



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



Air Quality Strategy

2024 – 2029

June 2024

Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Air Pollution, Sources and Health	6
What is air pollution?	6
Sources	6
Health Impacts	7
Air Quality in Darlington	8
The vision for Darlington	9
Aims of the Strategy	9
Who will we work with?	10
What we have achieved so far & Key Priorities going forward	11
What can you do to help?	17
Monitoring Progress	18
Review of the Strategy	18

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Foreword

“Clean air is essential to the quality of life and health of everyone who lives, works in or visits our Borough and we are committed to protecting and improving air quality for the benefit of current and future generations.

Minimising air pollution levels will bring lasting benefits, with positive effects on public health, economic growth, and population wellbeing. Only by working collaboratively including across the Council, with external partners and our community can we bring about meaningful improvements in air quality.

This air quality strategy will contribute to improving air quality and Darlington becoming a healthier, more sustainable, well-planned place where people want to live, and businesses want to locate and where the economy continues to grow.”



Cllr Chris McEwan



Cllr Matthew Roche

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Executive Summary

Improving air quality is important to Darlington Borough Council. This is our first air quality strategy produced by Environmental Health, which sets out plans for 2024 – 2029 on how we aim to do this.

The quality of the air around us should not be taken for granted and councils need to ensure they are doing all they can to safeguard areas of good air quality and bring about improvements in other areas to protect public health and the environment.

The mortality burden of air pollution within the UK is equivalent to 29,000 to 43,000 deaths at typical ages¹, with a total estimated healthcare cost to the NHS and social care of £157 million in 2017².

Darlington takes air quality seriously and we are fortunate in that the air quality in our area meets national air quality objectives. We continue to monitor air quality across the borough and always strive to make further improvements where possible. In Darlington the principal pollutants of concern are particulates (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) arising predominantly from road traffic emissions.

The Environmental Health team of Darlington Borough Council is responsible for monitoring air quality, promoting and educating on air quality matters, helping to maintain the good air quality in the borough by commenting on planning applications, and producing reports for DEFRA to fulfil our statutory obligations under the Environment Act 1995, as amended by the Environment Act 2021, as well as regulating certain industrial processes under the provisions of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (as amended). We also have enforcement powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relating to statutory nuisance associated with smoke, dust and fumes from premises (chimneys and garden bonfires) and the Clean Air Act 1993 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021) relating to dark smoke offences and smoke control area requirements.

This strategy will look at the actions and interventions Darlington Borough Council currently undertake and identify new areas which can be explored to make further improvements. Further information on local air quality management including monitoring data and actions to improve air quality can be found in the Air Quality Annual Status Report which is available on the Council's website.

It also contributes to our commitment to reducing Darlington Borough Council's carbon emissions to net zero (carbon-neutral) by 2040, following the Council's recognition of the existence of the climate emergency declared in July 2019. The Strategy links to wider National policies including Defra's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, the Clean Air Strategy 2019, The Road to Zero 2018 and the National Air Quality Strategy 2023.

¹Defra. Air quality appraisal: damage cost guidance, March 2023.

²Public Health England. Estimation of costs to the NHS and social care due to the health impacts of air pollution: summary report, May 2018.

Introduction

Darlington is a great place to live, work and visit. Good air quality is an important factor in making sure this continues to be the case and to protect our health and the environment. While we have not been required to produce an air quality strategy before, since no air quality management areas exist, measures have been implemented or are ongoing which do have a bearing on improving air quality.

It is important to continually work towards reducing exposure to pollutants, even where air quality objectives are met. This is particularly important for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) where there are no safe levels of exposure.

Air quality in Darlington is generally good and monitoring shows compliance with national air quality objectives. Our Annual Status Reports (ASRs) provide a yearly update on monitoring data; measures to improve air quality; new identified sources and issues; and progress made, which is submitted to Defra for approval, in line with the statutory local air quality management framework responsibilities under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995, as amended by the Environment Act 2021.

