

# Draft Air Quality Action Plan 2024 consultation FAQ's

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## Introduction

Reducing air pollution is vitally important to our health and environment. As outlined, we have 8 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in our region where air pollution has exceeded UK national government levels for nitrogen dioxide and must legally produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) that sets out we intend to reduce it with the help of our partners. This must be submitted to the national government's Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for approval.

## What do you mean by air pollution?

In West Northamptonshire the main air pollutants are nitrogen dioxide and small dust like particles, called PM10, or PM2.5 that are around the width of a human hair.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) is produced by the combustion (or burning) of fossil fuels, and mainly road traffic.

Particulate pollution is made up of tiny pieces, or particles of solid or liquid, and exists in the air. It is produced by a large number of sources including the burning of solid fuel, transport and the wider environment such as pollen, sea salt, desert dust and chemical reactions in the air.

Pollution also travels to our region from other areas and countries. This is called transboundary pollution.

## How do we measure air pollution?

We carry out monthly monitoring of nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes at 142 sites in West Northamptonshire. These tubes are fixed to lampposts and the fronts of buildings, and absorb nitrogen dioxide over a monthly period. We change the tubes every month and send them to a laboratory to have them analyzed. The monthly results are then averaged over a year to give an annual average which we compare to the national government objective level.



Image of diffusion tube on lamppost



Image of diffusion tube for size comparison with human hand

There is also a national government run DEFRA Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN) national network automatic station at Spring Park, Northampton. This is powered by electricity and measures pollution all the time by using a number of pumps and chemical sensors. The monitoring station is located within a self contained, air conditioned housing within the grounds of University College Northampton, close to the main entrance. The nearest road to the station is Broughton Green Road.



Image of DEFRA Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN) national network automatic station at Spring Park, Northampton

### **What does the Council legally have to do?**

We are legally required to measure some air pollutants across our region and establish if they exceed nationally set air quality objectives that are designed to protect public health. If they go above this, we must declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and then develop an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

### **Our Air Quality Management Areas**

We have 8 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) in our region – 7 in Northampton and 1 in Towcester, where air pollution has exceeded UK national government levels for nitrogen dioxide because of road traffic.

These areas are:

- AQMA1- M1 - The area of land which runs alongside the southbound carriageway of the M1 motorway.
- AQMA2 - Victoria Promenade - An area that includes a number of properties along Bridge Street, Victoria Promenade and Victoria Gardens, including the Plough Hotel, in Northampton.
- AQMA3- St James - An area that includes a number of properties along St James Road, Weedon Road, Harlestone Road and adjoining streets in Northampton.
- AQMA4- Harborough Rd - An area that includes roads and properties fronting parts of Kingsthorpe Grove, Harborough Road, Cranford Terrace, Alexandra Terrace and Boughton Green Road in Northampton.
- AQMA5- A45 - An area that includes properties in Wootton Hall Park, Cottesbrooke Gardens, Hermitage Way, Stratford Drive and Chestnut Drive close to the A45 London Road in Northampton.
- AQMA6 - Campbell Square in Northampton.
- AQMA 8- St Michael's - An area that includes a number of properties along St Michael's Road and close to the junction on Kettering Road in Northampton.
- AQMA- Towcester - An area that includes parts of Watling Street through Towcester

The AQAP will build on work that has already taken place in the Daventry area, Northampton area and South Northamptonshire area which has included:

- More effective use of the planning control system to ensure air quality is fully considered, including the successful adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on air quality in the South Northamptonshire Area and via Northampton's Low Emission Strategy;
- Completing road improvement schemes to ease congestion and therefore improve emissions;
- Delivering electric vehicle infrastructure and
- Continuing with the statutory Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) process of monitoring and reporting.

The action plan sets out details of our existing air quality and how we and our partners will work towards improving air quality.

