



27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## 16 YEARS OF BREATHING POLLUTED AIR!

### Greens Call for Action on Air Quality in Witney and Chipping Norton

**Fast on the heels of the river pollution scandal is the air pollution scandal.** We can decide if we want to swim in a river that we know could be polluted, but we have no choice with air - we all have to breathe!

**Air pollution is an invisible killer. Each year it is estimated that 39,000 people die prematurely in the UK because of poor air quality.** It has long been recognised as a contributing factor in the deaths of people with heart or lung disease and is associated with reduced lung capacity in children, plus worsening of asthma in both children and adults.<sup>1,2</sup>

Air pollution also impacts neurodevelopment and cognitive ability and can trigger childhood cancer. Children who have been exposed to high levels of air pollution may be at greater risk for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease later in life. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution because they breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants, at a time when their brains and bodies are still developing, and they also live closer to the ground, where some pollutants reach peak concentrations. "Polluted air is poisoning millions of children (around the world)" says Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. **"This is inexcusable. Every child should be able to breathe clean air so they can grow and fulfil their full potential."**<sup>3</sup>

In 2020 - for the very first time in the UK - **air pollution was listed as a cause of death** in the case of 9-year-old Londoner Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah. But dangerous levels of air pollution are not limited to our major cities. Shockingly, West Oxfordshire has some of the most polluted locations in the whole county as traffic continues to outgrow the historic streets of our towns. **Annual average NO<sub>2</sub> levels in Bridge Street in Witney and parts of the Horsefair, Chipping Norton remain above the UK and the WHO limits<sup>4</sup> of 40mg/l<sup>5</sup>.** What is worse is that **the County Council has apparently limited itself to measuring average NO<sub>2</sub> levels, and no longer measures the peak levels - or levels of other pollutants, such as fine particulates generated by vehicles** (also known to cause severe health issues<sup>6</sup>).

The health risk to both elderly and younger citizens in West Oxfordshire was recognised as long ago as 2005, when West Oxfordshire District Council was required to create 'Air Quality Management Action Plans' for Bridge Street other streets in Witney North & East and the Horsefair in Chipping Norton. However, in the 16 years since then, very little action has been taken, the Chipping Norton 2008 plan hasn't been fully implemented and no improvement in air quality has been seen. Residents continue to inhale polluted air and risk long-term consequences to their health. For many children, that represents a lifetime of breathing polluted air, putting them at risk of poorly developed lungs and increased risk of asthma and other diseases.

There are lots of ways we could change this. In Witney and Chipping Norton, the Green Party has been calling on the District and County Councils to take action.

**Green Councillor, Andrew Prosser (Witney Town)**, has regularly drawn attention to Witney's air pollution and the failure of the District and County Councils to act. He is once again calling on West Oxfordshire District Council to produce and implement air quality action plans, as they have previously promised, and finally bring an end to the toxic air in our towns. As a first step, **the Council should properly measure and publish all the pollutants that according to their website they "have a duty"<sup>7</sup> to monitor** – preferably with real time reporting.

The main constraint in both towns is road traffic. At least in Witney there is the promise of some marginal relief when the Shores Green Junction is implemented, and a new pedestrian/cycle route built across the River Windrush as part of the East Witney Development. But the construction traffic from the housing development itself could actually exacerbate issues for a number of years, and without properly integrated active travel and public transport measures in the rest of Witney, the Shores Green junction will only mitigate some of the impacts from even larger volumes of traffic as thousands of additional homes are built in Witney and the surrounding areas.

Nationally, the Greens have been calling on Government to give us a **new Clean Air Act fit for the 21st century**.

The Green Party wants to push councils to improve monitoring of **all** pollutants (not just NO<sub>2</sub>) and champion the move to make **walking, cycling, and public transport** the main forms of urban transport by:

- **Making public transport cleaner**, more affordable, more accessible, and more joined up.
- Make use of **"last mile deliveries"** so that less polluting vehicles are used in our town centres.
- Reducing the need for private car usage and the air pollution it causes.
- Improving people's health by creating **more opportunities for physical activity in everyday journeys**, such as walking and cycling.
- Making our towns and streets **safe and friendly** places where people choose to spend time.

**Witney North Cllr. Andrew Prosser said "Over the last fifteen years there has been little evidence of action from WODC or the County Council to address West Oxfordshire's air pollution issues. Meanwhile, the health of local residents continues to suffer. It's time things changed."**

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#### **Notes to Editor**

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#### **About West Oxfordshire Green Party**

The [West Oxfordshire Green Party](#) is a branch of the Oxfordshire Green Party and of The Green Party of England and Wales. We are addressing the issues of our time, taking local action to solve local, national and global issues.

The Branch supports and runs campaigns for Green Party candidates at parish, town, district and county council elections. The membership includes all Green Party members in the Witney parliamentary constituency (which covers the same area as the West Oxfordshire district).

#### **Contact for enquiries or additional information about the Branch:**

Further information is available on the West Oxfordshire Green Party website at [www.westoxon-greens.uk](http://www.westoxon-greens.uk) or by contacting:

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<sup>1</sup> Williams M, Evangelopoulos D, Katsouyanni K, Walton H (2019) "Personalising the Health Impacts of Air Pollution – Summary for Decision Makers" (2019) *King's College London*. Available at: <http://erg.ic.ac.uk/Research/docs/Personalised-health-impacts-Summary%20for%20Decision%20Makers.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.asthma.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/our-policy-work/air-pollution-affects-asthma/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-10-2018-more-than-90-of-the-worlds-children-breathe-toxic-air-every-day>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/rxlkndgw/air-quality-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.westoxon-greens.uk/- - air pollution>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/noise-pests-pollution-and-air-quality/air-quality/>