

Draft

AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

2026-2030



Why produce an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)?



If the air is likely to be too polluted and break national legislation rules, the Council must officially mark the area as needing action. This is called an *Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)*.

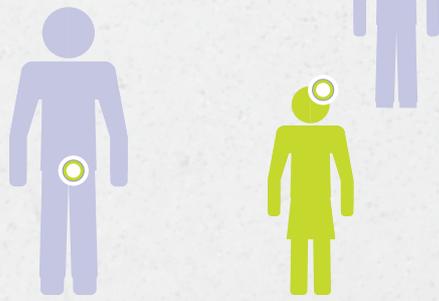
In 2010, the Council declared the whole of Oxford as an AQMA because levels of a pollutant called nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) were too high.

When the Council marks an area as having poor air quality (an AQMA), it must also create a plan to help clean up the air. This plan is called an *Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)*, and it includes steps to reduce pollution and make the air cleaner and healthier.

In Oxford, the main problem is a pollutant called nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which has often gone over the legal limits. Tiny particles in the air (called PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) are also a concern, although Oxford is currently meeting the legal limits for those pollutants and is very close to meeting even stricter health guideline limits from the World Health Organization.

NO₂ NO₂ NO₂
NO₂ NO₂
NO₂ NO₂
NO₂ NO₂

This new draft plan sets out actions to improve Oxford's air from 2026 to 2030. It follows on from the previous plan that ran from 2021 to 2025.



**Air pollution
can harm your
health in many
ways.**

- Stroke
- Brain development
- Mental health
- Dementia
- Skin aging
- Lung diseases (asthma, cancer, lung development, pneumonia)
- Blood clots
- Heart disease pressure
- Insulin resistance and diabetes
- Premature birth
- Low birthweight
- Illness during pregnancy
- Decreased sperm quality

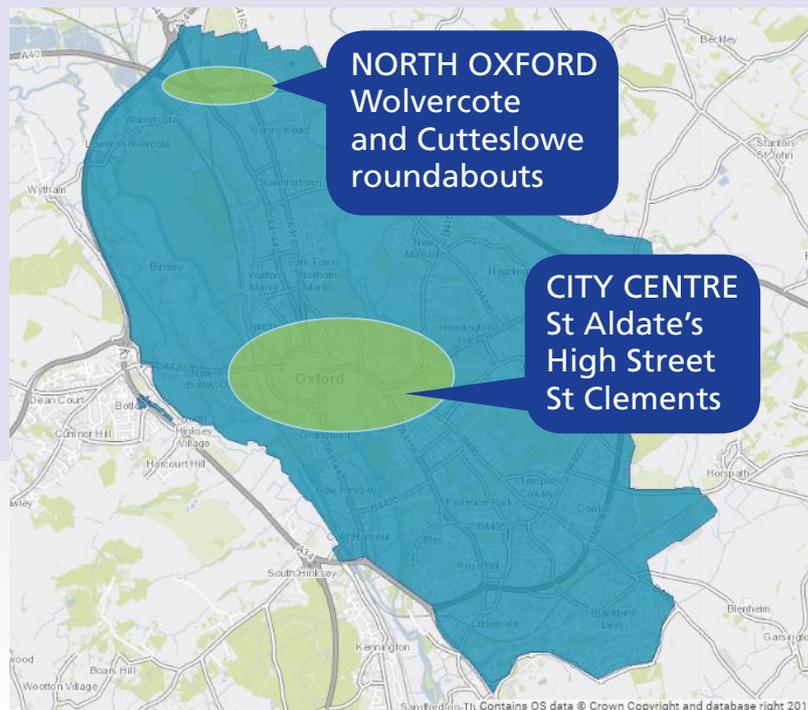
How serious is the problem?

Breathing the gas NO₂ and the tiny particles in the air (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) over a long time can lead to problems with your lungs and heart and may cause serious long-term illnesses.



Right now, **99%** of people around the world are breathing air that contains harmful levels of pollution.

Map of Oxford's AQMA and places where NO₂ pollution has been historically highest



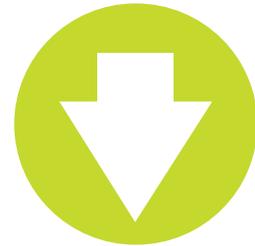
Recent research shows that poor air quality can affect every part of the body - even the brain. It's linked to health issues like **cancer, asthma, stroke, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and dementia.**

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** estimates that around 7 million people die early every year because of air pollution. About 4.2 million of these deaths are linked to outdoor pollution, and 3.2 million to pollution inside homes.



What are the recent trends in Air Quality?

Overall, Oxford's air has been getting cleaner. Between 2014 and 2024, NO₂ levels dropped by about 50%, and a quarter of that improvement happened since the city's last *Air Quality Action Plan* started in 2021.



But even though things are improving, the World Health Organization backed by recent research says that *no amount of air pollution is completely safe*, as even low levels of air pollution can still be harmful to our health.

