

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM**PUBLIC MEETING****AIR QUALITY ISSUES IN WINCHESTER TOWN****1 February 2005****1. Apologies**

Councillors Saunders, Maynard and the Forum's Chairman, Councillor Pearce, had forwarded their apologies to the meeting and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Nelmes, took the Chair for the meeting.

2. Chairman's Introduction

The Vice-Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 45 members of the public, representatives of local groups and Councillors to the meeting at the Guildhall, Winchester.

3. The Vision for Winchester

Simon Eden, the City Council's Chief Executive, stated that the Vision for Winchester Statement had been discussed at previous public meetings of the Forum. The Statement was available on the Council's website (www.winchester.gov.uk) and invited comments to be made to the City Offices on 01962 848313.

4. Presentation on the Air Quality Management Plan for Winchester

The Forum received a presentation from Robert Heathcock, the City Council's Head of Health and Environment. In summary, he explained that the Government had, through a number of Acts and Regulations, required all local authorities to review the air quality of their districts. At Winchester, the air quality was continuously measured by two permanent sites in the town centre which monitored background and roadside levels.

The results of this review were tested against the Government's Air Quality Objectives and the centre of Winchester had failed these objectives in regard to the nitrogen dioxide and particles emissions that were predominately caused by traffic. As a result, the City Council had declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in November 2003 which encompassed the town centre and part of the main roads into the centre.

Mr Heathcock explained that although Winchester was fairly unusual in that its topography, combined with its medieval street layout, meant that there was little wind to clear pollution from its congested town centre streets, it was not alone in declaring an AQMA. 133 other local authorities had so far declared AQMAs and it was likely that others, including some in Hampshire, would do so in the near future.

Having declared the AQMA, the City Council had drafted an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) which set out a list of 32 options that the Council and its partner organisations would pursue so that air quality could meet the Government's on-going air quality objectives. The Action Plan was currently undergoing a period of public consultation (of which this meeting formed part) before it was

amended as necessary, published and submitted to DEFRA for ratification in April 2005.

An Executive Summary of the Plan had been made available to the Forum and Mr Heathcock requested that any written comments on the Plan should be submitted to the City Offices, Colebrook Street or via email to environment@winchester.gov.uk by 28 February 2005. Further information was also available on the webpage, www.winchester.gov.uk/agma. He added that this website also contained the full Air Quality Action Plan and that CD copies were available upon request by calling 01962 848488.

The Action Plan had been divided into three broad categories:

1. Engineering Solutions

This included the need to increase the availability of Park and Ride on other routes into the town; traffic management changes to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion; and the encouragement of walking and cycling to reduce the number of short car journeys.

2. MIRACLES Project Initiatives

The MIRACLES Project is a European Union funded initiative, run with the County Council to promote sustainable transport. In underlining the importance of the MIRACLES Project to the implementation of the AQAP, it was noted that the Project had established roadside vehicle emission testing, parking policy incentives for low emission vehicles and had been involved in improving public transport. The Project had also overseen the BikeAbout Scheme, goods delivery alternatives, improved traveller information, and the promotion of alternative fuelled vehicles. The Forum also noted the Project's Bus Quality Partnership work with the private bus operators which had reduced emissions from many of the buses that operated in the town centre.

3. Policy and Promotional Areas

This category of the AQAP sought to link up the Plan with other policies of the Council (such as those influencing Planning Development Control decisions), the workplace and school travel plans, and encouraging improvements to the taxi and private hire fleet.

5. Public Questions

The Chairman thanked Mr Heathcock for his presentation and opened the meeting to questions from the members of public. A summary of some of the questions and responses from the City Council's officers are set out below.

- *The effects of the reversal of the traffic flow along Parchment Street.*

The Officers explained that the reversal was an experimental trial and that its effects on the air quality of the town centre would be evaluated, along with other factors, in deciding whether to make a permanent change to the traffic order.

- *What effect has the Park and Ride Extension at Bar End had on reducing traffic levels in Winchester?*

Data for the usage of the Park and Ride Extension would be analysed and published in due course.

- *As the employers of the largest group of commuters into Winchester, what efforts had the City and County Councils made to promote sustainable transport amongst its own staff?*

Due to the cost of properties in Winchester, most of the public sector staff were unable to live in the town. New officers of the City Council were able to claim a free pass for the Park and Ride sites and it was explained that most private companies also provided free staff parking. However, City Council staff were no longer given parking passes for car parks within the AQMA and the Council were investigating options to further reduce its own effect on the AQMA, which included encouraging more homeworking and making more services available to its customers via the internet and through closer working with the District's Parish Councils. Proposals for a staff bus service had been considered but discounted because of the probable high expense.