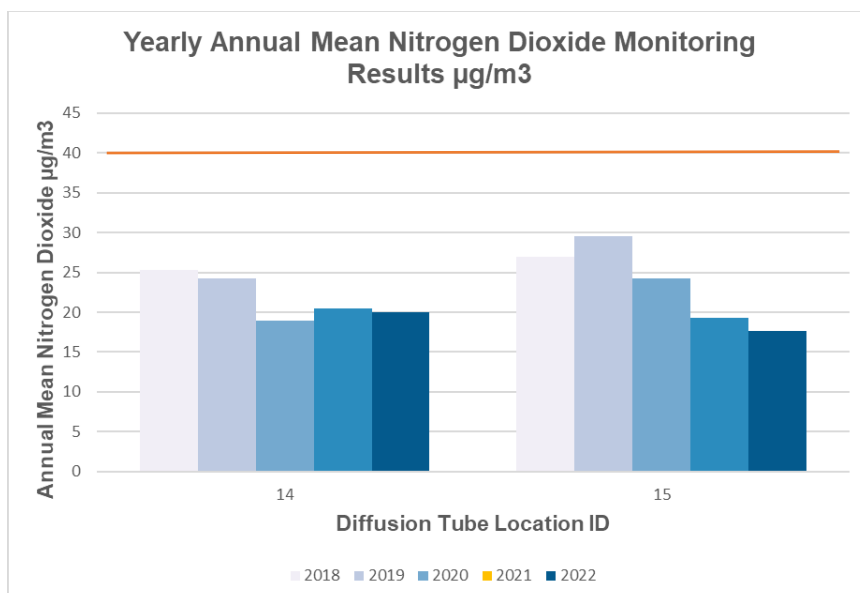
### Are pollution levels reducing?

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way that we work and travel with fewer vehicle journeys. In addition, improvements in vehicle technology has nationally reduced traffic emissions. Locally, nitrogen dioxide levels in our AQMA's have followed this national trend. However, DEFRA have recommended that the measured levels from years 2020 and 2021 are excluded from our assessment due to the pandemic, to allow opportunity for the situation to return to pre-pandemic levels.

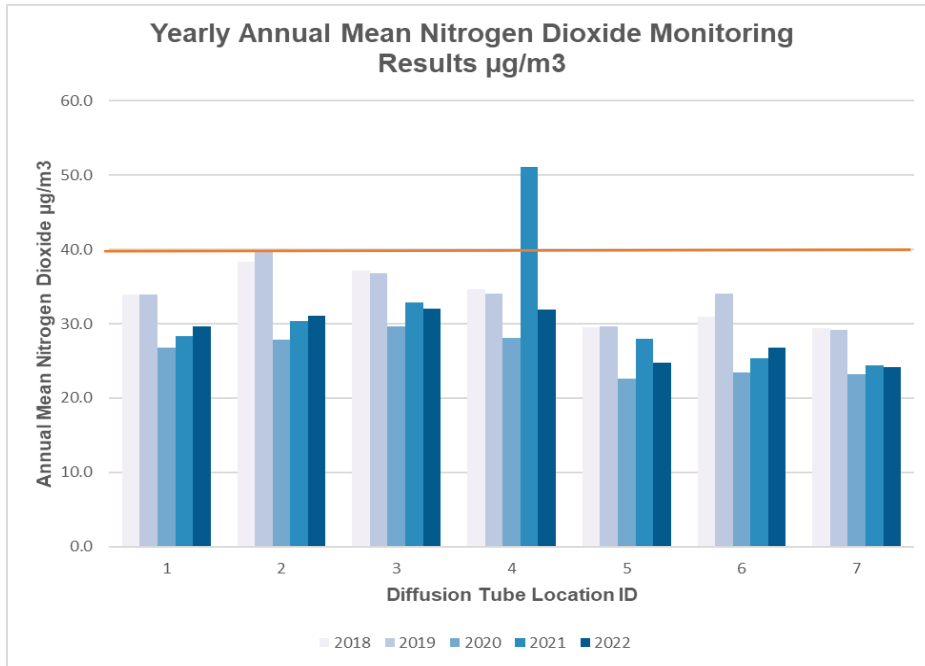
In 2 of our AQMA's, nitrogen dioxide levels have reduced to below the air quality objective level for more than 3 years, pandemic years excluded, so we are considering removing these areas called AQMA1- M1 and AQMA5- A45

The graphs below show the reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels at the monitoring locations inside the AQMA's.

