

NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL AIR QUALITY PLAN

UNAPPROVED OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

APPENDIX 23 - Communications and Engagement
Strategy



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1 Background

In parts of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, traffic-related pollution is above legal limits. Along with a number of other towns and cities in the UK, the Councils were highlighted by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) as local authorities where the UK's national air quality assessment has identified road links that are currently exceeding the annual mean nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) limit value, with exceedances predicted to continue in 2021, if left unabated.

In October 2019, Stoke-on-Trent City Council (SoTCC) and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (NuLBC) received Ministerial Direction to “*develop and implement local plans to reduce pollution to compliant levels in the shortest time possible*” and by a specific target date which is set as the start of 2022.

This means identifying a viable option that will, within these timeframes, ensure that annual average NO₂ concentrations on all local road links in the study area are 40µg/m³ or less.

Following this direction, the Councils began work on developing the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan to meet NO₂ limit values and secure local public health benefits.

Subsequent work on options development and appraisal led to the identification of a potential Preferred Option which would most effectively achieve the primary aim of achieving compliance in the shortest time possible.

This option was then compared against a benchmark Clean Air Zone (CAZ) D for its ability to achieve the primary aim. Details of the two options are summarised below.

- **Benchmark CAZ D** – an area that encompasses the three exceedance sites and within which non-compliant motor vehicles would be charged a daily fee (enforced through a network of ANPR cameras and a turnkey back-office system) for driving into or within the CAZ area.
- **Preferred Option** – an enhanced traffic management option, comprising a series of measures to restrict traffic on the A53 Etruria Road and Victoria Road, with peak period bus gates, some traffic management at nearby junctions and to restrict through traffic on nearby residential streets, and the expansion of an existing programme of bus retrofit to reduce harmful emissions from bus exhausts.

Details of the work to test the Preferred Option is explained within the OBC.

Defra guidance states; ‘*Clean Air Zones should involve engaging and informing the community to ensure they understand the importance of good air quality, the choices available to them, the impacts they make and how these contribute to a successful zone.*’¹

In line with best practice guidance, the Councils recognised the need to engage and inform the public and key stakeholder groups of the Councils’ plans to move forward with developing

¹ Defra, DfT, Clean Air Zone Framework: Principles for setting up Clean Air Zones in England, (2020). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/863730/clean-air-zone-framework-feb2020.pdf

options to address air quality exceedances in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region.

As such, the Councils contracted Sweco, in partnership with Ricardo Energy & Environment, to undertake a communications and engagement strategy to gather feedback for and about the Councils' Local Air Quality Plan. This is in addition to gathering stakeholder intelligence on public attitudes and behaviours towards air quality, to help inform and shape development of the Councils' future plans.

Details of the communication strategy for the Councils' Air Quality Plan are detailed below.

The work undertaken for the Councils by Sweco and Ricardo Energy & Environment, is being supported by the communication strategy sub-contractors M·E·L Research and Global Action Plan (GAP). M·E·L Research is an independent social research company responsible for the build and analysis of the Councils' stakeholder engagement survey. GAP is a sustainability charity, serving as lead delivery partner for press and media engagement regarding promotion of the Councils' survey and stakeholder engagement events.

2 Communications plan rationale

The aim of the Plan is to engage stakeholders, raise awareness and understanding of the NSLAQP and to minimise impacts of the scheme. Key objectives include:

- Delivering coordinated communications across the different authority areas to keep stakeholders informed and updated
- Promoting key health messages and the health reasoning for improving air quality
- Ensuring appropriate levels of engagement and consultation take place

The strategy to support the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) consists of 2 parts, adopting a phased approach to stakeholder engagement:

- **Phase 1: Understand stakeholder awareness, attitudes and perceptions about air quality and travel habits.**
 - Gathering insight on existing stakeholder awareness, understanding and perceptions of air quality helps to inform development of the communications plan for implementation, and shape the messaging used to target different audiences. It also contributes to the formation of an evidence base the Councils can utilise to support the NSLAQP.
 - Insight on stakeholder attitudes and opinions on air quality will be gathered via a phase 1 stakeholder engagement survey, supported by secondary research into existing stakeholder data held by the Councils.
- **Phase 2: Engage on the options to address air quality challenges in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.**
 - Following submission of the OBC, communications activities will focus on engaging stakeholders in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region on the options set out in the NSLAQP. Two consultation events are planned later in 2020.

- The stakeholder engagement events will be an opportunity for the Councils to understand how stakeholders feel about the chosen options, and what support and information different stakeholder groups will require to help them adapt to any change or disruptions caused by implementation of the options.

The intention behind this 2-phased approach is to gather valuable intelligence on how best to engage with different stakeholder groups and identify which parts of the Councils proposals will drive the most engagement with stakeholders, and which parts are likely to be more challenging to convey, either due the technical nature of them or because they are viewed negatively or as controversial by stakeholders.

Such insight provides the Councils with the benefit of early visibility regarding potential challenges/barriers to implementation further down-the-line and allows for time to plan accordingly.

