

TELEGRAPH

Pressure builds to tackle air pollution

By PETER KAY

COMMUNITY groups in Sheffield this week pressed the council to step up the fight against air pollution for the sake of residents' health.

They demanded tougher action against an "invisible killer", mainly the result of traffic fumes, saying that Sheffield was failing to meet European targets.

The authority says it is already drawing up a strategy to improve air quality but community groups want more to be done, not only in known hotspots such as Tinsley, near the M1, but in residential suburbs and around other mains road such as Abbeydale Road and Chesterfield Road.

They also want to see the planning system used to help control air pollution, such as by stopping developments that generate too much traffic. A proposed extension to the Sainsbury's superstore at Millhouses was rejected last year because of traffic and air quality concerns.

Representatives met council cabinet member for climate change Andrew Sangar, saying air pollution was causing up to 500 premature deaths a year in Sheffield, losing 30,000 work days and costing the NHS around £95m a year. Experts say cardiovascular disease is a common consequence and children are especially vulnerable to conditions such as asthma, coughs and bronchitis.

The council is being urged to ensure it meets national targets by 2015. Community groups say the authority already faces "swingeing"

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finances for failing to meet its national targets for 2010.

Ted Gunby, of the Carter Knowle and Millhouses Community Group, said: "People don't realise that this invisible killer is also in the residential suburbs. The council is going to have to show some strong leadership to encourage people to change the way they use their cars."

Maurice Littlewood, of Handsworth Forum, added: "With the huge congestion on the B6200 at Handsworth resulting in very high air pollution levels I can't believe the council keep approving more development there. You can't see it or taste it but air pollution is a serious health risk, particularly to young and older people."

Neil Parry, of Sheffield East End Quality of Life Initiative, said: "We wanted to get the message across that it is not just areas like Tinsley which suffer from air pollution. Levels have been found above safe levels on other main road corridors such as Chesterfield Road and near the universities.

"Although some action could be taken at a national level, such as reducing the speed limit on motorways in urban areas to cut emissions and encouraging companies to send freight by rail, the council can take steps. The council could discourage car use, encourage bus companies to bring in cleaner vehicles such as gas-powered buses and set up low emission zones where access by polluting vehicles is controlled."

Coun Sangar said: "We welcome the challenge that local community groups are setting us. Air quality in Sheffield – and across much of urban Britain – needs to improve so that we can all live healthier lives as well as meeting these tighter targets.

"The draft air quality action plan includes a number of key measures to improve air quality in Sheffield: a city centre low emission zone, promoting low carbon vehicles and refuelling, biogas, electric, and hydrogen vehicles (including the use of gas powered recycling vehicles by Veolia Environmental Services), helping everyone in their transport choices and working with the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport to improve air quality surrounding Junction 34 of the M1."

●Sainsbury's superstore appeal, page 10.

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