



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Executive 11 November 2026
Subject	Revocation of Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Management Areas
Wards affected	Witney North, Witney East, Witney Central, Chipping Norton
Accountable member	Cllr Alistair Wray - Executive Member for Environment Email: alistair.wray@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Claire Locke - Executive Director Corporate Services Email: claire.locke@publicagroup.uk
Report author	Susan McPherson – Senior Officer Air Quality Email: susan.mcpherson@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	The purpose of this report is to gain approval from the Executive for the revocation of the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Witney and Chipping Norton. Both areas now meet with the revocation criteria set by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
Annexes	Annex A – AQMA Declaration Orders
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: 1. Approve the revocation of the Witney and Chipping Norton AQMAs upon the adoption of a new district wide Air Quality Strategy anticipated in 2027.
Corporate priorities	• Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO

Consultees/ Consultation	Witney Town Council and Chipping Norton Town Council for their information.
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Witney and Chipping Norton were declared on 1st March 2005. The Declaration Orders are presented in Annex A. The full extent of the AQMA is shown in Figures 1 & 2. The AQMA was declared due to exceedances in the annual average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) above the UK objective of 40µg/m³.
- 1.2** It is likely that multiple factors have contributed to the improvements in air quality in the two AQMA. These are likely to be: the increase in the number of people working from home; improvements in combustion engine technology; uptake of low and ultra-low emission vehicles; and, the introduction of the 20mph speed limit.
- 1.3** Defra recommends revocation following a minimum of three consecutive years where the pollutant(s) of concern are below 90% of the relevant national objective (36µg/m³ for NO₂). Both the Witney and Chipping Norton AQMA have met these criteria, and Defra have requested the council now revokes these AQMA.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Under the Environment Act 1995, local authorities are required to monitor and improve air quality in their area. The legislation targets certain pollutants which may pose a health risk to humans should they enter the body, primarily by inhalation. These pollutants have been assigned objective concentrations which reduce the health risks to an acceptable level.
- 2.2** Where concentrations are found to be above the associated objective for three consecutive years the local authority must declare the area as an AQMA and, demonstrate it is applying measures to improve air quality. Pre 2005 monitoring showed concentrations above the national objective on Bridge Street in Witney and Horsefair in Chipping Norton. The Air Quality Management Area boundary was drawn up based on conclusions from a detailed assessment carried out in 2004. The resulting AQMA are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.
- 2.3** The AQMA were formally declared on the 1st March 2005. Copies of the Declaration Orders are attached at Annex A.