In addition, gathering nuanced stakeholder intelligence on attitudes, behaviours and motivational drivers will help to create a more robust, data driven communications plan, that is effective in engaging key stakeholder groups and hopefully, encouraging a good level of stakeholder 'buy-in' for the NSLAQP.

3 Stakeholder identification

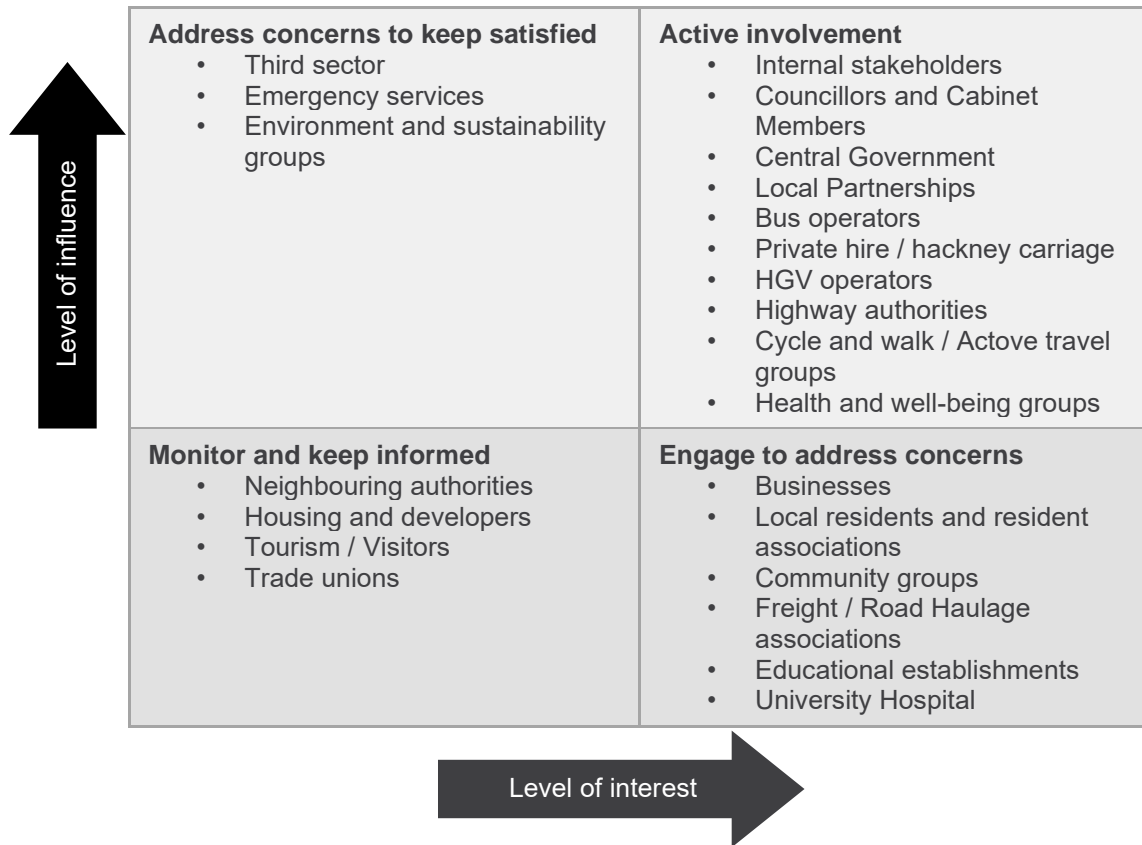
The approach to identifying stakeholders seeks to consider a range of questions:

- Who is directly impacted?
- Who is indirectly impacted?
- Who is potentially impacted?
- Whose help is needed?
- Who knows about the scheme?
- Who will have an interest in the scheme?

By considering these questions and using an interest-influence matrix, see Figure 3-1 below, the Councils are able to consider the impact the project will have on different stakeholders and the level of influence stakeholders have on its success.

The matrix helps to identify key stakeholder groups and suitable methods of communication.

Figure 3-1: Stakeholder matrix



The full list of stakeholders identified to date is set out below, however, as the project progresses, this list will be continuously reviewed and stakeholders will be identified and added as necessary.

- Business
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Federation of Small Businesses
 - Large employers
 - Local Enterprise Partnership
 - SMEs
- Community groups
 - Youth groups
 - Sports & recreation groups
 - Citizens advice
 - Age UK

- Education
 - Secondary schools and colleges
 - Parent teacher associations
- Environment
 - Client Earth
 - Campaign for better transport
 - Friends of the Earth
 - Living Streets
 - Sustrans
- Health & wellbeing
 - CCGs
 - Health professionals
 - University Hospital
 - Emergency services
- Housing & developers
 - Housing associations
 - Property developers
- Political
 - LA leaders
 - All councillors
 - Member of Parliament
- Third sector
 - British Heart Foundation
 - British Lung Foundation
- Transport
 - Bus and coach operators
 - Taxis / private hire
 - Freight
- Trade unions
 - Unison
 - Unite
- Internal officers

Phase 1 – Communication activities (Pre-OBC submission)

4 Overview of engagement

Although the Councils Preferred Option is that of a non-charging CAZ, the potentially controversial nature of the project meant that it is important for the phase 1 communication activities to a) create a case for why action on local air quality is important and b) open up a space in current public discourse to allow for a future dialogue on action to address local air quality.

