

Air Quality Action Plan for Bradford on Avon

Background

Traffic is overwhelmingly cited as Bradford on Avon's biggest problem. The impact on health, pedestrian safety, tourism and economic viability (etc.) cannot be overstated. There have been numerous efforts to resolve this problem. None has been successful.

Conclusion: Either the problem is unsolvable or the efforts to resolve it have been inadequate.

The Current Initiative

The impetus for this latest effort has come primarily from Wiltshire Council's Environmental Health Department [see letter from Gary Tomsett]. This is the first time that the Unitary Authority has formally addressed this problem within the Bradford on Avon Community Area. This coincides with the work arising from both the Core Strategy and the Joint Strategic Assessments (Health, Environment etc.).

The initiative has been supported by the Area Board and, in particular, the Area Board Chairman, Rosemary Brown.

Initiative Details

This initiative, so far, has consisted of just three meetings between various stakeholders [see attendees list], with various communications in between. Full meeting notes are available electronically at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/communityandliving/publicprotection/pollutionandnoise/airandwaterpollution/airquality/airqualityreportsandsummaries.htm> ‘

Meeting One, 27 June 2012

The first, introductory, meeting was led by Gary Tomsett of WC Environmental Health Dept., who explained the reasons for action, the work in progress elsewhere in Wiltshire and the desire to engage the community in an action plan to inform the Core Strategy.

Following this meeting BoACAN was asked to facilitate the remaining (two) meetings and to present progress to the Area Board.

Meeting Two, 23 July 2012

The meeting considered and prioritised 'Options for Change' [based upon the options considered at the time of the Air Quality Action Plan process led by West Wiltshire District Council in 2005]. It also endorsed the following goal:

To reduce the Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate levels to 40 milligrams per cubic metre throughout the air quality management area by 2015

Following this meeting there were over 20 representations/recommendations received from a variety of stakeholders. These are available on request.

Meeting Three: 23 August 2012

The meeting considered all of the previous input using a proposed project management framework (see the work of Robert Fritz including 'The Path of Least Resistance').

1. What is the goal or desired outcome?
2. What is the current reality?
3. What actions are required to move from current reality to the desired outcome?

The outputs, as above, are detailed in the notes from Meeting Three.

The meeting also endorsed a long-term aspiration for a 'CLEAN AIR 2020' town and community area.

Next Steps & Recommendations

These are best described using the project management framework (see above).

Goals/Desired Outcomes:

Long-Term:

The long-term goal is to achieve a Clean Air Town by 2020. It is quite obvious that this requires a structured, coordinated project/campaign which engages the entire community.

Recommendations:

- a. An *Air Quality Partnership* engaging all relevant Departments of Wiltshire Council, our Town Council, relevant Parish Councils, plus voluntary/community groups and organisations (including our schools) and the local business community.
- b. An *Air Quality Network* engaging all our citizens in a concerted campaign.
- c. A *Project Management Group* mandated to act upon and deliver the desired outcomes with minimum bureaucracy.

Medium-Term:

Goal: Legal Air Quality by 2015.

Recommendation: As above, with the added benefit of ensuring urgent action to achieve a challenging goal.

Short-Term:

To set up the necessary structures as recommended. Further immediate actions are best recommended under 'Current Reality'

Current Reality

Despite the long history of previous efforts there is an immediate and important need to provide up-to-date information in the following areas:

A. Origin and Destination Traffic Information

Who is creating this problem? Where are they coming from; going to, and why?

Is it 'us' i.e. is it town-based, area-based or from further afield?

Answers require a properly resourced and funded Origin and Destination Survey. Any differences regarding cost, organisation, purpose (and so forth) are entirely secondary to the imperative need for top-quality data. This project is the absolute sine qua non for further action.

It is, hopefully, worth mentioning that people can also be asked these questions when they are not in their vehicles. There are a variety of settings (home, school, clubs, shops) and a variety of methods (social media, apps, facebook, twitter, community websites) wherein and whereby

the community can reflect on the extent to which this problem is of it's own making and, therefore, that the solutions are also theirs.

