

COUNCIL MEETING

25 SEPTEMBER 2007

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 5.6

The following question has been asked pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 5.6 by Mrs Frani Hoskins:

"Would the relevant Cabinet Member please explain what practical steps are being taken to deal with the improvement of air quality issues in Tonbridge High Street and in meeting the targets set out in the Air Quality Action Plan?"

Response by Councillor Owen Baldock, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services:

'Air quality in the southern end of Tonbridge High Street (from the Vale Road roundabout to the Botany) does not meet the national air quality standard for nitrogen dioxide. This is caused by emissions from motor vehicles, aggravated by the "canyon effect" of a relatively narrow street with buildings on both sides which are generally higher than the width of the road. This location was declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2005. The Borough Council is required to take action "in pursuit" of the air quality objective; where the exceedance is mainly due to emissions from traffic we need to work closely with the highway authority, which in this case is Kent County Council.

We are using the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (part of the Local Development Framework) as the mechanism for setting spatial, development and delivery strategies which have improving air quality in the High Street as one of the key objectives. The proposals in the Action Plan include measures to reduce traffic in the High Street leading to an improvement in air quality.

A report on the transport strategy for Tonbridge, including studies on options associated with the implementation of the development opportunities included in the Central Area Action Plan, was presented to the meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on 11 June. Copies of these detailed documents, which run to over fifty pages, are on the Council's website.

The transport studies are supported by an air quality assessment undertaken for the Borough Council by Bureau Veritas – a specialist environmental consultancy which carried out the assessment which led to the declaration of the Air Quality Management Area. The report is available in the LDF library. It examines the effect on air quality of a range of scenarios associated with the implementation of the development and transport proposals in the Central Area Action Plan. The assessment looks at the likely impact on air quality in the High Street and other key locations e.g. Cannon Lane, Hadlow Road, Bordyke. It looks at the base year (2006) and the predicted situation in 2016, for a range of scenarios.

The assessment concludes that the projected reductions in background pollution levels and in emissions from vehicles due to national policy measures will be such that the proposals in the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan can be implemented without causing exceedances of the national air quality standards at any locations, that the Plan's objective of improving air quality in the High Street will also be achieved and that air quality here will also meet the standard.

The Public Examination of the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan commences before an independent inspector on 23 October. She has identified a number of transport/air quality related issues as matters that she will wish to examine, to determine their soundness. The Borough Council will advocate that the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan identifies air quality as a key issue and the strategies in the Plan provide a sound way of balancing the opportunities for investment in the town centre with the need for improvements in the range of services and amenities available, along with enhancements to environmental quality.'