

Expert testimony to inform NICE guideline development

Section A: Developer to complete

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Contact information:	
Guideline title:	Air pollution – outdoor air quality and health
Guideline Committee:	Public Health Advisory Committee – PHAC E
Subject of expert testimony:	Role of the local authority planning regime in delivering improvements to ambient air quality and in reducing public exposure to pollution
Evidence gaps or uncertainties:	N/A

Section B: Expert to complete

Summary testimony:

Planning can have an important influence on air quality. Air quality issues should be an important consideration in long-term planning, ensuring that land is used and allocated in a manner that minimises emissions and reduces public exposure to pollution. In addition, the planning system should ensure that decisions are not taken to grant approval on individual proposals that lead to unacceptably poor air quality, nor make a series of decisions that collectively delivers an undesirable outcome.

Within the development of their Local Plans, individual local authorities have the opportunity to give careful regard to how future land development can be brought about in a manner that both reduces pollutant emissions and reduces public exposure to those emissions. Site Allocations Policy Documents form an important part of the Local Plan, and set out site allocations for new housing, employment land, retail, community, education and transport uses. In considering options for site allocations, local authorities can minimise the generation of emissions from road traffic by giving consideration to the locations of developments with regard to public transport or other sustainable choices (such as cycling and walking). Key to delivering this objective is the full integration of the planning, transport, education, housing, transport and environment departments to ensure that air quality issues are considered at the earliest stages of the strategic planning processes.

At the more local scale, “spatial masterplanning” has an important role to play. The masterplan deals with major developments in a defined physical area, and considers how streets and open spaces may be interconnected, the heights and massings of buildings, the locations of different land-uses and activities in the area, and the movement patterns of the users of the site, and how these can be linked to various transport options. Careful spatial design can reduce pollution exposure, and can have specific regard to sensitive members of the population. As examples, buildings can be designed to maximise their distance from busy roads, habitable rooms can be located away from roadside facades, and sensitive facilities such as schools, nurseries and retirement homes can be allocated in those areas where pollution levels will be the lowest.

At the development control level, which is related to planning permission sought for individual developments, local authorities can ensure that new development does not generate unacceptable levels of new pollution, and nor does it introduce new exposure into areas where pollutions levels are high. Where planning permission is to be refused, the local authority is required to give reasons which show “demonstrable harm” as reflected in a relevant policy or other matter related to planning. In this regard, Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide greater detail on specific policies within the Local Plan, and can be used to define requirements for air quality assessments, and set minimum requirements for building design and layouts. Where formally-adopted policies (such as a SPD) cannot be implemented, guidance has been published by local authorities (e.g. Camden Council) setting out similar requirements on spatial planning, the requirements for an air quality assessment, emissions standards for CHP plant and boilers, and minimum requirements for the provision of EV charging points etc..

References to other work or publications to support your testimony’ (if

applicable):

Moorcroft, S. and Barrowcliffe, R., et al (2015) Land-use Planning and Development Control: Planning for Air Quality. Institute of Air Quality Management, London.

Greater London Authority (2014) Supplementary Planning Guidance on Sustainable Design and Construction.

Camden Council – Guidance on Planning and Air Quality. Available online at: <https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/environment/air-quality-and-pollution/air-quality/planning-and-air-quality.en?page=1>

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