AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN CONSULTATION

March 2023

ABSTRACT

This report summaries the responses and presents the result to consultation on the draft actions for the Councils Air Quality Action Plan.

Consultation@maidstone.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction

Air Quality Action Plans are the mechanism by which local authorities, in collaboration with national agencies and others, state their intentions for working towards air quality objectives through the use of the powers they have available.

A draft Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was produced in September 2022 as part of the Council's duty to improve local air quality. It outlines the actions MBC will undertake to improve air quality in the borough between 2023 and 2028.

Methodology

Maidstone Borough Council undertook a consultation between 28 November 2022 and 29 January 2023.

The survey was carried out online with a direct email to those on the Council's consultation mailing list. It was also promoted through the Council's social media channels. Paper copies of the survey and alternative formats were available on request. The survey was open to all Maidstone Borough residents aged 18 years and over and visitors to the borough.

Respondents were asked their opinions about the proposed actions for the Air Quality Management Plan. There was opportunity throughout to provide additional comments.

There was a total of 471 responses to the survey and a letter commenting on the proposed actions was received from KCC (attached at Appendix A).

The data has not been weighted; however, the bottom two age brackets were combined to create the 18 to 34 years group. Please note not every respondent answered every question; therefore, the total number of respondents, refers to the number of respondents for that question, not to the survey overall. Comments have been categorised according to content with some covering more than one category.

Transport Measures

Achievability of Transport Measures

Respondents were asked to review the proposed transport measures and were asked if they were achievable or not.

A total of 467 respondents answered these questions.

Overall, Measure 1, 'Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street' was considered to be the most achievable with 66% responding this way.

Measure 3, 'Consider discount on resident's parking for EV' was considered the least achievable with the greatest proportion answering 'not achievable' across the transport measures. 23% of respondents answered this way and the lowest proportion stating it was achievable at 52%.
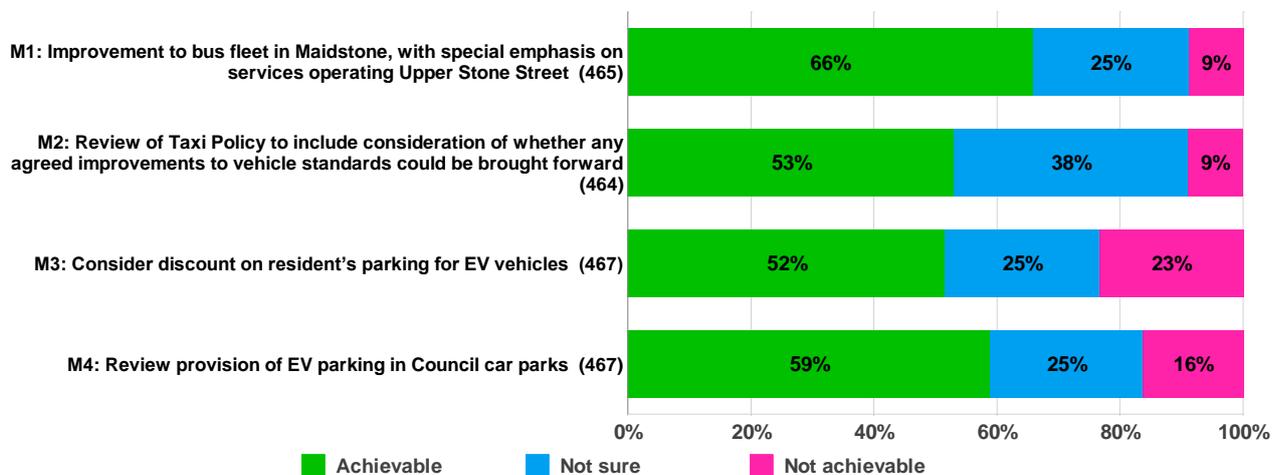
Demographic Differences

The data showed that there was a greater proportion of male respondents that felt Measure 3, 'consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles' was unachievable with 27% compared to 18% of female respondents.

Male respondents also had a greater proportion than female respondents that answered, Measure 4, 'review provision of EV parking in council car parks' was unachievable with 19% answering this way compared to 12% of female respondents.

Additional Comments

Respondents that said that a measure was unachievable, were prompted to explain why they felt this way. The comments are set out, by question, in the tables below:

M1: Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street (40 Comments)		
Theme	No.	Nature
Traffic Flow	9	A bypass is needed. Redirect traffic from Upper Stone Street.

M1: Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street (40 Comments)

Theme	No.	Nature
		Stationary traffic is the issue.
Public Transport doesn't meet needs	8	Bus services have been cut and services have been reduced. Services are unreliable. Will only work if there are dedicated bus lanes.
Cost	6	Who will pay for improvements to the fleet? Too expensive.
Little or no impact	6	Unconvinced measure will result in improvements to air quality. Buses have to use this route. Buses are in the minority of vehicles on the roads.
No control	6	The Council has no control over private bus fleet operators.
P&R	3	Condemnation over the cutting of P&R services.
Environmentally Friendly Buses	3	Why not hydrogen cell yet? Make all buses hydrogen or electric.
Other	2	Bring back trolly buses. Stop buses from idling.