B. Health Impact

A Health Impact Survey is now available (c/o Rosemary Brown). The survey must be linked to existing data and engage both Wiltshire Council Public Health initiatives and the Primary Care Trust, Health Centres etc.

C. Safety Impact

Although it is obvious that traffic in and around the town is a constant danger to pedestrians, this information needs to be collated and assessed. The HCZ initiative is looking at this material, as are others concerned with mobility and safety.

D. Environmental Impact

It is important that we support the work of the Environment Health Department whilst also looking at other methods of collecting data on the environmental impact; town fabric, pollution etc.

A new air quality monitoring station is to be sited on Masons Lane by the end of this year to record nitrogen dioxide and particulates in real time.

Action Plans

The full range of potential actions requires much more detailed work along 'SMART' lines (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely). Producing this would, again, be a first priority for a Project Management Group.

Work in Progress: Some groups are rightly keen to act on their own initiative in solving this multi-faceted problem. Climate Friendly Bradford are engaged in encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles and related actions as part of their long-term commitment to change. Further details on the CFB website.

Finally....

There is a strong desire to maintain and build upon the momentum created around this initiative. Those, however, who have 'been here before' will attest that we must work professionally, pragmatically and in unison if we are to make a difference. If we can ally passion with responsibility perhaps we can do it?

Bradford on Avon Community Area Network is willing to help move these endeavours forward. Specifically, if the Area Board and other stakeholders wish, BoACAN will be willing to take a lead on moving forward on the recommendations contained in this progress report.

Jim Lynch
BoACAN

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The Options for Change

The 10 options considered in the 2005 report are still largely relevant and were discussed as a starting point in considering priorities for action in 2012:

i) Do Nothing

Not considered acceptable in the light of the serious air quality issues, particularly on Mason's Lane. Option rejected.

ii) Soft Options

Some action ongoing through implementation of the Historic Core Zone, Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon's 'Active Travel Map' and through car sharing, school travel plans, Lorry Watch etc. Scope for more to be done. Option agreed as a priority for action.

iii) Congestion Charging

Agreed to be expensive and technically challenging but not to be ignored as a possible measure. Option agreed for further investigation.

iv) Low Emissions Zone

Ditto. Option agreed for further investigation.

v) Signing alternative routes

A major signing project has now been approved by the Area Board for 18 new signs around the town to warn HGVs of the 18 tonne weight limit on the Town Bridge and to sign alternative routes for larger lorries. Out to consultation with parish councils and others until end July. Option agreed as a priority for action.

vi) Relief Road

Agreed to be unrealistic in the current financial climate. Not programmed within the current Local Development Framework and Local Transport Plan. Option to be kept as a long term aspiration.

vii) Support to the A36/A46 link

Ditto. Option to be kept as a long term aspiration.

viii) One-way traffic management scheme

One-way scheme proposed by Capita Symonds in 2005 for Market Street, Masons Lane, Mount Pleasant, New Road, Springfield, Silver Street was consulted upon and rejected by residents. Independent research has shown the potential negative effects on air quality of such a scheme. There is conflicting data and interpretation of data regarding the exact impact of traffic redistribution in the town. Option requires further investigation.

The Options for Change...

ix) Improved parking enforcement

No particular parking problem evidenced. Option to be monitored.

x) Demand management to reduce volumes and speed of traffic and improve pedestrian facilities

This option was thought the most likely to be productive, though Options iii) and iv) could help in pursuing it.

A key issue is to establish what current demand actually is (an estimated 20,000 vehicles per day pass through the town with claims that 60 % of this locally generated and counter-claims that the figure on a narrower measure is only 15 %). An 'origin and destination' traffic survey is required as a robust evidence base to understand the nature of these journeys. Allan Creedy commented that this is an expensive exercise, others suggested it could be done using volunteer effort.

Other suggestions for pursuing this option included: a town-wide weight restriction order; downgrading the A363 to a 'B' road; timed traffic signalling (such as on the A4 London Road in Bath where the traffic is slowed and filtered to allow priority for buses); better control on planning approvals which generate more traffic growth and/or contribute to worsening air pollution; and pollution absorbent paint.

