



Air Quality Strategy
2019/20 – 2021/22

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Introduction

Air pollution in the UK

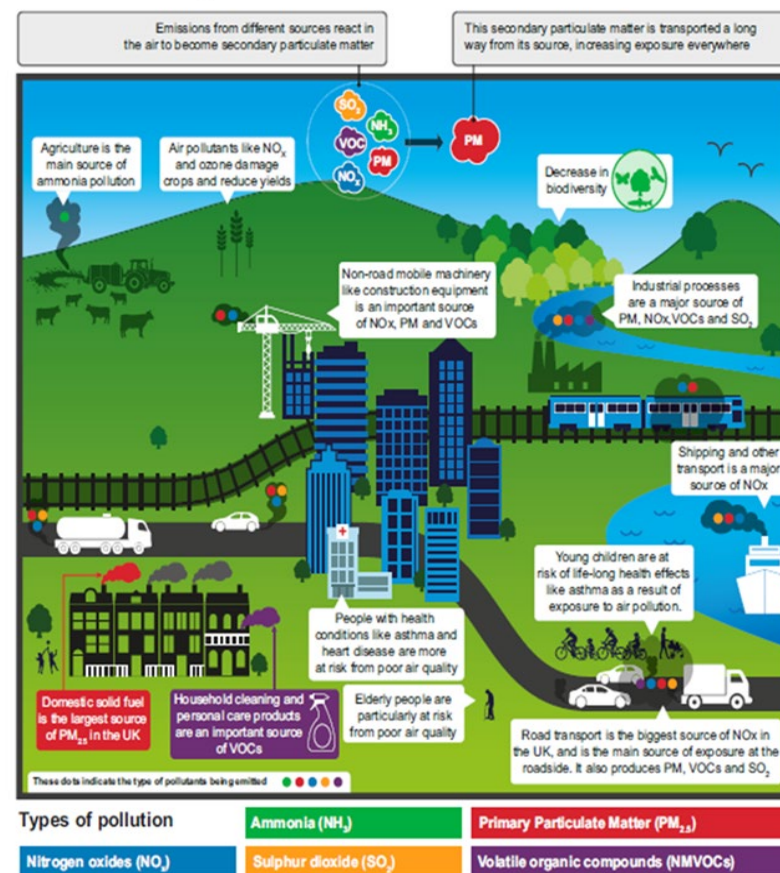
Air pollution leads to the early death of tens of thousands of people each year in Britain and negatively affects the health of hundreds of thousands more. Put bluntly, poor air quality shortens lives and contributes to chronic illness.

Air pollution is the greatest environmental risk to public health in the UK. It is the fourth greatest threat to public health after cancer, heart disease and obesity. It causes more harm than passive smoking.

In 2010, the Environment Audit Committee considered that the cost of the health impacts of air pollution was likely to exceed a previous estimate of £8 - £20 billion. People are less able to work and need more medical care, which results in higher social costs and demands on the National Health Service.

Air pollution also has a direct impact on our natural environment, contributing to climate change, reducing our crop yields and polluting our oceans. We are dependent on the health of the planet on which we live – from the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the energy that powers our homes and businesses. Protecting our natural environment protects our way of life – this is particularly true of air quality.

The sources of air pollutants and their effects



It is acknowledged that there is extra effort required to effectively tackle air pollution. For example:

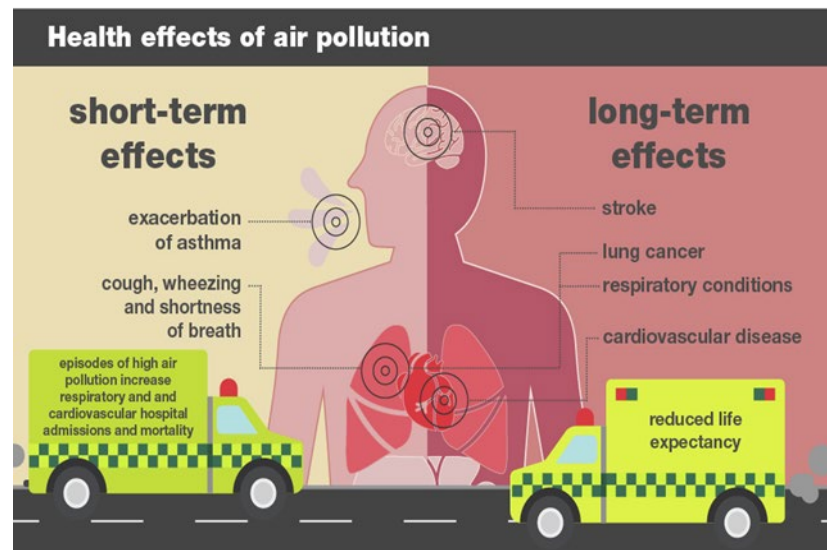
- In October 2018, the United Nations warned that the UK government was endangering people's health by denying their right to clean air
- The world's biggest children's charity, Unicef, has stated it has refocused its British operation to tackle air pollution because of the scale of the "health crisis" facing young people in the country
- In October 2018, the World Health Organisation said that air pollution was the "new tobacco", causing 7 million deaths around the world and harming billions more

