

THE HENLEY SOCIETY Occasional Talk : Pollution in Henley & its mitigation  
Held in The Barn Henley on Thames 28 Feb 2017

Around thirty people gathered in The Barn to hear David Dickie provide information in respect to national and regional air pollution levels; followed by Pat Fleming who spoke to the emerging proposed Henley Transport Strategy and Richard Francis who described 'Green Walls' and their application.

In David Dickie's introduction he drew attention to many failures of areas throughout the UK to meet minimum levels of air pollution caused by Nitrogen Oxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulates (emitted particularly by diesel engines). Henley being one of these areas.

David drew attention to the damage caused to our health and particularly to the health of children and of course the increased pressure on the health service in treating this damage. Damage to individuals' health particularly of the vulnerable young and elderly is of course of primary concern but also the quality of the environment of our urban areas is severely reduced and this impinges on normal town activities - particularly the retail sector - to such an extent that 'keep the door closed' is a policy being advocated by some retailers to protect their customers. So much for pavement cafes in Henley !!! David stated that for twenty four days last December the air quality in Henley was below EU limits. David argued for more local action 'activism' but was reminded by Frank Browne during discussions that not much would happen without central government intervention. The reponse being there has been a dearth of government action to date and how long should we have to wait. It would appear that the government is relying on the market for diesel powered cars to decline (as the car manufacturers respond to changing market demand and EU environmental legislation to take effect). So a long wait and much damage to our health and physical urban environment. It should be noted that because the UK exceeds, in some areas, permitted levels of air pollution the EU has threatened to impose fines unless remedies to the situation can be made within two months. Do not hold your breath for this one (the UK is set to leave the EU) - but maybe you should hold your breath just to restrict the amount of foul air entering your lungs !!

Patrick Fleming is a member of the Henley Transport Strategy Group which was involved in developing a Transport Strategy for the Henley & Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan (H&HNP). However as the H&HNP\* was primarily concerned with the allocation of sites for housing, the Transport element was not covered in a comprehensive or 'joined up' way. However the work has not been lost and is the basis for a proposed Transport Strategy for Henley. The Strategy acknowledges that there is no 'silver bullet' to the transport situation and proposes forty one particular initiatives. Pat acknowledged that to grasp all forty one at one time would be inoperable and the Group has prioritised nine initiatives. He mentioned the idea of removing 'traffic furniture' eg traffic lights to maintain a non-stopping flow of traffic through the town, its speed being controlled by 20mph limits; when stationary a motor vehicle should turn off its engine & make Henley a 'Clean Air Zone'. Although monitoring of NO<sub>2</sub> takes place, monitoring of particulates should take place. Car-sharing should be encouraged; incentives for electric and low emission vehicles and restrictions on Heavy Goods Vehicles passing through the town or making deliveries. Enhanced public transport with gas fuelled buses is encouraged.

In discussion Pat lamented the ability of OCC (Oxfordshire County Council) as the Transport Authority to implement much in the way of new controls, due much to lack of finance. However Henley Councillor David Nimmo-Smith was supporting Henley's case at OCC. Pat also lamented that SODC (South Oxfordshire District Council) by requiring the Air Quality Officer to spend only half her time on air quality issues and now also deal with air

quality issues of the Vale of White Horse District, the officer was only working a quarter time on air quality issues compared with four years ago.

*\* many people are of the view-erroneously-that the Neighbourhood Plan would be a comprehensive local plan, but unfortunately not so.*

Richard Francis spoke on behalf of his company 'Sensescape' and introduced the audience to 'Green Walls'. He acknowledged the benefits of planting trees and growing plants such as ivy and Virginia Creeper etc - (called PASSIVE greening) over buildings, but went on to show that 'Green Walls' (called ACTIVE greening) which pump polluted air into the growing medium of the plant - where the air is purified by filtration by the medium and uptake by roots of the plant - are more effective. He accepted that 'Green Walls' demanded energy in themselves to function and that often this energy is provided by carbon fired power stations, which are themselves polluters. He also accepted that the quantity of air requiring to be cleaned in an urban area would require many many green walls, even with the latter's efficiency.

The event finished with the speakers contributing to a general discussion on possible ways forward to reduce air pollution in Henley. The suggestion of local 'protest' was questioned as to their long term effect and as Richard Francis mentioned are likely to be 'closed down' by mainstream media. The suggestion that young people should be encouraged to be involved was one of the more optimistic highs of the event. Pat Fleming who has taken on the running of the Schools Environmental Science Competition (from its creator Dr John Thornley, who was in the audience) acknowledged that although schools mutually choose their environmental area for the competition, they could be drawn to the importance of this area as a subject for the competition.

David Feary mentioned that some schools e.g. Badgemore were having an effect on air quality by planting an orchard, encouraging bees and making honey.

How to involve young people and perhaps their parents was to be pursued in more depth.

Local monitoring by low cost equipment was now becoming a more realistic option, thus showing in quantitative terms the level of air pollution in the town. This could be carried out by interest groups with support from the Town Council.

John Thornley as a concluding point mentioned that everybody should become more aware of their 'ecological footprint' and there were various programmes via the Internet which would allow an individual to form their 'footprint'.

The event covered an important and complex subject and was leavened by the serving of refreshments which contributed to the conviviality.