

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 4 OCTOBER 2016**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors H Asker, G Barker, R Chambers, P Davies, M Felton
and B Light.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services),
M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of
Public Services), A Lee-Moore (Specialist Environmental Officer)
and M Watts (Principal Environmental Health Officer).

Also present: Councillors P Fairhurst, J Lodge and J Redfern.

SC27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harris, Oliver and Sell.

Councillor Asker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Saffron
Walden Town Council.

SC28 CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION – AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

The meeting had been called to consider the decision taken at the Cabinet
meeting on 15 September to approve the Air Quality Action Plan.

*Paul Garland from sustainable Uttlesford spoke to the meeting. A summary of
his statement is attached to these minutes.*

Councillor Dean had called in this decision for the following reasons.

- Overall the action plan as written is not adequately specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and timely (SMART).
- In particular, but not exclusively, item numbers 1, 7 & 8, which will support the delivery of the Local Plan and will have high or medium impacts on air pollution, do not provide enough detail to give the reader confidence that they will support some of the options that may be included in the Local Plan. They are unspecific.
- The action plan needs to support relevant options that may be chosen for the local plan to allow for the right decisions to be taken on those options. Delaying the formulation of specific actions until after the Local Plan site selection decisions have been taken based on inadequate evidence to support their delivery would be contrary to the ethos of the Local Plan process. Currently the action plan is not timely

Officers' had responded to these points in a document circulated to the committee, together with an updated Action Plan.

Councillor Dean said he had called in this decision because he had the same concerns as when the document had first been considered by the Scrutiny Committee. The plan failed to identify the most important areas to be addressed, to prioritise action and provide quantifiable measures for improvement and did not identify the resources to implement these measures.

He said the document failed to meet the Defra guidance on producing an AQAP. This recommended Local authorities to consider a package of measures, and to carry out an impact assessment to estimate the expected reduction. He said the council should focus on those measures that would bring the most significant changes.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said it was difficult to apply quantifiable targets to each air quality measure. The plan contained a combination of actions, which aimed to benefit the wider air quality area. It might be possible to measure specific outcomes where radical changes were proposed e.g. for a new bypass, but the improvement made in the smaller town centre area would not bring substantial change that could be easily measured.

It was explained that many of the proposed actions relied on input from external partners. Some of the measures were close, but the annual status report showed that all measures were within the limits. The task was to ensure the management of additional traffic and a key part of this work was to liaise with ECC to improve traffic flow.

Members of the committee questioned how the plan could improve air quality in Saffron Walden when the future new developments would bring an increase in the volume of traffic. Officers said there were other factors to consider including improved emission technology, new road infrastructure, new types of vehicles, and also junction improvements.

Members said it wasn't clear if the aim of the plan was to reduce AQ levels or just to ensure they didn't get any worse. They also asked how the information would help inform the new Local Plan in relation to the preferred location of new developments and the required mitigation.

The Director of Public Services said the overall purpose of the AQAP was to ensure that the air quality objectives were met in the Saffron Walden Air Quality area. This was a quantifiable and measurable objective. The monitoring system provided detailed information on an annual basis and reported progress throughout the year.

In relation to the Local Plan, when ECC had finalised the model for traffic flow for Saffron Walden, it would put this through an air quality model and look at the effect of various interventions.

Councillor Lodge spoke to the meeting. He said there had been occasions when the air quality measures had not been met and this was concerning as there were 500 homes to the west of the town yet to be developed. He said the plan was a good start to the process, but it included only qualitative measures with no numbers attached.

He said the plan fell short of the DEFRA Local Air Quality Management advice that it should include a clear indication of reductions expected over time, when this was likely to be achieved, the measures already taken and further measures to be met and within timescales. He felt there was more information that could be included and suggested that the plan should be delayed until this was available.

Officers said that it wasn't possible to have a quantifiable reduction for each measure. The modelling carried out by ECC had identified that the main pollutants in the town were caused by queuing traffic. The plan therefore aimed to reduce the reliance on cars and to increase traffic flow. Councillor Asker said the problem was the limited capacity of Saffron Walden's medieval narrow streets.

Other members said they had little confidence that the pollutants would improve in the light of new the developments proposed for Saffron Walden. There was also the question of whether budgets had been identified within UDC to implement the actions.

The Director of Public Services said the council would have to consider the extent it wished to prioritise measures through the budget preparation process. There would also be resources through planning obligations when the developments were implemented. The council would also look at the CIL option through the Local Plan process.

Members commented that it was difficult to prioritise schemes when the plan was neither itemised or costed. Officers replied that the updated table of actions gave more detail on the impact and relative cost of the measures. This was still an outline plan and any bid for a project would have to be properly costed.

Councillor Chambers said that the pollution levels in Saffron Walden were still reasonably low compared to other areas of the county. The problem was that Saffron Walden was an affluent area with relatively high car usage. It was agreed that driver education was important. The action plan included measures to encourage change in driver behaviour although this was difficult to quantify.

Other Members mentioned the future change in vehicle use/type of vehicles that was likely to reduce emissions over the next few years.

Councillor Barker said the document was more of a strategy than an action plan that set out aspirations of what the council would like to do without the necessary detailed of how this would be achieved. He said the Cabinet meeting on 15 September had asked officers to devise project plans for the actions, which was an indication that the Cabinet felt there was still work to be done.

Councillor Fairhurst spoke to the meeting. He said everyone agreed on the aim to control and reduce emissions but the plan should start with a base line number in order to judge improvements going forward. The Principal Environmental Health Officer said that through its air quality measurements the council did have quantifiable base level information for Saffron Walden.

Councillor Dean said the circulated update to the plan showed some improvement, but it could still be more detailed. Members agreed that the document, in its current form was not yet ready to be adopted. It was suggested that the action plan should include the following information

- A position statement
- Prioritise the actions.
- Quantification of costs
- Confirmation that the plan meets DEFRA guidelines

RESOLVED to refer the decision back to Cabinet, with a recommendation that improvements be made to the Saffron Walden AQAP before it was approved and submitted to DEFRA.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

Public Statement

Paul Garland spoke on behalf of Sustainable Uttlesford. He said air quality was a serious issue in Saffron Walden. He was impressed with the outline policies in the draft plan. However, he felt these were only a series of aspirations and there was little chance of full implementation, when there were neither the available officers nor resources to make this happen.

There was an urgent need for a fully integrated and costed highway access and transport plan. This should be funded by developers and raised through CIL rather than a S106 obligation, so the funds were not confined to the locality. This was the only way to get the infrastructure to help prevent car journeys. The soft measures around changing lifestyle were also important but these also needed resources and dedicated officers to drive them forward.