M2: Review of Taxi Policy to include consideration of whether any agreed improvements to vehicle standards could be brought forward (34 Comments)

Theme	No.	Nature
Impact on taxi drivers	18	Would make running a taxi unviable. Unfair on taxi operators. New EV Taxis are expensive.
Little or no impact	5	Taxis are not the issue. Taxis already at a high standard.
Cost of living/Cost of fares	4	This policy should not be brought forward as people are already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. This will result in increased fares for taxi users.
Electric Vehicles	3	Need electric taxis. No infrastructure for electric vehicles. Issues recycling lithium batteries.
Other	3	This is outside the Council's remit. Taxi standards have declined (vehicles & driver skills). The technology is not available to implement this measure.
Uber	2	Will this include Uber drivers' vehicles? Invention of Uber means this can not be regulated.

M3: Consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles (99 Comments)

| Theme	No.	Nature
Unfair	34	This measure is unfair and discriminates against those who cannot have EVs. EV owners should not get any special treatment.
EV Expense	26	EVs are expensive. Majority of people cannot afford to buy an EV.
Space issues	9	Resident parking is at a premium. This will not improve situation as still more cars than spaces. There is not currently enough resident on-street parking.

M3: Consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles (99 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Impact on Council finances	9	Waste of money as bigger priorities. Uncollected money is a lost for the Council. Council cannot afford to lose the revenue.
Too soon for EV	9	Wait five years for this measure when EVs will have improved (and more people have them). Electric shortages expected this year. Issues with recycling/disposing of EV batteries still need to be resolved.
Little to no impact	8	All vehicles pollute in some way (brake dust and rubber) and take up the same space. Measure does not meaningfully incentivise EV take up. Amount of EV vehicles too small to make an impact.
EV Infrastructure	6	Cost of installation will not be recoverable for several years. This measure will cost too much to implement. Wider infrastructure for EVs still requires investment to make it a viable alternative to petrol.
Traffic & Traffic Flow	3	Would be better addressing pinch point in traffic and improving/changing the one-way system. Queuing traffic/congestion needs to be addressed.
Parking charges	2	Should not have to pay to park outside your own house.
Other	2	Should be encouraging mode changes. Government has introduced road tax for EV due to loss of revenue.

M4: Review provision of EV parking in Council car parks (63 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Unfair	25	Creates preference system – EV owners should pay the same as everyone else. Unfair for EV owners to get special treatment.
Limited parking	15	Already a shortage of parking spaces. Current EV spaces not used.
EV Infrastructure	9	This measure is too expensive. There is a lack of wider infrastructure to support EVs.
Little to no impact	9	EVs still cause pollution (displaced to manufacturing process). Improvements to air quality arising from this measure likely to be negligible. EVs are in the minority of vehicles.
Other priorities	4	There currently are more important issues for MBCs budget than implementing this measure.
Deters visitors to Maidstone	4	Implementing this measure would deter people from visiting Maidstone. People will shop elsewhere if they cannot park.
Other	3	EVs expensive. Vandalism would be an issue. EVs need long periods to charge (short charges impact on battery life).
Traffic Flow	2	Improve traffic flow by removing traffic lights and improving one-way system. Introduce enforceable speed limit for HGVs going through Harrietsham.

Impact of Transport Measure

Respondents were asked to indicate what impact they thought each of the measures would have on air quality locally.

