

Reading Friends of the Earth

Air Quality Petition presentation to SEPT 22nd November 2017

Intro: Reading FoE – who are we?

Good evening Councillors. My name is Enrico Petrucco. I am co-ordinator of Reading Friends of the Earth - a local group which campaigns on environmental issues.

What does petition say?

I'm pleased to present our petition for action on clean air which demonstrates concerns of local people. The petition has 350 signatures gathered over 7 weeks so far. Text is:

“I call for a new air quality action plan to be put in place by 2018 with the necessary resources to cut all pollutant levels to below World Health Organisation guidelines by 2020.”

What do we want?

We are concerned about the effects of polluted air – the UK government has not ensured that diesel vehicles meet high enough standards, and is not requiring nor supporting local authorities to take enough measures to improve air quality.

RBC report at Item 10 to this committee says: “given concerns about the accuracy of DEFRA’s modelling and the continuing need to protect residents’ health from exposure to poor air quality, work is still required.”

We want more action to ensure that air quality everywhere in Reading will be well below the WHO guidelines for NO₂ and PM_{2.5} to keep people healthy and safe.

Nitrogen Dioxide

Reading has been in breach of EU legal limits for NO₂ – a toxic gas that inflames the lining of the lungs – since limits were introduced in 2010. Some locations still fail to meet EU annual legal limit of 40 micrograms/m³. This is also the current World Health Organisation recommended level, though worryingly they have identified health impacts at lower levels.

Latest government modelling says that in 2020 Reading will be at 39 ug/m³. RBC report at Item 10 to this committee says ‘*this is a marginal ‘pass’’* – so government does not require the Council to carry out a ‘feasibility study’ for ‘Clean Air Zones’ that the government could fund.

Our view is that a ‘marginal pass’ in 2020 is not good enough and we want Reading to carry out a ‘feasibility study’, acquire or allocate funding, and implement effective measures.

Particulates PM2.5

Being less than 2.5 thousandths of a millimetre across PM2.5 can enter and persist within the alveoli, the deepest part of the lungs. The effects of these micro-particles are described in Reading's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment :

- *"PM2.5 is understood to have no safe limit for health"*
- *"People with respiratory or pulmonary conditions are more susceptible to poor air quality"*

WHO (2013) says "Recent studies show associations between PM2.5 and mortality at levels below the current Air Quality Guidelines fixed at 10 µg/m³ annually".

Two of the primary sources include vehicle exhausts and wood-burning stoves.

The government monitors PM2.5 at its 'urban background' monitor in the middle of the Cemetery, about 100 m south of the A4. Measurements of NO₂ at this location are much lower than in town centre locations near busy roads so we don't think the PM2.5 results are valid for the town centre.

We want the Council to investigate levels of PM2.5 in areas that are busiest and assess the risks and take appropriate actions.

What measures would be effective?

Reading's current action plan lists many positive actions but does not quantify the benefits expected from each – or achieved - so it is not clear what effect they will have.

Cleaner air requires some combination of cleaner vehicles and/or fewer vehicles – both should be considered but we note that traffic reduction and modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling can also reduce congestion and greenhouse gases – potentially win, win, win!

We want the Council to assess the benefits of:

- Greatly improved facilities for cycling
- 'Clean Air Zones' – charging particularly polluting vehicles – at the river crossings and at pollution hotspots.
- Workplace parking levies to reduce congestion and support public transport
- Reducing town centre car parking
- Road pricing as advocated by Reading Independent Transport Commission

Will the Council assess these benefits?

Will the Council ensure all pollution levels are reduced as fast as practicable by putting in place a new air quality action plan by 2018 with the view to meet WHO guidelines?

Appendix:

Won't be able to say all this but may be useful if asked questions.

What is a Clean Air Zone?

RBC report at Item 10 to this committee Section 4.3 describes Clean Air Zones:

“Measures such as

- changing road layouts at congestion and air pollution pinch points;
- encouraging public and private uptake of ULEVs;
- using innovative retrofitting technologies and new fuels; and,
- encouraging the use of public transport.

“If these measures are not sufficient, local plans could include access restrictions on vehicles, such as charging zones or measures to prevent certain vehicles using particular roads at particular times. However, local authorities should bear in mind such access restrictions would only be necessary for a limited period and should be lifted once legal compliance is achieved and there is no risk of legal limits being breached again.”

Why do we want it - National Stats:

A government report on air quality says: “Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It is known to have more severe effects on vulnerable groups, for example the elderly, children and people already suffering from pre-existing health conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.”

The combined effects of particulates and NOx are estimated to cause 40,000-50,000 ‘attributable deaths’ per year in the UK, roughly twice the figure due to alcohol. Particulate pollution alone is estimated to account for 340,000 ‘years of life’ lost each year.

Air pollution in the UK makes existing illnesses worse with over 100,000 cases of bronchitis in children under 12 and over 10,000 annual respiratory hospital admissions estimated each year.

The annual cost to the UK of pollution is valued at £20 billion, and lost productivity is greater than 6,000,000 days of lost work valued at £2.7 billion.”

Links:

JSNA <http://www.reading.gov.uk/article/9439/Air-Quality>

Item 10 on SEPT agenda: http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/7973/Item10-AirQuality-update-FINAL/pdf/Item10_AirQuality_update_FINAL.pdf