4.1 Engagement aims and objectives

The purpose of the Councils' pre-OBC communication and engagement activities was to achieve the following:

- Gather feedback from the public and key stakeholder groups on existing awareness, attitudes and perceptions about air quality, the potential health impacts of poor air quality and preferred travel habits of locals and workers in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- Raise awareness of poor air quality as a priority area of concern for the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region
- Identify the variable factors (language, topics, motivations etc.) that may improve or impede the likelihood of different stakeholder groups to engage with communications messaging regarding implementation of the Council's Preferred Option.

4.2 Desired outcomes

The intention for the pre-OBC communications activities was to do the following:

- Gauge level of public understanding regarding the potential health impacts of poor air quality and identify where gaps in collective knowledge exist, to inform and shape the communications plan for implementation.
- Cultivate an atmosphere that supports more tolerant and measured dialogue regarding the Councils' Preferred Option and local implementation plans.
- Collate an evidence base regarding public and stakeholder views on whether air pollution is seen as an area of public concern in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and if there is evidence of collective public support for mitigation action to be taken locally.
- Understand and identify preferred channels and sources of information the public and stakeholders use to access information regarding air pollution, to inform future communications activities for implementation.

5 Early engagement with key stakeholders

During the OBC development process early engagement has taken place with key stakeholders to discuss and understand their attitudes towards the proposed scheme to help inform options and manage potential conflict. Specifically, meetings and discussions have been held with:

- Officers and Cabinet Members for SoTCC, NuLBC, and SCC

- Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU)
- Highways England
- Local Partnerships
- Department for Transport (DfT)
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Transport operators
- Ambulance service
- Road haulage association
- University Hospital

Engagement with these key groups will continue as the project progresses and further engagement with other groups that are affected is planned to take place after the OBC is finalised as described later in this document.

6 Stated Preference survey

To inform the development of the OBC it was identified that a programme of stated preference surveys would be required to help determine the local transport reactions and preferences to a charging CAZ. The surveys, across all vehicle types, were undertaken during September and early October 2019. These surveys involved direct engagement and dialogue with drivers, businesses, operators and associations to help understand the likely responses of local people to the introduction of a charging CAZ. To promote engagement and raise awareness, the survey was covered via the Councils' own news channels and in local media.

Whilst the key objective of the surveys was to gather data and views, the surveys also helped to raise local understanding and awareness of the need for action, the potential plans and the work being undertaken.

7 Stakeholder engagement survey

On 26 February 2020, the Councils launched a public stakeholder engagement survey, seeking views on local air quality from people living and working in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region.

The purpose of the survey was to find out how air quality affects people in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme and measure awareness, amongst stakeholder groups, of the simple actions that can be taken to help improve air quality. Feedback from the survey was intended to help the Councils better understand local opinion on air quality, how best to engage residents in the air quality conversation and help inform the Councils' thinking in regard to strategy development and action for local air quality and implementation.

Table 7-1: Survey summary

Service	Summary/activities
Launch date	26 February
Survey duration	10 weeks
Number of responses	459
Target stakeholder groups	Local residents, bus operators, taxi associations, emergency services, businesses, freight haulage representatives, active travel groups, chambers of commerce and other relevant bodies in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region
Promotional channels	Council websites, social/digital media channels, elected members, Locality Action Partnerships, relationships with parish and town Councils
Response targets	1,000 responses (minimum)

The survey ran for 10 weeks between 26 February until 30 April. Overall, the survey received 459 responses in total, which is lower than the Councils intended target to gather a minimum of 1,000 responses from residents, workers and local businesses in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region (see Table 7-1).

It should be noted that in the first 14 days of launch, the survey generated 408 responses. From week 3 of the survey being live, responses saw a marked decline. During the same time, the UK Government was ramping up measures to deal with the growing Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Noting less interest amongst media contacts to publish and/or promote content on the Stoke/Newcastle Air Quality Survey, the delivery partners for the communications strategy suspected growing national concerns over the virus may have significantly diminished public and stakeholder interest in the Councils' public stakeholder engagement survey on air quality.

On 1 April, the delivery partners advised Council leads that it was highly likely that Government measures introduced nationally to curb the spread of COVID-19 had likely had a detrimental impact on public responses to the survey. In addition, attempts to actively promote the survey to local trade press or raise awareness of the potential negative impacts of poor air quality to locals in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme – may not be well received by the public, posing a risk to the successful delivery of the entire communications strategy. There were concerns amongst the delivery team that active promotion of the survey may be viewed as insensitive at best, or at worse, offensive and would likely reflect badly on the Councils.