The UK national government is taking action to tackle air pollution, as outlined in the Clean Air Strategy 2019. The UK government has set stringent targets to cut polluting emissions by 2020 and 2030. The aim of the national Clean Air Strategy is to reduce harm to human health from air pollution by half. We know that we need to tackle air pollution locally to ensure that we achieve national targets and improve air quality for future generations.

Air pollution is everyone's problem, and taking action to improve our air quality is everyone's responsibility.

There are small things we can all do that would make a big difference to pollution levels, both locally and nationally.

We must work together to protect each other from harm, as well as our environment.



What is air pollution?

Air pollutants are emitted from a range of man-made and natural sources. Every day activities such as driving, heating our homes, manufacturing goods and farming our land can and do have a detrimental impact upon air quality. Pollutants can travel long distances and combine with each other in the air to create different pollutants. The impact of pollution can depend upon how much is emitted, how harmful the emission is and how it interacts with other substances already in the air.

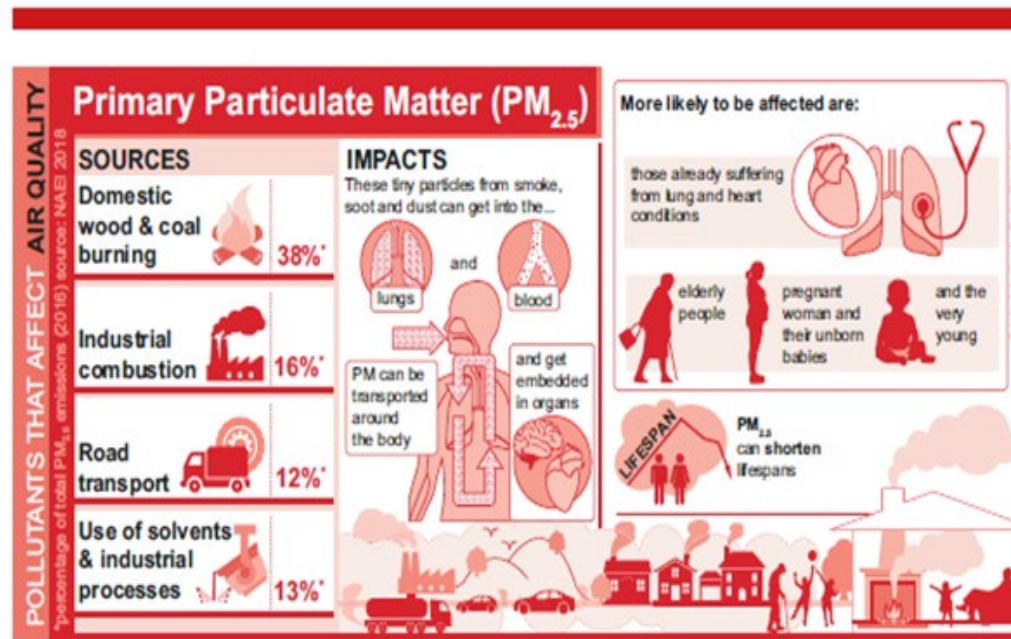
Concentrations occur where pollutants build up in large quantities in a particular location, for example by a busy road, a large industrial estate or an intensive farming operation. Emissions from distant sources can also build up into high local concentrations of pollution. Exposure to high concentrations is most likely to directly result in adverse impacts, although our health can be affected by both short term exposure to high pollution levels and by long term exposure to lower levels of pollution. We are exposed to air pollution in all aspects of our lives – at home, when travelling, at school and at work.

There are different types of pollutants, and we are focusing on three of the most damaging ones in our first air quality strategy. These are detailed in the next sections.

Particulate matter

PM is a generic term used to describe a complex mixture of solid and liquid particles of differing size, shape and composition. PM is simply everything in the air that isn't gas. Sizes range from a few nanometres in diameter (about the size of a virus) to about 100 micrometres in diameter (about the size of a human hair). These particles include carbon, trace metals and mineral components. PM_{2.5} is less than 2.5µm (micrometers) across, is the main type of PM which is regulated and that causes the most harm to health. The UK has made legally binding commitments to further reduce the amount of PM_{2.5} that we emit into our air by 30% by 2020 and 46% by 2030, based on a 2005 baseline.

