Revocation of air quality management area (AQMA) in Great Barton

Following a successful and sustained reduction in air pollution at Great Barton, we are writing to let you know that we intend to revoke the air quality management area (AQMA) there. This does not mean that monitoring will stop, but it does mean that it will no longer show on searches as a polluted area for example when people are buying and selling a property in the area.

Below we outline a bit more about AQMAs and our statutory duties.

Local authorities have a duty under the Environment Act 1995 to monitor the quality of air within their administrative areas, produce an annual report and designate special management areas known as air quality management areas (AQMA) where pollutants exceed certain nationally set levels.

In 2017 the council declared an Air Quality Management Area was declared for this part of Great Barton and the year after the council recorded an annual average mean of 48.5 micrograms of nitrogen dioxide per meter cubed of air (48.5 µg/m3) – the highest it had reached. The level permitted as safe by The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is 40 micrograms of nitrogen dioxide per meter cubed of air (40 µg/m3) recorded as an average mean over the course of a year. Anything above that requires the local district council – in this case West Suffolk Council - to take action to bring pollution levels back down.

An action plan was subsequently created to try to bring nitrogen dioxide levels back below the threshold set out by Defra.

That action plan included relocating a pedestrian crossing to a less built-up area where air pollution could more naturally disperse as well as delivering improved electric vehicle recharging infrastructure in across West Suffolk.

It also included work with the Great Barton Primary School and Suffolk County Council, to raise awareness of the harm toxic fumes released by drivers leaving their engines running while parked. Pollution from idling vehicles can cause asthma in children, stunt their lung growth, and impact on their health for the rest of their lives.

These local actions have coincided with changes in car manufacturing and ownership of electric vehicles which do not produce any exhaust emissions.

That in turn has seen nitrogen dioxide levels fall year on year.

Substantial monitoring was undertaken in Great Barton along the A143 from 2019 to 2024 and sufficient evidence has confirmed that there have been no further breaches of the nitrogen dioxide levels and so legally Defra require the AQMA to be removed from Great Barton.

There are six monitoring points and two co-located monitoring points along approximately 340m of the A143 in Great Barton. These have indicated nitrogen dioxide levels have fallen from a maximum of 45.1 µg/m3 in 2019 down to 27.7 µg/m3 in 2024.

Figure 1, below, shows the general location of the AQMA within Great Barton and Figure 3, at the end of this document, shows the current extent of the AQMA, together with the location of the monitoring points within the AQMA.

Figure 1: Map showing the location of the AQMA in relation to Great Barton

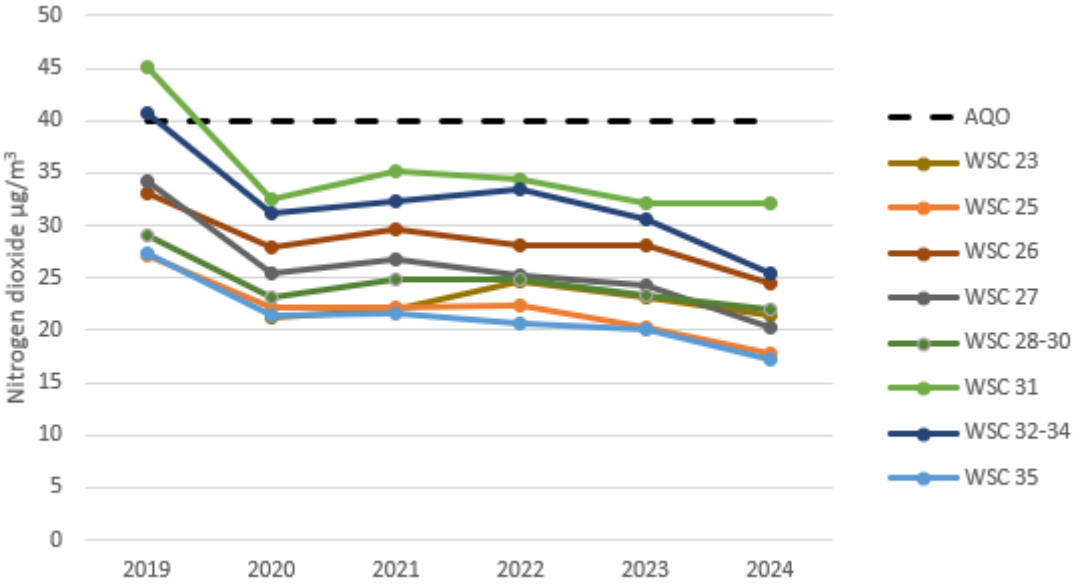
Monitoring of these locations has shown that the levels are now comfortably below the objective level of 40 micrograms per metre cubed (40 µg/m^3), with the highest recorded value being 45.1 µg/m^3 in 2019, being reduced to 27.7 in 2024 at the same monitoring location. Results are summarised in the below table and graph and show a continued downward trend since 2019. Monitoring points in Great Barton have references starting WSC followed by the location number. Please note that 2020 and 2021 annual results have been impacted by the various COVID-19 related restrictions in place during these years.

