

Case Study 2. Gaining political and high level buy-in for LES activity

Summary

Delivering local authority action on Low Emission Strategies (LES) requires gaining the support of senior staff and Members. The cross departmental nature of LES work (often involving environmental health, planning and transport) also means that officers working on LES need to build relationships with colleagues and often put forward persuasive arguments for joint working.

The Peer Project authorities have used a mixture of carrot and stick arguments to justify LES action: highlighting benefits across policy development, Council performance and local community, whilst setting out key policy and legislative drivers. They have used a number of mechanisms for influencing senior colleagues and Members, including use of outside expert help and hosting national seminars.

This case study sets out to capture some of the methods, mechanisms and justification used by LES projects to gain Member and high level buy-in.

1. Background

Delivering local authority action on Low Emission Strategies (LES) requires gaining the support of senior staff and Members. The cross departmental nature of LES work (often involving environmental health, planning and transport) also means that officers working on LES need to build relationships with colleagues and often put forward persuasive arguments for joint working.

However, this interdisciplinary nature of LES work contributes to its persuasive case, especially for Members.

2. LES actions and outcomes

Gaining senior officer and member support has been built around a typical 'carrot and stick' approach which can be summarized as:

- Awareness raising about LES;
- Promoting the **benefits** of LES;
- Highlighting the **policy and legislative drivers** for doing the work.

Awareness raising – what is an LES?



Low emission strategies (LES) provide a set of measures to help mitigate the impacts of travel and vehicle use in development. LES also aim to accelerate the uptake of low emission fuels and technologies in and around the development site. LES compliment other mitigation options, such as travel planning and the provision of public transport infrastructure. Strategies are secured through a combination of planning conditions and legal obligations. They may incorporate policy measures and/or require financial investments in and contributions to the delivery of low emission transport projects, including strategic monitoring and assessment activities.

Low emission strategies enable a variety of measures to be assembled, which work together to reduce transport emissions. LES may address both construction and operational phases of a development. Typical operational phase measures include parking policy, investment in low emission infrastructure, fleet emission improvement's, emission based tolling, procurement and supply chain initiatives and contributions to local transport projects and monitoring. A practical approach for mitigating the cumulative impacts of transport emissions from development is to require contributions to a central low emission fund. The fund may be used to support a variety of local projects as well as for assisting the implementation of air quality action plans, climate change action plans and local transport plans.

The benefits of LES¹

The following list summarises some of the benefit arguments that have been used to gain Senior Officer and Member support for LES projects.

Developing better and more joined up policy

- **The Climate Change Imperative:** Climate change is one of the greatest long-term challenges facing the world today. In addition air pollution causes major damage to our health and the environment in general. Joined up policies are particularly important for the transport sector, which is by far the most common cause of air pollution and for the declaration of air quality management areas. Transport currently remains the only sector where carbon dioxide emissions continue to increase. There is an urgent need for continued action; and spatial planning has a pivotal role in helping to secure enduring progress against the UK's pollution/emission targets;
- **Reducing emissions:** The main benefit of low emission strategies is to accelerate the uptake of low emission fuels and technologies in and around a new development, thereby complementing other design and mitigation options, such as travel planning and the provision of public transport infrastructure (note: since vehicles may travel considerable distances, these benefits will also be felt beyond the immediate vicinity of the development);

¹ Greenwich Council are currently researching the benefits of LES.

- **Developing better and more joined up local policy:** LES focuses on emissions and enables a joined up approach to tackling air quality and climate change. There is considerable scope to join up with other Council policies, such as waste, in terms of using landfill biomethane gas as a vehicle fuel. As Andrew Whittles from Cenex commented:

'Every local authority that I speak to is using LES as an opportunity to make links between different priorities, particularly between air quality and climate change. These priorities have become pertinent for everyone and the programme makes it look and feel feasible to address them in an integrated way';

Improving Council performance

- **Provision of a funding pot for implementation:** A practical approach for mitigating the cumulative impacts of transport emissions from development is to require standardised contributions from all developments over a certain threshold. Contributions secured in this way are most usefully allocated to a general low emission strategy fund, which is used to reduce transport emissions in the local area. The fund may be used to support a variety of local plans and projects (for example see measures referred to by Wandsworth Council, below) as well as for assisting the implementation of air quality action plans, climate change action plans, local transport plans, strategic monitoring/ assessment activities and relevant enforcement/ compliance work. Projects may support, for example, enhancements to the emissions performance of the local authority's own fleet;