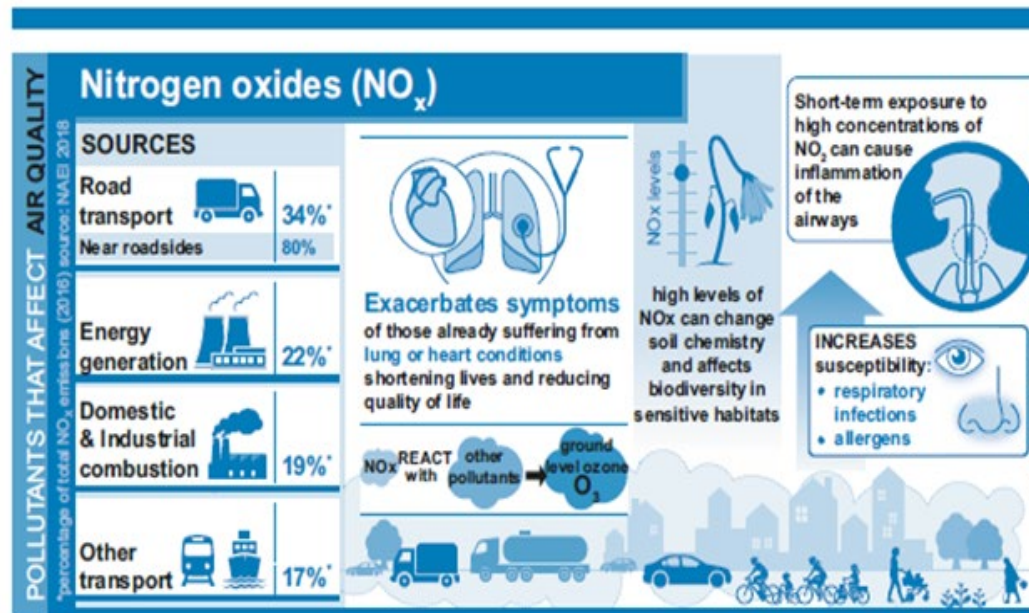
The below shows the main sources of PM_{2.5} on a national level, some of the health impacts and those who are most likely to be affected:



Nitrogen oxides

Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) are a group of gases that are mainly created from burning fossil fuels. This includes nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). The UK isn't meeting the current limits of nitrogen dioxide concentration. DEFRA estimates 80% of NO_x emissions (particularly in places where the UK is exceeding the NO₂ limit) is due to transport, mainly smaller vehicles such as cars and vans. The UK aims to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides (from a 2005 baseline) by 55% by 2020 and 73% by 2030.

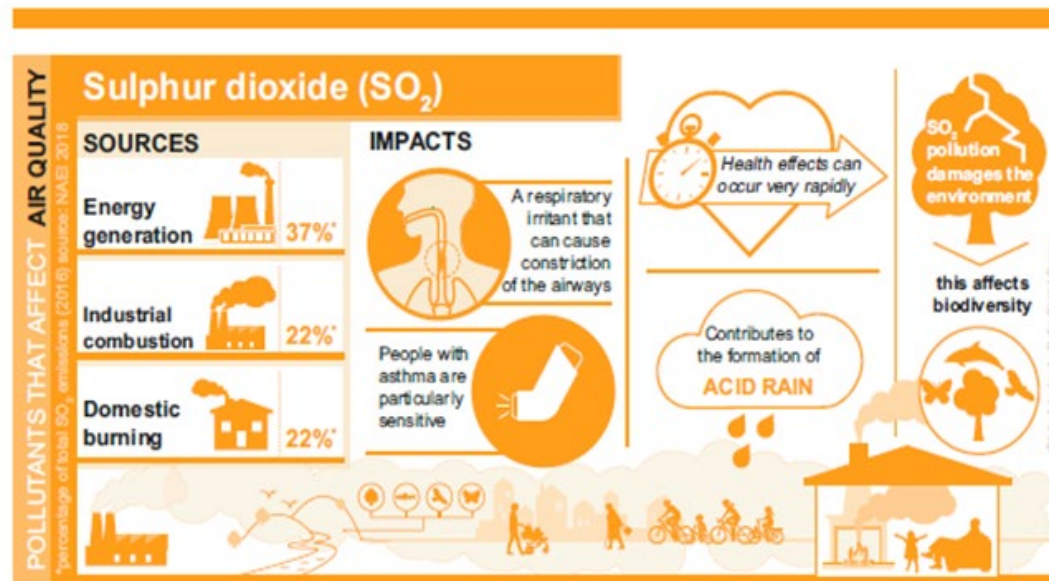
The below shows the main sources of NO_x on a national level, some of the health impacts and those who are most likely to be affected:



Sulphur dioxide

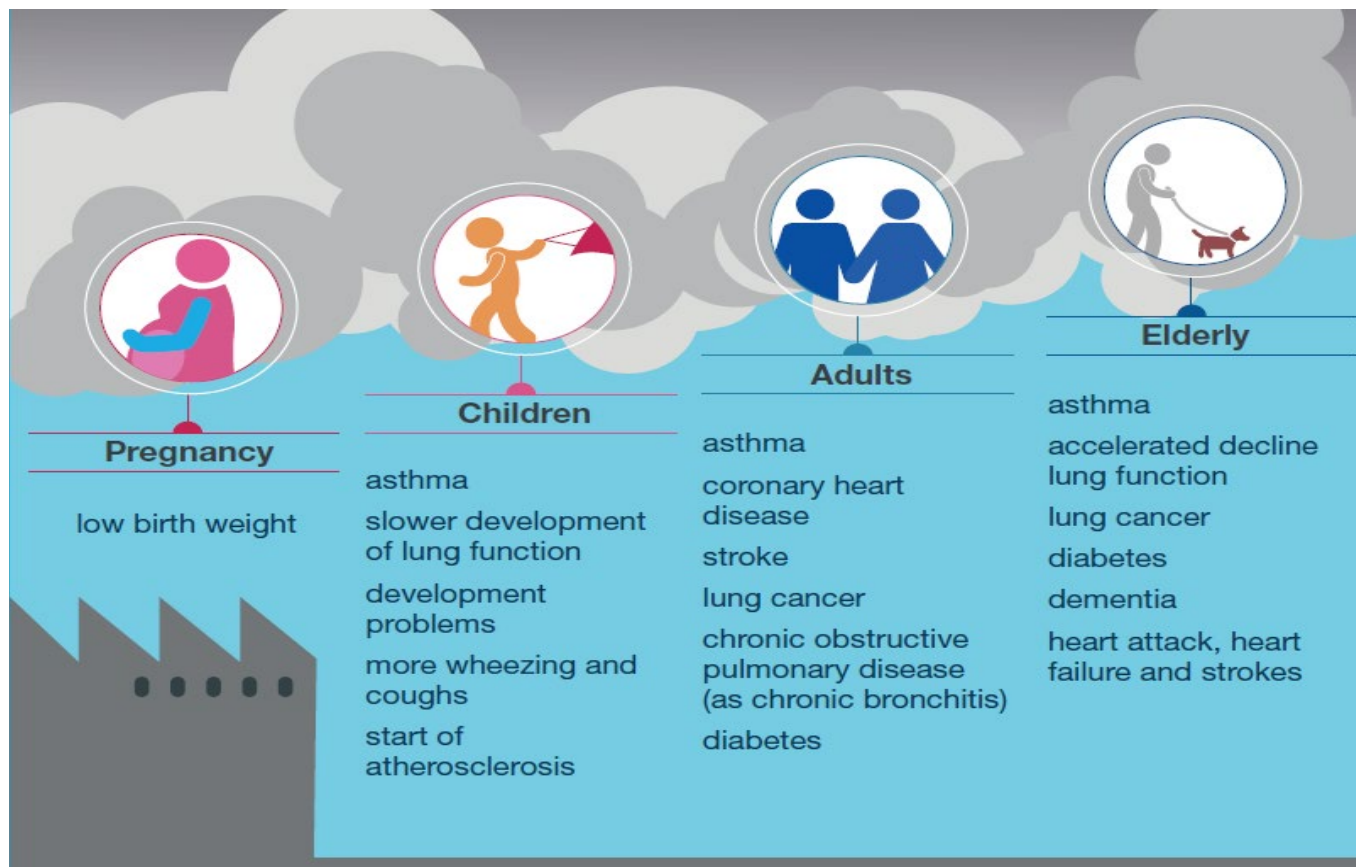
Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) is an acidic gas which can combine with water vapour in the atmosphere to produce acid rain. Sulphur dioxide is an irritant that can affect airways, particularly in those who have asthma. Emissions of SO₂ are decreasing and have fallen by 97% since 1970, although there is still more work to do. The UK aims to reduce emissions of SO₂ (from 2005 baseline) by 59% by 2020 and 88% by 2030.

The below shows the main sources of SO₂ on a national level, some of the health impacts and those who are most likely to be affected:



What are the health impacts of air pollution?

Poor air quality can affect health at all stages of life. Those most affected are the young and old. In the womb, maternal exposure to air pollution can result in low birth weight, premature birth, still birth or organ damage. In children there is evidence of reduced lung capacity, while impacts in adulthood can include diabetes, heart disease and stroke. In old age, a lifetime of exposure to air pollution can result in reduced life expectancy and an increased risk of disease and lower quality of life at the end of life. There is also emerging evidence for a link between air pollution and an acceleration of the decline in cognitive function. People with pre-existing health conditions – such as asthma or heart disease – are also at greater risk from air pollution.



