

Full Council

Title:	Air Quality Educational Project Proposal
Date:	18 June 2024
Contact Officer:	Becky Reid, Environmental Project Officer

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to draw down Section 106 Air Quality Funds towards an educational project that will be delivered to schools and the local community over 2024 – 2026.

Background

2. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), 2023-2027, states,

“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.... (pg i)

The annual health cost to society of the impacts of particulate matter alone in the UK is estimated to be around £16 billion. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are committed to reducing the exposure of people in our areas to poor air quality in order to improve health..” (pg ii)

SODC has specifically set aside CIL/s106 funding to tackle air pollution in Thame.

3. Thame Town Council adopted the Thame Green Living Plan (GLP) in October 2020 which included a priority section on the need for clean air and reduction in carbon emissions. The GLP also acknowledges the need for safer streets, less traffic and therefore less pollution in the town centre and specifically around vulnerable groups such as children and young people.
4. The plan was created over a 6 year period, with several members of the community taking the lead in its creation through RSA Thame group, at least 12 named community groups being consulted in the creation of the draft plan, and a community consultation being undertaken in 2018, prior to the plans formal adoption in 2020.

Outline of Thame Air Quality and sustainable travel project.

5. The Environmental Project Officer has been working with Lord Williams's Upper School – both their Eco Club (who have engaged students who are keen to play a role in the delivery of the project, and have already been campaigning and taking action around Air Quality on their own school sites), and their Geography department who is keen to see this project delivered. Connection has been made with 2 of the 3 primary schools in Thame, both of whom are also keen to work on a joint project with the Town Council. Thame Green Living volunteers have also been engaged and through this work we have developed a proposed project that will be delivered in 3 parts:
 - 5.1. A programme of interactive educational workshops and activities to help increase understanding and recognition of the climate and personal dangers of air pollution. The project will initially engage 4 local schools (5 campuses) and interested community groups that work with school-aged children: It will then move on to be delivered to the wider community through local groups and networks.
 - 5.2. An education and awareness campaign to reduce idling in Thame, with a focus on the town centre, car parks and the 5 school sites in Thame.
 - 5.3. A project that promotes the use of sustainable and active travel as an alternative to cars. This will include encouraging more students to walk or cycle to school rather than using a car.
6. Outcomes of this work will be:
 - 6.1. Improved awareness of air pollution causes, how to reduce it and reduce personal exposure to it, including through choosing sustainable/active travel options.
 - 6.2. Evidence of increased journeys to Thame schools that do not use cars.
 - 6.3. Leaflets and banners created to help educate residents of Thame, and especially parents of pupils about the alternative, sustainable/active travel options that are available for them to choose instead.
 - 6.4. Delivery of an anti-idling campaign – repeating and expanding on the work already done by SODC under their last AQAP through the 'Turn it off' campaign.
 - 6.5. Creation of an education campaign that can be used by schools going forward to continue to educate pupils about air quality – including videos, lesson plans and other relevant resources.
 - 6.6. Supporting Schools to review and update their School Travel Plans based on any findings from the project.

South Oxfordshire District Council – Air Quality Action Plan & relevance to this project

7. This project has been developed to tie into measures identified in the District Council's recently published Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). The AQAP and their Low Emissions Strategy (LES) both reference the core theme of 'promoting low emission behaviours'. The project will also help to achieve the following measures identified in the AQAP:
 - 7.1. AW1: Promotion of cycling: through education about safe routes. This also links to the OCC Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) that is due to be developed in Thame later this year.
 - 7.2. AW2: Promotion of public transport uptake: including promotion of Thame's new Community Bus.
 - 7.3. AW4: Public info linked to AQ monitoring results. The project will ensure that the messages from SODC are reinforced and heard by the population of Thame. No messaging or education around Air Quality will be shared without first being approved by SODCs Air Quality team, to ensure that messaging is consistent.
 - 7.4. The project would also support the delivery of H5: Low emissions schools and colleges – Promoting Travel Alternatives. Although this action is specific to Henley, we will apply it to Thame and review options for promoting active travel to school, and then support schools to determine a next steps action plan relevant to them (including exploring School Streets, park and stride and wayfinding).

