



Image: Rachel Cooper on Upsplash

TAKING ACTION FOR CLEANER AIR IN SUFFOLK

Highlights from 2023/2024 and Looking Ahead





Image: Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council

FOREWORD

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich,
Operational Highways and Flooding

"2023 has been a year of firsts for Suffolk. We have launched our first Air Quality Strategy, put in a successful joint bid to the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs for funding from the Air Quality Grant, expanded our No Idling Campaign and carried out a programme of public and partner engagement to highlight the need for action.

However, poor air quality continues to be the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. Breathing in polluted air can lead to and make worse a range of conditions from asthma through to lung cancer and stroke.

Despite Suffolk's rural nature, pollution issues persist in our towns and its important we lead the way in making the air cleaner and healthier for us all."

INTRODUCTION

In May 2023, Suffolk County Council (SCC) published its Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan for improving air quality in the County.

It was developed in partnership between Suffolk County Council's (SCC) Public Health and Communities directorate and the Growth, Highways and Infrastructure directorate, with contributions from district and borough councils, NHS and the University of Suffolk.

The strategy sets out specific actions which the council and partners are taking to raise awareness of and improve air quality. It can be viewed, along with quarterly update reports, at www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/airquality.

12 months on from the launch of the Strategy we are taking a look at what has been achieved and setting out our plans for the future.



3,769

Students Bikeability trained



2,017

Responses on SCC social media



500

Conversations about air quality



110

Electric bike trials

2023/24 IN NUMBERS



SWITCH OFF WHEN PARKED

14

Schools signed up to the No Idling Campaign



3

Walking and cycling hubs launched



2

Schools Streets with more to follow



1

Suffolk's first Air Quality Strategy launched

Pollution from health. It can cause cancer and stunt

HIGHLIGHTS

- A more detailed look at what has been delivered in the first year of the Suffolk Air Quality Strategy -
This isn't an exhaustive list but a flavour of some of the work that has taken place over the past 12 months.

CLEAN AIR DAY 2023

The theme for 2023's national Clean Air Day was 'Clean up our air to look after your mind' – highlighting the link between air pollution and mental health.

Linking into the mental health message in Suffolk we focussed our Clean Air Day activity on encouraging people to walk or wheel one mile on the day and share their thoughts and pictures online using the hashtags 'A mile for my mind' and 'Clean Air Day Suffolk'.

The aim was to break the 'driving short journeys' habit by encouraging people to see how easy, cheap and enjoyable making the journey on foot or wheels could be.

If every car journey in Suffolk under one mile was walked, wheeled or cycled it would lead to a reduction of 15 million car journeys a year and over 40,000 car journeys a day. As a result we would have cleaner, healthier, air and improved physical and mental health.

Suffolk's Clean Air Day activity was supported county-wide by organisations and groups including Ipswich Borough, Babergh and Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk and West Suffolk Councils along with the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board, Talk Club Ipswich, Active Suffolk, Bury Eco Carriers and Community Action Suffolk.

On the day there was 62 social media posts and 50 participants on led walks. The initiative was featured on BBC Radio Suffolk, who interviewed Suffolk County Councillor Paul West, and also appeared in Air Quality News.



SUFFOLK IDLING ACTION



The Suffolk Idling Action Campaign was relaunched on 1 March 2024 urging drivers to switch off their engines when parked.

The campaign focuses on turning off engines outside schools to protect children's growing lungs from unnecessary pollution.

Idling engines, where a car is stationary with its engine on, cause peaks in harmful pollutants which when breathed in overtime can lead to asthma, heart disease, cancer and stunt children's growing lungs.

Campaign materials are available free of charge to businesses, schools and VCSFE organisations and include:

Myths and facts postcards and leaflets

Car stickers

A4 outdoor posters/ signs

A3 and A4 posters

Outdoor banners

Social media infographics

To date there are 14 schools and 2 community groups signed up to the campaign and we are continuing to encourage people to get involved and support the initiative.

For further information or to request materials contact ph.widerdeterminants@suffolk.gov.uk

SUFFOLK'S FIRST SCHOOL STREET



Image: Ranelagh Primary School, Ipswich

2023 marked the launch of Suffolk's first school street at Ranelagh Primary School in Ipswich.

A school street is where a small area outside of a school is closed off to traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times. Research has shown school streets reduce pollution and provide a safer, healthier and more enjoyable commute to school.

