



Miss S Robinson  
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**Date:** 16 November 2020

**Ref:**

**Officer:** Graham Duggan

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Dear Miss Robinson

**Complaint - Air Quality in Chideock**

I refer to your letter dated 19 October 2020 concerning the above and I have been asked to reply to you.

Firstly, I am sorry that you have considered it necessary to make a formal complaint on behalf of Chideock Parish Council about this matter. Both this council and the predecessor councils have sought to work and liaise with the Parish Council on this important issue.

It is acknowledged that the air quality in areas of Chideock remains unsatisfactory and Dorset Council recognise the frustrations for both the Parish Council and residents living along this section of the A35. Finding and implementing measures to achieve an improvement remains difficult.

If I could address the points in the order in which you have raised them.

1. Dorset Council has failed in their legal duty to deliver an air quality action plan which identifies measures which can be delivered within a time limited framework, as required by DEFRA in their response to the 2018 Annual Status Report.

The Council has a legal responsibility to review local air quality and where certain pollutant concentrations exceed national objectives, put in place measures to reduce emissions, as detailed in the local Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). In relation to Chideock, the road is part of the Highways England Strategic Road Network and the responsibility to achieve improvement principally rests with Highways England.

The AQAP is currently being reviewed and a new plan is being developed which includes the valuable suggestions that the Parish Council provided via Councillor Peacock. We are also awaiting information on the recent speed trial study from Highways England which when received will be incorporated into the Action Plan.

Work on this has been slower than originally anticipated for which I apologise. Latterly, we have been dealing with the implications of Covid-19 and pressures on the service but we hope to be able to submit the draft plan to DEFRA for appraisal shortly. I understand that during this time Coralie McGown, Team Leader, has given a number of updates to the Parish Council on the position of the 2020 Annual Status Report and monitoring results.

2. Dorset Council has consistently ignored the impact of the high illegal levels of air pollution in Chideock and the detrimental effects this has on its citizens by not agreeing to put in place monitoring of particulate matter.

The Council's view is that the benefits of monitoring for particulates are not clear. Certainly, vehicle emissions would be considered to be one of the higher contributors of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and we already know that at certain locations, the NO<sub>2</sub> Air Quality Objective is exceeded. Any measures which could be put in place to reduce NO<sub>2</sub> will also reduce particulates. Furthermore, to identify the specific source of the particulate matter is costly and problematic which means it is difficult to establish any tailored control measures.

We work with Air Quality Consultants (Bristol) to help inform and peer review our Annual Status Report and Air Quality Action Plan. Our specialist officer will again raise this issue with them and you will be informed of the outcome.

3. Dorset Council has taken, over many years, a public relations strategy of talking to the village and Highways England about the NO<sub>2</sub> pollution levels (which are being monitored), but with little actual action being taken to alleviate the impact on the public health of its citizens.

The Council has the duty to monitor air quality and with input from partner agencies produce the Air Quality Action Plan. It has been a significant challenge for partner agencies including Highways England to identify possible measures which would have significant benefit in reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide and associated particulates. The Parish Council will be aware of the following measures which have been explored/actioned;

Bypass – as part of the Road Investment Strategy and would be solely a Government decision.

Clean Air Zone / Charing Zone – unable to introduce as the A35 is on the Strategic Road Network.

Platooning – modelling has showed that such a proposal would increase congestion and result in queue lengths of over 4km in eastbound and westbound directions.

Eco barriers – insufficient space to incorporate barriers, and recent studies indicate mixed results on the positive impacts to air quality – they merely provide a block to the receptor.

CCTV Survey – it was established that the HGVs travelling up the hill & vehicles turning right into Duck street did not cause congestion. The main cause of congestion were buses stopping.

Voluntary re-routing – initiative led by former MP Oliver Letwin in conjunction with Highways England to achieve a reduction in HGV traffic through Chideock.

Current initiatives include the Highways England speed reduction trial and the feasibility & efficacy study on mechanical ventilation for affected properties both of which are yet to report back. As soon as information is available it will be passed to the Parish Council.

4. Dorset Council is responsible for public health and yet Chideock, with an identified issue of air pollution, was not considered for the Dorset pollution and public health study currently taking place. Instead the village of Beaminster was identified which does not have the same levels of air pollution. Dorset Council and Dorset Public Health are currently failing to actively consider outcomes for the residents of Chideock, where it is believed there is an increased risk of asthma and heart conditions due to air pollution from all types of particulates and other pollutants.