This Air Quality Strategy (AQS) will support the measures highlighted in the annual status report and outlines how we plan to continue to work towards improving air quality within our borough.

In July 2019, the Council acknowledged the threat of climate change and passed a motion committing the Council to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In July 2023, a new motion reaffirming the climate emergency declaration and bringing the date forward to 2040, was passed. As part of the commitment, a strategy and action plan has been developed to set out the baseline of our own carbon emissions, to identify the key actions and intervention measures required to meet this commitment and what measures we will take to deal with unavoidable impacts of climate change, recognising that the actions will see co-benefits such as cleaner air.

The Air Quality Strategy integrates with the existing measures being taken to reduce carbon emissions. It also complements objectives in the Strategic Transport Plan 2020-2030 (covering the five Tees Valley Local Authorities) and Darlington's Transport Plan 2022-2030 in looking to reduce transport's impact on the environment to improve air quality and support health and wellbeing. The Darlington Borough Council Local Plan 2016-2036 Policy DC 3 Health and Wellbeing – requires all new development that may cause air pollution to incorporate measures to prevent or reduce their pollution so as not to cause unacceptable impacts on the living conditions of all existing and potential future occupants of land and buildings.

Air Pollution, Sources and Health

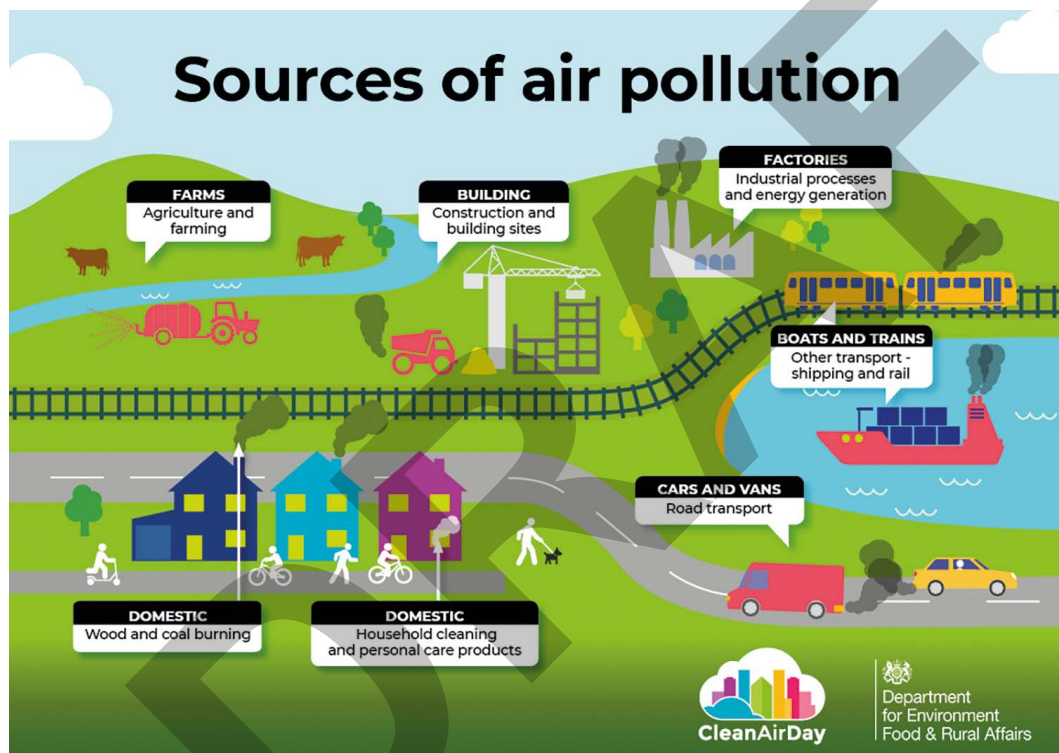
What is air pollution?

Air pollution is a substance or complex mixture of particles and gases in the air that cause harm to people's health (Defra, Air Pollution: applying All Our Health, 2022), as well as the environment. It affects both the indoor and outdoor environment.

