



<b>Subject:</b>	2024 Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment. Update on DAERA appraisal report.
<b>Date:</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2024
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alastair Curran, Environmental Protection Manager Vivienne Donnelly, City Protection Manager

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

**Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.**

Insert number.

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained.
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction.
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?**

<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The Committee will recall that it considered, at agenda item 4b of its meeting of 10 <sup>th</sup> September 2024, the council's 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment (USA) report for ambient air quality, in advance of the USA report being submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (DAERA) independent technical assessors for appraisal.
1.2	In consideration of the USA report and accompanying Committee report, the Committee noted the contents and conclusions of the Belfast City Council 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment report and agreed that the report be submitted to DAERA's technical assessors for appraisal. The Committee further agreed, at that stage, not to move to revoke the Ormeau Road and Upper Newtownards Road Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) by Order and instead to await acceptance of the 2024 USA report and an update on the conclusions and recommendations, to be received from DAERA / DEFRA.
1.3	The council has now received a Bureau Veritas technical assessors' report from DAERA concerning the appraisal of its 2024 USA, which, in addition to accepting the report and publishing it on the DAERA NI Air website ( <a href="https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/lagm/district-council-reports#511">https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/lagm/district-council-reports#511</a> ), recommends that the council should now progress revocation of AQMA No. 3 - Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA No. 4 – Ormeau Road.
1.4	Bureau Veritas have also suggested that the council should liaise with DAERA to consider additionally revoking the Cormac Street and Albertbridge Road AQMA, and revoking the M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor AQMA for exceedances of the 1-hour mean objective for nitrogen dioxide.
1.5	DAERA have asked that Belfast City Council reverts to the Air and Environmental Quality Unit with a timescale for revocation of the AQMAs and any associated planned public communications so that the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister may be briefed accordingly.
1.6	The formal process for revoking an AQMA is detailed from section '3.53 Amendment and Revocation of AQMAs' of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance LAQM.TG(22) and within Article 12 Designation of air quality management areas of The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.
1.7	DAERA and Bureau Veritas have commented that the council's 2024 USA report has been completed to a high standard, with additional appropriate appendices to show the further work that the Council is undertaking to improve air quality within its area of jurisdiction.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Committee is requested to note the contents of this report concerning the outcome of the DAERA and Bureau Veritas technical appraisal of the council's 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment report for ambient air quality.</li> </ul>
2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Committee is requested to agree that on the basis of the DAERA and Bureau Veritas comments concerning AQMA 3 Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA 4 Ormeau Road, and the conclusions of the council's 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment report and 2023 Air Quality Detailed Assessment reports that the council will now move to revoke these two Air Quality Management Areas.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The Committee will be aware that the council is statutorily required to review and assess ambient air quality for the Belfast City Council area in accordance with the provisions of 'Part III Air Quality' of The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.

3.2	To that end, the Committee will also be aware that the council completed its first review and assessment of ambient air quality for the city in 2004 and concluded that areas surrounding four of the city's main arterial road transport routes were variously exceeding the government's air quality objectives for nitrogen dioxide (NO <sub>2</sub> ) and particulate matter (PM <sub>10</sub> ), primarily as a consequence of road transport emissions.
3.3	The four areas were subsequently declared by Order as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and encompass; <b>(1)</b> M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor; <b>(2)</b> Cromac Street to the junction with East Bridge Street and then from East Bridge Street to the junction with the Ravenhill and Albertbridge Roads and Short Strand; <b>(3)</b> Upper Newtownards Road from the North Road junction to the former Belfast City boundary at the Ulster Hospital and; <b>(4)</b> Ormeau Road from its junction with Donegall Pass to the former Belfast City boundary at Galwally.
3.4	The council, its competent authority partners and other city organisations and bodies have subsequently developed and implemented a series of Air Quality Action Plans, designed to achieve the air quality objectives for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter within the AQMAs, and to improve ambient air quality generally across the city. The most recent 2021-2026 Belfast City Air Quality Action plan may be accessed via the following weblink <a href="https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026">https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026</a> . The Committee is advised that the M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor AQMA was revoked for exceedances of particulate matter (PM <sub>10</sub> ) objectives in September 2015.
3.5	The Committee will be aware that ambient air quality and other corroborating data presented within the council's 2024 USA report confirm that there have been no monitored exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide (NO <sub>2</sub> ) annual objective mean recorded within the AQMA No. 3 (Upper Newtownards Road) for the last six years and within AQMA No. 4 (Ormeau Road) for the last ten years since 2014. Moreover, the conclusions of the Air Quality Detailed Assessment, considered by Committee at agenda item 12 of its meeting of 13 <sup>th</sup> June 2023, indicate that there will be no future exceedances of air quality objectives at any human health receptors within these AQMAs. <a href="https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=166&amp;MId=11151">https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=166&amp;MId=11151</a>
3.6	LAQM.TG(22), at section 3.57, states that revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance with the relevant objective as evidenced through monitoring. The Committee is advised that monitoring within AQMAs 3 and 4 is carried out by way of a reference grade chemiluminescent automatic analyser and various nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes. LAQM.TG(22) additionally states that there should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period. DAERA and Bureau Veritas have both referred to this 5-year compliance period within the USA appraisal report.
3.7	On this basis, DAERA have consequently advised in their appraisal report that the Department are content that Belfast City Council should now progress revocation of AQMA 3 Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA 4 Ormeau Road. DAERA have additionally advised that the council should refer to 'Article 12, Designation of air quality management areas, and the revocation of such an order' of The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, and to LAQM.TG(22) (Revocation of AQMAs) for further guidance.
3.8	'Article 12 Designation of air quality management areas' of The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 provides that an order designating an AQMA may similarly be revoked by order, in a form prescribed by DAERA ( <a href="https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/air-quality/aqmas/how-to-revoke-an-aqma/">https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/air-quality/aqmas/how-to-revoke-an-aqma/</a> ). After making such a revocation order, the council is required to publish a notice in the Belfast Gazette and once at least in each of two successive weeks in more than one newspaper circulating in the district to which the order relates. The notice is required to state that the revocation order has been made, to state its general effect and to specify a place in the council district where a copy of the order and of any map (or plan) referred to therein may be inspected by any person, free of charge and at all reasonable times.