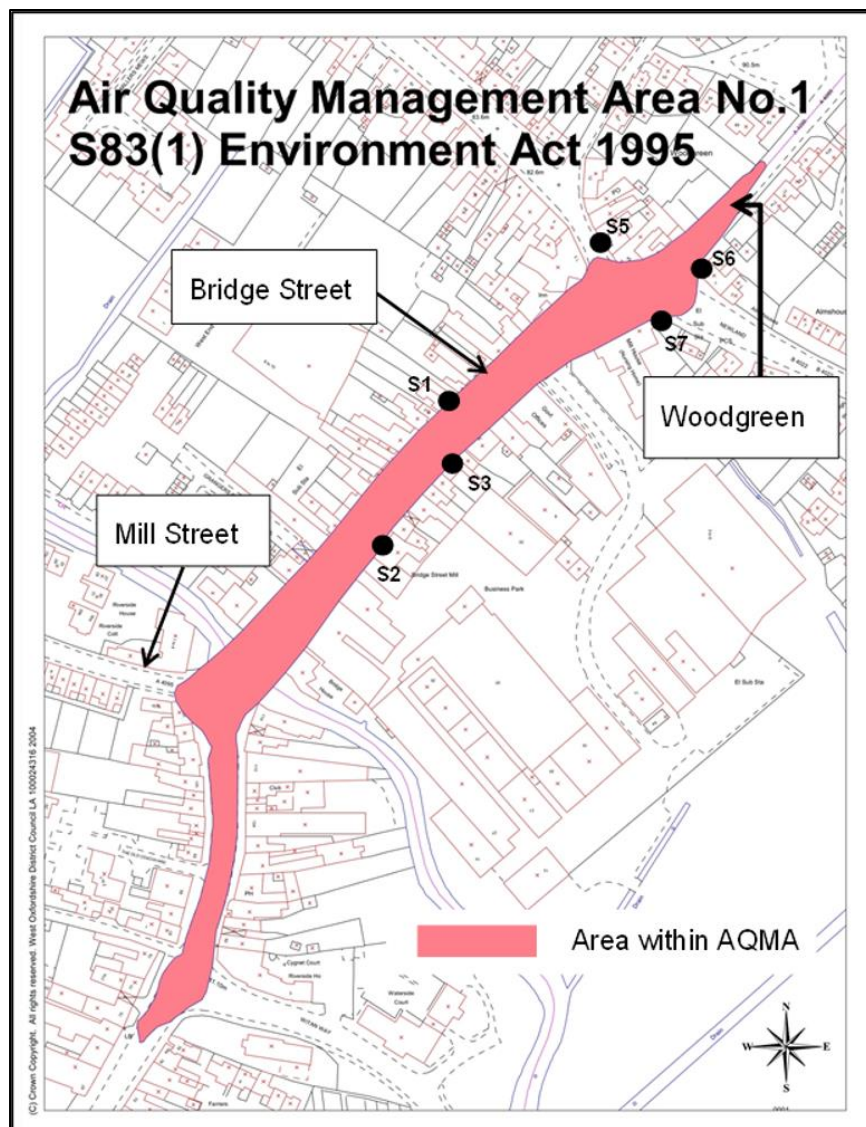


Figure 1 - Witney Air Quality Management Area

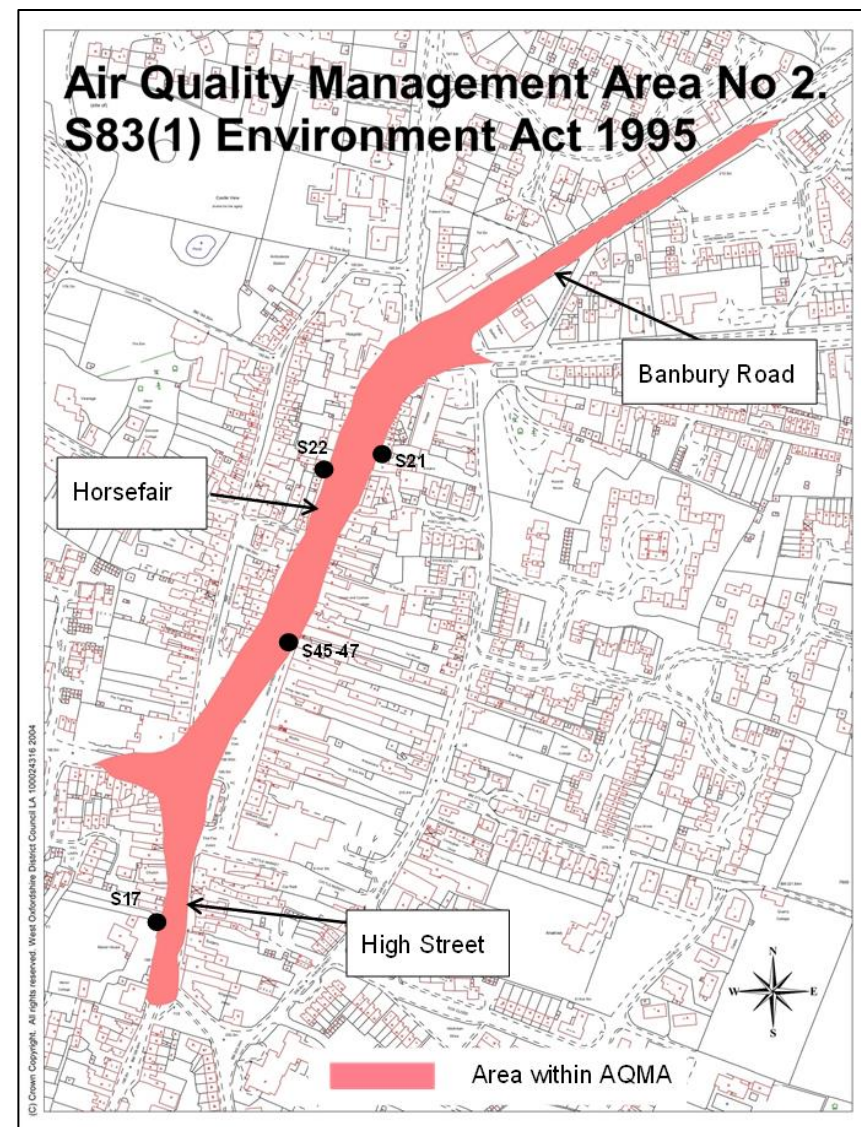


Figure 2 – Chipping Norton Air Quality Management Area

3. POLLUTION SOURCE AND MITIGATION

- 3.1** The primary, if not exclusive, source of NO₂ in both AQMAs is petrol/diesel vehicle exhaust gases which build up due to idling and stop start traffic. In Witney, Bridge Street was, until the recently opened Shores Green junction, the only viable route to cross the River Windrush for traffic travelling between Witney and destinations to the north and northeast of the town. Consequently, a large number of vehicles, both commercial and domestic, use this route daily, frequently causing congestion on and around Bridge Street, particularly at the roundabouts on the junctions with Mill Street and West End. Furthermore, the street canyon, created by the continuous row of buildings on each side of Bridge Street, is also thought to have intensified exhaust emissions.
- 3.2** In Chipping Norton, Horsefair and High Street form part of the A44 which links Oxford to towns such as Moreton-in-Marsh, Evesham and Leominster, terminating in Aberystwyth in West Wales. The A44 is classed as a Secondary Freight Priority Route and consequently is frequently used by freight as well as other vehicles travelling from the northwest to southeast of the district and vice versa. Congestion is caused by the sharp 90-degree turn at the junction of High Street (A44) and New Street (A44), the pedestrian crossing in High Street and the narrowing of the A44 as it becomes Horse Fair.
- 3.3** The Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) adopted in 2024, listed a number of mitigation measures to reduce air pollution in the two AQMAs. Mitigation measures most effective at reducing pollution caused by vehicle emissions are those which will reduce the number of vehicles