

Warrington Local Plan Examination in Public

Statement by Cllr Peter Walker, Borough and Parish Councillor for Stockton Heath on behalf of Stockton Heath Parish Council

Matter 13: Air quality - para 16 & 17

This submission refers to air quality in Stockton Heath village and the negative impact on air quality that proposals in the submission version of the Local Plan will have.

A feature of Warrington is that there are two canals (the Bridgewater and the Manchester Ship) and the river Mersey running east/west across the Town. Most of the facilities that residents would need to access (railway stations, hospital, retail and employment parks, rugby league stadium etc.) are to the north. Traffic going north is funnelled through the A49, A50 and A56/A5060 to cross the waterways. The A49 runs through the centre of Stockton Heath village.

More traffic through Stockton Heath will cause the quality of the air to deteriorate even further.

Air Quality

I will be referring only to two contaminants; the gas nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and very small particles (particulates known as Pm_{2.5}). Both are potentially serious health hazards.

NO₂ is produced mainly from older diesel engines and therefore mainly from vehicular traffic. Pm_{2.5} can come from several sources but significantly also from vehicular traffic. This will include older internal combustion engines and brake, tyre and road wear from any vehicle (including electric powered); old or new.

Current situation

The Borough Council measures NO₂ concentrations at several locations in the Town. It measures Pm_{2.5} in only one place. It does not have a complete picture of air quality in the Town. The Local Plan was developed in the absence of this knowledge.

NO₂ in Warrington is predominately measured using sample tubes which are analysed in a laboratory after a period of time and therefore can only record an average figure. In Warrington, only measurements of NO₂ content are used to designate air quality management areas (AQM). Areas currently where NO₂ content exceeds an annual average of more than 40 micro grams per cubic metre are designated AQM. There is an AQM just to the north of Stockton Heath on the A49.

The one location where the Borough Council measures Pm_{2.5} levels in the Town is located 100 metres away from a main road in a wooded area just outside a primary school play area to the north of the canals and river. It is quoted as 'background' level. It is approximately 2 miles away from Stockton Heath.

In 2019 Stockton Heath Parish Council installed an air quality monitor on the A49 in a residential area to the south of the village. The monitor measures several contaminants including NO₂ and Pm_{2.5}. The monitor is a Zephyr unit from 'EarthSense', an offshoot of Leicester University. The provenance of the monitor is attached to this submission. Readings from this meter are recorded daily

The average reading from the monitor for each 24 hour period averaged over the last 12 months for NO₂ is 19.1 micro grams per cubic metre, and for Pm_{2.5} it is 7.7 micro grams per cubic metre. The latest recommendation from the World Health Organisation is that countries should take actions that will reduce NO₂ levels to no higher than 10 and for Pm_{2.5} levels to no higher than 5. The UK Government is currently consulting on Pm_{2.5} levels and will probably set a target of no more than 10 micro grams per cubic metre of air to be achieved by 2040 (note that the Local Plan runs until 2038).

The peak average readings from the monitor for a 24 hour period during the month of July, 2022 are 60.93 for NO₂ and 16.29 for Pm_{2.5}. WHO recommendations are 25 and 15.

In response to the Central Government consultation on air quality, WBC said that actions should be taken to deliver WHO recommendations by 2030. Proposals in the Local Plan do not support this ambition.

The latest WHO recommendations were published in August 2021. The air quality considerations in the local plan appear to have been based on a report commissioned in 2018. Several years before the significant health hazard posed by particulates was fully recognised.

Submission Version Local Plan Proposals

The proposal to develop a South East Warrington Urban Extension, with an eventual additional 4,200 houses, plus an expansion of industrial areas, to the south of Stockton Heath village with no infrastructure to support it will put more traffic onto the A49 and through the village. As demonstrated by the figures above, contamination of the air in the village already exceeds the latest WHO recommendations that countries are encouraged to work towards. The SEWUE will make this situation worse.

It cannot be assumed that advances in technology will reduce pollution caused by vehicles to compensate for the additional traffic and achieve the reduced contamination levels now advocated. Emissions from internal combustion engine tail pipes will no doubt improve as older vehicles are phased out and more electric vehicles are in use, however, there will still be particulate emissions from tyres, brakes and road wear, which already are the main sources of particulate emissions from modern vehicles.

The Local Plan should not contain proposals which will increase traffic on existing roads through already highly populated areas such as Stockton Heath. The SEWUE must not be in the Plan, until and unless the road infrastructure is in place to take the additional traffic which will be generated away from the village.

This submission to the Examination in Public of the Warrington Local Plan comments only on the air quality issues that the proposed SEWUE and industrial area expansion will generate and are unacceptable to the Stockton Heath Parish Council. Other concerns, such as loss of green land are dealt with elsewhere. The proposals also run counter to the Borough Council's stated ambition to improve air quality.