This Option agreed as the single most important priority for action.

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Desired Outcomes

1. A Clean Air Town
2. A No-Through-Route
3. Reduced rush hour traffic
4. Reduced traffic volumes year on year
5. Reduced pollution
6. Reduced cancer and asthma - to the Wiltshire average or lower
7. A Safe Town
8. Increased low carbon transport journeys such as walking and cycling within the town
9. A more economically viable town

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Current Reality

1. There is a damage to built fabric of the town from vehicle emissions
2. There is generally too much traffic volume
3. Motorists do not follow signs, maybe only 1%
4. A 2003 survey shows 60% of traffic on the Town Bridge is locally generated and of this 15% of journeys start and end within the town's boundaries
5. Only 40 % of traffic volume is 'through-traffic'
6. There is a lack of (and also disagreement on) key data. We simply don't know which elements of the traffic are contributing what proportion of the problem and at what times of day and what is the reason for the traffic being in the town. Without proper data, analysis and understanding we waste our time
7. Bradford on Avon has a greater traffic flow than Westbury - 20,000 against 15,000 AADT – and greater traffic queuing times
8. A northside partial one way system has been proved to be counter-productive to both air quality reduction and traffic reduction
9. There is an above-average incidence of cancer and asthma
10. Traffic generated from new developments - e.g. Kingston Mill and in Trowbridge and Frome - is exacerbating the problems
11. There is an alternative view that traffic is an economic resource/good
12. Air pollution is above EU limits, particularly in Masons Lane
13. The topography of the town cannot be changed
14. There is danger to pedestrians from traffic in the town centre and elsewhere
15. Lorry Watch is having a good impact – but can it have a lasting effect when HGVs contribute less than 2% of total pollution?

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Action Plan Ideas

1. Erect new signage warning HGVs of the 18 tonne weight limit on Town Bridge and signing alternative routes
2. Erect new signage on town entrances to warn drivers to 'Help Bradford on Avon become a Clean Air Town'
3. Invite Climate Friendly Bradford to lead the clean air campaign which could include: lobbying for greater weight to be given to air quality issues in planning decisions; a programme of education on lower emission car choices; a programme for cleaner public transport; restricted goods delivery times to shops and businesses within the central area; 'shop and go' delivery services user lower emission vehicles; free parking for electric cars; provision of electric charging points around the town; all backed up by a general awareness-raising campaign
4. Support the introduction of electric vehicles e.g. an electric minibus and charging points at hotels, B&Bs, car parks etc
5. Promote the 'Active Travel Map' to encourage walking, cycling and public transport journeys
6. Encourage local people, parents and schools to reduce unnecessary journeys through the town centre
7. Carry out an Origin and Destination Survey, with volunteer effort if necessary, to confirm journey purposes, patterns, frequency, necessity etc.
8. Update Traffic Counts generally
9. Manage demand by re-routing unwanted traffic and encouraging a modal shift in journeys
10. Introduce the planned Historic Core Zone in the town centre to slow traffic and give greater pedestrian priority
11. Differentiate policies towards cars, light goods vehicles and heavy goods vehicles
12. Close the A361 main road
13. Downgrade the A254 to a B road to deter through-traffic
14. Downgrade the A363 to a B road
15. Consider park and ride sites such as at the Wiltshire Music Centre, Sainsburys and canal car parks
16. Provide a subsidised bus for school children and for/to the villages
17. Try 'Car Free Days'