Deprived communities are more likely to experience adverse health effects from poor air quality. There are many reasons for this, for example:

- They are more exposed to air pollution by living closer to major roads.
- They are less likely to live close to well-maintained green spaces associated with lower levels of air pollution, increased physical activity, and improved mental wellbeing.

However, air quality can also be poor in areas that are generally considered affluent, such as central London. This is reflected by the overall national distribution of air pollution with highest average levels in South East England and lowest levels in the North of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Considerations in developing Ashford's Air Quality Strategy

What about air pollution in Ashford?

We know air pollution has a significant impact on the health of the borough. Public Health England has estimated that air pollution is a contributory factor in **50** deaths in Ashford each year. PHE has also estimated that there are **539** years of life lost in our population due to exposure to air pollution – meaning many of our population are dying earlier deaths than necessary. Improving our air quality will lead to our communities living longer, healthier and happier lives.

In Ashford our pollutant concentrations are below the national limit, which is positive. This doesn't mean we have no work to do. **No amount of air pollution is safe.** Even lower levels of air pollution can have a detrimental impact on our health, as evidenced by the statistics above. We know we must aim to reduce levels of air pollution as far as possible.

That is why we are taking action to accelerate the improvements to our air quality. We aim to reduce the risks to health for current and future generations. This strategy is evidence of a compelling case for action so we reduce public exposure to air pollution in order to save lives and improve quality of life for all.

Opportunities and challenges ahead

We also know there are a number of opportunities and challenges on the horizon, which will inform the delivery of our air quality strategy. A PESTELGO (political, economic, societal, technological, environmental, legal, governmental and organisational) analysis was conducted as part of the strategy's development – key highlights include the following:

Political

- Brexit planning and implications for all partners - the EU Withdrawal Act preserves some EU law after our exit, but leaves potential for disruption and instability. Risks for Ashford include road transport (risks of queues at Dover and impact on the rest of the county) and a downturn in the economy which might affect partners' financial situations
- EU funding and funding for sustainable vehicles dropping out

Economic

- Continuing investment and development in Ashford town centre, including the expansion of the Ashford Outlet Centre and the Chilmington Green development for almost 6,000 new homes – bringing with them potential increased air pollution levels, for example an increase in the number of vehicles, dusts associated with building sites etc.
- National funding streams available to deliver work to improve air quality often focus on the major cities and those with declared exceedances in the UK

Societal

- Health inequalities and disproportionate impact of air pollution on our most vulnerable community members, for

example the young and the old, those with pre-existing health conditions, those living in our most deprived communities

- An increased awareness of and concern about air pollution in the general population, with an increased expectation of action taken by the local authority

Environmental

- The new M20 junction 10a scheme is scheduled to complete in spring 2020
- Enhancement of some of our major green spaces, for example Victoria Park and Conningbrook Lakes,

Legal/Governmental

- Challenges in the High Court to national government over failure to deliver against international air quality standards
- Consultation on air quality strategy and potential new statutory instruments

Organisational

- Partners are developing new strategies and are currently in the consultation phases, for example the Kent County Council Energy and Low Emission Strategy.
- Ongoing public sector budget cuts are affecting all partners and services, resulting in priorities around core business

What have we achieved so far?

Although this is Ashford Borough Council's first specific air quality strategy, we have always been working to safeguard our air quality. In 2018/19 for example, we have:

- Specified high levels of electric vehicle charging points within new developments, as well as providing 14 charging points in our own car parks
- Invested in A-rated condensing boilers to update older, inefficient boilers as part of our planned maintenance of our council housing stock
- Delivered a number of energy efficiency improvements to the key buildings within our property portfolio, resulting in a year on year reduction in greenhouse gases from the council's managed estate
- Launched a community transport scheme – with the pilot scheme 'Rolvenden Rocket' up and running since July 2018
- Worked to set up a green taxi grant scheme, which will launch in 2019/20
- Invested in electric transport options for our staff, such as the e-bikes used by our civil enforcement officers and the electric pool car used by our housing officers



Priority outcomes for this strategy

Based on the evidence of the problem at a national and local level, we will seek to improve air quality in Ashford and safeguard excellent air quality for future generations. In order to achieve this, this strategy will achieve the following outcomes:

- **Ensuring we lead the way** – actions the council will undertake to set a high standards for ourselves
- **Working with our partners** – actions to council will undertake with its partners to safeguard and where possible improve standards of air quality
- **Enabling behavioural change** – actions the council will undertake to facilitate lasting behavioural change within the population of the borough

Ensuring we lead the way

We will show commitment and leadership to show what is possible when tackling air pollution, modelling the behavior we expect to see in others.