A total of 457 respondents answered these questions. Overall, respondents felt that Measure 1: Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street, would have the greatest impact. 59% of respondents said that this would have a Major or Moderate impact. Respondents felt that Measure 3 Consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles would have the least impact with 51% responding that this measure would have a slight impact or no impact.
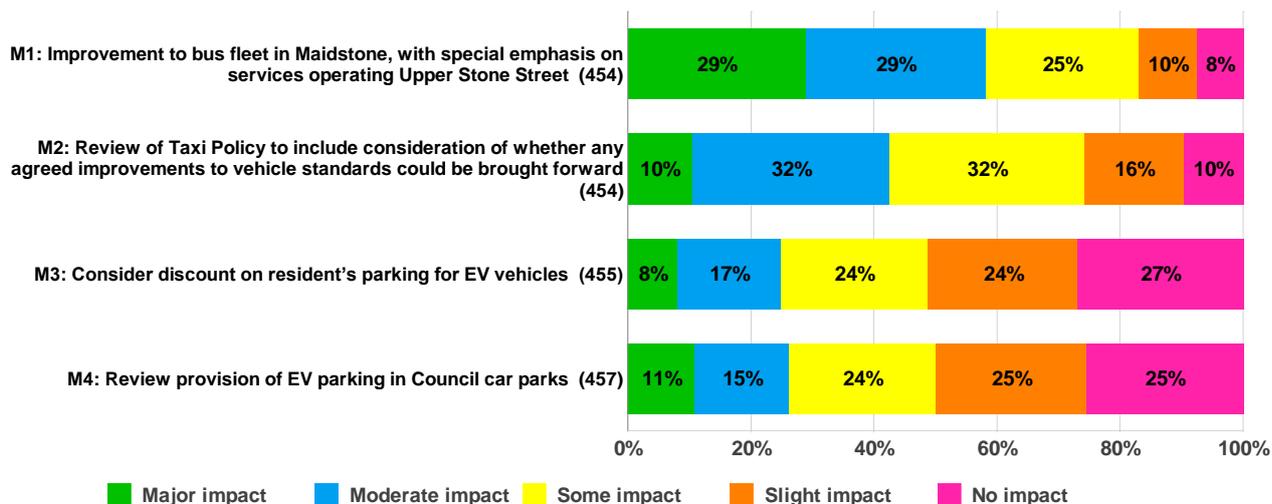
	Major impact	Moderate impact	Some impact	Slight impact	No impact
M1: Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street (454)	29%	29%	25%	10%	8%
M2: Review of Taxi Policy to include consideration of whether any agreed improvements to vehicle standards could be brought forward (454)	10%	32%	32%	16%	10%
M3: Consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles (455)	8%	17%	24%	24%	27%
M4: Review provision of EV parking in Council car parks (457)	11%	15%	24%	25%	25%

Demographic Differences

The data show that a greater proportion of female respondents felt that measure 1: Improvement to bus fleet in Maidstone, with special emphasis on services operating Upper Stone Street, would have a major or moderate impact on air quality locally with 64% answering this way compared to 54% of male respondents.

There were no respondents aged 18 to 34 years that said that Measure 3: Consider discount on resident's parking for EV vehicles, or Measure 4: Review provision of EV parking in Council car parks, would have a major of moderate impact.

A greater proportion of male respondents answered slight or no impact when asked about measure 3 with 57% responding this way compared to 42% of female respondents.

Male respondents also had a greater proportion responding slight or no impact when asked about measure 4 with 56% responding this way compared to 41% of female respondents.

Transport Measures General Comments

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments about the proposed Transport measures, a total of 172 comments were received.

| Transport General Comments		
Theme	No.	Nature
Traffic Flow & Management	57	Congestion is the main issue. Remove traffic lights and create a bypass to improve air quality in the Town Centre. Create a Clean Air Zone. Prevent and enforce idling (Taxis and Busses in High Street).
Public Transport	48	Update all the buses. Improve public transport – cheaper and more frequent services. Make public transport more attractive to people.
EV Vehicles	36	EVs are expensive - financial incentives to buy could help take-up. Counterproductive – electricity is not generated in an environmentally friendly way. EVs are in the minority of vehicles on the roads. More Council charging points needed.
P&R	20	Bring back the P&R service. P&R will reduce the number of vehicles in the Town centre.
Active Travel	16	More bicycle lanes and secure storage in the Town centre. Encourage cycling with safe (& segregated routes). Improvement pavements.
Little to no impact	16	Trivial measures that will only have a marginal impact. These measures do not go far enough and will not impact pollution.
HGVs	11	Divert HGVs from the Town centre. Restrict HGVs traveling through Town. HGVs are the biggest polluters.
Development	9	Development has increased the number of vehicles on roads. Development is not supported by road and highways infrastructure upgrades. Stop building so many new homes.
Other Comments	5	Do not reduce the AQMA. Do not penalise petrol vehicle users. Protect green spaces. Measure would impact on Council revenues. Too many people are the real cause of pollution.
Behaviour Shift	4	Need more meaningful measures to facilitate a behaviour shift from private vehicles.
Other Areas	3	Upper Stone Street is not the only area of concern. These measures only relate to the Town Centre rather than villages.
More detail	3	Requests for more details on the proposed measures.
Suggestions	2	Introduce charges for commercial vehicles parking overnight. Remove all diesel vehicles registered before 2016.

Information & Education Measures

Achievability of Information & Education Measures

Respondents were asked to review the proposed information and education measures and were asked if they were achievable or not.

A total of 464 answered these questions.

Overall, Measure 7, 'A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas' was considered the most achievable with 62% responding this way.

Measure 8, 'Promote and encourage change of transport modes' was considered the least achievable with the greatest proportion of respondents answering 'not achievable' across the information and education measures with 33% answering this way and the lowest proportion stating it was achievable at 42%.