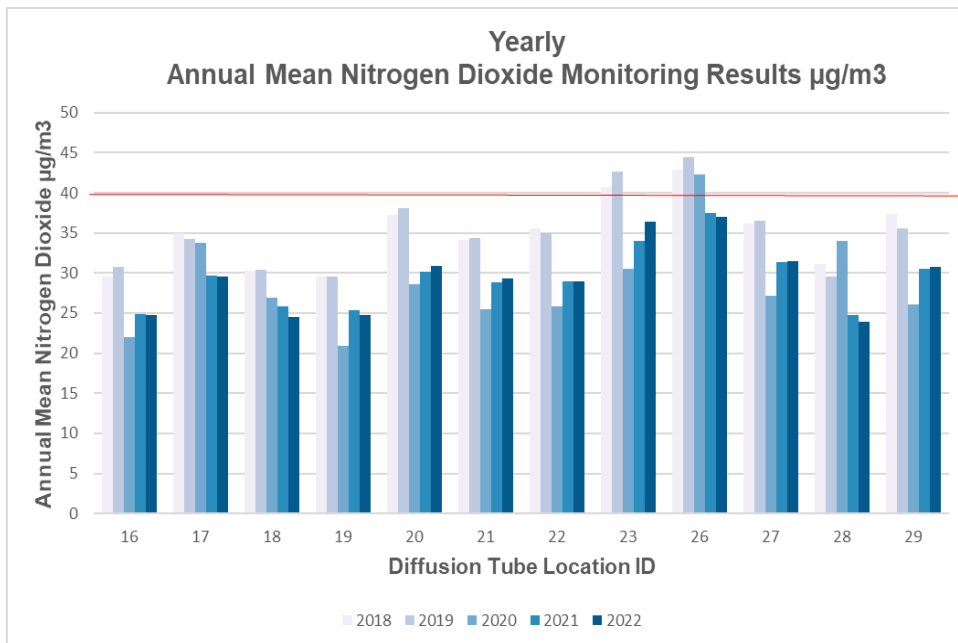
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA1 – M1 between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



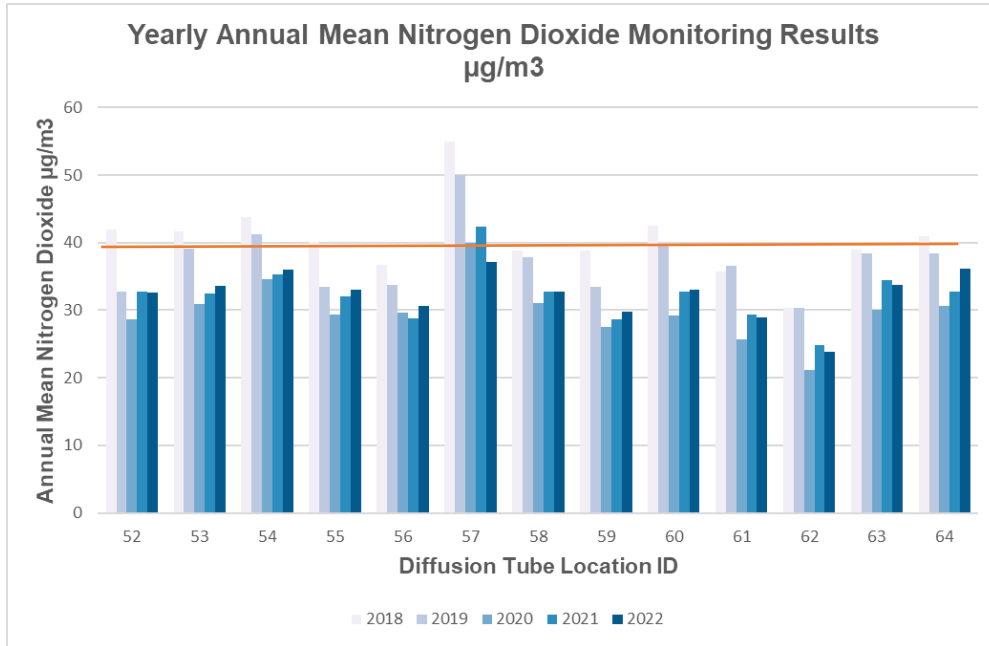
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA2 – Victoria Promenade between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