Action plan

| Objective | Key actions | Key performance measures | Lead |
|---|---|---|---|
| Create an in house resource to deliver the Air Quality Strategy | Appoint an officer, with key tasks to include establishing a cross council delivery group, developing a lobbying and funding strategy and developing behaviour change campaigns. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officer in post Delivery group set up Additional funding levered in | Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager |
| Increase the number of staff using public transport, cycling, walking or car pools in their journeys to, from and within work | Conduct annual staff survey includes questions around journeys to, from and within work to establish current methods and trends. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New schemes launched to target barriers identified by the survey e.g. car pooling Increase in those using public transport, cycling or walking | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Review the impact of free car parking permits for staff in terms of the implications for air quality, parity of terms and conditions with staff who use other modes of transport and our income levels. | Review completed after six months of free car parking scheme | Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager |
| | Explore the installation of additional shower facilities within the Civic Centre to enable staff to cycle to and from work. | Increased use of public transport and cycling as primary means of travel to and from work from baseline to be established through staff survey | Head of Human Resources |
| | Explore the establishing of a pool bike scheme to enable travel whilst in work. | Reduced levels of claim against vehicle mileage scheme | Head of Human Resources |
| | Promote mileage rate for cycling scheme. | Increased take up of cycle to work subsidy | Head of Human Resources |

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| Reduce the pollutants from our vehicle fleet | Explore limits on high polluting vehicles within our leasing and mileage claim schemes. | Following feasibility, reduced levels of CO ₂ within staff vehicle fleet as recorded in annual greenhouse gas emissions report | Head of Human Resources |
| | Explore procurement of fuel efficient driver training for essential car users. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following feasibility reduced levels of CO₂ within staff vehicle fleet as recorded in annual greenhouse gas emissions report Following feasibility reduced fuel consumption within council fleet vehicles | Head of Human Resources |
| Ensure the highest standards of development in our borough | <p>A best practice standard is set for future developments and this standard to be applied as is appropriate. The standard includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electric vehicle charging points for residential and non-residential development, including off street car parking for major developments Minimum standard gas fired boilers Major developments carried out in line with guidance from the Institute of Air Quality Management. | The standard is applied to all new developments as and where appropriate | Head of Planning and Development |
| | A proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) should be set aside for air pollution mitigation measures. | This will be taken forward dependent on the future of the CIL post national government changes | Head of Planning and Development |
| | Set appropriate planning conditions requiring the delivery of electric vehicle charging points within residential and non-residential development. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electric vehicle charging points provided within new developments at a minimum of 1 per residential property with a dedicated parking space Electric vehicle charging points provided within new non-residential development at a minimum of 10% of parking provision Increased number of charging points within the borough | Head of Planning and Development |

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| | Set appropriate planning conditions for enabling cycling to work within new commercial development. | Cycle storage, shower and changing facilities provided within appropriate non-residential development | Head of Planning and Development |
| | Maintain high standards of green space, including effective planting strategies to support pollutant mitigation and street ventilation. | Improved green spaces around the areas with the highest air pollution levels | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| Ensure we understand our air quality | Ongoing monitoring of our air quality making best use of available resources and information. | Annual air quality status reports compiled and submitted to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) | Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader |

Working with our partners

We know we cannot do this alone. A great many of the changes we know we need are not within our gift. Crucial to achieving our strategic aims will be effective partnership working – lobbying and influencing others to secure the changes we need.

Action plan

| Objective | Key actions | Key performance measures | Lead |
|---|---|--|---|
| Increasing the use of sustainable transport | Lobbying bus companies and KCC to provide low emission buses within Ashford and maintain good, high quality, frequent and well used services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bus vehicles at Euro IV standard or higher Reduced levels of private car use within Ashford and consequential reduction in pollutant concentrations | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Lobby rail companies to ensure services continue to be frequent and regular | There is a positive impact in decision making | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Lobby KCC regarding the outcomes of The Big Conversation | Community preferred rural public transport options maintained in Ashford, particularly serving rural communities | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| Minimising the impacts of poor air quality | Work with KCC to deliver roadside planting that seeks to mitigate air pollution. | Roadside planting delivered and impacting positively on pollutant concentrations along key transport routes | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Lobby KCC to consider air quality impacts in the design of road layouts and traffic calming measures. | Reduced pollutant concentrations along key transport routes | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Lobby KCC to use urban traffic management control to optimise traffic flow within Ashford. | Reduced pollutant concentrations along key transport routes | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |

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| | Work with KCC to explore options for providing on street electric vehicle charging points. | Feasibility is assessed and a project developed accordingly | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Collaborate with KCC over the use of variable message signing (VMS) to promote air quality information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced pollutant concentrations along key transport routes • Reduced incidents of vehicle idling in high risk areas | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Work with Kent Police to tackle vehicle idling in key locations such as outside schools. | Reduced incidents of vehicle idling in high risk areas | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| Driving a collaborative approach to air quality | Continue to work with our KCC partners, including in the development and delivery of the Kent energy and low emissions strategy. | Positive impact on the developing strategy and the direction of travel | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Influence any legislation emerging nationally, lobby the national government to ensure we are able to take action where we need to. | Positive outcomes in the national environment, for example in terms of funding allocated to district authorities | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Work with the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Partnership to ensure all partners are playing their part in tackling air quality, for example the NHS. | The Ashford Health and Wellbeing Partnership develops the action plan across the partnership and drives delivery accordingly | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Work with the big employers in Ashford to reduce the number of employee journeys made to and from work by single occupant vehicles. | A scheme is developed and key big employers sign up to it | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |

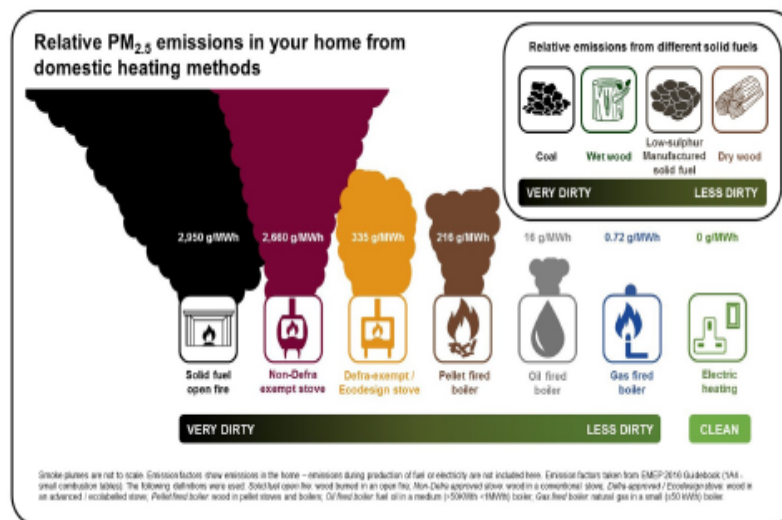
Enabling behavior change

Ashford Borough Council will not be able to reduce air pollution alone.

Key to the success of this strategy is everybody understanding air pollution and taking personal responsibility for changing their own behaviours to positively impact air pollution levels.

Small actions – ones that we can all make - will make a big difference. This might seem like an unsurmountable task, but we have done it before. After action from the council, residents changed their recycling habits, taking Ashford from the district authority with the worst recycling rate nationally, to one of the best.

Public education will be the first step. For example, most people will be aware of air pollution caused by large industrial sites or major urban road networks. Yet many people will be unaware that emissions in their own homes not only increases their personal exposure to pollutants, but contributes significantly to our national emissions. The below shows just how polluting some of day to day activities (such as heating our homes) can be:



Our community leadership role to deliver the necessary changes in behavior will be key in the delivery of this strategy.

Action plan

| Objective | Key actions | Key performance measures | Lead |
|--|--|---|---|
| Making sustainable transport the easy and preferred choice for our community | Delivering the council's Cycling and Walking Strategy, including an audit of what cycling facilities are available in the borough and action to be taken where gaps are found. | Delivery of the strategic aims contained in the strategy | Community Project Manager |
| | Continue to support and enhance walk to school schemes within the borough. | Increased uptake of walk to school schemes | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Rolvenden Rocket pilot continues, with lessons learned and expansion to other parishes / hosts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schemes launched, in operation and level of usage Promotion of community transport grant schemes | Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager |
| | Promotion of Kent Karrier and other sustainable transport schemes, where appropriate. | Increased membership recorded in Ashford borough | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Ensuring our network of electric vehicle charging points expands. | Number of electric vehicle charging points across the borough | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Explore options to reduce or remove parking charges for electric vehicles within our own car parks to encourage increased uptake of these vehicles. | Options paper developed for consideration | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| Making sustainable transport the easy and preferred choice for businesses | Launch a scheme to encourage electric and hybrid vehicles in the taxi and private hire fleets in the borough. | Uptake of scheme among trade | Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager |
| | Explore options to deliver fuel efficient driver training for taxi and private hire drivers. | Interest in scheme established and uptake of scheme | Environmental Policy and |