As such, it was agreed with the Council leads to leave the survey open to run for the duration of the scheduled 10-week period but halt active promotion of the survey, until the situation with COVID-19 is resolved. Given that the survey closed on 30 April, whilst the UK is still under

lockdown, the delivery partners have agreed with the Councils to re-run the survey later in 2020, at a more appropriate time.

A new date for re-launch is yet to be confirmed and will be determined once the Councils are confident that meaningful and effective engagement with stakeholders can be achieved.

At the time of finalising this report for inclusion with the unapproved OBC, the Government has made very minor modifications to the lockdown arrangements and it is unlikely the delivery partners will be able to resume survey promotion activities sooner than July 2020, at the earliest.

The timing of the re-launch could have implications on the nature and content of the survey, if it is re-launched after the OBC has been approved by the three Councils.

7.1 Promotion

To raise visibility of the stakeholder engagement survey and encourage widespread community and stakeholder participation in the region, all of the available communication channels for SoTCC, NuLBC and SCC were utilised during launch.

Promotional channels:

- Council websites: A link to the survey was hosted on all three Council websites.
 - To ensure the survey was accessible to all who wished to complete it – the option for paper copies of the survey with Freepost return envelopes was available upon request from local libraries, Citizens Advice offices and on request by email or telephone from M·E·L Research via the Councils transport teams.
- PR activity/Press engagement: A press release on the survey launch was circulated to local press in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region on Wednesday 26 February.
 - 24hours prior to launch of the press release, GAP engaged local newspapers, media outlets and online publications to generate anticipation ahead of the survey launch and encourage local coverage.
 - Within the first week of launch, coverage of the survey featured in several news outlets, shown in Table 7-2:

Table 7-2: PR activity/Press engagement summary

Medium	Date	Feature
TV Broadcast	26 February	26 February – Good Morning Britain (ITV), ‘news-in-brief’ feature ran in first two morning bulletins
Radio	9 March	9 March – Signal Radio ran as a bulletin
Online	26 February	26 February – Air Quality News - New survey to find out how air pollution impacts local communities
	9 March	9 March – Signal - Survey asks residents and workers in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle about air quality
Print	6 March	March - Stoke Sentential

- In addition, the Councils were also approached about a TV interview opportunity with BBC regional television involving a Council spokesperson (the status of which is currently still pending due to the COVID-19 pandemic).
- To maintain visibility of the survey locally and encourage widespread participation, 2 follow-on press releases were due to be issued and circulated throughout the survey’s 10-week duration. However, neither follow-on release could be issued due to promotional activities being halted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to the project delivery timeline for the OBC. Similarly, plans to identify and develop news content on ‘local voices’ in the region on people who have been impacted in some way by poor air quality were put on hold until later in the year, after the situation with COVID-19 subsides.
- Digital and social media channels: To help raise visibility of the survey launch and encourage wide spread sharing of the survey link and related information, GAP prepared a stakeholder communications pack containing; sample social media content, pre-written newsletter and PR content that was shared digitally with local community groups, businesses, schools, public services and the Councils to disseminate to their contacts and networks.
 - To support the Councils’ internal communications teams to maintain ongoing social media and digital engagement regarding the survey, GAP ran a coaching session on 5 February for Council communications leads and their wider communications teams, as well as key customer service personnel, who man the Councils’ enquiry helplines – to brief internal teams on the rationale behind the survey and how to respond to survey-related enquiries.
 - In addition, the teams were briefed on best practice for developing and sharing social media content, including tips and advice on the best time of day/day of the week for sharing content, frequency of posts, use of hashtags and related imagery to increase reach of content, advice on persuasive language and ideas for drafting future content to maintain prolonged engagement e.g. posting about key milestones or emphasising timing deadlines to create a feeling of urgency.

- Existing contacts and networks: Whenever possible, the delivery partners sought to leverage the Councils' existing networks and relationships with relevant contacts and intermediaries (i.e. Local Action Partnerships, and relationships with parish and town Councils) to raise visibility of the survey and encourage awareness.

Table 7-3 lists the different stakeholder groups targeted during Phase 1.

Table 7-3: Engagement matrix

	Residents	Businesses	Schools	Community groups
Channels	Social media GP surgeries Libraries Local papers	Social media Local papers Industry press	Social media School newsletters Local papers	Social media Libraries Religious building noticeboards Local papers
Organisations and intermediaries	Housing associations Local residents' associations	Bus operators Taxi associations Emergency services Freight haulage representatives Local union groups	Parent teacher associations	Active travel groups Sustainability groups
Influencers		Union leaders	Head teachers	Community group leaders Religious leaders

7.2 Interim survey analysis

The following section provides an overview of the key findings from the interim survey results from the Phase 1 stakeholder engagement survey. As stated in the previous section, active promotion of the stakeholder survey was halted 5 weeks into delivery due to concerns over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on response rates.