Pollutants include nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, ozone and sulphur dioxide. While carbon dioxide is not considered an air pollutant as such as it occurs naturally in the air, its concentration in the atmosphere has significantly increased due to human activity.

Sources

Air pollutants are emitted from both natural and human sources. Everyday activities such as driving, heating our homes, manufacturing goods and agricultural activities can all impact air quality.

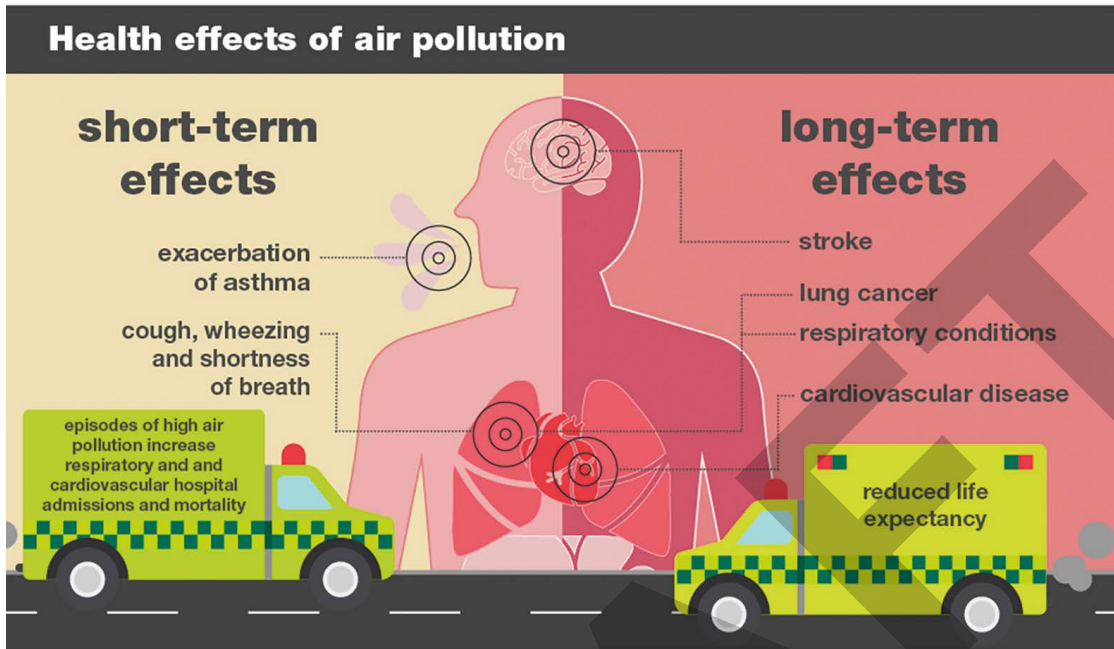


(Defra, *Where does air pollution come from?*)

Some pollutants can also travel large distances with the prevailing winds i.e., transboundary. This is particularly true for fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) which due to its extremely small size can travel long distances in the air. This also includes natural sources of transboundary $PM_{2.5}$ such as desert dust from the Sahara.

Health Impacts

Air pollution can cause both short term and long-term effects on health and can exacerbate existing conditions such as asthma. Poor air quality can affect health at all stages of life.



(UK Health Security Agency, 2018)

Although air pollution can be harmful to everyone, health inequalities do exist in that some people are more affected, for example, because they live in a more polluted area, are exposed to higher levels of air pollution in their day-to-day lives or are more susceptible to health problems linked to air pollution such as children, the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions.

The Government air quality objectives relate to the protection of human health at areas of relevant exposure, with examples of areas of relevant exposure given in the Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (TG22)³.

PM_{2.5} is the pollutant which is considered most harmful to human health and targeted for future action.

³Defra, Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (TG22) August 2022.

Air Quality in Darlington

In the borough, the main pollutants of concern are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) which primarily arises from road traffic emissions from the main arterial road network, which connects the relatively densely populated centre of Darlington out to its more rural surroundings. Other sources include from domestic and commercial heating (combustion) including wood burning which has increased in popularity recently.