on the road or promote free flowing traffic. As roads, active travel routes and public transport in West Oxfordshire are managed by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), most of the measure likely to have a significant impact on air quality in the AQMAs were OCC proposed actions to tackle congestion.
- 3.4** For Witney, these included: option appraisal for managing traffic within Witney town centre, including on Bridge Street; improvements at the Shores Green Junction on the A40, to the southeast of the town; improvements to Market Square; and, improvements to the active transport network, including the approval of the Witney Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan. The improvements to the Shores Green Junction is one of the main measures likely to have a positive impact on air quality within the AQMA. The addition of on and off slip roads on the west side of this junction allows east bound vehicles to leave the A40 and west bound vehicles to join the A40 at this junction. This provides a more attractive route for travel between the A40 west of Witney and destinations to the north and northwest of the town, avoiding the need to travel through the town centre. This work was completed in the summer of 2026. However, it is unlikely that the impact of this modified junction, on air quality on Bridge Street, will be known until early 2028. Many of the other measures remain either as future projects, in development or in the early stages of implementation.
- 3.5** For Chipping Norton, measures in the AQAP included: options appraisal for the junction of High Street, New Street and West Street; approval of the Chipping Norton Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan; development of a West Oxfordshire Travel Plan; and the

A44 Corridor Plan. These measures are mainly in the early stages of implementation or are in development.