3.9	<p>Section 3.53 of LAQM.TG(22) states that in most cases, the decision to revoke an AQMA should only be taken following a detailed study or air quality review, adding that a detailed atmospheric dispersion modelling study or air quality review may allow for compliance to be assessed over a wider geographical area than when compared to monitoring locations alone. LAQM.TG(22) advises that if the conclusions of the study are suitably robust to allow an assessment of compliance to be determined, revocation can be taken forward but due to inherent uncertainties in dispersion modelling, consideration should be given to predicted concentrations being 10% below the relevant objective before revocation of the AQMA is completed. The Committee is advised that the council employs Cambridge Environmental Research Consultants (CERC) Atmospheric Dispersion Modelling Software (ADMS-Urban) for the purposes of ambient air quality reviews and assessments. The Committee is reminded that the Council completed an Air Quality Detailed Assessment in 2023, (referenced in paragraph 3.5 of this report), which considered nitrogen dioxide concentrations across the Belfast City Council area, including for the Upper Newtownards Road and Ormeau Road AQMAs, for a 2019 base year and a 2028 forward projection year. Where appropriate, the council will make use of the atmospheric dispersion modelling data and conclusions of the Detailed Assessment to assist in completion of detailed air quality reviews required for revocation of the Upper Newtownards Road and Ormeau Road AQMAs.</p>
3.10	<p>‘Schedule 2 air quality: supplemental provisions - consultation requirements’ of The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 advises that a district council, in carrying out its functions in relation to any air quality review, shall consult such other persons or bodies as follows: DAERA; each district council whose district is contiguous to the council's district; such competent authorities exercising functions in, or in the vicinity of, the council's district as the council may consider appropriate; such bodies or persons appearing to the council to be representative of persons with business interests in the district to which the review relates as the council may consider appropriate; and such other bodies or persons as the council may consider appropriate. The council will therefore give consideration to these consultation requirements at an appropriate juncture within any AQMA revocation process.</p>
3.11	<p>The Committee will be aware that DAERA have asked that the council reverts to the Air and Environmental Quality Unit, with a timescale for revocation, and any planned public communications, so that the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister may be briefed accordingly. At this juncture, it is anticipated that completion of the detailed studies / air quality reviews, approval of such reports by council, appraisal of such reports by DAERA's technical assessors, and all necessary associated publicity and consultations, to inform the revocation of both AQMAs may take approximately up to 12 months to complete.</p>
3.12	<p>Notwithstanding the proposed revocation of the Upper Newtownards Road and Ormeau Road AQMAs, it is the council's intention to maintain the automatic roadside nitrogen dioxide monitoring stations with these AQMAs, and to continue to monitor nitrogen dioxide, subject to agreement with DAERA and the continued provision of financial support via the Local Air Quality Management Grant process. The Committee is advised that data from our roadside monitoring sites form an aspect of DAERA's ongoing reporting on nitrogen dioxide concentrations and trends at urban roadside sites across Northern Ireland within the DAERA and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) annual Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report. The 2024 report may be accessed via the following weblink: <a href="https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report-2024">https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report-2024</a></p>
3.13	<p>The main benefit of revoking the AQMAs for the Upper Newtownards Road and Ormeau Road is that the air quality standards in these areas have improved and been sustained over a period of years giving assurance that air quality standards have been met and overall air quality has improved in these areas .</p>

3.14	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no immediate financial or resource implications associated with this report. It is anticipated that any detailed studies / air quality reviews to help inform revocation of AQMA 3 Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA 4 Ormeau Road will be undertaken from within existing Scientific Unit air quality staff resources. Should financial support be required for any aspect of the detailed studies / air quality reviews, including, for example, obtaining up to date road traffic data and traffic counts for the Ormeau Road and Upper Newtownards Road, funding support will be sought as an aspect of the DAERA Local Air Quality Management Grant 2025-2026 process.</p>
3.15	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs assessment implications associated with this report or the revocation of either AQMA 3 Upper Newtownards Road or AQMA 4 Ormeau Road.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p>None.</p>