That means we need to continue to do more to reduce air pollution levels in the city and to make Oxford's air cleaner and healthier for everyone.

What's causing the problem?

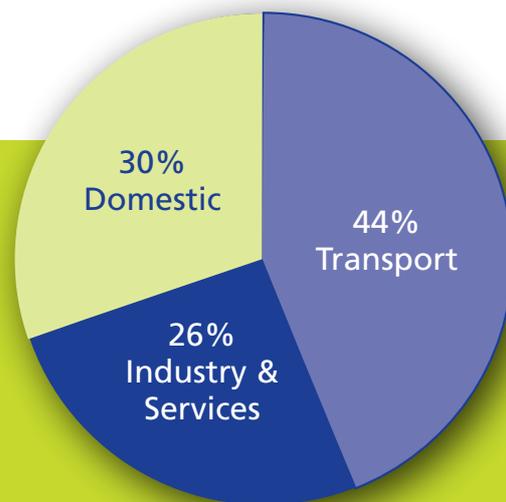
Oxford's air pollution comes from a mix of sources, mainly from three key areas.

Since the last air quality plan in 2021, the sources of air pollution in Oxford have **changed**.

Back then, transport (like cars and buses) caused about 68% of the city's pollution. Now, that number has dropped to 44%, thanks in large part to an increase in the number of electric cars and buses in Oxford's roads.

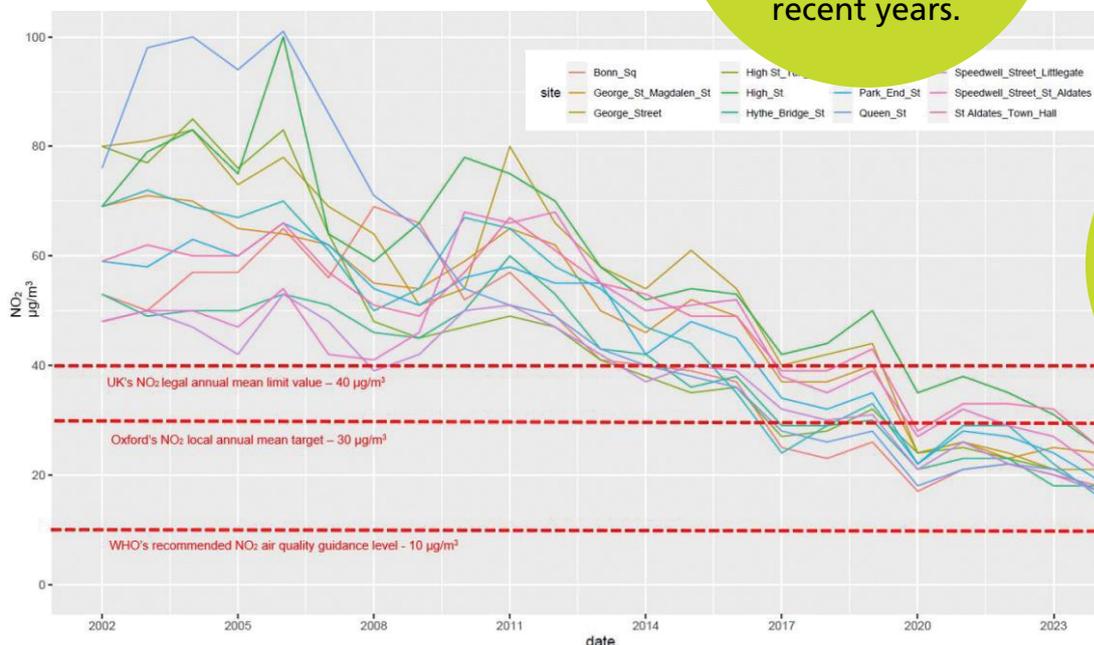
Whilst pollution from transport has gone down, other sources are now gaining more importance. Industry and services now make up 30% of the emissions, and home heating and cooking (called domestic combustion) account for 26%.

To keep making Oxford's air cleaner, we now need to focus not just on transport, but also on these other growing sources of pollution.



Trends in Air Quality in Central Oxford (2002-2024)

The chart shows how air pollution (specifically NO₂) has changed in central Oxford over recent years.



Is the problem the same in all areas of the city?

- Areas in Oxford nearby busy roads and traffic jams (specifically where streets are poorly designed) normally tend to suffer from higher air pollution levels.
- Vehicles release pollution, and narrow and tall streets can stop that pollution from spreading out, causing it to build up in certain areas. Because of this, air pollution levels (and how much people are exposed to it) can vary a lot depending on the location. We are most concerned about places where pollution is high and people are likely to be affected by it - particularly vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, and individuals with heart and lung conditions.
- We are particularly concerned about areas with high levels of air pollution and where vulnerable groups — such as children, older adults, and people with respiratory conditions — are more likely to be exposed, often because they spend more time in these locations.
- Our latest air quality checks from 2024 show that St. Clements, near The Plain roundabout, is still the area in Oxford city centre where people are most exposed to air pollution.