3.6 Although the AQAP listed multiple measures to either directly or indirectly reduce air pollution within both the AQMAs, very few of these measures have been fully implemented to date. Consequently, the most likely reason for the reduction in air pollution in Witney and Chipping Norton are behavioural and technological changes which include:

- An increase in the number of people working from home following the Covid pandemic, reducing the need to travel.
- An increase in the number of virtual meetings, again, reducing the need to travel.
- Improvement in engine and exhaust technology reducing harmful emissions from petrol and diesel cars.
- Increased uptake of low and ultra-low emission vehicles.

4. REVOCATION

- 4.1** Defra's Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (TG22) states that "it is recommended that revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of annual mean NO₂ concentrations being lower than 36µg/m³ (i.e. not within 10% of the annual mean NO₂ objective due to uncertainties and yearly variations)".
- 4.2** Data from both AQMAs is presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4 below. The figures clearly show both AQMAs have been compliant for the required three consecutive years, with NO₂ concentrations showing a downward trend. Consequently, in accordance with the LAQM guidance, the council is expected to revoke these AQMAs.

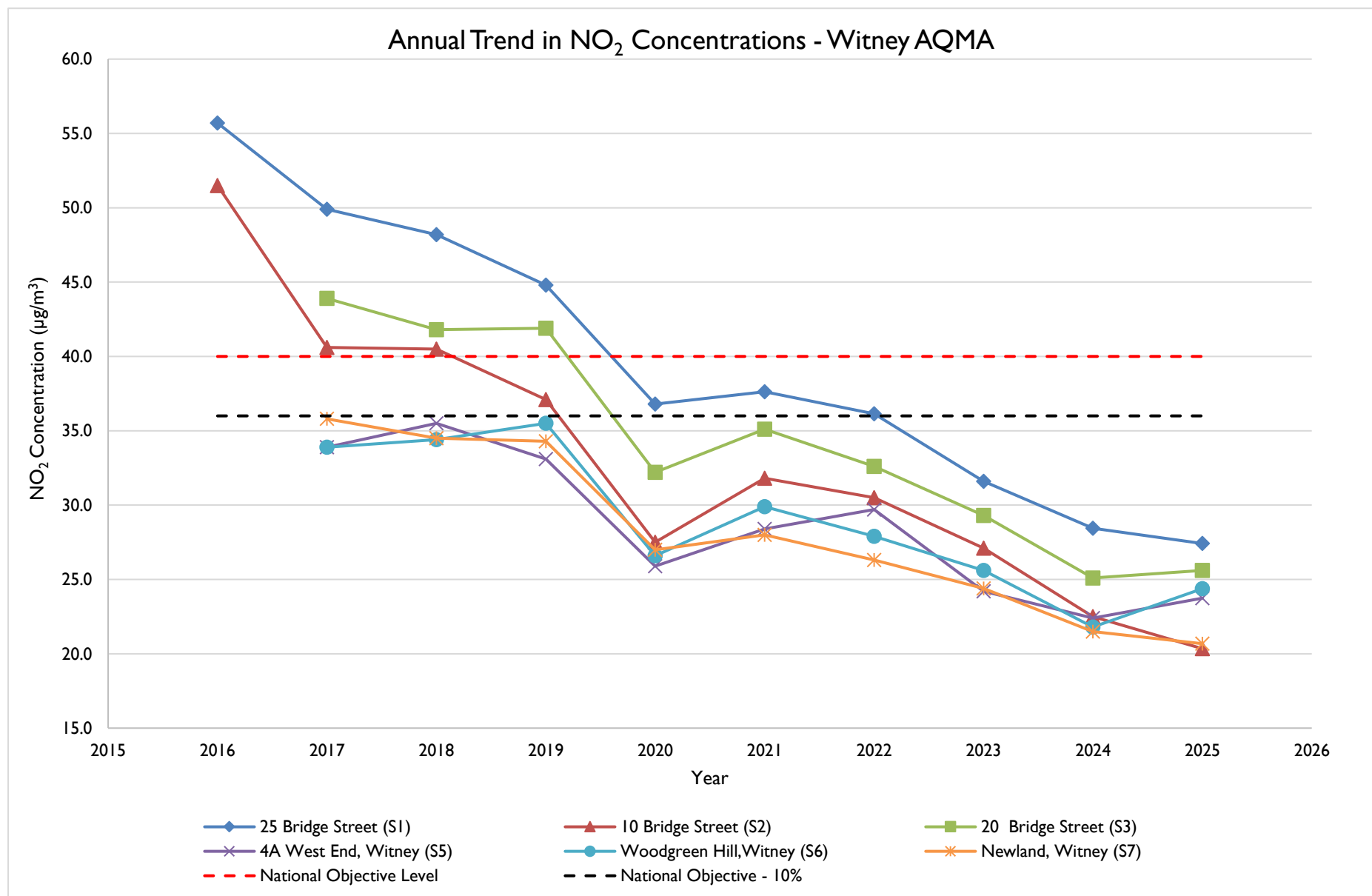


Figure 3 - Trends in NO₂ concentrations in Witney

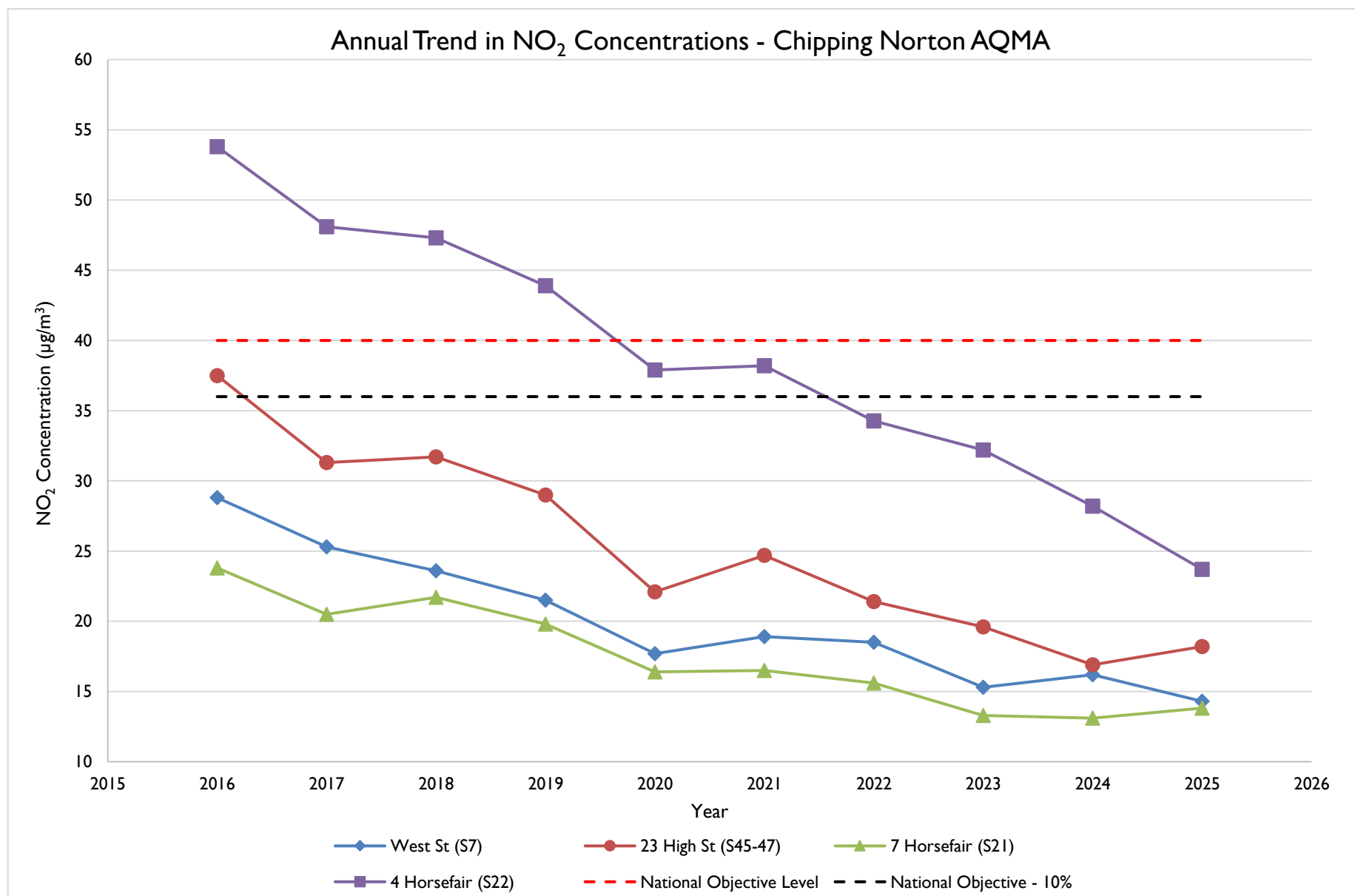


Figure 4 - Trends in NO₂ concentrations in Chipping Norton

5. AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

- 5.1** Following the successful revocation of the Witney and Chipping Norton AQMAs, the council is expected to adopt a district wide Air Quality Strategy. Unlike an Air Quality Action Plan, the strategy is not a legal requirement but is strongly encouraged to ensure air quality remains a priority.