The majority of the Darlington urban area is within a smoke control area, subject to Smoke Control Orders.

Darlington does not have any large industrial areas, and of the industry we do have certain installations are covered by the environmental permitting regime to control emissions to air.

Monitoring of air quality by the Council is carried out using diffusion tubes at a number of locations throughout the borough to measure levels of NO₂.

The monitoring of NO₂ shows air quality in Darlington is generally good and government objectives are being met. However, we cannot be complacent in this and need to ensure that as the borough continues to grow and develop, we maintain good air quality and strive to bring about further improvements.

At the time of publication of this Strategy a PM_{2.5} monitor is being considered for a site in Darlington as part of the Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN) and Darlington is committed to playing our part in helping to achieve the government targets for PM_{2.5}.



The vision for Darlington

This air quality strategy will contribute to improving air quality and Darlington becoming a healthier, more sustainable, well-planned place where people want to live, and businesses want to locate and where the economy continues to grow.

Aims of the Strategy

The main aims of our Air Quality Strategy are as follows:

1. Reduce emissions and protect public health	<p>Minimise emissions from road traffic as well as from industrial and other sources, to lower NO₂ and particulate matter emissions while reducing greenhouse gases.</p> <p>Minimise emissions associated with domestic burning while helping to improve indoor and outdoor air quality.</p>
2. Raise awareness and influence change	<p>Raise awareness through education to encourage and enable behaviour changes.</p>
3. Lead by example	<p>Ensure we lead the way as a Council and working with stakeholders/partners by minimising the environmental impact of Council activities.</p>
4. Decrease exposure to air pollutants	<p>Provide information to residents, employers, workers, and visitors, especially those who are more susceptible to the effects of poor air quality, to increase understanding of the effects of exposure to poor air quality and how to minimise exposure.</p>
5. Consider the impact of development on air quality	<p>Ensure the air quality impact of development within the borough is assessed and, wherever possible, to secure improvements to or mitigate impacts on local air quality in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.</p>
6. Ensure compliance with legislation	<p>Fulfil statutory obligations such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environment Act 1995 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021) (Local air quality management - monitoring and reporting requirements).• Environmental Protection Act 1990 (statutory nuisance provisions).• Clean Air Act 1993 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021) (dark smoke and smoke control area requirements).• The Air Quality (Domestic Solid Fuels Standards) (England) Regulations 2020 (sale/certification of domestic solid fuel).• Environmental Permitting Regulations (England & Wales) 2016 (as amended) (regulation of 'Part B' activities).

Who will we work with?

Air pollution is everyone's problem. Improvements to air quality cannot be undertaken as a standalone factor, and collaborative working between Local Authority departments including Public Health and Transport, organisations, businesses, and residents is essential, and opportunities must be considered on an ongoing basis as they arise. Darlington Borough Council will also continue to work with the other Tees Valley Local Authorities.

Most people will be aware of air pollution caused by large industrial sites or major urban road networks. Yet many will be unaware that emissions in their own homes not only increases their personal exposure to pollutants but contributes significantly to our national emissions.

One of the main focuses of the intervention work by the Environmental Health team is around education of the public on the action they can take e.g. unnecessary idling of vehicle engines, heating of homes, to raise awareness and influence change.



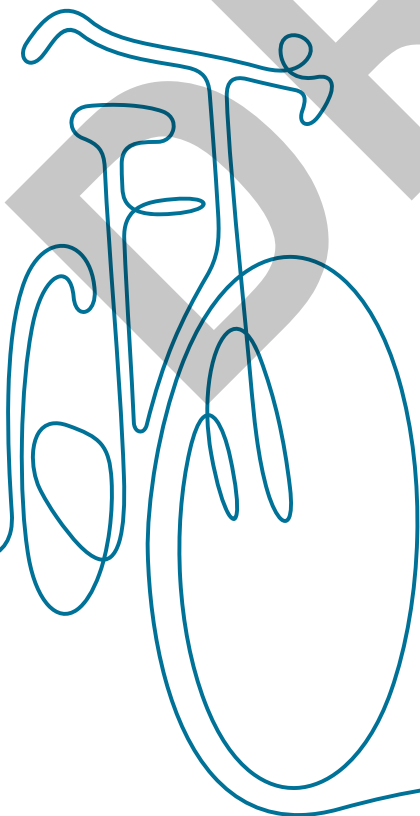
What we have achieved so far and Key Priorities going forward

Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
<p>1. Reduce emissions and protect public health</p>	<p>Taxi licensing policy (2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirement for all vehicles to be Euro 6 compliant or emission free from 1 April 2023. Incentive – 25% reduction in fees for cleaner fuels. <p>Sustainable transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arriva who operates most bus services in Darlington: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of buses with stop start technology. All buses have engine cut offs 4/5 minutes. All vehicles are Euro 5 or Euro 6 compliant. The Tees Flex bus service was launched in February 2020, providing an on-demand bus service to areas of the region (including Darlington) previously not well served by public transport. The three-year trial has been extended for a further 18 months from February 2023. This is part of the work carried out by the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). <p>Cleaner energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting households/businesses to undertake energy efficiency works, using available grant funding, including through the work done by the Council’s Private Sector Housing and Invest in Darlington Team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A six-figure investment saw the transformation of Coniscliffe House, office space which now benefits from electric charging points, LED lighting, air source heat pumps, A++ rated air conditioning, a bike store and roof mounted solar panels. 	<p>Taxi licensing policy (2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadline extended - all vehicles to be Euro 6 compliant no later than 31 March 2024. Continue to explore ways to encourage uptake of less polluting vehicles among the private hire and hackney carriage taxi trade. <p>Sustainable Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work set to continue to expand the active travel network. <p>Educational Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to educate people and raise awareness on how to reduce emissions, protect health and bring about air quality improvements through campaign work. To investigate correlation between air quality and health inequalities local to Darlington to help target future work. <p>Cleaner energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to work with and support householders/businesses in the uptake of low-emission energy technologies and improvements in efficiencies and reduce the reliance on the consumption of fossil and solid fuels, as opportunities arise. <p>Lead by example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Aim 3.

Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
<p>2. Raise awareness and influence change</p>	<p>Educational Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Woodburning campaign (2023/24) ‘Burn Right’ - aimed at educating people on smoke control area requirements and burning suitable fuel. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media messages, press releases, website updates, billboard graphics. School idling campaign (2023) ‘Care for Clean Air’ - aimed at reducing unnecessary idling of vehicle engines when parked outside schools. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media messages, press releases, website updates, information provided to schools, lamppost signs, banners. Taxi idling campaign (2022). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaflets distributed to hackney taxi drivers to raise awareness on idling. One Darlington Magazine Article (2019) on air pollution and health. Woodburning article One Darlington Magazine (2018). Safe Routes to School Programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road improvement schemes to increase safety and encourage more to walk and cycle. <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of electric vehicle charging points in Town Centre car parks. Introduction of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which sets out the ambition to provide approximately 92 kilometres of new and improved cycling and walking routes over coming years across the Tees Valley (including Darlington). <p>Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of reliable, up to date information and advice/signposting in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice given by Healthy Darlington/ Move More and Darlington Travel Advisors to residents, businesses and educational establishments on sustainable/greener travel choices/travel planning/routes. 	<p>Educational Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further educational inventions proposed including in relation to wood burning, and smoke control area requirements. Expansion of the idling campaign to target the general public, delivery drivers as well as bus companies and other businesses. Take part in National Clean Air Day. Consideration of a ‘No idling’ action day. Indoor air quality. Analyse data trends/information to be able to target future campaigns where appropriate, and consider the use of newer monitoring technologies and equipment to support campaign work particularly around woodburning and engine idling. <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to expand the electric vehicle charging infrastructure/provision/ use of alternative cleaner fuels. <p>Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide information to allow people to make informed choices, including in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving awareness of traffic free walking/cycling routes. Promotion of works undertaken to encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport, including cycling and walking, as well as the electric vehicle charging infrastructure available. Smoke control area requirements. Health impacts linked to air quality.

Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke control area requirements. • Air Quality Annual Status Report including monitoring data. • Climate Change. • Energy saving, cleaner energy and energy efficiency (including improvement schemes and funding opportunities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Quality Annual Status Reports including monitoring data. • Climate Change. • Energy saving, cleaner energy and energy efficiency.
<p>3. Lead by example</p>	<p>Council fleet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric vehicles • Currently used by Building services, Highways, Building cleaning, Street Scene, Cemeteries, Pest Control, South Park Gardener. • Use of ‘Green-Link’ couriers which is Darlington’s first and only zero-emission delivery and distribution company. <p>Council buildings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar panels installed on the Town Hall roof. <p>Council infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric vehicle charging points installed at depot to support current electric vehicle fleet. <p>Council housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar panels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 300 Council properties have solar panels installed. • Other property upgrades carried out including installation of air source heat pumps. <p>Council employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable transport incentives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arriva Employee Travel Club – offers savings on local Arriva bus travel to employees. • Cycle 2 Work Scheme (Vivup) – salary sacrifice initiative allowing employees to hire a bike and accessories up to the value of £1,500. • Green Car Leasing Scheme – the Council has teamed up with NHS Fleet Solutions to offer opportunities to lease a brand new electric car. 	<p>Council fleet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to reduce emissions from our fleet by replacing petrol/ diesel vehicles with electric/ alternatively fuelled vehicles, as they are due to be renewed. • The use of HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) fuel in Council HGVs (heavy goods vehicles) is being trialled. <p>Council buildings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to look at ways/ opportunities to reduce emissions from our buildings. <p>Council housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darlington Borough Council’s Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-2029 sets out actions proposed going forward. <p>Procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the Council’s procurement policy to ensure it aims to select products and services that minimise negative and promote positive environmental impacts. • Continue to look at ways/ opportunities to reduce emissions to air through our contracts. <p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of an ‘Air Quality/ Green Driver Training’ module as part of the essential skills training for all staff on Academy 10 (the Council’s training platform).

Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blended working policy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home working option – reduced staff travel. <p>Climate Emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pledge to reduce the Councils carbon emissions to net zero by 2040. 	<p>Travel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of an updated Staff Travel Plan.
<p>4. Decrease exposure to air pollutants</p>	<p>Sustainable transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on cycling and walking routes including those away from major roads. <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedestrianisation of the Town Centre (2007). 	<p>Sustainable transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work set to continue to expand the active travel network as part of the Tees Valley Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), including options away from main roads etc. <p>Reducing Emissions in the Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to educate people and raise awareness on how to bring about air quality improvements in relation to indoor air quality, in particular around the subject of wood burning.



Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
<p>5. Consider the impact of development on air quality</p>	<p>Development Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air quality is a material planning consideration. Air quality assessments are required for certain planning applications, for example where a development is a source of air pollutants itself, or where it is proposed to introduce sensitive receptors to areas with existing sources of air pollutants. <p>Planning Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darlington Borough Council’s Local Plan 2016 – 2036 (adopted February 2022) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy DC 1 Sustainable Design Principles and Climate Change (Strategic Policy) – to help reduce carbon emissions and increase the resilience of developments to the effects of climate change. Policy DC 3 Health and Wellbeing – All new development that may cause air pollution required to incorporate measures to prevent and reduce their pollution so as not to cause unacceptable impacts on the living conditions of all existing and potential future occupants of land and buildings. Submission of Health Impact Assessments for certain developments to explain how health considerations have informed the design. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy IN 3 Transport Assessments and Travel Plans – to promote and encourage the use of sustainable transport. Policy IN 4 Parking Provision including Electric Vehicle Charging – includes requirements for electric charging at certain residential and non-residential developments. 	<p>Development Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to assess planning applications for air quality impacts, to ensure developments, wherever possible, secure improvements to or mitigate impacts on local air quality. <p>Planning Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to ensure development accords with the Local Plan. <p>Council Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look to establish a strategic framework which brings air quality considerations to the heart of Council policies, procedures, and decisions, to ensure we are well placed to secure improvements across the Borough going forward. Alongside ‘Carbon impact and Climate Change’.