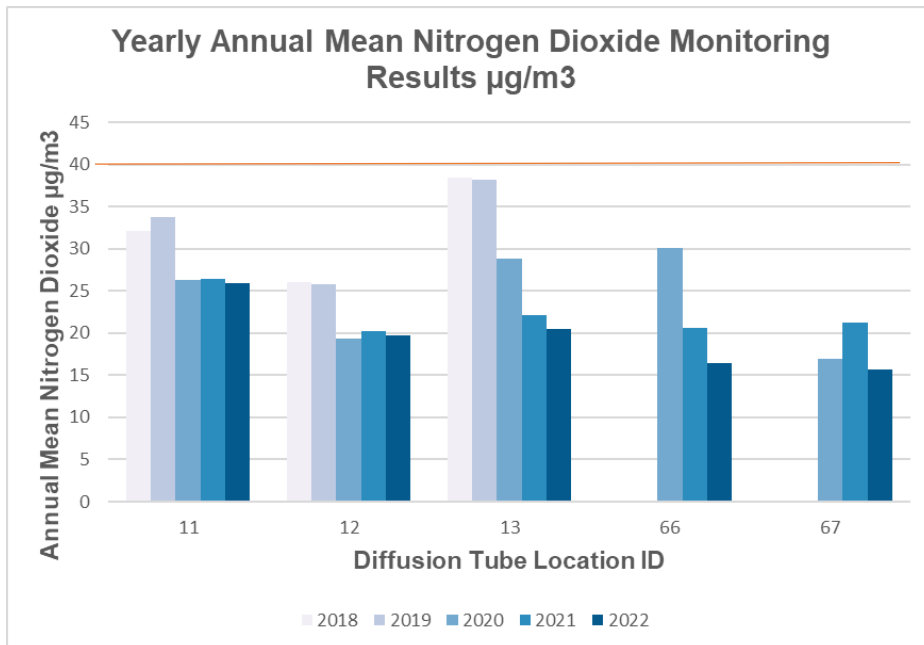
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA3 – St James between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



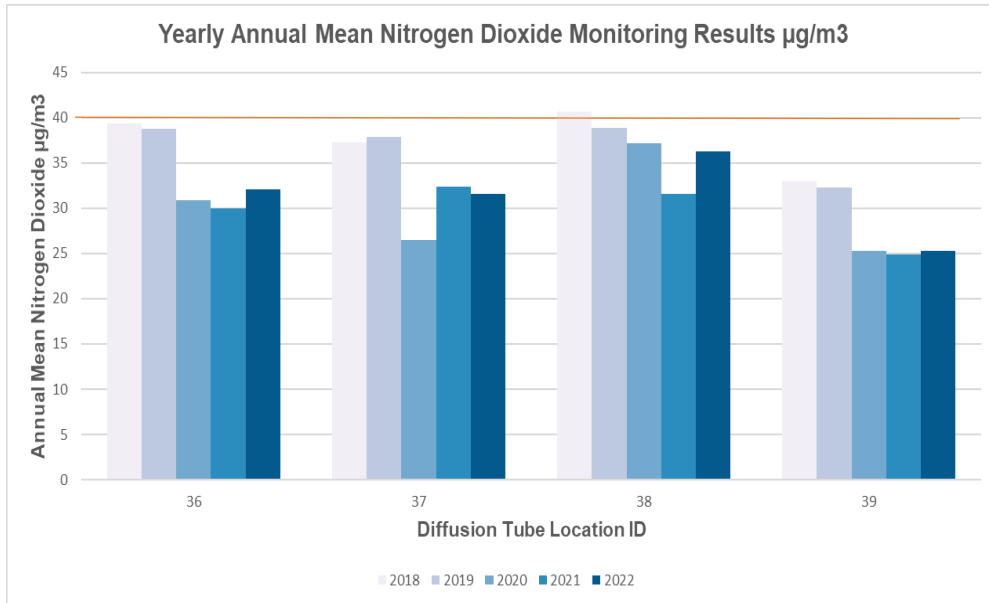
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA4 – Harbourough Road between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