Low emission strategy fund – examples of target measures

Measure	Operational phase measures
Construction phase	e.g. refer to the London Code
On-site parking	Graduated price parking permit schemes (e.g. graduation based on VED emission bands/ Euro standards)
	Residential parking space set aside (e.g. for car clubs and/or low emission vehicles)
	Customer parking allocation for low emission vehicles (e.g. supermarkets)
Low emission infrastructure	Provision of electric charging bays or low emission fuelling points
	Car clubs – development and promotion (including provision of low emission vehicles and electric charging bays)
	Public transport fleet improvements
Fleet emission improvement	Fleet improvement agreements
Emission-based differential tolling	Toll rates based on emission performance of vehicles
Innovative ideas	Creative and opportunistic measures, for example:

	Low emission travel incentives via store loyalty card Local ESCO addressing transport issues Inter authority partnership
Procurement and supply chains	Forward commitment procurement Use of procurement potential to help accelerate market entry for low emission technologies

- **Contributing to National Indicators (NIs):** Low emission strategies may also contribute towards local authority performance indicators and targets for climate change mitigation and air quality (i.e. NI 185, 186 and 194);
- **Streamline planning decisions:** For air quality, the relevant statutory thresholds are the air quality objectives set out in the national air quality strategy. Impact modelling is expensive, complex and beset with uncertainties. Results are heavily confounded by meteorology and pollution backgrounds. It is rare for the air quality impacts of a single development to be considered significant. This is not to say that such developments are non-polluting or non-detrimental to health; rather that the assessment methodology is too crude for its intended purpose and fails to give adequate consideration to cumulative effects. For carbon dioxide, the emphasis is on emissions rather than concentrations. There is an established methodology, but no statutory threshold to provide a basis for assessment. Again, it is rare for the impacts to be considered significant and again, cumulative effects are often ignored. An attractive integrated solution is to assess both air quality and climate change on an emissions basis, and to require full mitigation from prospective developers. This move makes sense not only to improve the usefulness of the assessment, but also because it is known that all emissions of PM and NOx are harmful to public health and the environment;

Community benefits

- **Improving health:** Almost any development has potential to increase harmful transport emissions and/or increase human exposure to transport related air pollutants. As the Tunbridge Wells LES project Member briefing states:

'Air pollution can have a serious effect on people's health. Exposure to air pollution is associated in particular with premature mortality due to cardiopulmonary effects and high pollution episodes can also trigger increase admissions to hospital. Air pollution is currently estimated to reduce the life expectancy of every person in the UK by an average of 7-8 months, impacting particularly on children, the elderly and those in poor health. Air pollution also has a negative impact on our environment through effects on vegetation on water and soil';

- **Local economic benefits:** The approach has potential to provide local economic benefits. Agreements may be tailored to support the development of local low

emission supply chains (e.g. fuel and vehicle supply, local renewable energy resources, vehicle leasing/ maintenance services, battery recycling) and to take advantage more generally of the wider societal shift towards a low emission and low carbon economy.

Legislative and policy drivers

Recent planning policy guidance on climate change and air quality reinforces the importance of using the planning system effectively to manage the environmental impacts of new development, including the emission of air pollutants and greenhouse gasses. The main legislative and policy drivers are set out below. The fact that Defra are now championing the LES programme has been used by officers as a factor in persuading senior staff and members to action LES. In addition, government support for particular aspects of LES type work has also been helpful, e.g. support for low emission vehicles. Some important guidance documents for the statutory basis for LES work are:

- Planning Policy Statement 23 (PPS23): Planning and Pollution Control (2004);
- Planning Policy Guidance note 13 (PPG13): Transport (2001); and
- PPS1 Climate Change Supplement (2007);

PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

The PPS confirms that air quality in relation to new development is a material planning consideration and outlines the key role played by the planning system in avoiding or mitigating emissions (paragraph 2). **Appendix A** sets out various matters which should be taken into account when preparing a development plan. These include:

- The impact of potentially polluting development;
- The environmental benefits of development e.g. reducing the need to travel;
- Meeting regional or national air quality objectives;
- The need to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- Existing action and management plans e.g. AQMPs

Annex 1 of PPS23 explains the background to pollution control legislation and its interactions with the planning system. In particular, it provides useful guidance on the use of planning conditions and obligations (e.g. S.106). Key wording includes:

'Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should note that air quality can be an important consideration, whether or not the levels of air pollution in areas on which the proposed

development may impact due to dispersion or cumulative load are already high enough to justify the designation of an AQMA' (para 1.13);

'LPAs should take account of climate change considerations in their development plans ... in terms of mitigating the local conditions to climate change' (para 1.15); and

*'Properly used, S.106 Agreements can be used to improve air quality, make other environmental improvements before a development goes ahead or offset the subsequent environmental impact of a proposed development', including measures such as *'...limiting car parking, car-free developments, supporting public transport, walking and cycling routes/paths, ... air quality monitoring equipment'* (para 1.50).*

PPG 13: Transport (2001)

The PPG recognises that planning can help reduce the need to travel and promote more sustainable travel choices such as public transport, cycling and walking in order to reduce reliance on the car. Guidance is provided on the use of planning conditions and obligations.

PPS1 Climate Change Supplement (2007)

Sets out the role of the Planning system in tackling climate change. Plans should deliver patterns of urban growth and sustainable rural developments that help secure the fullest possible use of sustainable transport for moving freight, public transport, cycling and walking; and, which overall, reduce the need to travel, especially by car. The proposed provision for new development, its spatial distribution, location and design should be planned to limit carbon dioxide emissions.

Meeting EU targets

Peer Groups had found mixed success with using EU targets as a 'stick'. Sheffield considered that Defra's impetus (highlighting that UK was not meeting EU AQ targets) was important in terms of influencing senior staff and members. However, Maidstone had little success when citing our predicted failure to meet national/EU targets. The Tunbridge Wells Member briefing on LES states that:

'... the UK is projected to miss the objectives for three of the nine pollutants used to measure air quality. These include nitrogen dioxide, particles and ozone. The European Commission has just launched legal proceedings against the UK for failing to meet EU air quality targets for PM10. Similarly, there are issues surrounding NO2 that are being considered'.

3. Lessons learned

Successful methods and tools

Successful methods used to gain buy-in include:

- Committee Papers (e.g. Wandsworth) and Member briefings (e.g. Tunbridge Wells);
- Hosting events, seminars, conferences;
- Making presentations;
- Promoting inter-departmental cross working (meetings, steering groups etc). Sefton's use of brainstorming session with planners, helped to crystallise their project objectives with senior staff;
- Publicity. Greenwich have maximised political zeal for 'green' issues and the desire to be seen as a leader in the field. Low emission vehicles, for example, can be emblazoned with the council logo and used for Member publicity;
- Use of external experts e.g. Tunbridge Wells hosted a meeting of planners and environmental health staff in September 2007 to discuss the way forward for local authorities in Kent and Medway in relation to air quality and planning obligations. The Head of Planning and the Environmental Protection Manager from the London Borough of Greenwich attended to present 'Planning for Air Quality'. Sheffield invited senior Defra person to their AQ summit to speak about the role of planning in delivering LES. Use of 'outside experts' is one way of attracting senior colleagues to discussions;
- Use of templates – making it easy to understand. Leeds City Council developed a simple flowchart on 'initiatives to improve air quality'.

Other success factors

- LES offers an opportunity for joined up policy – bringing together air quality, health, planning, transport, sustainability and climate change. One of its selling points is to produce or contribute to a cohesive corporate approach;
- One of the key selling points for Wandsworth was improved communication with developers: it was clear what would be expected of them in terms of S.106 requirements;
- Ability to have a degree of flexibility about the project, rather than one size fits all. Enables colleagues to help shape the LES project into best vehicle for delivering Member priorities;

- Be persistent: keep trying to get the message across – *'eventually the opportunity will arise and it will be taken up'*.

Barriers/ challenges

- Lack of in house resources;
- Members' perception that LES represents another constraint on development which might mean developers going elsewhere. However, if LES can be argued as best practice and that the 'big developers are doing it anyway' then this will help. This was not seen as a barrier in all Peer Group Projects: some felt that their 'desirability' in terms of a development location overrode such concerns;
- Delivery. One authority felt that senior officer support would not be forthcoming until the programme/ project started to deliver results;
- A degree of resistance to a new agenda, and the feeling that it could be accommodated via existing mechanisms (or could be with slight revisions)? A clear understanding of planning mechanisms can assist in this respect.

Note

LACORS are planning to develop a set of templates and tools intended to assist local authority officers in making the case for LES initiatives.

For more information: contact:

Steven Donaghy, Wandsworth Council 020 88717874 sdonaghy@wandsworth.gov.uk
(Committee Paper for LES SPD)

Dave Cherry, Leeds City Council dave.cherry@leeds.gov.uk (template/ flowchart)

Karin Gray, Tunbridge Wells 01892 554240 karin.grey@tunbridgewells.gov.uk (Member Briefing)

LACORS: Cassandra.Harrison@lacors.gov.uk