Topic Paper 2: Air quality Summary

Introduction

Planning policies should aim to improve and maintain good air quality for Knowsley residents and visitors alike.

Context

The causes of poor air quality are multifaceted. Knowsley has the highest transport emissions per capita in the Liverpool City Region. This is connected to the lower levels of public transport connectivity observed. Growth in car ownership in the Liverpool City Region has been at a slightly higher level that seen nationally (+13.9% 2011 to 2022, compared to +12.5%). This is highest in Knowsley (22%), possibly connected to increased housing growth. In terms of households with no car or van, the Liverpool City Region has dropped from 34.4% in 2011 to 30.2% in 2021, whilst Knowsley has dropped from 37.1% in 2011 to 31.2% in 2021.

Knowsley currently does not have any declared Air Quality Management Areas. The main sources of air pollution in Knowsley are from industrial sources and road traffic vehicle emissions.

Key policies, plans and strategies

The National Planning Policy Framework does not contain a specific air quality policy, but air quality considerations are embedded throughout its planning framework. It seeks to avoid allocating sites where occupiers would be exposed to unacceptable pollution, a reduction in air pollution, the protection of vulnerable populations and sensitive receptors, and improved air quality through spatial planning, sustainable transport and nature-based solutions. Policy PM1 supports these objectives through sustainable growth and infrastructure provision, while wider NPPF policies promote sustainable development, reduced pollution and sustainable travel to help minimise transport-related emissions.

The Planning Practice Guidance on Air Quality advises it should be embedded within Local Plan preparation to support a strategic approach and deliver overall air quality improvements. It says that local Plans should consider the implications of development locations, Air Quality Management Areas, Clean Air Zones, sensitive habitats and designated biodiversity sites, as well as incorporate air quality into habitat assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisals. Key considerations include existing air quality trends; pollution from point sources for example, industrial chimneys, energy generation facilities, waste management facilities, and large commercial boilers; the cumulative and individual impacts of development on emissions and traffic; measures to ensure development is suitable in areas of poor air quality; and opportunities to improve air quality through sustainable transport, travel management and green infrastructure.

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy is being prepared, and air quality is likely to be embedded throughout the strategy as a key strategic objective. The Spatial Development Strategy is likely to seek reductions in Air Quality Management Areas, minimise pollution impacts and improve air quality. It is expected to support healthier communities by improving air quality, avoiding significant deterioration, preventing the creation of new Air Quality Management Areas, encouraging sustainable travel, protecting the natural environment from pollution, and using green and blue infrastructure to help mitigate pollution and improve health outcomes. Collectively, these measures are likely to require Local Plans to contribute to air quality improvements through development location, transport planning, environmental protection and green infrastructure provision.

The Knowsley Council Air Quality Strategy (2024-2027) sets out the clear priorities for air quality followed by a clear strategic framework to help deliver local air quality improvements and objectives within Knowsley. It can support the achievement of national air quality objectives taking into consideration the range of local government and regional framework.

Key issues to be addressed by the Local Plan

- Air Quality and New Development – Although there are currently no designated Air Quality Management Areas within Knowsley, air quality remains an important consideration for new development. Development should be located and designed to minimise emissions and avoid adverse impacts on local air quality.
- City-Regional Context – Air quality issues are not constrained by administrative boundaries and should be considered within the wider Liverpool City Region context. Cross-boundary working may be required to address the cumulative impacts of development and transport movements on air quality.
- Local Plan Policy Framework – Knowsley's adopted Local Plan contains limited policy coverage relating specifically to air quality. There is an opportunity for the new Local Plan to establish a clear policy framework requiring development proposals to demonstrate that they will not result in unacceptable impacts on air quality.
- Assessment and Mitigation – Development proposals with the potential to affect air quality should be supported by appropriate evidence and, where necessary, incorporate mitigation measures to prevent or reduce adverse impacts. Development should not lead to exceedances of statutory air quality objectives or contribute to the need for the designation of an Air Quality Management Area.
- Sustainable Transport and Place-Making – The Local Plan can support improved air quality by promoting sustainable patterns of development, reducing the need to travel, and encouraging walking, cycling and public

transport use. Development should be located and designed to support these objectives.

- Integration with Other Planning Objectives – Air quality considerations should be reflected across a range of Local Plan policies, including those relating to housing, employment development, transport, health and wellbeing, green infrastructure, biodiversity and sustainable design.
- Traffic Generation and Air Quality – Development that generates significant additional traffic has the potential to affect local air quality. The Local Plan should ensure that the potential air quality impacts of development are properly assessed and that appropriate mitigation measures are secured where required.