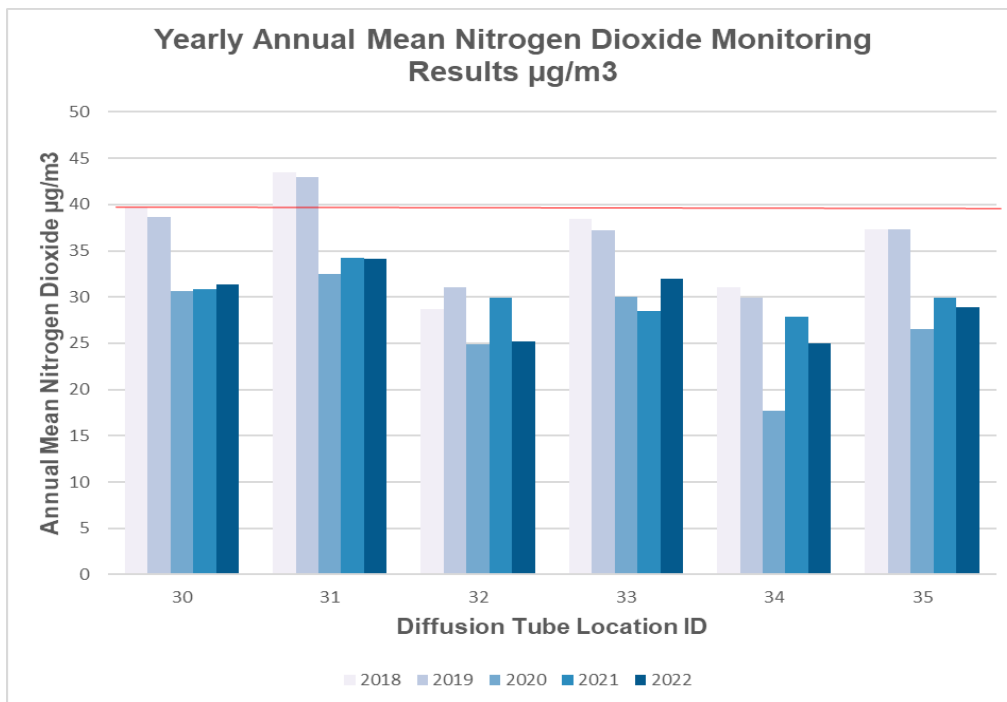
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA5 – A45 between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