As a result of this, the following results represent a much smaller sample size (459) than was originally intended by the Councils and delivery partners. As such, the following feedback

results may not be indicative of the views of the majority of people living and/or working in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region.

However, these interim results are useful to consider the general themes that may be present in a larger sample size.

Table 7-4: Demographic breakdown

Category	Interim results
Location/ Geographic spread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27% work in Newcastle-under-Lyme and 39% work in Stoke-on-Trent. • One third (33%) are regular visitors to Newcastle-under-Lyme and 30% to Stoke-on-Trent. • Only a small proportion of survey respondents run businesses in the two areas.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54% of responses received were from women (including trans women) • 39.4% responses were from men (including trans men) • 0.9% of respondents identified as non-binary • 4.6% of respondents did not wish to state a gender
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most common age of respondents was 55-64 (20.9%) • The second most common age of respondents was 45-54 (20.5%) • 35-44 year olds made up the third largest group of respondents (19.6%) • People under the age of 24 were among the lowest proportion of respondents, representing less than 6% of overall responses.
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White respondents made up the largest proportion of respondents at 91.9% • Asian/Asian British and Mixed/multiple ethnic group respondents made up .9% of responses respectively • Black/African/Caribbean/Black British respondents accounted for .2% responses • 0.9% of respondents did not wish to state their ethnicity
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-disabled people made up 81.5% respondents • People with disabilities accounted for 13.3% of respondents • 5.2% respondents did not wish to state their ability

Overall, the majority of responses to the survey were from people based either in Newcastle-under-Lyme or Stoke-on-Trent which shows the survey was successful in targeting respondents in the key target areas (see Table 7-4). The interim results show more women completed the survey than men and the most responsive age groups were those respondents aged 45 or more. People aged 35-44 were the next biggest group. These results indicate that people of middle-age or older, were more receptive to the communications messaging about the survey than those from a younger cohort. This could also indicate that more needs to be done to engage those under 35 moving forward and it may be worthwhile for the Councils and delivery partners to explore additional and/or alternate methods of engagement to reach underrepresented groups.

Thoughts on air quality:

- Overall, the majority of respondents to the survey rated air quality in the region as being either 'Fairly poor' (23.7%) or 'Very poor' (22%).
- 22.9% of respondents thought air quality in the region was 'Fairly good', whilst a smaller proportion rated local air quality as being 'Very good.'

The combined proportion of respondents who found air quality to be either 'Fairly poor' or 'Very poor' is greater than the combined proportion who rated air quality positively. As such, these interim results indicate that air quality in the region is of concern for people living and working in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme area.

Links between poor air quality and breathing:

- 74.3% of respondents indicated that they think poor air quality can have a 'Major impact' on people's breathing. A further 18.3% of respondents indicated that they think poor air quality can have a 'Moderate impact' on people's breathing.
- Only 16% of respondents felt poor air quality can have an impact on people's breathing.
- 2.4% did not know what impact poor quality can have on people's breathing.

The above results indicate that the majority of respondents to the survey are already aware that poor air quality can impact respiratory health. Only a small proportion of respondents felt that the health risks posed by poor air quality were minor and an even smaller proportion were unaware of any link at all.

These interim results indicate that future communications messaging emphasising the negative impacts of exposure to poor air quality is likely to resonate with local people and carries a low risk of being rejected by different audiences. As such, including messaging around the health impacts of poor air quality should be effective in engaging interest in any local campaigns regarding the Councils' air quality measures.

Table 7-5: Environmentally friendly behaviour

Behaviours	All (n=459)	NuLBC (n=259)	SoTCC (n=171)
Avoided idling a vehicle (i.e. running a vehicle's engine when the vehicle is not moving)			
I have done this, primarily to reduce pollution	50%	49%	48%
I have done this, but not primarily to reduce pollution	20%	19%	21%
I have not done this	30%	32%	21%
Eco-driving (e.g. minimising breaking and acceleration, limiting driving speed)			
I have done this, primarily to reduce pollution	35%	38%	32%

I have done this, but not primarily to reduce pollution	29%	27%	30%
I have not done this	36%	36%	38%
Walked or cycled instead of driving short distances			
I have done this, primarily to reduce pollution	28%	38%	26%
I have done this, but not primarily to reduce pollution	50%	51%	48%
I have not done this	23%	22%	26%
Switched to driving a less polluting vehicle (i.e. with lower emissions)			
I have done this, primarily to reduce pollution	17%	15%	18%
I have done this, but not primarily to reduce pollution	8%	7%	11%
I have not done this	76%	78%	72%
Used public transport instead of making journeys in an individual vehicle			
I have done this, primarily to reduce pollution	12%	10%	15%
I have done this, but not primarily to reduce pollution	26%	27%	23%
I have not done this	62%	63%	63%

Whilst the majority of respondents for both Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme claim to consciously adopt certain driving behaviours (i.e. avoid idling the vehicle's engine when the vehicle is not moving or minimising braking and acceleration, limiting driving speed), the same level of consciousness does not appear to be present for alternative forms of travel (see Table 7-5).

