

How bad is the air quality in Farnham?

Farnham is one of over 250 locations in the UK where local councils have had to declare an Air Quality Management Area. This is not due to particulates or chemical fumes but is because of higher than targeted levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), mainly from traffic. In 2011, the maximum measured concentration¹ of NO₂ was 54µg/m³ but the highest measured concentration that year was in London, approaching 100µg/m³ in Marylebone.

Elevated concentrations of nitrogen dioxide are not a problem to healthy people, unless at very high concentrations, which are rarely present in Waverley. However, it can cause problems in sensitive groups such as young children or people with asthma. Those people with respiratory illnesses may also be sensitive to nitrogen dioxide levels, however a direct causal link is yet to be proved.

The report recommends a health impact assessment of pollution levels in Farnham is undertaken and Waverley has received government funding to do this. The findings should be published later this year.

Is this report just another piece of paper without any teeth?

In short - No.

Waverley Borough Council is required to monitor and collect data on pollution levels but has only very limited duties under the Local Air Quality Management regime to put controls in place. Because Farnham's pollution is mainly generated by traffic it is the County Council that might be expected to make changes. However, pollution is not the only factor they must consider when looking at new road layouts.

Waverley is the only local authority in Surrey to have undertaken a study like this so should be at an advantage when consideration is given to new traffic circulation measures or other, similar schemes.

Why is there an Air Quality Management Area in Farnham?

An AQMA is an area that Local Authorities are obliged to create where local air pollution is unlikely to achieve the national air quality objectives, set by central government. An AQMA must encompass, as a minimum, the area of exceedence of an air quality objective. Within the AQMA, the Local Authority has a duty to consider and implement measures to try and bring about an improvement in air quality such that concentrations reduce to below the level of the objective.

As part of its duties under the Local Air Quality Management process, Waverley Borough Council identified areas where the measured concentrations exceeded these objectives, and, following Detailed Assessments, three areas of the borough

¹ NO₂ is measured by weight in air – microgrammes (µg) are one-millionth of a gram and one cubic metre (m³) of air is that contained in a beachball measuring 4 metres around

were declared to be AQMAs. Farnham is one and Godalming and Hindhead are the other two. All of these areas are due to traffic-related NO₂ pollution.

Do the report's recommendations mean I shouldn't drive into the town centre?

There are many things people can do to reduce traffic pollution in Farnham or in Waverley generally. A surprise result of the study is that far more diesel-engined cars than expected use Farnham's roads. Because these cars don't have catalytic converters fitted, they produce NO₂ at a much greater rate than petrol engines. This isn't a problem on the open road but Waverley has narrow, congested streets that create a canyon effect – this reduces the ease with which NO₂ is dispersed.

The report identifies diesel cars as one of the bigger contributors and recommends that steps to encourage changes in their contribution are looked at. Government funding is being provided for this. Even so, petrol and diesel engines all produce NO₂ so anything you can do to reduce driving will help with pollution. Please see the last section of this: "*Is there anything I can do to help?*".

Will the Brightwells development make air quality worse in Farnham?

The report has studied pollution levels for Farnham as they exist now. It has also modelled future levels for the year 2015 in two ways: assuming there are no changes compared to today and assuming that currently planned developments, including Brightwells, are in place. The tables show a small increase in pollution levels with planned for developments in place in 2015 compared to without them. The greatest increase modelled is in The Borough and measures 2.2µg/m³.

The measures identified in the report to reduce pollution levels (traffic circulation changes, HGV restrictions, fewer diesel cars, etc.) could combine to provide a modelled reduction of up to 36.2µg/m³.

How long will it take to reduce pollution levels?

The pollutant we measure is NO₂, which disperses very quickly and easily. Anything that reduces the rate at which NO₂ is generated will have an almost immediate effect on pollution. For example if all vehicles stayed away from the town centre for a day, levels would decrease significantly that same day.

The bar chart on page of the report shows how much each type of vehicle contributes to the total. It also shows the underlying levels, or background levels, that exist regardless. Tackling the categories that produce the greater proportion of NO₂, the quicker the effects will be.

Is there anything I can do to help?

Everyone can help to improve air quality within their area by making a number of changes /choices; many of these changes will also help to reduce climate change impacts:

- Where possible, avoid using your car for short, local journeys. Is a car essential for your journey? Can you walk or cycle? Or take the bus?
- Start a walking bus to get your children to school, rather than using your car for the school run. Walking to school is a healthy way to start the day!
- Avoid idling – turn off your car engine whilst waiting.
- Switch to a cleaner fuel, such as electric. Avoid purchasing a diesel vehicle.
- Avoid accelerating and braking hard; driving more smoothly will reduce fuel consumption, reducing emissions and saving you money!
- Ensure your car tyres are at the correct pressure, to reduce fuel consumption.
- Where possible, investigate grants and schemes to improve insulation of your property.
- Insulation will reduce the amount of energy used to heat the property, which in turn reduces both emissions and energy bills.
- Install thermostats and timers to heating