Measure	Achievable	Not sure	Not achievable
M5: Information campaign to residents of the new AQMA (463)	53%	41%	6%
M6: Extension to the Clean Air For Schools (CAFS) programme (462)	56%	36%	8%
M7: A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas (463)	62%	19%	19%
M8: Promote and encourage change of transport modes (464)	42%	25%	33%
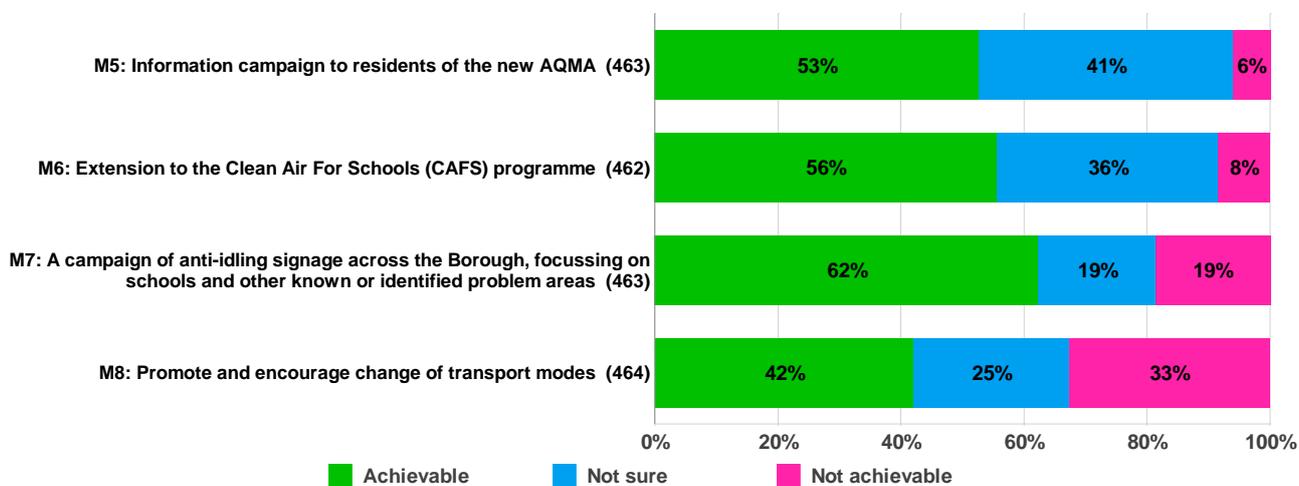
Demographic Differences

The data showed a greater proportion of female respondents felt that Measure 6, 'Extension to the Clean Air for Schools (CAFS) programme' was achievable with 62% answering this way compared to 51% of male respondents.

Respondents aged 18 to 34 years had the greatest proportion, across the age groups, that said Measure 6 was unachievable with 29% responding this way.

A greater proportion of female respondents answered that Measure 7, 'A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas' was achievable with 71% answering this way compared to 58% of male respondents.

A greater proportion of respondents from minority groups felt that Measure 8 'Promote and encourage change of transport modes' was achievable with 67% answering this way compared to 41% of respondents from white groups.

A greater proportion of female respondents answered that Measure 8 was achievable with 49% answering this way compared to 37% of male respondents.

Additional Comments

Respondents that said that a measure was unachievable, were prompted to explain why they felt this way. The comments are set out, by question, in the tables below:

M5: Information campaign to residents of the new AQMA (22 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Little to no impact	12	People don't pay attention to these campaigns. Will not change behaviour. People don't care about air quality.
Cost	7	This measure is a waste on money. This measure is too expensive.
Other	5	People will still need to get from A to B. The general public do not take their responsibility towards air quality seriously. EV infrastructure is not available yet.

M6: Extension to the Clean Air For Schools (CAFS) programme		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Ignored	15	This measure will not have any impact as it will be ignored.
Cost	5	Don't waste money on pointless campaigns.
Discriminatory	4	This measure would be discrimination – people who don't have children and those that cannot afford EVs.
Logistics	3	Children do not live locally /in walking distance of their schools. Public transport is too unreliable for school transport.
Other	3	Stop making people use EVs. Areas of high pollution- around the Montessori School & Tonbridge Road (by College).
Enforcement	2	MBC can't enforce this. Schools can't enforce this.

M7: A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Ignored/Little to no impact	39	Will be ignored - particularly in cold and wet weather. Signage alone will make no difference and will be ignored. This measure is not significant enough to make a difference to air quality.
Enforcement	16	Without sanctions this is waste of money. This needs proper enforcement to work. This cannot be enforced.
Traffic	14	The high volume of traffic on Maidstone's roads makes this measure ineffective. Structure of road system and network causing pollution. Improve traffic lights. Constant roadworks cause congestion.
Cost	9	This is a waste of money. Money for signs could be better spent elsewhere.