Interestingly, the majority of people who walk or cycle instead of driving short distances, claim to do so for reasons that are not primarily to do with reducing pollution.

This indicates that future messaging encouraging use of alternative or 'cleaner' forms of travel are likely to be more effective if such messaging emphasises non-pollution related benefits. i.e. emphasise the benefits to personal health of individuals who opt to walk, run or cycle.

This is not to say that the positive impacts to air quality should not be mentioned. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that such messaging would be rejected, only that it doesn't seem to be the primary reason for such behaviours. It is possible that dovetailing messaging about improved personal health with messaging about also helping to improve air quality, may have a

complementary effect and cause messaging to be more effective through; a) resonating with people who already adopt healthier travel habits; and b) reinforcing existing good behaviour by highlighting the positive impact on local air quality. A '2-for-1' to put it another way.

Behaviours regarding switching to a less polluted vehicle or using public transport instead of making journeys in an individual vehicle – overall, have lower numbers of respondents that adopt such behaviours compared to those that don't. This suggests that there is work to be done to encourage locals in the region to invest in less polluting vehicles and/or use public transport more often.

With this in mind, future messaging may need to emphasise the benefits of using public transport and consider ways to make this option more attractive to the local community.

Similarly, messaging about the benefits of investing in cleaner vehicles is probably an important theme to incorporate into long-term communications. Regular, consistent messaging over a long period of time may help to shift attitudes and encourage behaviour change that moves away from cheaper, more polluting vehicles – to seeing investment in cleaner models as a worthwhile investment that is better for individuals and local air quality.

Only 7% of respondents indicated a willingness to pay a congestion charge to enter areas with high levels of traffic. This low level of willingness to pay a congestion charge would suggest that the Councils' preferred non-charging option is likely to be better received in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region, than the Benchmark CAZ D option. If this interim response rate is indicative of similar trends in a larger sample size, it is likely that any charging option would carry with it far greater risk of being rejected by the local community.

Sources of information:

- *Regional news reports, Facebook and national news reports appear to be the top 3 most popular sources of information for info about levels of air quality amongst respondents. Response rates for these options range between 20%-34% of all respondents.*
- *Mobile phone weather apps, word of mouth, general web searches, local Council website, community groups and local Council email/newsletter make up the second tier of sources with response rates ranging from 10%-17% of all responses.*
- *Government websites (e.g. Defra), Twitter, other social media channels and Council events make up the 3rd tier sources – with the lowest response rates ranging between 4%-9%.*
- *One third of respondents indicated that they do not actively search for information on air quality.*

These interim responses suggest that future messaging regarding local air quality news is likely to reach more people in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region if messaging is pushed through regional and national news outlets. As such, targeted/tailored PR content could be an effective tool in communicating future campaign messaging.

In addition, Facebook appears to be a more effective social media channel than other well-known social media channels like Twitter or LinkedIn. Any future communication activities should probably look to incorporate this low-cost option into regular communications delivery.

Council websites, emails and/or newsletters, and local community groups appear to be effective secondary sources of information so future communications planning should probably also look to utilise those channels to push targeted campaign messaging.

- *When considering where to find out about levels of air quality in the future, around two-fifths (42%) of respondents would prefer to use their local Council website and a similar proportion (38%) would be interested in a local Council email or e-newsletter.*

The above indicates that the majority of respondents would like their local Council to provide information on local air quality either via the Council website or in a Council email/newsletter. SoTCC already produce a Council newsletter that could be circulated to residents living in both Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme. As such, this may be a useful resource to disseminate campaign messaging regarding air quality in future.

- *When considering future topics about levels of air quality in the future, around four-fifths (82%) of respondents would like to know where the air pollution hot spots are and what is being done to tackle air pollution.*

The above results indicate that there is much interest amongst respondents for information on the distribution of air pollution locally and an appetite to know more about the Councils' plans regarding air pollution.

This feedback indicates that there is overwhelming support amongst respondents to see something done about air pollution locally – which should in turn mean, that the Councils decision to take action in regard to improving local air quality is more likely to be accepted than rejected by people in the region. Of course, support may vary depending according to specific measures but generally speaking, action to tackle air pollution should be more supported than inaction to address local value exceedances.

Phase 2 – Communication activities (Post-OBC submission)

8 Overview of engagement

The Phase 2 communication activities will build on the work from Phase 1 – which sought to encourage the public and key stakeholder groups to consciously recognise local air quality as a priority area for public concern, requiring local action. With the Phase 2 activities, the delivery team aims to expand on local interest further by inviting the public and wider stakeholders to participate in an open dialogue regarding the Councils' plans to address local air quality.

This will primarily be done through the delivery of two public stakeholder engagement events.

8.1 Engagement aims and objectives

The aims and objectives for engagement during Phase 2 are:

- Clearly communicate to the public and relevant stakeholders the Councils' Preferred Option
- Provide opportunities for the public and stakeholders to ask questions and access information regarding the Preferred Option.

