahead they would be fully evaluated and a report including the results would be presented to the General Licensing Committee for a final decision on permanent implementation.
12. Concerns were also raised that the draft LES did not include any Henley specific actions. The reason for this was that the scenarios modelled did not result in significant air quality improvements and so the associated actions were not taken forward for inclusion in the draft document.
13. Following discussion of the results of the February 2016 consultation with cabinet members in July 2016, officers were asked to commission further targeted consultation on these three issues in the three affected towns.
14. In September 2016, the council contracted MEL Research to undertake further public engagement activities in Watlington, Wallingford and Henley to develop a better understanding of residents' views. A suitable methodology was agreed including sampled door to door surveys to canvass the opinion of people living in affected streets and drop-in events were organised to provide people with an opportunity to speak to council officers.
15. Self-completion surveys specific to each of the towns were also made available online and to people attending the drop-in events. This was to make sure that all residents had an opportunity to participate.
16. The MEL public engagement summary report (appendix three) details responses to this engagement work. The council can be confident that responses to the door to door survey are representative of the views of people living in streets likely to be affected by the proposals. Surveys completed online and at the drop-in events provide additional insight into wider opinion in these towns, however, they are not strictly representative as no sample control was used. We know this as there was evidence at the events of respondents completing multiple paper surveys as well as making online representations.

Watlington issues

17. In Watlington 66 per cent of people interviewed during the door to door surveys said they disagreed with the proposal to remove the on-street parking. These people cited the loss of residents on street parking and the fear of increased traffic speeds as reasons for their opposition. These views were echoed in surveys completed at the drop-in event and online where 78 per cent of people said they disagreed with the proposal.

Wallingford issues

18. In Wallingford, door to door surveys showed that the majority of residents (58 per cent) living in affected streets supported the proposal to restrict vehicular access to the bridge. Only 26 per cent were against. In contrast, surveys completed online and at the drop-in event showed that 72 per cent of respondents disagreed with the proposal. The main reasons for the objections were concerns over congestion elsewhere in the town and concerns over the potential economic impact. However, due to inaccurate media reports many people thought the closure would be for much longer periods than would be the case and this is likely to have influenced their response.
19. In accordance with the council's petition scheme, which requires that a petition with in excess of 500 signatures will be discussed at Council, Council considered a petition containing in excess of 1700 signatures at its meeting on 20 July 2017. Council resolved to refer the petition to the General Licensing Committee for consideration together with the views expressed by councillors. The text of the relevant minute is set out in appendix five.
20. SODC and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) are aware of the concerns raised in the petition and until further feasibility works are carried out to provide clear evidence we are unable to comment on the concerns raised. In adopting the strategy, we are simply requesting permission to explore the feasibility of such options not asking members to make a decision on them at this time. If after exploring the feasibility SODC and OCC consider a part time traffic restriction of Wallingford bridge would be a viable measure, and were in the position to trial this, there would be further public consultation with facts and evidence presented.

Henley issues

21. In Henley, door to door surveys showed that the majority of respondents (63 per cent) were not aware of existing measures being undertaken to reduce air pollution in the town. About half of people completing the survey online or at the drop-in event were also unaware. When asked what more could be done to address air quality in the town, the suggested actions were either already in the AQAP or had previously been considered by the council and deemed unviable.
22. A composite report containing the results of both consultations is included in appendix four.
23. No new viable measures were suggested as a result of either consultation.
24. SODC is working closely with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) exploring the viability of all measures laid out in the Strategy. All transport related measures will be fully assessed in relation to both highway safety and network management perspectives prior to the decision to move to any trials.

Financial Implications

25. There are no financial implications resulting from the proposed adoption of the strategy, any funding required to complete trials or further works would be sought from external funding through air quality and transport grants.

Legal Implications

26. There is a legal requirement under the Environment Act 1995 for a local authority to produce an action plan in pursuit of the achievement of air quality standards and objectives in the designated area. The low emission strategy is a key action in SODC's air quality action plan that was adopted in 2015.

Risks

27. This work was carried out as a result of a successful DEFRA air quality grant, after having modelled many scenarios it has concluded that there are measures that could enable us to revoke two of the three AQMA's within the district. If we do not fully explore the feasibility of the proposed measures, it is unlikely DEFRA will provide any future funding for air quality work.

Other Implications

28. Officers are required to report annually to DEFRA on progress towards the measures within the action plan, these reports are then made publically available via our website. The adoption of a LES is a key measure in the air quality action plan.

29. The Environment Act 1995 places a duty on both the district and county council to work towards achieving the national air quality objectives. We have worked closely with OCC throughout the creation of this low emission strategy. Some of the proposals within this strategy are outside of the district councils control and come under those of the highways authority (OCC), therefore these proposals would not go ahead without their full support.

Conclusion

30. The draft LES sets out potential solutions to the district's air quality issues and includes actions that could resolve the air quality issues in Wallingford and Watlington. The committee is invited to consider the proposed solutions set out in the draft LES having regard to the consultation responses and the Wallingford petition and make recommendations to Council.

31. If the draft LES is adopted officers will continue to develop the proposals laid out within it. Before implementation officers will investigate them further and where possible mitigate against the concerns raised during the consultations. If the trials go ahead they would be fully evaluated and a report including the results would be presented to the General Licensing Committee for a final decision on permanent implementation.

Background Papers

• Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Low Emission Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Consultation report – July 2016
- Appendix 3 – MEL Public Engagement Report – February 2017
- Appendix 4 - Consultation composite report – March 2017
- Appendix 5 – Wallingford Bridge petition

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