Together with BCP Council we are undertaking a study of population exposure to particulate matter across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. This is a time limited project and its objective is to establish what steps can be taken across the study area to reduce the impact of exposure to particulate matter on

the population as a whole. To achieve this, the study is focussing on understanding population exposure to general background levels of air pollution - not specifically from roadside locations. The study area includes both rural and urban sites to provide broad geographical coverage and includes vulnerable populations. A decision matrix for the location of the monitors was used, combining pollution, health and demographic data.

This is a separate piece of work and will not directly inform the local Air Quality Action Plan which looks at specific measures for Chideock. However, the work will contribute to a better understanding of particulate matter and will be available to inform future work in Chideock.

5. Dorset Council appears to be unable to separate the political and economic needs of the A35 strategic highway (which is delivered by Highways England) from the environmental and public health needs of its citizens. Dorset Council and Highways England appear to favour doing nothing about the increasing level of heavy goods and congestion, at the expense of the lives of those who live in Chideock.

Dorset Council has worked closely with other local authorities and partners across the SW region to support and encourage Government to deliver strategic improvements to the A303. A303 improvements are now progressing and once delivered will help provide more reliable, quicker journey times for long distance movements, thereby diverting east-west traffic away from the A35. Dorset Council has also requested that government includes a strategic study of routes east-west through Dorset along the A35/A31 corridor within the Road Investment Strategy (RIS2) programme. This study is vital to consider options for improvement and to raise the profile of the corridor at the national level and is the same process the A303 improvements went through. Government has so far not accepted the need for a study along this route so the Council will continue to press for this.

6. In short, Chideock requires Dorset Council to be a responsible and legally compliant public body which is able to introduce and deliver measures which safeguard the residents of this village over and above the needs of the road haulage and higher levels of congestion. Chideock Parish Council look forward to hearing how Dorset council are going to address these issues.

The Council takes its responsibilities to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of its residents very seriously. The predecessor councils (West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council) worked with the Parish Council and partner agencies in exploring measures to address this situation.

This Council brings together air quality; transportation and public health expertise into a single organisation and expect this to bring benefit to complex issues such as this. I am keen to discuss with you how you feel liaison may be improved and subject to your agreement would like to arrange a meeting where this can be discussed. Meanwhile, work will continue to complete the Air Quality Action Plan and submit it to DEFRA. We will let you know when this happens.

However, it is possible that the air quality objectives for Chideock may not be achieved until cleaner vehicle technology is more readily available and in use. Alternatively or alongside a significant change to the vehicle use on this part of the A35 which remains a matter for Highways England. But, as mentioned above, the A303 improvements may bring some benefit.

In relation to respiratory illness. There are a range of environmental factors which can contribute to respiratory illness including traffic pollution, smoking, past industrial exposure, indoor air quality, wood and fossil fuel heating and cooking. Previously, consultation has taken place with local GP's to determine the prevalence of respiratory illness in the area with nothing unusual being identified at that time. Officers are in discussion with Public Health Dorset to repeat this exercise (or something similar) once Covid-19 pressures have eased. We will advise when this work is due to be undertaken and discuss the results with the Parish Council.

I hope that the above goes some way in addressing your concerns and also those raised in your letter dated 12 October 2020. As said above, I think a meeting would be helpful where any outstanding matters can be discussed. We will need to take account of Covid-19 restrictions and agree how the meeting will take place,

If you are dissatisfied with my response, you may request that your complaint is reviewed by a senior manager in conjunction with the complaints team. In this event we would ask you to clearly state the following, and provide any additional information to support your complaint, not provided at the time of your original emails:

- What issues do you feel are still outstanding?
- What outcomes are you seeking?

We will then decide if we can help further and whether your complaint warrants any further investigation. We will let you know the outcome of that within 20 working days. We will send you our decision along with details of what we will do next to help you, if appropriate. If we are unable to do anything differently, we will refer you to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Please send any review requests to:

The Complaints Team, Chief Executive's Department, Dorset Council, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ (email: [complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)).

Alternatively, you can contact:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH.

Advice line: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983, or [www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint](http://www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint)

Yours sincerely



**Graham Duggan**  
**Head of Community & Public Protection**