M7: A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Newer vs Older vehicles	8	Many newer vehicles have automatic cut outs. Idling only an issue with older vehicles (and not everyone can afford to upgrade).
Other	4	Discourage people driving to schools. This aims to restrict movement and move to hybrid learning under the guise of climate change. Maidstone does little for pedestrians who are the most at risk of poor air quality.

| M8: Promote and encourage change of transport modes (141 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Public transport	73	Public transport is unreliable and expensive. Many places do not have bus services. Bring back the P&R service. Bus services are being cut.
Behaviour change/Car Reliant	42	Cars are the only options – alternative are not viable. The car is the most convenient way to travel in Maidstone. Behaviour change impractical for many.
Active transport	17	More cycle lanes and footpaths away from roads needed. Older demographic unable to walk or cycle. Feels unsafe cycling in Maidstone.
EVs	10	EVs are too expensive for most – more purchase incentives required. EV charging network needs work.
Impact	9	Without enforcement or penalties measure will be ignored. The Council has no control in this area. Measure will have minimal impact on air quality.
Traffic & Traffic Management	7	Road are not big enough (and no space for trams or trolly buses). Need alternative routes to south of the Borough that bypass the town centre.
Development	6	Too many homes being built. New housing development are not served by public transport. Infrastructure has not kept up with development.
Cost	5	This is a waste of money. This measure would be expensive to implement. There are no available funds to support this measure.
Other	3	Need to set harder targets. Need more data on people modes of transport and journeys. Run a school's bus service like in America.

Impact of Information & Education Measures

Respondents were asked to indicate what impact they felt each of the measures would have on air quality locally.

A total of 458 respondents answered these questions.

Overall, respondents felt that Measure 7: A campaign of anti-idling signage across the Borough, focussing on schools and other known or identified problem areas would have the greatest impact with 42% responding Major or Moderate impact.

Respondents felt that Measure 8: Promote and encourage change of transport modes would have the least impact with 44% responding that this measure would have a slight impact or no impact.
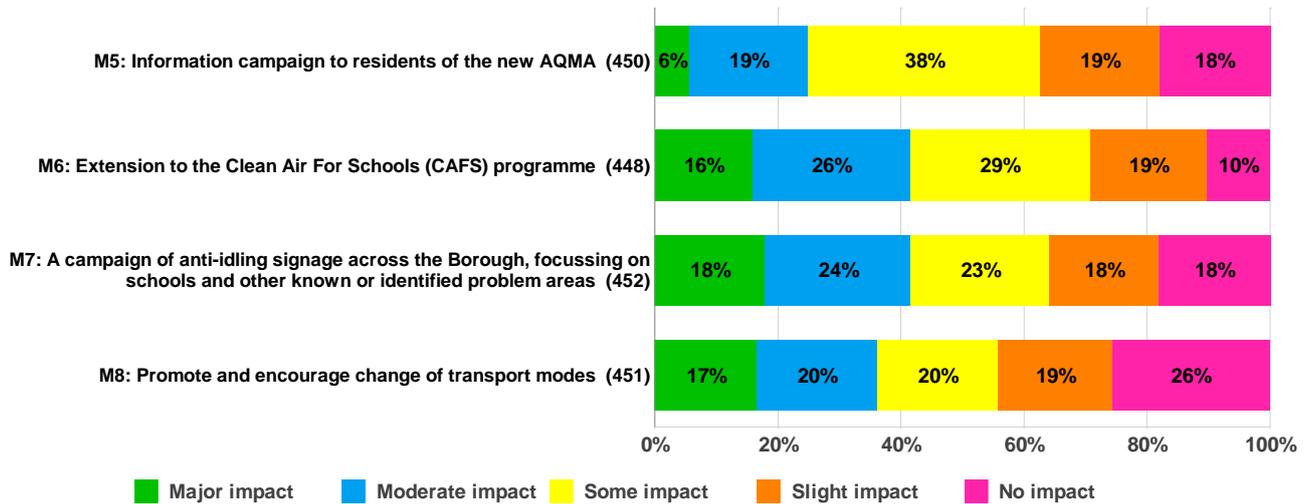
Demographic Differences

The data show that a greater proportion of male respondents felt that measure 5: Information campaign to residents of the new AQMA, would have a only a slight impact or no impact on air quality locally with 43% answering this way compared to 28% of female respondents.

A greater proportion of female respondents felt that measure 6: Extension to the Clean Air For Schools (CAFS) programme, would have a only a major or moderate impact on air quality locally with 53% answering this way compared to 35% of male respondents.

A greater proportion of male respondents responded slight or no impact when asked about measure 7 with 42% responding this way compared to 26% of female respondents.

A greater proportion of male respondents responded slight or no impact when asked about measure 8 with 51% responding this way compared to 32% of female respondents.