- Provide a forum by which to gather feedback from the public and stakeholders on the Preferred Option.
- Ensure feedback is analysed in a timely and meaningful fashion to enable the Councils and Elected Members to make informed decisions regarding implementation.

8.2 Desired outcomes

The intention for the post-OBC communications activities is that all residents and stakeholders in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme:

- Have a good understanding of their Council's wider clean air plan and understand the importance of reducing air quality value exceedances locally in order to protect public health.
- Are aware of the proposed measures and understand the potential impacts of implementation on their lives, work and/or business.
- Feel engaged and well-informed about the decision-making process for local actions and how this fits with national directives from Government.

9 Stakeholder engagement events

The public stakeholder engagement events will provide an opportunity for local people and key stakeholders to come together with Council representatives to learn about the Preferred Option and implementation plans. The events will be designed to create an open and welcoming environment that allows for in-depth discussion on the finer points of the NSLAQP. Participants will be invited to ask questions regarding areas of uncertainty or where they feel more information is needed. The delivery partners and facilitators at the events, will work to capture feedback and insight from participants that can help to better inform the communication plan for implementation.

9.1.1 Current delivery status

Kick-off of the Phase 2 activities was originally scheduled to begin from late March/early April 2020. However, due to uncertainties regarding progression of the Preferred Option and revisions to the OBC submission deadline, and the outbreak of COVID-19, the Phase 2 activities have been moved back until later in 2020.

Although, the timings for delivery of the phase 2 activities is yet to be agreed, the date of delivery is certain to take place after the submission of the unapproved OBC to JAQU on 15 May 2020. As such, it is not yet possible to report on the Phase 2 activities or indeed, the completion of the communications strategy in full. As the Phase 2 activities are designed to raise awareness of, and open up a dialogue about the Preferred Option, it would not be appropriate to publicise the intended plans before they have been finalised and agreed by the necessary oversight committees and governing bodies.

It is intended that this Communications Plan will be a 'live document' that evolves as the communication activities are developed, promoted and take place.

Once the OBC is published, communications and engagement activities will focus on engaging the public and wider stakeholders on the options set out in the plan. Analysis of this

engagement will then feed into finalising the NSLAQP to ensure that it is deliverable and supported by key stakeholders.

9.2 Promotion

Once the OBC is published and details of the Preferred Option is in the public domain, the delivery team for the communications strategy will commence the following activities to raise awareness of and encourage participation in the Phase 2 public engagement events.

Promotional channels:

- Council websites: A press release announcing the Councils' intentions to hold public engagement events with local people and key stakeholders on the Preferred Option – will be coordinated to be publicised in the news section of all three Council websites on the same date and time.
- PR activity/press engagement: A press release announcing plans to hold public engagement events will be circulated to local press in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region on an agreed date and time.
 - Prior to publication of the press release, GAP will once again reach out early to local newspapers, media outlets and online publications to generate interest in, and encourage coverage of the Councils' public engagement plans.
 - As the weeks leading up to the engagement events progress, GAP will work with the Council leads to generate regular news content that can be shared with local press and media to maintain visibility of the engagement events and provide information on how the public and stakeholder groups can participate.
 - Work will be done to identify and develop content on 'local voices' within the region. The 'local voices' content will focus on stories of people who have been impacted in some way by poor air quality. Publicising human stories about local people should help campaign messaging better resonate with the local community and maintain stakeholder interest in the topic of local air quality, as well as encourage participation in the public engagement events.
- Existing digital and social media channels: GAP will prepare an updated stakeholder communications pack for the Phase 2 launch, highlighting; the purpose of the engagement events, why people should attend and how members of the public can sign up/participate.
 - As before, the communications pack will contain sample social media content, pre-written newsletter and PR content that can be shared easily online.
- Existing contacts and networks: Similar to Phase 1, the delivery partners for the communications strategy will seek to leverage the Councils' existing networks and relationships with relevant contacts and intermediaries (i.e. Local Action Partnerships, and relationships with parish and town Councils) once again to raise visibility of the public engagement events.
- The delivery partners will seek to engage the same range of stakeholder groups as before, building on the groundwork laid during Phase 1.

- Target stakeholder groups: Local residents, bus operators, taxi associations, emergency services, businesses, freight haulage representatives, active travel groups, chambers of commerce and other relevant bodies in the Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme region.

9.3 Variable options for Phase 2 engagement

9.3.1 Timing of survey re-launch

As mentioned earlier, the timing for re-launching the stakeholder engagement survey is yet to be decided and the approved OBC is yet to be published. These two combined factors create two possible scenarios for re-launching the stakeholder engagement survey.

9.3.1.1 Scenario A: Re-launch survey before OBC is in the public domain

The same survey questions from Phase 1 can be re-used as details of the Preferred Option would not be in the public domain yet. Therefore, to update the survey content to reference them would be inappropriate.

