



# POLLUTED CITIES



# KENT

**Urban areas in Kent, like Maidstone and Canterbury, are blighted by Britain's toxic air crisis. Here I examine the latest available air pollution data and offer some insight on potential solutions.**

## AIR QUALITY LIMITS

Local authorities that experience poor air quality must designate air quality management areas (AQMA) and are mandated to collect and report on pollution levels.<sup>1</sup> Legal limits of exposure have been set by the EU (informed by the World Health Organization (WHO)). For Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) – which inflames the lining of the lungs and makes them more susceptible to illnesses such as bronchitis, and in the UK, is linked to the premature deaths of more than 20,000 people every year<sup>2</sup> – there are both hourly average targets and annual average targets. Within any given year, a local authority has exceeded the hourly average limit if levels of pollutants go above 200µg/m<sup>3</sup> more than 18 times for an hour or longer over the course of the year. And if the annual average is higher than 40µg/m<sup>3</sup> at any monitoring station, it has broken the safe, legal limit.

- 1 Local authorities are required to report annually on the levels of pollution and can remove an AQMA if the average annual levels fall back within the legal limit.
- 2 Defra (2015) Valuing impacts on air quality: Updates in valuing changes in emissions of Oxides of Nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>) and concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/460401/air-quality-econanalysis-nitrogen-interim-guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460401/air-quality-econanalysis-nitrogen-interim-guidance.pdf)



**KEITH TAYLOR, GREEN PARTY MEP FOR THE SOUTH EAST**

## CANTERBURY

**The historic city of Canterbury is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the wider district is home to 150,000 people. Over two million tourists visit Canterbury annually.**

The main source of air pollution is road traffic emissions, primarily from the A2, A28, and A290. Canterbury declared an AQMA in 2006 for parts of the A28 in the city centre. From 2011 an expanded AQMA included parts of Broad Street and Wincheap.<sup>3</sup> Here people experience poor living environment quality despite having less access to cars than the Kent average.<sup>4</sup> In April 2018, some small areas were added to a new, expanded AQMA.<sup>5</sup>

NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) pollution<sup>6</sup> are measured in Canterbury. However, over 80 premature deaths a year of Canterbury's over 25s are attributed to PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution, with almost 750 associated life years lost.<sup>7</sup> Canterbury City Council (CCC) has no plans to start measuring PM<sub>2.5</sub>.<sup>8</sup>

CCC's latest available data reports that NO<sub>2</sub> was monitored at 38 sites in 2016. Eight sites (or 15%) exceed the annual NO<sub>2</sub> legal limits of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Five sites saw 'borderline exceedances' of over 36µg/m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

### THE AREAS OF CANTERBURY EXPERIENCING THE WORST AIR POLLUTION

Site	Annual mean (NO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Over safe/legal limit	Highest monthly recording (NO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Over safe/legal limit
92b Broad Street	49.2*	123%	82.9	207%
Old Tannery Rheims Way	49.6*	124%	76.4	191%
284 Wincheap	49.0†	109%	84.9	212%

\* Data capture of 92% † Data capture of 83%

There is a danger that Canterbury's air quality is worse than reported due to a lack of reliable monitoring. Of the eight sites over the limit, only two captured data for the whole year. One site on Wincheap is reported as being within the legal limits at 35.9µg/m<sup>3</sup>. However, this site registered levels above 60µg/m<sup>3</sup> for all nine months recorded, with one month at 91.4µg/m<sup>3</sup>, which at more than double the legal limit, was the highest level recorded by CCC across all sites.<sup>10</sup> It is clearly a mistake to state this site is within the legal limits.<sup>11</sup>

Residents are concerned that Canterbury's clean air crisis will be worsened by the impact of numerous planning applications for new development within the district. But CCC's draft 'Air Quality Action Plan' does not address these fundamental concerns. Nor does it seek to introduce the proper and comprehensive monitoring of PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> which is so desperately needed to better protect residents from this harmful, potentially fatal, pollution. I visited Kent University in Canterbury in