Information & Education General Comments

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments about the proposed Information & Education measures, a total of 115 comments were received.

| Information & Education Measures Additional Comments		
Theme	No.	Nature
Impact	22	Measures are a waste of time and money. Promotion and encouragement will not be enough to get people on board. Measures will be ignored unless enforced. Measure will have little impact on air quality.
Schools Transport	20	Schools traffic is a significant contributor to air quality and congestion in Maidstone. Most children live too far away from their school to walk to cycle. Walking & cycling in some rural areas is dangerous for children. Cycling classes in schools would help normalise cycling. Encourage schools to encourage their pupils to use active transport methods and public transport.
Traffic	19	Focus on improving traffic flow. Review traffic lights to reducing queuing. Maidstone needs a by-pass or ring road.
Idling	17	Anti-idling signage will not work unless it is enforced. Anti-idling should apply to buses and HGVs. Anti-idling campaigns around schools should be wider than just the road that the school is on.
Behaviour	11	Promote car sharing and travelling off-peak. Measures need to be easy to achieve or they will be ignored. Behaviour changes difficult without incentives and sanctions.
Active Transport	7	Maidstone is walkable but pedestrians are exposed to high levels of pollution. Improve provisions for cycling. Promote cycling and walking.
EVs	7	EVs are not affordable for most residents. Do more to support residents change to EV by supporting resident to install or installing EV chargers on residential streets.
Air Quality Data	7	More information requested on details of the proposals. Data being used to evidence AQMA is flawed.
Park & Ride	6	Should not have cut the P&R services.
Car Alternatives	6	There are no alternatives that are as convenient or cost effective as travelling by car.
Suggestions	5	More tree and bushes. Scrappage grants for older and diesel vehicles. Consider electric scooters (subject to standards) as an alternative mode of transport (particularly for school children). Use of smaller vans and commercial vehicles at peak times (Ashford model).
Development	4	Extra vehicles on the town's roads are due to extensive house building in the borough. Development has created out of town estates that are reliant on the car.
Other	3	No backdoor taxation for road users. Wood burning stoves contribute to poor air quality. Lobby for top tier authorities with highways responsibilities to be responsible for AQMAs.

Miscellaneous Measures

Achievability of Miscellaneous Measures

Respondents were asked to review the proposed transport measures and were asked if they were achievable or not.

A total of 467 answered these questions.

Overall, Measure 9, 'Review of Air Quality Planning Guidance to reflect updated air quality information' was considered the most achievable with 58% responding this way.

Measure 10, 'Continuation of MBC sponsorship of the Walk on Wednesday' was considered less achievable with 17% answering this way.
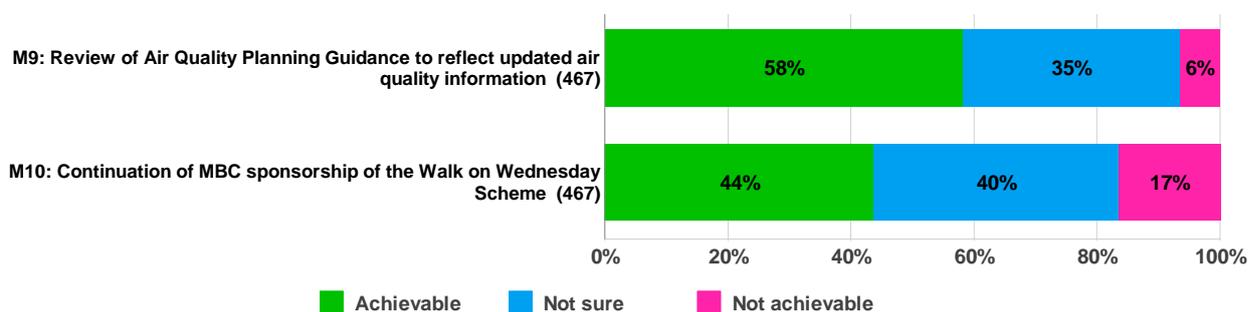
Demographic Differences

29% of Respondents aged 18 to 34 years said that Measure 9 'Review of Air Quality Planning Guidance to reflect updated air quality information' was unachievable, the highest response across all age groups.

A greater proportion of respondents from minority groups felt that Measure 9 was achievable with 83% answering this way compared to 58% of respondents from white groups.

Additional Comments

Respondents that said that a measure was unachievable, were prompted to explain why they felt this way. The comments are set out, by question, in the tables below:

M9: Review of Air Quality Planning Guidance to reflect updated air quality information (24 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Impact	14	A review will make difference.
		People have to rely on their cars so traffic will not be reduced.
Development	3	Development has lacked transport infrastructure.
		Planning doesn't care about environmental issues.
Costs	2	This measure is too expensive.
		This measure needs more investment.
Other	2	Should not have cut P&R.
		Do not support the 'Great Reset'.
Data	1	More information needed to make an informed decision.
Suggestions	1	Plant more trees.
		Subsidies for EVs.

Traffic	1	Sort out the one-way system.