What does this new AQAP commit to?

This is Oxford's most ambitious air quality goal ever and no other local council in the UK has set a target this strong.

The main goal of this air quality plan for Oxford is to:

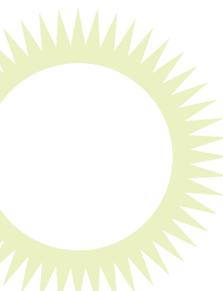


Reduce nitrogen dioxide pollution to 20 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) by the year 2030

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What are the key areas of intervention of this new AQAP?



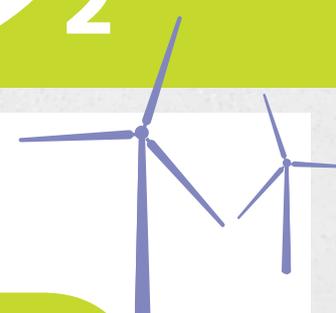
The draft *Air Quality Action Plan* includes 30 proposed actions to help reduce pollution over the next five years to be delivered through collaboration with a range of partners, including Oxfordshire County Council, who (as the Transport Authority for Oxfordshire) have played a key role in shaping this draft AQAP and will also be central to its implementation.

The draft plan lists both the actions and who will help carry them out.



Reducing emissions from domestic heating, industry and services

Examples: Prevent installation of fossil fuel heating in new development, support development of retrofits and cleaner heating options.



Promoting active travel and reducing the need to drive

Examples: Expanding cycle and footway routes, improving rail and bus services, reducing car usage.

Accelerating the transition to low and zero emission transport

Examples: Increase EV charging infrastructure, promote sustainable deliveries and fleet electrification.

Facilitating behaviour change by enhancing public awareness and fostering collaborative partnerships

Examples: Improve content and visibility of OXONAIR website, work with schools, communities, districts, County, NHS and local health services on the importance of clean air.



Comparing Air Pollution Limits

UK Law, World Health Organization Guidelines, EU Rules, and Oxford's new Local Target

Pollutant	NO ₂								
Measured as	Annual mean								
UK Air Quality Objective (µg/m ³)	40								
Interim WHO targets (µg/m ³)	<table><tr><td>I</td><td>II</td><td>III</td><td>IV</td></tr><tr><td>40</td><td>30^{a)}</td><td>20</td><td>-</td></tr></table>	I	II	III	IV	40	30 ^{a)}	20	-
I	II	III	IV						
40	30 ^{a)}	20	-						
European Union legal annual mean by 2030 (µg/m ³)	20								
Oxford's proposed new local target (µg/m ³)	20								

a) This goal was part of Oxford's previous air quality plan (2021-2025), and the City is well on track to meet it by the end of 2025 in all areas of the city that are considered of relevant exposure i.e. where people are more likely to be affected by it.

Building on the progress made in the last air quality plan, our new goal of 20 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³) of nitrogen dioxide by 2030 is:

- **Half** the legal limit set by the UK Government (40µg/m³)
- **In line** with the World Health Organization's recommended guidelines (20µg/m³)
- **Matching** the European Union's new legal limit (20µg/m³)

This new target shows how serious Oxford is about cleaning up its air. It's part of our commitment to protecting people's health and leading the way for other communities across the UK.

Please
complete the
online survey by
**30 November
2025**
(11:59pm)

How can I get involved?

What do you think about the ideas in this plan?

Do you have other suggestions to help improve Oxford's air quality?

You can read the full draft plan, booklet, and fill out the questionnaire online here:
<https://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/>

If you'd prefer a paper copy of the survey, email us at airquality@oxford.gov.uk to request one.

How does this AQAP link to other policies and schemes?

This air quality plan is a key part of Oxford's wider efforts to protect the environment and improve public health. It works alongside the city's transport, climate, and planning policies, and directly supports two of Oxford City Council's main goals:

- **Zero Carbon Oxford** – aiming for no carbon emissions across the city by 2040.
- **Thriving Communities** – recognising that clean air is vital for both physical and mental health.

The plan also includes three major transport projects currently being led by Oxfordshire County Council:

- Trial Traffic Filters
- Workplace Parking Levy
- Zero Emission Zone Expansion

One important project that supports this air quality plan is reopening the [Cowley Branch Line](#) for passenger trains by 2030.

It's expected to carry over one million passengers each year. By giving people a cleaner travel option, this shift from cars to trains will help reduce traffic and cut down on pollution during the plan's rollout.

The [Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership \(ZCOP\)](#) will also play a key role in helping reduce air pollution over the next five years.

ZCOP brings together people from local government, businesses, universities, and other organisations to work as a team. Their focus is on cutting emissions from buildings and energy use (two major sources of air pollution) through projects like:

- Electrification of heating
- Promotion of renewable energies
- Support for low-carbon technologies in industry and commerce.

Environmental Sustainability

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