9.3.1.2 Scenario B: Re-launch survey Post-OBC being in the public domain

The survey questions and design may need to be updated to incorporate details of the Preferred Option, as the OBC will be published and available. Once the OBC is available publicly, it is logical to anticipate the public and wider stakeholders will expect to see details of the Preferred Option reflected in the survey questions.

Re-launching the survey without updating the survey questions to directly reference the Preferred Option carries a risk of the survey and the Councils wider engagement activities being viewed as 'closed' and not transparent.

If the survey is re-launched once the OBC is in the public domain, it could serve as an effective support tool to the stakeholder engagement events. Effectively providing another avenue through which individuals who are unable to participate in the stakeholder events can feed through their views to the Councils on local air quality. Again, the possibility of running both activities in parallel would depend on the finalised timeline for the Phase 2 activities.

9.4 Format of stakeholder engagement events (Face-to-face vs. online)

Although the format for the stakeholder engagement events is intended to be face-to-face – UK lockdown restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic – may mean that the Councils will have to explore online, digital alternatives through which to host the events with the public and wider stakeholders. A potential option for online engagement could be the use of Zoom – a digital, video conferencing application that allows for multi-user participation and engagement.

At the time of finalising this report, there is no confirmed date for easing lockdown restrictions. Indeed, current Government advice is that social distancing measures should remain in place.

Depending on when timing for the stakeholder events has been formally agreed, the delivery partners will consult with the Council leads regarding the most appropriate format for delivery.

10 Implementation

Following approval from scrutiny and publication of the full and approved OBC, the Councils will proceed with consultation on the final option and development of plans for local implementation.

At this stage, the communications plan will be updated to include an approach and activities to inform and engage local residents and stakeholders of the option being taken forward and likely impacts of local implementation.

Communications on local implementation would aim to:

- Inform local people and key stakeholders of actions to be implemented locally, as part of the Preferred Option to improve air quality
- Provide on-going communications on progress of the implementation process and highlight any observed/measured improvements to air quality as a result of the local measures. (Highlighting any measured improvements or observable reduction in traffic-related air pollution once local measures are introduced, provides justification for their implementation and helps to validate the approach taken by the Councils. In addition, such messaging helps strengthen public engagement with stakeholders by demonstrating transparency of process – through providing regular updates on the real-life impacts/results of the Councils' Local Air Quality Plan as they emerge.)
- Continue to build on earlier engagement that has taken place to inform local awareness of air quality, through regular, ongoing local messaging that supports and reinforces adoption of better travel behaviours. i.e. regular issuing of communications around using alternative forms of travel (run, walk, cycle) to get around, coupled with highlighting of the positive impacts this has on the health of individuals and local air quality in general.

The key messages incorporated into the communications plan for implementation and beyond, will reflect the information and data gathered during phase 1 and 2 of the communications strategy.

Depending on the level of impact or transition required locally as a result of the final option selected, additional communication and engagement activity to the stakeholder engagement events, may be needed to effectively target specific stakeholder groups during implementation. This will be reviewed as part of the evolving communications plan as it is further developed.

Without completion of the phase 1 and phase 2 communications activities or the submission of the full OBC, it is difficult to define the exact nature of the communications activities that will be delivered during implementation. However, the approach taken will always seek to utilise the full range of communication channels available to the Councils, in order to maximise full reach of messaging – in addition to identifying the right mix of channels to successfully engage different stakeholder groups.

10.1 Tools and activities

Communication activity will be underpinned at every stage with key messaging – to be set out within a Key messages document – to ensure a consistent and positive message is delivered. The tools and activities to be used will be developed as the project progressed but it is anticipated will involve a mixture of the following:

- Face to face meetings
- Presentations
- Media FAQs
- NSLAQP briefing note
- Focus Groups
- Website and social media – particularly utilising existing resources such as the
- Letters, email and mail shots with project updates
- Project newsletter
- Community advocate engagement
- Advertisements
- Statutory notices
- Engagement with schools, hospitals, neighbourhoods and businesses

11 Challenges and risks

There are a number of challenges and risks associated with the success of the communications plan and stakeholder engagement. At present the COVID-19 pandemic means there is uncertainty around future timescales and also the impact on travel behaviour and local attitudes is unknown.

In addition, the following key challenges and risks are noted:

- Timescales associated with delivery and achieving exceedance in the shortest possible time may impact quality and scale of engagement
- Negative opinions and feedback received by stakeholders
- The implementation of NSLAQP is subject to funding approval, a delay to funding will delay roll-out of communications
- Reputational risk to the councils

12 Roles and responsibilities

As part of the project governance organogram (described within the OBC) a Communications Sub-Group has been established to support the Joint Advisory Group and Joint Officer Group. This sub-group consists of:

- Phil Jones, Heads of Communications at NuLBC
- Emma Rodgers, Strategy Manager for Communications at SoTCC
- Paul Dutton, Senior Media Officer at SCC

Together, they will be responsible for developing and implementing, both directly and with partners, the Communications Plan.