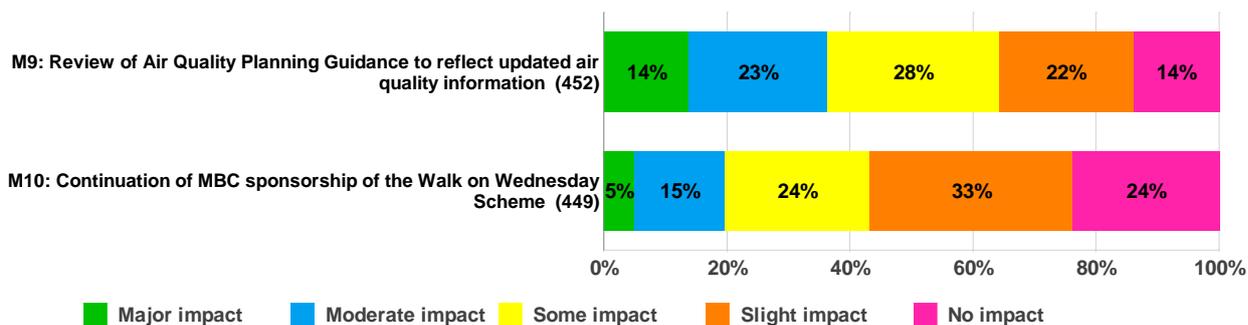| M10: Continuation of MBC sponsorship of the Walk on Wednesday Scheme (75 Comments)		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Impractical	18	People live too far away to walk to work/school. Not everybody can walk. People don't want to walk in poor weather/in the dark. Shopping locations out of town require a car for access and carrying goods.
Unaware of walk on Wednesday scheme	17	What is Walk on Wednesday? Unaware of this scheme.
Impact	17	This will be ignored. This measure will have minimal impact (particularly in the Lower Stone Street area). This will not impact on congestion. Impact would be greater if walking scheme was more than one day a week.
Waste of money	11	This measure is a waste of money.
Behaviours	8	People are unlikely to take part – will continue to use preferred method of transport.
Active travel	6	Cycling and walking are unsafe. There is a lack of cycle lanes/paths. Footpaths are narrow, overgrown and are dirty.
Other	3	Sort out the one-way system. Do not support the 'Great Reset'. Bus services being cut and no routes in rural areas.
Development	1	Nothing about reducing emissions from development.

Impact of Miscellaneous Measures

Respondents were asked to indicate what impact they thought each of the measures would have on air quality locally.

A total of 452 respondents answered these questions.

Overall, respondents felt that Measure 9: Review of Air Quality Planning Guidance to reflect updated air quality information would have the greatest impact with 37% responding Major or Moderate impact. However, only a marginally lower proportion said that this measure would have a slight impact or not impact with 36% answering this way.

More than half of all respondents felt that Measure 10: Continuation of MBC sponsorship of the Walk on Wednesday Scheme would have a slight impact or no impact at all with 57% answering this way.

M9: Review of Air Quality Planning Guidance to reflect updated air quality information (452)	14%	23%	28%	22%	14%
M10: Continuation of MBC sponsorship of the Walk on Wednesday Scheme (449)	5%	15%	24%	33%	24%

■ Major impact　■ Moderate impact　■ Some impact　■ Slight impact　■ No impact

Demographic Differences

43% of female respondents felt that measure 9: Review of Air Quality Planning guidance to reflect updated air quality information, would have a major or moderate impact on air quality compared to 32% of male respondents.

66% of male respondents responding slight or no impact when asked about measure 10: Continuation of the MBC sponsorship of the walk on Wednesday Scheme compared to 44% of female respondents.

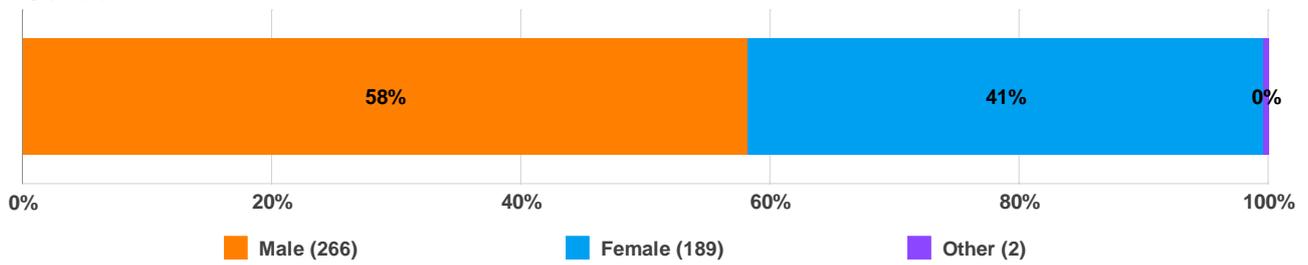## Miscellaneous Measures General Comments

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments about the proposed Miscellaneous measures, a total of 94 comments were received.