- 3 Canterbury City Council, 2017 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), Bureau Veritas, June 2017.
- 4 Kent County Council - Kent Public Health Observatory, CANTERBURY & COASTAL CCG Analysis of Deprived Areas In the most deprived decile for Kent, January 2016. [https://www.kpho.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/58830/C2C-Profile.pdf](https://www.kpho.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/58830/C2C-Profile.pdf)
- 5 Canterbury City Council, Draft Canterbury Air Quality Action Plan for consultation April 2018. <http://democracy.canterbury.gov.uk/documents/s95798/Draft%20AQAP%202018%20-%202023%20Appendix%203%20to%20the%20report%20for%20P%20and%20R%20Committee%2018%20April%20Final%20Agenda.pdf>
- 6 Although PM<sub>10</sub> is only measured in one location.
- 7 Public Health England, Estimating local mortality burdens associated with particulate air pollution, 10 April 2014. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332854/PHE\\_CRCE\\_010.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332854/PHE_CRCE_010.pdf)
- 8 Canterbury City Council, 2017 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), Bureau Veritas, June 2017.
- 9 Canterbury City Council, 2017 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), Bureau Veritas, June 2017.
- 10 In addition, three months were above 70µg/m<sup>3</sup> and, two months above 80µg/m<sup>3</sup>
- 11 Canterbury City Council, 2017 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), Bureau Veritas, June 2017.
- 12 Canterbury Clean Air, About Us. <https://www.canterburycleanair.org/about/>
- 13 Maidstone Borough Council, 2016 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), January 2017. [http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV\\_ASR\\_Maidstone\\_England\\_2016\\_v4\\_Final\\_final.pdf](http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV_ASR_Maidstone_England_2016_v4_Final_final.pdf)
- 14 Maidstone Borough Council, Authority Monitoring Report July 2016. [http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/131857/Annual-Monitoring-Report-2016-July-2016.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/131857/Annual-Monitoring-Report-2016-July-2016.pdf)
- 15 Public Health England, Estimating local mortality burdens associated with particulate air pollution, 10 April 2014. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332854/PHE\\_CRCE\\_010.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332854/PHE_CRCE_010.pdf)
- 16 Maidstone Borough Council, 2016 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), January 2017. [http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV\\_ASR\\_Maidstone\\_England\\_2016\\_v4\\_Final\\_final.pdf](http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV_ASR_Maidstone_England_2016_v4_Final_final.pdf)
- 17 2015 data reported on in Jan 2017 as the 2016 report.
- 18 Maidstone Borough Council, 2016 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), January 2017. [http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV\\_ASR\\_Maidstone\\_England\\_2016\\_v4\\_Final\\_final.pdf](http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV_ASR_Maidstone_England_2016_v4_Final_final.pdf)
- 19 Maidstone Borough Council, 2016 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), January 2017. [http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV\\_ASR\\_Maidstone\\_England\\_2016\\_v4\\_Final\\_final.pdf](http://www.kentair.org.uk/Pagesfiles/BV_ASR_Maidstone_England_2016_v4_Final_final.pdf)

2017 to see the monitoring research taking place there, but the Council needs to do more itself.

Local campaigners have brought court cases against the Government and CCC to compel action on air pollution. Canterbury District Green Party has been involved in several campaigns to improve the dire situation, including Canterbury Clean Air, which is a community action group working on:

- **Creation of new datasets for regulated pollutants**
- **Community engagement and education**
- **Engagement with local authorities and private businesses**
- **Direct action<sup>12</sup>**

## MAIDSTONE

### Standing on the River Medway, Maidstone is Kent's county town and the wider Borough is home to 150,000 people.

Road traffic is the primary source of air pollution in the Borough. In 2008, Maidstone urban area and M20 corridor was declared an AQMA.<sup>13</sup> High Street ward is home to the three most polluted sites in Maidstone and is also in Kent's 10% most deprived areas.<sup>14</sup> NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> are measured in Maidstone. However, 75 premature deaths of Maidstone's over 25s are attributed to PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution a year, with 769 associated life years lost.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) does not currently monitor PM<sub>2.5</sub>.<sup>16</sup>

MBC's latest available data<sup>17</sup> reports that NO<sub>2</sub> was monitored at 59 sites in 2015. PM<sub>10</sub> was monitored at two sites. Five sites (or 8%) exceed the annual NO<sub>2</sub> legal limits of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup>. An additional seven sites saw 'borderline exceedances' of over 36µg/m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE AREAS OF MAIDSTONE EXPERIENCING THE WORST AIR POLLUTION

Site	Annual mean (NO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Over safe/legal limit	Highest monthly recording (NO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Over safe/legal limit
Upper Stone Street (Nos. 4-6)	71.4 (77.6)*	179% (194%)*	108.1	270%
The Pilot PH (Upper Stone Street)	71.5	179%	115.9	290%
Upper Stone Street (Opp 81-83)	94.8 (99.2)*	237% (248%)*	169.5 <sup>†</sup>	424%

*\*Two figures are stated for this site in the report. It is not clear which the correct one is, so both appear here. <sup>†</sup>This was the highest monthly level recorded at any site in Maidstone.*

As well as the severity of the exceedances, the lack of available data, errors and MBC's 'conservative' adjustment methodology are also worrying. For example, Upper Stone Street, the worst site on record, where just 33.3% of data (or 4 months) was recorded, saw 75% of recorded levels well over 100µg/m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>19</sup>

Air quality needs urgent attention in Maidstone, and this must include PM pollution too. MBC need to take decisive steps to monitor and better understand the impacts for residents.

Maidstone Green Party is calling for MBC to halt 'improvements' to the ring road system, which will actually increase traffic. Instead they are urging action to:

- **Reduce the amount of petrol and diesel powered vehicle journeys made in Maidstone**
- **Prioritise travel by foot and bicycle over cars**
- **Significantly improve public transport**



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