- 5.2** West Oxfordshire is likely to see a significant level of housing development in the next 5 to 10 years, which may significantly increase vehicle numbers on the district's roads. A significant proportion of this development will be around Witney and the neighbouring towns of Carterton and Eynsham, with further development also around Chipping Norton. The magnitude of the potential development has raised understandable concerns regarding the associated impact on air quality. To ensure air quality remains a priority in Witney and Chipping Norton, and other areas where development may increase air pollution, it is proposed to begin work on the strategy as soon as possible, ensuring that it will be in place before the AQMAs are formally revoked. To enable this work to be completed in a timely manner, it is suggested a specialist air quality consultant is appointed to carry out this work. This is likely to cost around £8,000 to £14,000 depending on the level of complexity and detail within the strategy. There is an underspend value of £7,569 available from the Air Quality Action Plan budget, which can be put towards this cost. In addition, Finance have confirmed that there are sufficient reserves available to meet any shortfall.
- 5.3** The strategy will include the following:
- Overview of policies and strategies at district and county level which reduce air pollution
 - Information on pollutants and sources including source apportionment
 - Why continuing to reduce air pollution is important
 - Action areas, including planning, highways, industry, agriculture, domestic burning and public awareness
 - Raising awareness of indoor air pollution
 - Commitment to continuation of monitoring at current AQMA areas as well as other selected areas across the district

The process will include input from a Steering Group and a public consultation.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1** Not to revoke the AQMAs. This would go against the expectations of Defra as there is no benefit in retaining this status. It should be noted that Oxfordshire County Council are aware of the air quality improvements in both towns. Consequently, even if the AQMAs were to remain in place, it is unlikely that they would influence County decisions regarding traffic issues in these areas as resources would be targeted at areas that are still in breach of targets.
- 6.2** Revoke the AQMAs without an Air Quality Strategy. This may give perceptions that the council no longer considers air quality to be an important issue within the district.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1** To conclude, concentrations of NO₂ are now within the national health objective concentrations in either Witney or Chipping Norton, which is good news for the health of not only those who live in the affected areas, but also for the wider populations of both towns.
- 7.2** Compliance with the national objective, in accordance with TG22, has been demonstrated, and consequently the Council are in a position to revoke the AQMA in line with Defra advice.
- 7.3** Finalisation of the revocation (submission of the revocation orders to Defra) will be carried out once the new air quality strategy is adopted, which is expected to be within 12 months.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** There are no financial implications associated with this revocation. Funding to deliver the new district wide strategy has been identified by finance as part of the current budget process for 2027/28.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** The Council is meeting its statutory obligations for air quality management. There are no legal implications associated with this revocation.

10. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1** There are no risk implications associated with this revocation.

11. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 11.1** There are no equality implications associated with this revocation.

12. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** Revocation of the AQMA will not impact on the climate and ecological emergency. Conversely, this revocation demonstrates an improvement in air quality with positive implications for climate change.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

(END)