Table 1: Results of nitrogen dioxide monitoring in Great Barton, Bury St Edmunds, showing all monitoring results to be below the air quality objective of 40 micrograms per metre cubed.

Monitoring reference	Nitrogen dioxide annual mean (µg/m^3)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
WSC 23		21.2	22	24.7	23.2	21.4
WSC 25	27.2	22.2	22.2	22.4	20.2	17.8
WSC 26	33.1	28	29.6	28.1	28.1	24.4

WSC 27	34.3	25.4	26.8	25.2	24.3	20.3
WSC 28-30	29.1	23.2	24.8	24.9	23.3	21.9
WSC 31	45.1	32.5	35.2	34.5	32.1	32.1
WSC 32-34	40.8	31.1	32.4	33.4	30.6	25.5
WSC 35	27.4	21.5	21.6	20.7	20	17.3

Figure 2: Graph showing the measured concentration of nitrogen dioxide within the Great Barton AQMA and general downward trend compared to the air quality objective.



The above results show there has been no breach of air quality objectives for the past five years. Defra guidance recommends at least three years without a breach of the air quality objective before revoking an AQMA. The proposed revocation was outlined in our 2024 annual report (source West Suffolk Council – 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) and Defra have confirmed in their feedback from this report that they agree with the proposal to revoke the Great Barton AQMA.

It is therefore concluded that West Suffolk Council should revoke the AQMA as the levels of pollution in Great Barton are compliant with the nationally set air quality objectives and no longer meet the statutory threshold for an AQMA designation.

How has this pollution been reduced?

A large contributing factor for the reduction has been attributed to changes in car manufacturing including greater production and ownership of electric vehicles which do not produce any exhaust emissions. West Suffolk Council has been working for a number of years to access national funding to improve electric vehicle charging infrastructure including in Bury St Edmunds town centre. And that has coincided with a 581 per cent increase in EV ownership across West Suffolk between 2019 and 2024 (source UK Parliament - Local area data: Electric vehicles and charging points). According to zapmap, figures for March this year show there are now over 1 million

fully electric cars on UK roads, an increase of more than 1000 per cent on five years ago (source: zapmap – EV market statistics 2024).

What does this mean for monitoring of pollution levels?

Revocation of the AQMA does not mean that West Suffolk Council is going to stop monitoring air pollution in Great Barton. We are committed to continuing monitoring both in Great Barton and throughout West Suffolk. We are also committed to continuing our work to reduce levels of pollution throughout West Suffolk.

Why are you consulting if the area no longer meets the need for an AQMA?

We have written to residents in the AQMA and other stakeholders to outline our intent to revoke the AQMA and to invite feedback should you think there are any other factors that need to be considered. Anyone who wishes to make a representation with regards to these proposals, should email their comments to environment@westsuffolk.gov.uk by 5pm on 14 August 2025.

Figure 3: Plan showing the extent of the Great Barton AQMA and the locations of the monitoring diffusion tube monitoring points.