- *What real progress had been made on the Winchester Movement and Access Plan (WMAF)?*

During the ten years WMAF had been in operation, there had been a zero rate of growth in Winchester's traffic, which compared well with the significant increases in volume experienced at other towns and cities. However, the fact that the WMAF had not met all of its original targets was due in part to delays in implementing the Bar End Park and Ride extension.

- *What effect did the increasing number of low flying aircraft on route to Southampton Airport have on Winchester's air quality?*

The City Council was working through the Southampton Airport Joint Consultative Committee to put forward the views of Winchester's residents concerning the trials of different flight routes for the airport and members of the public were welcome to contribute to this by contacting the City Council's Environmental Health Team on 01962 848476. With regard to pollution from these aircraft, it was explained that the majority of planes using the airport were modern low emission, quiet propeller aircraft.

- *The polluter should pay. It was suggested the cost of all car parking in Winchester should be substantially increased to deter car use.*

The City Council had recently agreed that the cost of long stay car parking in the town centre should be increased by 25%, with effect from April 2005, but that the cost of parking needed to achieve a balance between reducing the number of car journeys against the needs of maintaining a vibrant shopping centre. In response to other questions, the Head of Traffic and Transport explained how the car parking accounts were audited.

The City Council had also considered congestion charges (similar to those in central London) and workplace parking levies, but both had been discounted for reasons of practicality.

- *What would happen if, after implementing the AQAP, the City Council's Air Quality continued to fail to meet Government targets?*

At this stage, it was unclear what action the Government would take in these circumstances but it was not expected that this option would need to be pursued.

- *What steps had been taken to encourage walking through the town centre?*

Although more work had yet to be done, the County Council had completed a number of projects to improve facilities for pedestrians such as the improvements at Jewry Street, the City Road junction, Bar End Road, Chesil Street, Romsey Road and the Upper High Street.

- *Did the timing sequences of traffic and pedestrian lights help or hinder traffic flow through the town centre?*

Traffic signals provide a balance between vehicle and pedestrian flows. The new traffic signals at the Stockbridge/City/Andover Road junction provide an improved facility for pedestrians compared to the previous layout.

- *What progress had been made in promoting school's travel plans?*

A recent Government grant had been used to increase the number of officers working on the promotion of School Travel Plans, but it was likely that there could be difficulties in funding all of the schemes that sought to improve the physical environment around schools.

- *Several members of the public commented on the Council's lack of success in reducing the number of car parking spaces from the town centre.*

The Jewry Street car park would be closed shortly in connection to the works on the Winchester Cultural Centre and would be re-opened with approximately half the available spaces. As part of the re-development of Broadway/Friarsgate, it was proposed that the Friarsgate multi-storey car park would be demolished and re-built with the same number of spaces that would have been available had the current building been refurbished. With regard to residential development of the site, the developers had been requested to consider a car pool for residents. The officers also explained that there was strong public support for increasing, not decreasing, the number of parking spaces.

- *To what extent is Hampshire County Council involved in the AQAP, as both one of the largest employers in Winchester and as the Highways Authority?*

In addition to the work of the MIRACLES Project as summarised above, the County Council had also agreed that it would be appropriate to link AQAP objectives to the Local Transport Plan. It was also noted that the County Council was working towards drafting its own work travel plan.

Other Comments

In response to a question regarding the role of reducing traffic movements from students, it was noted that an extension of the Park and Ride bus route to include University College Winchester was currently under consideration.

In regard to comments about the South Hampshire Rapid Transport Links, it was noted that major transport projects such as these were likely to be a pre-requisite for the Government's promotion of development growth in the south-east.

A representative of the City of Winchester Trust suggested that the work towards the AQAP could help free some of the unnecessary street furniture from some of Winchester's streets and that the Council should consider adopting the design principles promoted by Dutch architects.

During debate, a member of the public reminded the Forum of the numerous traffic management schemes which, although often well thought-out, had not been implemented and urged officers that these be re-considered.

Other concerns were raised as to how the Council proposed to bridge the apparent contradictions between its planning policies, which encouraged denser development of Winchester, and therefore generated more traffic movements, and the AQAP. The questioner cited the proposed residential developments at the Broadway/Friarsgate site and the sub-division of domestic properties, such as student let properties in the Stanmore Road area.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and comments and explained that the next meetings of the Forum would be:

- 7.00pm Monday 28 February: Broadway/Friarsgate
- 7.00pm Monday 11 April: Archaeology in Winchester
- 7.00pm Wednesday 11 May: The Evening Economy in Winchester

The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and concluded at 9.00pm

Chairman