Action Plan Ideas

18. Control the traffic through traffic management measures such as timed controlled traffic signals on Bath Road to control vehicles entering Masons Lane
19. Build a bypass, possibly on the east side of the town edging the green belt with a river/railway crossing, make a case for funding from the EU or from the Community Infrastructure Levy
20. Reserve land for a relief road near the cemetery
21. Curb further development along Holt Road until the impact of Kingston Mill and the Historic Core Zone are known
22. Trial the 'Capita Symonds' one way system for one year with appropriate monitoring
23. Divert traffic from the A363 at the Frankleigh fork towards Woolley Green and Staverton. This would not be popular in the villages concerned - but the volume of traffic crossing the Staverton Bridge is currently about half that crossing the Town Bridge
24. Introduce a byelaw requesting the drivers of vehicles in Masons Lane to switch off their engines when in prolonged queues
25. Offer air conditioning to the residents of Masons Lane and Market Street to alleviate the effects of pollution, a relatively low cost solution
26. Introduce special flagstones to absorb pollution as well as pollution absorbent paint
27. Take Bradford on Avon off the satnav for lorry drivers and lobby hauliers not to use the town as a through-route
28. Reduce the weight limit on the Town Bridge to 7.5 tonnes
29. Display nitrogen dioxide and particulates readings prominently e.g. through local radio warnings, illuminated signs, public art work
30. Carry out surveys of health and of lichen
31. Provide cheap, reliable public transport as a genuine alternative e.g. bus 264 on a 20 minute frequency
32. Introduce alternating one-way traffic flows with traffic lights on Town Bridge
33. Designate the Town Bridge 'access only'
34. Close Town Bridge on Farmers' Market Sundays between 10am and 4pm
35. Designate a 'Low Emissions Zone'
36. Designate a 20 mph zone throughout the town centre
37. Build larger pedestrian refuges on road crossings
38. Introduce traffic controls at roundabouts and the periphery of the town linked to NO₂ levels and using queue sensors



Bradford on Avon
Community Area Network

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Update regarding the installation of Air Quality Monitoring on Masons Lane in Bradford-on-Avon

There has been significant progress in the relocation of the Air Quality Monitoring Station currently in Westbury to a site in Bradford. This will enable us to measure levels of nitrogen dioxide and PM₁₀ (particulates) on a minute by minute basis in this area. We currently have 2 diffusion tubes monitoring for nitrogen dioxide on Masons Lane providing us with a monthly mean level.

After we considered but had to rule out a number of sites for a variety of reasons, the residents of a property on Masons Lane have kindly given us permission to locate the analyser behind their wall which runs parallel to the road. It's a good site as it is secure, easily accessible and a power source is nearby. The sampling head will stand clear of the wall but the box itself will be hidden.

We are currently waiting for quotes to carry out the groundwork's necessary (the analyser requires a completely level surface on which to sit) and to have a secure power supply. Our procurement rules require two quotes for this before we can appoint a contractor.

Our aim is to locate the analyser for sufficient time to obtain meaningful data regarding the levels of pollution in Masons Lane, to perhaps incorporate any trials for actions proposed to reduce congestion in the town in order to measure the impact upon the air quality.

I am hopeful that we will be able to report that the device is operational by the next area board meeting in November 2012.

Peter Nobes
Senior Environmental Health Officer, Wiltshire Council.

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Message from Gary Tomsett, Public Protection Manager, Wiltshire Council

Wiltshire Council inherited two air quality action plans when it became a unitary Council in 2009, these being;

1. West Wiltshire District Councils Action plan document for Bradford on Avon and Westbury.
2. Salisbury District councils Action plan for Salisbury city.

The Salisbury plan was based on the Salisbury Transportation Plan 1, which was a fully funded scheme developed to relieve congestion and enhance the city centre, rather than improve air quality however, it was identified that there would be beneficial impacts on air quality. The plan has now been largely implemented.

The West Wilts Plan for Westbury fell when the Westbury by pass was cancelled and we are all aware of the situation in Bradford on Avon.

As nitrogen dioxide levels remain above the annual mean objective it is necessary to review these plans and develop new plans where new AQMAs have been declared.

There is not a statutory time table for the revised AQ action plan BOA, however, we are acutely aware of the emerging core strategy and have shaped our current work around their target dates for submission of Supplementary Planning Guidance etc.

We are looking to develop revised AQAP for Wiltshire by the early part of next year 2013. The document will have to be flexible enough to allow it to be adapted as specific measures emerge for the different towns.

Gary Tomsett
Public Protection Manager, Wiltshire Council

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Stakeholder Involvement

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