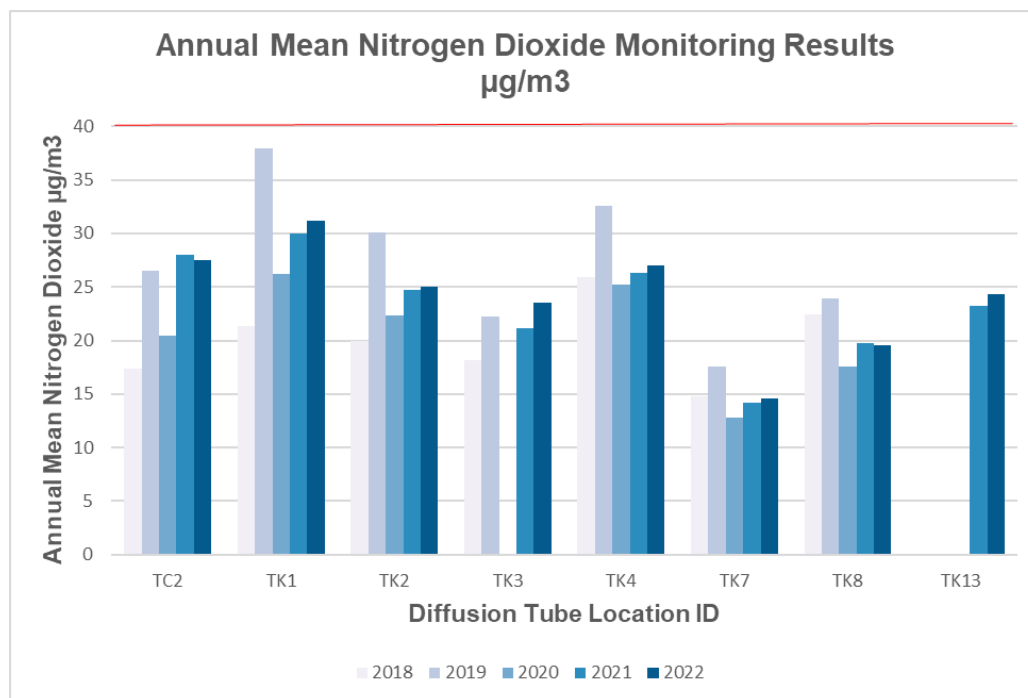
**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA6 – Campbell Square between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA8 – St Michaels between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



**Graph showing level of nitrogen dioxide in AQMA - Towcester between 2018 and 2022. The red line shows the national air quality objective level.**



## **Are there going to be any new Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs)?**

The Bradshaw Street area of Northampton has levels of nitrogen dioxide that are higher than the national air quality objective. We will look at why this is happening before we can declare a new air quality management area (AQMA).

## **What about particle pollution?**

Scientific research tells us that particles impact on health more than was thought. National government has recognized this and now requires all Councils to take steps to reduce particle pollution. There is no legal requirement for us to do this, though we too recognize the importance of working with our partners to do what we can to help. Often things we do to reduce nitrogen dioxide from traffic emissions will also reduce particle pollution. We will therefore include particle pollution in our AQAP.

## **Our priorities**

The priorities in our AQAP will cover 9 key areas:

- Transport planning that supports improving air quality,
- Encouraging active travel for example: walking or cycling,
- Promoting low emission vehicles, and providing the infrastructure,
- Further guidance and controls around planning and building development, that supports improving air quality



- Helping people to make informed travel, health and lifestyle choices by providing information,
- Traffic management to reduce congestion in our Air Quality Management Areas in Northampton,
- Reducing pollution from the Council's fleet of vehicles, our contractors' vehicles, and other vehicle controls,
- Education and regulation around burning solid fuels to heat homes,
- Using our legal controls to reduce industrial emissions, smoke and dust.

## **Key Actions**

- Review our monitoring data for the existing AQMA's, with a view to revoking AQMA1 – M1 and AQMA5- A45;
- Continue to monitor nitrogen dioxide in the other remaining AQMA's;
- Continue to monitor nitrogen dioxide in Bradshaw Street and consider if a new AQMA needs to be declared.
- Continue to deliver our x2 grant funded projects - a) to establish if active traffic management in Northampton town centre reduces congestion and improves pollution and b) assessing the impact of domestic solid fuel burning on air pollution and health in the region.
- Work across council department's and with partners to minimize emissions from transport, existing buildings, and new developments, incentivizing a change to ultra-low emission vehicles (such as electric), walking, cycling and so on. as far as possible;
- Continue to raise awareness of air quality, encourage all of us to do our bit to reduce levels of pollution and raise awareness of the importance in reducing our own exposure to poor air quality.

## **Who are our partners?**

The Regulatory Services team of West Northamptonshire Council is leading on air quality in partnership with colleagues from Transport, Highways, Planning, Sustainability and Public Health. External partners include statutory consultees such as National Highways and the Environment Agency, but also residents, businesses and transport service providers.

## **Where can I find more information on local air quality management?**

[Air quality | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/air-quality)