Aim	Implemented Measure	Future action(s)
<p>6. Ensure compliance with legislation</p>	<p>Local Air Quality Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal review and assessment of local air quality compiled into the Air Quality Annual Status Report submitted to Defra on an annual basis. The latest reports are available at: www.darlington.gov.uk/environmental-health/pollution/air-quality/ <p>Domestic combustion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to statutory nuisance i.e., smoke from premises, includes smoke from chimneys and garden bonfires. Enforcement of the Clean Air Act 1993 in relation to smoke control area requirements. Enforcement of The Air Quality (Domestic Solid Fuels Standards) (England) Regulations 2020 in relation to the sale/certification of fuel sold at retailers in the Darlington area. <p>Industrial processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Permitting – regulation of Part B installations. Permits include conditions relating to controlling emissions to air and the installations are subject to routine inspections based on risk. Dark smoke offences under the Clean Air Act 1993. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to fulfil our duties under relevant legislation and take action as appropriate in line with our Enforcement Policy and legislation. To review and consider expanding the extent of the Smoke Control Area in Darlington.

The above table is not exhaustive but focuses on key measures/priorities.

What can you do to help?

There are steps we can all take to help bring about air quality improvements in the Borough. Below are some examples and links to further information:

Travel

- Leave the car at home.
- Don't idle when stationary – turn off your vehicle engine.
- Use public transport.
- Walk or cycle.
- Choose quieter/cleaner routes.

For further information visit: <https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/travel/> and www.darlington.gov.uk/media/18126/care-about-your-air.pdf



Domestic burning

- Comply with smoke control requirements - Burn Right.
- Make an informed decision when choosing whether to install a wood burner or multi-fuel stove.

For further information visit: www.darlington.gov.uk/burnright

⁴Defra, Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

Monitoring Progress

The main indicator that will be used to review the effectiveness of the strategy relates to monitored pollutants and downward trends being shown in monitoring results. Continued effort will be made to maintain and expand our monitoring network as necessary.

While air quality data is one aspect, the growth of the electric charge point network, use of public transport and implementation of cycle routes are other examples which demonstrate how the Borough is changing and making improvements for the better.

The Government is committed to drive down emissions and has adopted reduction targets for five of the most damaging pollutants including nitrogen oxides and PM_{2.5}⁴. The work outlined by this Strategy will contribute to this by taking action at a local level. Success can only however be measured on a national level, with the main influences likely to come from wider government policy decisions. Notwithstanding this, Darlington Borough Council is committed to playing their part and improving air quality.

Further consideration will be given to how we can monitor the impact of our air quality campaign work going forward, including consideration of newer technologies and equipment such as mobile sensors.

The progress made with the priorities and actions identified within the strategy will be reported in the Air Quality Annual Status Report's.

Review of the Strategy

The AQS will be kept under review, with the proposal to update the publication after five years, and will take into account the following:

- Changes to relevant air quality legislation, regulations, including National Strategies/Policies/guidance,
- Introduction of new legislation or regulations,
- Changes in local circumstances, such as the introduction of any Air Quality Management Areas, changes to Smoke Control Area boundaries,
- Introduction of new sources of emissions,
- Updates or changes to existing Council policy or guidance impacting upon air quality,
- Updates on progress concerning key priorities,
- Changes to key priorities including identification of any new priorities,
- Review of future actions.

⁴Defra, Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

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Contacts



Environmental Health

Chief Executive's Office and Economic Growth Group
Darlington Borough Council
Environmental Health
Town Hall
Darlington
DL1 5QT

Carol Whelan



01325 406437



carol.whelan@darlington.gov.uk

Stacey Newton



01325 406438



stacey.newton@darlington.gov.uk

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