Resource Appraisal

8. Although the Environmental Project Officer can support the delivery of this work, the size of the project and specialist knowledge needed means that we will need to bring in external resources to lead on the project.
9. The Environmental Project Officer has been liaising with SODCs Air Quality team and the project has been developed with their informal approval to ensure that it meets the requirements of Section 106 funds earmarked for 'Air Quality' in Thame. They have confirmed they are happy to consider an application to these funds to help to support this work.
10. The specific funds include:
 - 10.1. 15S12: Towards the cost of monitoring diffusion tubes and of measures identified in the District Council action plan including any required mitigation measures. £9,300.86
 - 10.2. 15S13: Towards costs of monitoring diffusion tubes and of measures identified in the District Council action plan. £13,062.51
 - 10.3. 14S17: Air Quality Contribution - For monitoring diffusion tubes and information on sustainable travel options. £21,515.85

External support needed

11. As mentioned at point 6, the EPO does not have the capacity and expertise to lead this project but will instead seek to work in partnership with schools, community groups and external providers. Standard procedure would be to provide SODC with 3 quotes for each element of the work being delivered which would also meet Thame Town Council's procurement requirements. This will be the case for any capital expenditure. However, for this service we feel there is justification for working with an already identified partner to lead the delivery of this project.
12. Under 5.12 of Thame Town Council's Financial Regulations, it states: *The requirement to obtain competitive prices in these regulations need not apply to contracts that relate to items (i) to (iv) below:*
- i. **specialist services**, such as legal professionals acting in disputes;*
 - ii. repairs to, or parts for, existing machinery or equipment;*
 - iii. works, goods or services that constitute an extension of an existing contract;*
 - iv. goods or **services** that are only available from one supplier or are sold at a fixed price.*
13. We would like to work with CAG Consultants, and specifically Tom Knowles as the lead delivery partner on this project. We believe he brings all the necessary skills and experience that we need and is already well connected in the local community, which will allow the work to progress quickly, making him the most efficient and effective choice for us to make. Specifically:
- 13.1. **He is a local resident with children attending 2 of our local schools:** Tom is a resident of Emmington, with Thame being his key local economic hub. He has two children who attend school in Thame.
 - 13.2. **He has connections to local schools already through other workshops he is delivering:** Tom also works on his family farm and is currently exploring regenerative approaches to farming that support the environment. This has included delivering a programme of workshops to various community groups and schools.
 - 13.3. **He has extensive experience delivering similar projects:** Tom also works as a member of CAG Consultants and has experience of delivering very similar projects to schools in London and Suffolk (previously) and Southampton (currently) – anti-idling, air pollution education and map making. CAG Consultants are leaders in evidence-based research, advice and engagement for environmental, economic and social sustainability.
 - 13.4. **He is a long-standing volunteer with Thame Green Living, Thame COP and Chinnor and Thame Friends of the Earth:** Although he would have to be paid for this project, Tom has proven that he is committed to this local work through his roles as a volunteer, willing to give his time to support local initiatives even when he is not paid. He has supported the development of this proposed project on a completely voluntary basis. Tom has been an active volunteer with all the groups outlined above. Since 2020 he has been supporting the implementation of the 'Air' section of the Thame Green Living Plan, devising a plan to help drive action

forward towards improving air quality in Thame. He spoke at the Thame COP 2022 main event at the town hall in conversation with a farmer in Kenya, sharing details of the pressures that climate change was bringing to their respective farms and how they were mitigating this, and seeking to increase biodiversity.

Other people and organisations also involved in the delivery of the project will include 21st Century Thame and Chinnor and Thame Friends of the Earth.

Risk Assessment

14. There is a safeguarding risk as this project will involve working with Children. This will be mitigated by ensuring that all those involved in the project delivery hold current DBS checks and where possible are under the supervision of their school.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council:

- i) Apply for Section 106 funds totalling no more than the £43,879.22 outlined in this report to help deliver this project.*
- ii) Employ a specialist contractor, as identified in the report and through CAG Consultants, as the lead delivery partner, subject to approval from SODCs Section 106 application process. No more than £28,900 of the final funding amount drawn down will be paid to CAG consultants for their part in this project.*