

## Air Quality Management Areas Frequently Asked Questions

### **How is the air quality in the Lancaster district?**

Air quality is generally good across the District. However in parts of Lancaster city centre around the one-way system, and in central Carnforth, air quality does not meet one of the national air quality objectives. Concentrations of nitrogen dioxide from road traffic exhaust fumes are the cause of these raised pollution levels, leading to the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas.

### **What is an Air Quality Management Area?**

An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) is declared over an area where local air pollution is unlikely to achieve the national air quality objectives. This focusses the closer examination of air quality, and planning for what improvements may be needed on the hot spot of concern. Often the boundary of an AQMA may be drawn more widely and in some cases whole boroughs are AQMAs.

### **Where are the Air Quality Management Areas declared by Lancaster City Council?**

Lancaster City Council has declared one over parts of central Lancaster and one in Carnforth. Both have been declared for one of the national air quality objectives: the annual average concentration of Nitrogen Dioxide.

### **What are the national air quality objectives?**

The National Air Quality Strategy sets air quality objectives for England and Wales. These air quality objectives have been set with health effects in mind. The aim is to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy acceptable levels of air quality that meet these objectives, posing no significant risk to human health or quality of life and carrying no unacceptable social or economic costs. The specific concerns in Lancaster and Carnforth are the roadside locations that exceed the nitrogen dioxide annual air quality objective of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup> (microgrammes per metre cubed).

### **Where does nitrogen dioxide come from?**

Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) along with nitric oxide (NO) are collectively referred to as oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>). Burning of coal, natural gas and fuel produce NO<sub>x</sub> emissions largely in the form of NO which is converted to NO<sub>2</sub> through a chemical reaction in the atmosphere. The main source of NO<sub>x</sub> emissions both nationally and locally is road transport. Different vehicles give off different amounts of NO<sub>x</sub> whilst larger and older vehicles tend to produce more oxides of nitrogen than newer vehicles. New vehicles are 'cleaner' due to new technology such as catalytic converters.

### **Is the Lancaster district the only place to have AQMAs?**

No, over 200 places across the UK have been declared as AQMAs. Details of all AQMAs are published on the UK Air Quality website: [www.airquality.co.uk](http://www.airquality.co.uk). Declaring an AQMA does not mean air quality is worse than in other parts of the country, simply that the Council is committed to taking action towards achieving the national air quality objectives.

### **Is air quality getting better or worse?**

Air Pollution from all sources including road vehicles has tended to decrease over the past two decades. In the areas found to be worst affected, however, concentrations appear to be showing an upward trend. Air quality standards designed to protect human health will become more stringent and some local areas such as urban roadsides continue to generate what are considered significant amounts of pollution. The results of our review show that the improvements expected in road traffic emissions within AQMAs may not be enough to meet the national objectives.

### **So what are we doing about it?**

The council's Environmental Health Services has already extended its air quality monitoring in these hot spot areas to get a clearer picture of who is affected and how. Detailed scientific assessments are completed. The council then works with other agencies to draw up Action Plans aimed at reducing pollution levels to achieve the national air quality objectives. This may include proposals for reducing car dependence and promoting public transport.

We consult stakeholders and other interested parties on our findings and at appropriate times canvass opinions on measures that can and should be taken to improve air quality in the AQMAs.

## **Air Quality Management Areas - Frequently Asked Questions (continued)**

### **How long will it take to solve the problem?**

We will keep trying to reduce air pollution within each AQMA until we are reasonably certain that the air quality objective of concern will be met in future. This is likely to take a number of years.

### **Is air pollution an isolated problem?**

It depends on your outlook how you view this situation. Lancaster and Carnforth, like many other areas of the UK, have elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide in some central locations that are likely to exceed a national air quality objective. However through our work to tackle air pollution we may also be able to offer other positive and indirect benefits such as reduced congestion and noise, safer routes for pedestrians and a more sustainable and pleasant environment in which to live.

### **I live in an Air Quality Management Area – how will the air pollution affect me?**

The national air quality objectives have been set with health effects in mind. They have been specified at levels where there are believed to be no measurable health effects. People living within an Air Quality Management Area may (or may not) be exposed to air pollution worse than one of the objectives.

If your health is good, the air pollution we experience in Lancaster and Carnforth is unlikely to have any serious short-term ill effects. Smoking is likely to have far more serious effects on health than outdoor air pollution. However people with lung diseases or heart conditions are more likely to be affected by elevated levels of outdoor air pollution, especially if they are elderly.

Nitrogen Dioxide can have both short term and long-term effects. The short-term effects can include irritation of the eyes, nose and throat and can increase the symptoms of existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema. The long-term effects can contribute to the gradual deterioration in health of people who are already suffering from respiratory problems, and an increased susceptibility to respiratory infections amongst healthy individuals.

### **I live outside of, but close to, an Air Quality Management Area – how will I be affected?**

Concentrations of road traffic sourced air pollution tend to decline quickly away from busy roadsides in urban areas within the Lancaster district. If you live outside an Air Quality Management Area outdoor air quality at your home is likely to satisfy the air quality objectives.

### **What if I work or spend time in an Air Quality Management Area declared by Lancaster City Council but don't live in one?**

Our technical assessments to date have demonstrated that, over a shorter period of exposure than 24 hours a day, outdoor air pollution is likely to satisfy the current air quality objectives.

### **I own my own home – will an Air Quality Management Area affect the value of my property?**

If you live within one of these areas and wish to sell your property, this information may be declared if an environmental search is undertaken. This may or may not result in prospective purchasers wishing to negotiate. However the council is not aware of any instances where property values have been affected in what are desirable central locations.

### **Where can I find out about current air pollution levels?**

People vulnerable to the effects of local air pollution can be helped by obtaining pollution forecasts. These can give people an opportunity to take precautionary measures, minimising exposure to air pollution or limiting its effects.

Air Quality information and forecasts for the North West region can be found:

- on Ceefax and Teletext (page numbers subject to change)
- by telephoning Freephone 0800 556677 and enter the speed dial 43 for forecasts
- on the internet at [www.airquality.co.uk](http://www.airquality.co.uk).

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more general information take a look at our website [www.lancaster.gov.uk/airquality](http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/airquality). If you have a specific query you can contact us by email [airquality@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:airquality@lancaster.gov.uk) or by telephoning Environmental Health Services on 01524 582935.