Ranelagh Primary School Headteacher, Mrs Nicola Ling, said:

"We are really excited to be the first school in Suffolk to be involved in this scheme. By reducing traffic directly outside of the school entrance, we hope that our families will have a much safer and healthier journey to school. This trial is testament to the hard work of our Junior Road Safety Officers and the staff and Governors that have worked alongside them. We are also grateful for the support of our local businesses - by working together we can hopefully make the area less stressful and congested for all at key times."

Two more school streets are currently in the planning stages with more to follow for 2024/2025.



Image: Yan Krukau on Pexels

All electric pool cars

All 42 of Suffolk County Council's pool cars are now electric!

The vehicles are used daily by SCC employees to travel for work purposes, for example to meetings or on site visits.

Free e-bike trials

110 electric-bike trials have taken place in Suffolk over the last 12 months.

The trials are a great taster for what it is like owning and using an electric bike and often lead to people purchasing their own.

Electric bikes enable you to travel faster and over longer distances so are an ideal alternative to the car.

New walking and cycling hubs

Two walking and cycling hubs have launched in Ipswich and Stowmarket, with a Felixstowe launch pending and further hubs planned.

The hubs offer free bike hire, led walks and rides and accessible cycles for loan.

More children trained for cycling

For 2023, 3,769 year 5 and 6 students from schools across Suffolk have been trained to Bikeability Level 2.

This is a 10% increase from 2022.

Bikeability is the government's national cycle training programme. It helps children (and adults) learn practical skills and understand how to cycle on today's roads.

For more information about e-bike trials, cycle training or walking and cycling hubs please visit:
thewaytosuffolk.org.uk or email thewaytosuffolk@suffolk.gov.uk

AIR QUALITY TECHNICAL REPORT

A technical report exploring the potential causes of the Ipswich Air Quality Management Areas and possible options for reducing pollution levels has been commissioned.

The work is being carried out by Transport and Air Quality Consultants Ricardo and is expected to be complete by Autumn 2024.

In addition to options for improving air quality the report will also consider the economic and health impacts of potential solutions and will provide much needed evidence to inform potential future initiatives.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Our Public Engagement launched in June 2023 to raise awareness of poor air quality and the impact on health whilst exploring local awareness of the action that can be taken to reduce pollution and protect health.

It started with countywide Clean Air Day activities followed by attendance at a range of events including the Ipswich Mela, the Multicultural Festival and Family Fun Days. It included touring question sessions, social media polls, and a number of targeted meetings and focus groups.

In total there has been: **2,017** responses to air quality polls on SCC social media; **500** conversations with Suffolk people about air quality and health; **400** comments generated on SCC's air quality social media posts and **338** initial 2022 survey responses.

This is just the start of the conversation. We will continue gathering views from across Suffolk as our air quality work progresses, using the feedback to inform resources and initiatives.

A full report summarising the findings is available at: www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/airquality.

ENGAGEMENT STATS

88%



88% of 508 Suffolk respondents aware that air pollution can affect our health.

91%



91% of 68 respondents, from groups more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution, said they would like more information about pollution and health to be available, especially in healthcare settings.

27%



Poor air quality is seen as a 'big city problem' with only 27% of 654 Suffolk respondents thinking air pollution is a problem where they live.



Image: Super Straho on Upsplash

ENGAGEMENT STATS RELATING TO HEALTH AWARENESS

62%



62% of 200 Suffolk respondents aware that air pollution is linked to asthma.

54%



54% of 200 respondents aware that air pollution is linked to lung cancer.

27%



Only 27% of 200 respondents linked air pollution to increased risk of stroke.

22%



Only 22% of 200 respondents linked air pollution to low birth weight in babies.



Image: Lawrence Aritao on Upplash

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT - EXPLORING THE BARRIERS

Through the 2023/ 2024 public engagement programme we have been speaking to people about action they already take, or would be willing to take, to reduce pollution where they live. We also explored what prevents people from taking action.

- Walking and cycling short journeys (under one mile) was the action most respondents (41% of 565 respondents) said they did already or would be willing to do to make the air cleaner. When talking about barriers to walking and cycling some common themes emerged around safety, infrastructure and a need for more information on routes.
- Using public transport for journeys that can't be walked or cycled was the action that the least amount of respondents (13% of 565 people) said they did or would be willing to do to make the air cleaner. Public transport was a strong theme throughout the engagement with the majority of people describing it as unreliable, expensive, too infrequent, or non-existent where they live for it to be a realistic alternative to car travel.
- 11% of people (565 respondents) have already or would consider switching to an electric vehicle but for the majority of people comments centred around EVs being too expensive, access to charging points limited, no option to charge at home and not believing them to be an environmentally friendly or sustainable alternative due to their batteries.



PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

As well as our public engagement we have been working closely with our Suffolk partners to raise awareness of the health impacts of air pollution. We have also been encouraging partners to take action within their organisations. Engagement has included discussions, presentations and workshops with:

-
- 1 Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (Annual Expo)
 - 2 Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Partnership
 - 3 Suffolk and North East Essex Alliances - Ipswich, East and West
 - 4 The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board
 - 5 Growth Highways and Infrastructure Travel Behaviour Change Group
 - 6 Carbon Negative Nature Positive Champions Group
 - 7 Beat the Streets Steering Group
 - 8 Ipswich Air Quality Steering Group
 - 9 Suffolk Air Quality Group
 - 10 Active Suffolk

Various opportunities have been identified to reduce mileage from healthcare visits and day to day operations. Discussions are ongoing to ensure progress with actions and to continue to identify opportunities.

LOOKING AHEAD

- 2023/24 has been a busy year, but there is more planned for 2024/25 -

LOOKING AHEAD THROUGH 2024/25



Air Quality Action Plan Update

The action plan was originally developed in 2022 and launched alongside the Air Quality Strategy in 2023. It sets out how the Strategy objectives are going to be achieved and who will be delivering them. Things have moved on since the Plan's development and it doesn't currently reflect the breadth of work taking place.

We also recognise that it's currently focussed on transport and outdoor air quality and we want to bring in more of a focus on indoor air quality which includes domestic burning, damp and mould and housing quality in general.

Indoor Air Quality

Poor air quality at home can lead to discomfort like a tickly throat, blocked nose or watery eyes, but it can also trigger illnesses like asthma, allergies or a heart condition. People who spend more time at home, for example young children and frail older people, are particularly vulnerable. But others are at risk too, including pregnant women and their unborn babies, people with a heart or lung condition, and people living in poor quality housing. Over the next 12 months we will be looking at what we can do, working with Suffolk partners, to improve indoor air quality and address health inequalities.

Suffolk Air Quality Network (SAQN)

SAQN provides the opportunity for key stakeholders including borough and district councils, health, VCSFE organisations and community representatives to come together to share information and best practice to jointly tackle air quality in Suffolk.

The Network had a soft launch at the end of 2023 and will have its official launch with a Challenge Lab event in May 2024.

It is hosted by the University of Suffolk and is expected to meet twice a year with regular information sharing in between. Email address for joining can be found at the end of this document.

LOOKING AHEAD THROUGH 2024/25

Toolkits

We will be working with local partners to produce some business, community and healthcare toolkits using the latest data and evidence. The toolkits will provide Suffolk specific information and sign-posting alongside practical advice to encourage action for cleaner and healthier air.

Primary Care Interventions

Our public engagement highlighted how important people feel it is to get information on air quality and health in a healthcare setting, particularly those with respiratory conditions that can be triggered by poor air quality.

This is something we plan to develop with healthcare partners throughout 2024/25 to ensure people are receiving the information they need to help reduce their exposure to harmful air pollution.

ALSO PLANNED FOR 2024/2025:

- MORE School Streets.
- MORE children trained to Bikeability level 2.
- MORE schools signed up to Modeshift Stars.
- IMPROVED cycling infrastructure with nearly £8million in improvement schemes going live in Ipswich, Felixstowe and Woodbridge.



Image: Kelly Sikkhema on Upsplash



Image: Bikeability



Image: Ranelagh Primary School, Ipswich



Image: David Kiriakidis on Upsplash

ALSO PLANNED FOR 2024/ 2025:

- NEW walking and cycling hubs in Felixstowe and Sudbury .
- NEW scheme for parents and carers to trial an electric cargo bike for the school run.
- FREE bikes for Suffolk schools - up to 60 bikes in total.
- MORE electric vehicle charging points - as part of the Suffolk EV Charging Strategy.
- NEW and enhanced bus routes and support for transport schemes in areas that currently don't have public transport. Paid for from £3.7m Bus Service Improvement Plan funding.



Image: Sven Brandsma on Upsplash



Image: Ron Porter on Pixabay



Image: Andreas160578 on Pixabay



Image: Vitolda Klein on Upsplash

Find out more:

www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/airquality
ph.widerdeterminants@suffolk.gov.uk