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| | | | Projects Officer |
| | Explore options for new HGV parking facilities to provide for electric HGV charging and refrigeration. | Options paper developed for consideration | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| Advising and informing the public | A long term, overarching behavioural change campaign to be designed and delivered – key messages will need to be identified, as well as target audiences. This campaign will need to include an educational aspect, to ensure people understand the issues around air quality. The campaign will show individuals how they can take action to reduce air pollution and how they can help protect them, their families, neighbours and communities. The campaign should link to existing national, high profile activities, such as Clean Air Day. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people who recognise air quality and pollution as an important issue, as measured by the resident's survey • Increased use of sustainable transport options • Measured reduction in pollutant concentrations | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Linked to the campaign, the council's webpages to be updated to ensure full information on air quality is provided to members of the public, including any actions they can take themselves. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of hits on the new webpages • Number of people who recognise air quality and pollution as an important issue, as measured by the resident's survey • Increased use of sustainable transport options • Measured reduction in pollutant concentrations | Environmental Policy and Projects Officer |
| | Work with the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Partnership information for residents living in the worst affected areas in relation to steps they can take to minimise impacts on their health. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people taking regular physical exercise • Number of people categorized as obese • Number of smokers in the adult population | Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction in hospital admissions where poor air quality may be a contributory factor• Improvement in health profile of target areas | |
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Next steps

We will ensure the success of our Air Quality Strategy by embedding it into three key mechanisms. The mechanisms will take responsibility for one crucial element each, as below:

- Regular policy review and related strong strategic management
- Developing the action plans in this strategy in further detail and ensuring delivery against targets – including the district deal we develop with Kent County Council
- Strong performance management to ensure outcomes are achieved

This strategy is a three year plan from 2019/20 – 2021/22. It will be updated on an annual basis to ensure we make progress and build on our good practice. An annual progress report will be received by the AHWP and Ashford Borough Council.

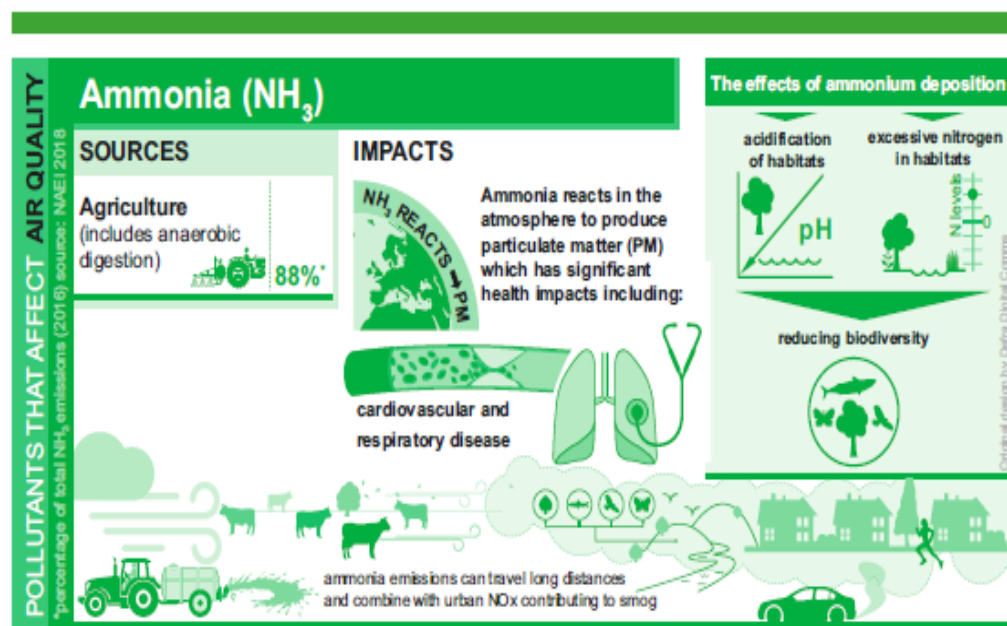


Future updates of this strategy

Future strategies will also look at how we all work together to tackle two other types of pollution, specifically ammonia (NH_3) and non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs).

Ammonia is a gas that is released into the atmosphere, mostly from agricultural sources like slurry or other rotting farm waste and fertiliser. The agricultural sector accounts for 88% of UK emissions of ammonia, which is emitted during the storage and spreading of manures and from application of inorganic fertilisers. This will be a crucial area for exploration in the development of future action plans as part of this strategy. Emissions from ammonia have fallen by 13% since 1990. However since 2013, there has been an increase in emissions of ammonia. The UK has targets to reduce emissions of ammonia (from the 2005 baseline) by 8% by 2020 and by 16% by 2030.

The below shows the main sources of ammonia, some of the health impacts and those who are most likely to be affected:



Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs) are organic molecules, which differ widely in their chemical composition but can display similar behaviour in the atmosphere. These include vapours from every day products we use at work or home like petrol, solvents, air fresheners, cleaning products and perfumes. The government has set targets to reduce emissions of NMVOCs (from 2005 baseline) by 32% by 2020 and 39% by 2030.

The below shows the main sources of ammonia, some of the health impacts and those who are most likely to be affected:

