

Cabinet

13 January 2026

Revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham Air Quality Management Areas

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alex Paterson, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement

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Summary

The purpose of the report is to gain approval from the Cabinet to revoke the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street Rainham Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) to satisfy the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and the accompanying statutory guidance.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Cabinet is recommended to approve revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham Air Quality Management Areas.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

2.1. To satisfy the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and the accompanying statutory guidance.

3. Budget and policy framework

3.1. The ongoing work of the Environmental Protection Team under the statutory local air quality management framework directly supports the delivery of the One Medway Council Plan 2024 strategic priorities, notably:

- Priority 3 Enjoying clean, green, safe, and connected communities.
- Priority 4 Improving health and wellbeing for all.

3.2. This work also supports and complements the Climate Change Action Plan in many areas, and there are expected co-benefits for public health and the environment from the monitored improvements in air quality across Medway .

3.3. Revocation of the AQMAs due to compliance with the air quality objectives is a positive step forward for progressing priorities 3 and 4 of the One Medway Council Plan 2024.

4. Background

4.1. Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts. It is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer. Additionally, air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children and older people, and those with heart and lung conditions. There is also often a strong correlation with equalities issues because areas with poor air quality are also often more deprived.

4.2. The annual health cost to society of the impacts of particulate matter pollution alone in the UK have been estimated to be around £16 billion.

4.3. All local authorities must regularly review and assess the air quality within their area for key pollutants, comparing their findings against the relevant air quality objectives (AQO).

4.4. If the air quality objectives are not achieved the local authority is required to declare an AQMA and then develop and implement an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), which sets out the actions that will be taken to improve air quality in the AQMA.

4.5. In 2010 Medway Council designated three AQMAs due to annual mean concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) exceeding the air quality objective. Having identified and designated the AQMAs the Council produced an AQAP that detailed the steps to be taken to reduce NO₂ to below the objective levels. The action plan was approved by Cabinet in December 2015. In line with the local air quality management framework requirements the 2015 AQAP has been revised to reflect the current state of air quality in Medway and was approved by the Cabinet for adoption in July 2025. Some key successes delivered under the 2015 AQAP include:

- Introduction of the Medway Air Quality Planning Guidance in 2016. This has helped control the air quality impacts of development across Medway and ensure that mitigation has been included as standard.
- The ongoing work of the Sustainable Transport team and Public Health to promote more active lifestyles and cleaner transport choices.
- Completing the Rainham Idling Project which is now being used to support the community lead Medway Breathes Project.
- Completing the Taxi and Private Hire Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Feasibility Study to help inform future licensing policies and support the transition to zero emission vehicles.
- Introduction of the street works permit system to better manage and control the impact on the highway network.

Whilst it is not possible to quantify the air quality benefit these actions have had, or will have in the future, there will be benefits where reductions in road

transport emissions are achieved, or where there are lower levels of exposure.

- 4.6. Since declaration of the 2010 AQMAs, monitored concentrations of NO₂ have reduced significantly in the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street Rainham AQMAs and are now well below the air quality objective level such that revocation of the AQMAs is now required. Tables 1 and 2 below show the monitored annual mean concentrations in the two AQMAs from 2020 to 2024 compared to the annual mean objective of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre (µg/m³).

Table 1 monitored annual mean NO₂ concentrations in the Pier Road, Gillingham AQMA 2020 to 2024

Monitoring site	NO ₂ annual mean air quality objective (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2020 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2021 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2022 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2023 (µg/m ³)	Annual Mean NO ₂ 2024 (µg/m ³)
DT25 Lamp post PAS23 adjacent 2A Pier Road	40	29.1	27.9	29.7	26.4	25.3
DT26 Lamp post PAS512 adjacent 24 Pier Road	40	19.0	20.5	19.9	17.5	18.5
DT27 Lamp post PAS22 adjacent Liberty Quays, Pier Road	40	26.6	31.4	27.3	26.9	23.7

Table 2 monitored annual mean NO₂ concentrations in the High Street, Rainham AQMA 2020 to 2024

Monitoring site	NO ₂ annual mean air quality objective (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2020 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2021 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2022 (µg/m ³)	Annual mean NO ₂ 2023 (µg/m ³)	Annual Mean NO ₂ 2024 (µg/m ³)
DT01 60 High Street, Rainham	40	30.5	32.6	34.9	31.3	28.8
DT15 Lamp post adjacent White Horse pub, 95 High Street, Rainham	40	25.3	29.2	30.2	27.3	23.5
DT16 Care home, 117 High Street, Rainham	40	18.6	21.5	20.6	19.5	16.8

- 4.7. The data in Table 1 and Table 2 reflects the general trend seen over the past five years of decreasing NO₂ concentrations across all non-automatic monitoring sites in the Medway AQMAs. This is thought to be largely a result of tighter emissions standards reducing emissions of the vehicle fleets passing through the AQMAs. Figures 1 and 2 show a graphical representation of the 5 year trends in the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs.

Figure 1 Trends in annual mean NO₂ concentrations – Pier Road, Gillingham AQMA

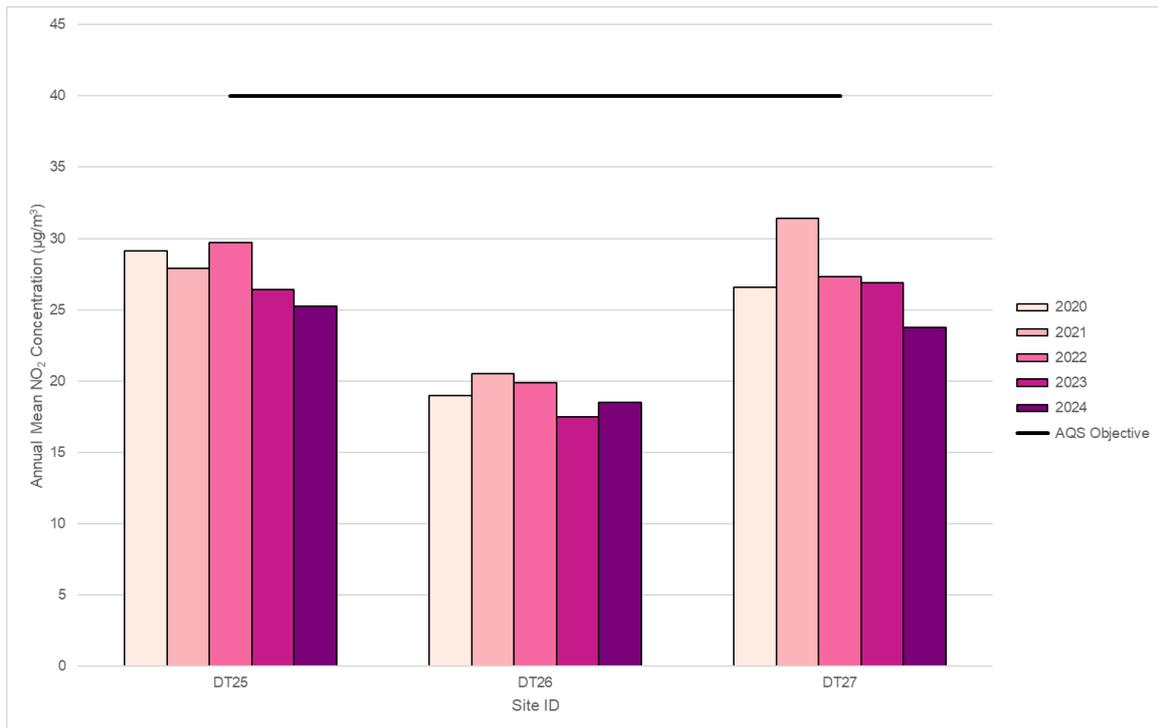
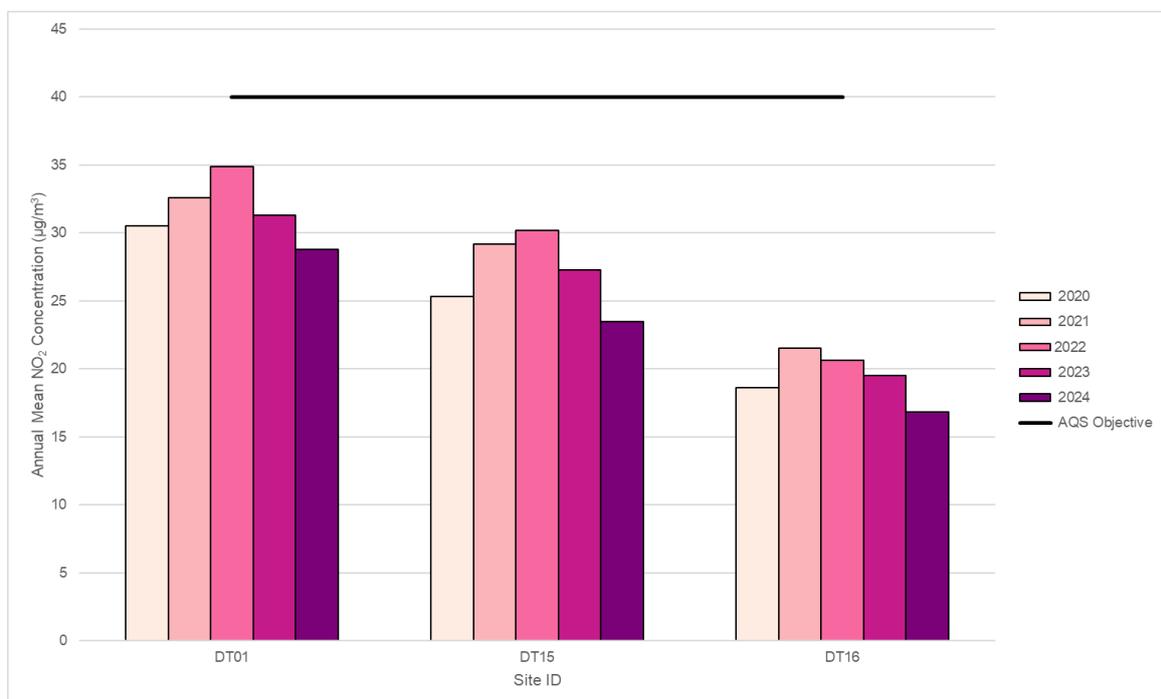


Figure 2 Trends in annual mean NO₂ concentrations – High Street, Rainham AQMA



4.8. As can be seen, monitoring sites within the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs have consistently recorded concentrations below the

NO₂ annual mean air quality objective. 2024 marked the sixth consecutive year of compliance with the AQO within both AQMAs.

- 4.9. The revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance with the relevant AQO as evidenced through monitoring. Where there have been no exceedances for the past five years, local authorities must proceed with plans to revoke the AQMA. The statutory technical guidance, LAQM.TG22, is clear in this respect:

“There should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period.”
(Point 3.61, page 53).

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will expect an update on revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs to be provided in the next ASR, due for submission in June 2026.

- 4.10. AQMAs should identify areas where the air quality objectives are not being met or are likely to be at risk of not being met. Keeping AQMAs in place longer than required is contrary to the statutory guidance, dilutes their meaning and can impact public trust in the local air quality management framework.
- 4.11. It is important to note that although the AQMAs would be revoked, the Environmental Protection Team will continue to ensure that air quality remains an important priority in the areas concerned, for example by:
- Retaining the long-term air quality monitoring sites.
 - Continued reporting of monitoring data to DEFRA through Annual Status Report submission.
 - Scrutinising planning applications that could impact air quality.
 - Implementing the Medway Air Quality Planning Guidance.
- 4.12. Following revocation, Medway will no longer be required to have an AQAP for the AQMAs, and once all four Medway AQMAs have been revoked, Medway will only be required to have an overarching Air Quality Strategy. It is expected that the measures contained in the recently adopted Medway Air Quality Action Plan 2025-2030 would be transferred into the Strategy where appropriate. This, combined with the actions in 4.11 above would help to ensure that air quality remains a high priority, and thereby enable a quick response should there be a deterioration in air quality.

5. Options

- 5.1. Two options are available:

Option 1: the Cabinet approves revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs to satisfy the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and accompanying statutory guidance.

- Option 2: the Cabinet does not approve revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs to satisfy the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and accompanying statutory guidance.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Medway has a positive record with DEFRA in relation to its ongoing air quality management duties. There are implications for not maintaining a positive record of meeting our local air quality management duties which was introduced as a criterion for being able to apply for funding for air quality projects through the DEFRA air quality grant program.
- 6.2. Monitoring within the Rainham and Pier Road AQMAs has shown compliance with the AQOs for several years, and therefore revocation of these AQMAs is now required. The current AQAP will still be of direct relevance to the Central Medway AQMA, until sustained compliance is achieved. At this point, any outstanding or ongoing measures within the AQAP can be incorporated within a local Air Quality Strategy. Local authorities that do not have an AQMA should continue to monitor for exceedances and should still have a local Air Quality Strategy in place to ensure air quality remains a high-profile issue, thereby enabling a quick response should there be any deterioration in air quality.
- 6.3. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has not been completed as it is not anticipated that revocation of the two AQMAs will have a disproportionate impact on people with a protected characteristic. The reductions in nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the AQMAs can be associated with positive public health benefits, particularly for at risk groups, including young children, the elderly and individuals with pre-existing health conditions which make them vulnerable to poor air quality.
- 6.4. The Cabinet is therefore asked to approve revocation of the Pier Road, Gillingham and High Street, Rainham AQMAs to satisfy the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and accompanying statutory guidance.

7. Risk management

- 7.1. Two risks have been identified with the proposed revocation of the two AQMAs as set out in the table below. In the event the Secretary of State exercises its powers to issue a direction to revoke the AQMAs, Medway risks significant reputational damage and could lose its positive record under the local air quality management framework. Medway would become ineligible to apply for future grant funding via the DEFRA air quality grant scheme. AQAPs are given higher priority for funding under the scheme. Whilst this is a theoretical risk, as there are no examples of this type of direction being issued under the local air quality management framework, it is a risk that can be easily avoided.
- 7.2. Revocation of the AQMAs could also reduce the priority given to air quality in the areas concerned, and lead to a deterioration in air quality. This could

potentially lead to re-declaration of the AQMAs in future years. However, this is considered unlikely given that the monitored concentrations are well below the objective level in both AQMAs, with further improvements expected due to further reductions in vehicle fleet emissions in coming years. The actions set out in paragraph 4.11 above would provide suitable risk mitigation to ensure that air pollution continues to be a priority.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
In delaying revocation of the AQMAs the SoS could direct Medway to meet its statutory duties and revoke the AQMA.	It is a duty for the local authority to comply with any direction given to it in relation to the provisions of the Environment Act 1995. Directions are made publicly available and so could cause significant reputational damage. Medway would also be unable to apply for future funding for air quality projects through the air quality grant programme. The grant programme can be used to deliver measures in an AQAP.	The cabinet approve s revocation of the AQMAs	C2
Revocation of the AQMAs leads to a worsening of air quality in the AQMAs and subsequent re-declaration	Revocation of the AQMAs could lead to a deterioration in air quality as focus shifts to the remaining AQMAs.	This will be mitigated through the actions detailed in 4.11 above	C2

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. The process for revoking an AQMA under the local air quality management framework is administered via DEFRA's local air quality management portal. No guidance is provided on the administrative and governance processes for

this within local authorities. Advice received from the Legal department is that revocations need to be reported to and approved by the Cabinet.

8.2. No consultation is required for AQMA revocation under the LAQM guidance, however full details are required to be submitted via the local air quality management portal to formalise the revocations.

9. Climate change implications

9.1. There are no expected climate change implications.

10. Financial implications

10.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report, all activity is met from existing revenue budgets.

11. Legal implications

11.1. The recommendation to revoke the AQMAs for Pier Road and High Street, Rainham complies with the statutory framework for these orders and meets the regulatory expectations of DEFRA. The move from an AQAP to an Air Quality Strategy allows the Council to positively influence air quality within the Medway area.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

[Environment Act 1995](#)

[Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance LAQM.TG22](#)

[One Medway Council Plan 2024](#)