

# Low Emission Strategies Partnership Response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Inquiry into Air Quality

(11 December 2009)

## Summary

- To date, air quality policy in the UK has focused too heavily on monitoring, review and assessment, with limited requirements for action to reduce emissions.
- We recommend that the Government:
  - revises the air quality policy framework in order to drive action on emission reductions; and
  - recognises the opportunities provided by the adoption of Low Emission Strategies.

## **1** Introduction

### The Low Emission Strategies Partnership

- 1.1 The Low Emission Strategies (LES) Partnership welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into Air Quality.
- 1.2 The LES Partnership ([www.lowemissionstrategies.org](http://www.lowemissionstrategies.org)) was established in 2007 to disseminate good practice in reducing transport emissions of toxic air pollutants and greenhouse gases. The Partnership specifically seeks to accelerate the deployment and penetration of low emission transport fuels and technologies. This is achieved by supporting local authorities to adopt and implement low emission policies, strategies and measures.
- 1.3 Phase I of the programme established 18 'peer group' projects across 15 local authorities, providing expert advice and sharing best practice. The Partnership also produced a guidance document 'Low Emission Strategies: Using the planning system to reduce transport emissions'. An updated draft of this document has progressed to the final stages of approval with a view to publishing it on the Defra website as a joint Defra and LES Partnership guidance report. Funding has been secured for Phase II, which will run from November 2009 to March 2011, building on progress made during the first phase.
- 1.4 The Partnership Board includes representatives from London Borough of Greenwich, London Borough of Hillingdon, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council, Mid-Devon District Council, Leeds City Council and Cenex (Centre of Excellence for Low Carbon and Fuel Cell Technologies).

### Low Emission Strategies

- 1.5 As defined by the Partnership, a *Low Emission Strategy* provides a package of measures to help mitigate the transport impacts of development. The primary aim is to reduce transport emissions by accelerating the uptake of low emission fuels and technologies in and around a development site. In this way, Low Emission Strategies can exploit opportunities presented to catalyse innovation and enable market transformation. Low emission strategies may address both the construction and operational phases of a development. They can also complement other design and mitigation options, such as travel planning and the provision of public transport infrastructure.
- 1.6 Strategies may be secured through a combination of planning conditions and legal obligations (section 106 agreements). They may incorporate policy measures and/or require financial contributions to the delivery of low emission transport projects and plans. For example, typical operational phase measures include emission based parking policies, investment in low emission

infrastructure, fleet emission improvement, low emission procurement and supply chain initiatives and contributions to local transport projects and strategic monitoring.

- 1.7 In reducing transport emissions, low emission strategies improve local air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with climate change. They also contribute to local government performance targets, provide local economic benefits, help to streamline planning decisions and contribute to wider sustainable development goals.

## **2 Factual information**

- 2.1 In June 2008, the LES Partnership published a Consultation Draft of Good Practice Guidance, *Low Emission Strategies: Using the planning system to reduce transport emissions*<sup>1</sup>. An updated draft of this document has progressed to the final stages of approval with a view to publishing it on the Defra website as a joint Defra and LES Partnership guidance report. This guidance includes an annex with details of practical examples of Low Emission Strategies adopted by local authorities in order to reduce transport emissions at development sites.

## **3 Recommendations for action**

- 3.1 Improvements in air quality require a co-ordinated approach at local, national and international levels. The LES Partnership is primarily concerned with action at a local authority level.
- 3.2 The principal weakness in the approach to air quality over recent years has been an over-emphasis on monitoring and assessment, to the detriment of concerted action on the ground. This is a result of a policy framework that is process driven and emphasises review and assessment, with limited regard for implementation. In particular, the requirement for local authorities to merely 'work towards' compliance with the Air Quality Objectives is ineffectual. The difficulty in resolving this issue is that compliance is not simply related to local authority action, but is also affected by regional and national factors. Furthermore, research into health impacts has identified potential adverse effects even below the levels set by the Air Quality Objectives.
- 3.3 Nevertheless, Local Air Quality Management has been successful in developing a large body of evidence on air quality in the UK. We have a good understanding of the actions that are possible, and an increasing understanding of their likely costs and benefits. We now need strong drivers for action and strong mechanisms for delivery.
- 3.4 The LES Partnership was established in response to these concerns, and we prescribe to the following approach:
- a) pursuit of cost effective emission reductions, wherever they can be achieved;
  - b) use of robust, quantitative assessment to support decision making;
  - c) recognition of the links between air quality and climate change, and the importance of pursuing win-wins and actively managing trade-offs; and
  - d) recognition of opportunities to reduce emissions through the planning system, by the implementation of low emission strategies.
- 3.5 The LES Partnership therefore recommends that the Government:
- i. revises the air quality policy framework in order to drive action on emission reductions; and
  - ii. recognises the opportunities provided by the adoption of Low Emission Strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.lowemissionstrategies.org/downloads/LES\\_Consultation\\_Draft.pdf](http://www.lowemissionstrategies.org/downloads/LES_Consultation_Draft.pdf)