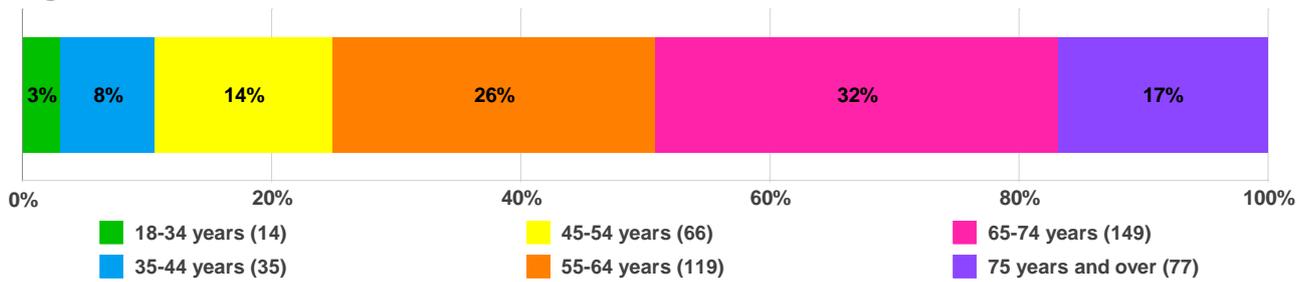| Miscellaneous Measures Additional Comments		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
Walking Scheme	32	Never heard of the Walk on Wednesday scheme. People who want to walk already do.
Suggestions	16	Plant more trees. Increase parking charges to discourage car use. Introduce stopping restrictions outside of schools and low traffic neighbourhoods. Promote walking buses and car sharing. Incentivise walking through trough CT discount. Link AQMA to Sustainability DPDs. Introduce a congestion charge. Look at installing City Trees (Wandsworth LA example). More cycle paths.
Impact	13	Measures will have little impact. Achievability of measure depends on will of the Council.
Development	13	Build fewer homes. Development should be designed to encourage walking. Travel infrastructure has not kept up with the speed of house building. This will slow down housing delivery.
Public Transport	12	Reinstate P&R. Buses do not cover all areas of the borough. Public transport needs to improve.
Traffic	11	Concentrate on reducing congestion and improving traffic flow. Improve the one-way system. Review traffic lights to target traffic flow at pollution hotspots.

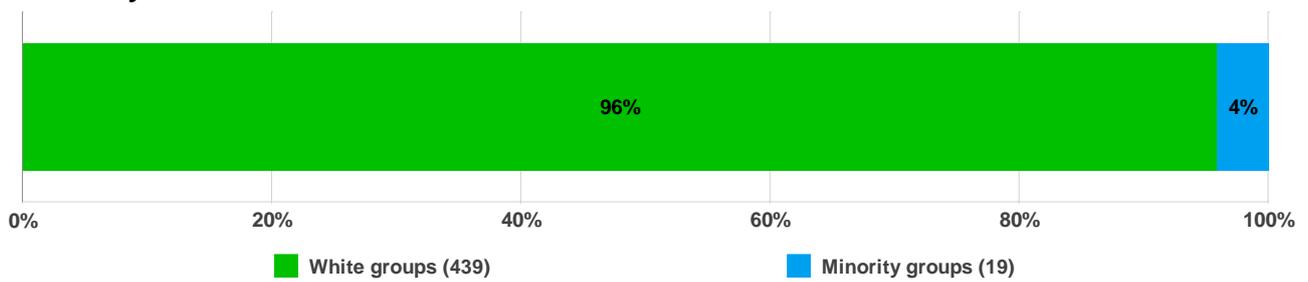| Miscellaneous Measures Additional Comments		
Theme	**No.**	**Nature**
		Remove traffic from the town centre.
Safety	5	Need safer bus shelters. Need safe cycle routes. Consider pedestrian safety (uneven & narrow pavements, appropriate crossing points). EV scooters on pavements are a safety issue.
Other	5	Unable to give an opinion further information needed. Wood burning stoves need to be addressed. Will Parish Councils be able to request air monitoring if they feel there is a need? Do not support the 'Great Reset'.
EVs	2	Charging points need to be reliable and maintained. Implications needed for non-electric vehicles using bays designated for EVs (i.e., those with chargers).

Demographics

Gender

58%	41%	0%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- Male (266)
- Female (189)
- Other (2)

Age

3%	8%	14%	26%	32%	17%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- 18-34 years (14)
- 45-54 years (66)
- 65-74 years (149)
- 35-44 years (35)
- 55-64 years (119)
- 75 years and over (77)

Ethnicity

96%	4%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- White groups (439)
- Minority groups (19)

Disability

15%	82%	4%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- Yes (68)
- No (376)
- Prefer not to say (16)