



**OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE  
(WAVERLEY)**

**RESPONSE TO PETITION: AIR QUALITY IN FARNHAM**

**16 MARCH 2012**

**KEY ISSUE**

To respond to a petition presented by Mrs C Sandars at the meeting of the Committee held on 16 December 2011.

**PETITION**

The petition was presented as follows:

Farnham town centre has suffered from traffic congestion for many years. The result has been sub-standard air quality from NO<sub>2</sub> pollution pumped out by vehicle exhausts. People have been breathing in noxious fumes, extremely harmful to health.

A report released on 14 November from the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee says “the government’s failure to meet EU standards on air pollution is putting the health of UK residents at risk”. It says the costs to society from poor air quality are on a par with those from smoking and obesity but the government has consistently downplayed the health impacts of air pollution. Quotes from the current UK Air Quality Strategy include: “99% of the UK meets European air quality standards”. That statistic is for geographical area, not the proportion of the population affected. The 1% below standards includes some of our most densely populated urban areas, whilst much of the 99% that is ‘clean’ is sparsely populated countryside.

Another misleading statistic is that “air pollution is currently estimated to reduce the life expectancy of every person in the UK by an average of 7-8 months”. In fact the impacts are concentrated in particular areas and the health impacts for those that live and work there are severe. The EA Committee report states that for people most directly affected the shortfall in life expectancy is two years.

Farnham is one of the most severely affected areas. Those with health problems, the elderly and the very young, whose lung development is affected by pollution, are most at risk. A recent report by the OECD into international health care tells us “there were more avoidable hospital admissions for asthma in the UK than the average”. 52 out of 100,000 adults in OECD countries are admitted to hospital for asthma each year. The UK’s figure is 74. The report’s author says this could be put down to “poor air quality”. I am told that asthma is rife amongst Farnham schoolchildren.

Waverley Borough Council declared most of Farnham’s town centre an Air Quality Management Area in 2005. Three years later the Council agreed an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). Three years later again there is no evidence of improvement; pollution levels remain stubbornly high, according to Waverley’s 2011 Air Progress Report. The AQAP has been ineffective. Nothing has been done to reduce the huge volume of traffic through Farnham.

This autumn a group of concerned residents set up the Farnham Air Quality Campaign. More than 1000 town centre residents and visitors and over 100 businesses signed the petition we are presenting today. We are confident these numbers are representative of the concerns of the whole town. Workers in the polluted town centre are rightly worried about their health.

I ask this Committee to please take our petition very seriously and urge our local councils to do the work required to reduce congestion and air pollution in Farnham now and for the future. You need to know that local authorities are soon likely to risk fines if they don’t deal with these problems.

### RESPONSE

Waverley Borough Council’s Air Quality Action Plan was published in 2008. In January 2010 an inter-agency Air Quality Workshop took place. A range of further actions was agreed and a number of these have been implemented, including:

- Experimental loading restrictions have been implemented on Downing Street and The Borough from March 2011, and are now enforced with a more vigorous loading regime. These restrictions enforce an out-of-hours delivery regime. The recommendation to make the experimental loading restrictions permanent is presented to this meeting of the Local Committee (Item 11).
- Positive lorry route signing has been implemented to divert lorries along the Blackwater Valley Route in preference to the A3016 through Upper Hale

## ITEM 14

- The Local Committee agreed to advertise changes to on-street parking restrictions and on-street parking charges on 16 September 2011 and 16 December 2011 respectively; the Committee is receiving a report at this meeting which seeks a decision following statutory consultation (Item 8).

The county and borough councils are currently reviewing previous studies and considering other possible improvements to identify other measures that might address congestion and therefore air quality issues. The findings from the Defra-funded study currently being undertaken for Waverley Borough Council will also inform this work (see Item 11).

### OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

**The Local Committee (Waverley) is asked to** agree the response set out above.

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