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Emission mission: Campaigners Jonathan Callaway, Susie Morrow, Alan Pates and Hilary Callaway

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Putney's pollution levels 'a national disgrace'

Pollution in Putney has been described as "a national disgrace" after it emerged that levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) exceeded EU regulations 18 times in the first three days of 2012 – more than is permitted for the whole year.

The high level of pollution in the town is killing dozens of people prematurely and as a result many more are suffering from asthma,

EXCLUSIVE

by **ALEXANDRA RUCKI**

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other respiratory conditions and heart disease.

Wandsworth has the dubious honour of being the first and only borough in London to breach European Union regulations for air pollution so far this year,

thanks to the levels of NO₂ recorded at the two council monitoring stations in Putney High Street.

And the situation is getting worse, not better.

Levels of the gas were significantly up last year, while readings of PM10 particulates – the most dangerous type of urban pollution according to experts at King's College – were the highest since

readings began in 2003.

The Putney Society has been campaigning on the issue since 2010 and this week it held an important meeting with London Assembly member Richard Tracey, pictured right, and the operations director of London buses who promised to prioritise greener buses for the high street.

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Polluted town 'a national disgrace'

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Transport for London (TfL) has said it will make Putney High Street a priority for greener transport methods, following a meeting with the Putney Society and London Assembly member Richard Tracey and councillors on Monday.

Bus pollution has been a major concern, because of the 120 vehicles using the garage on that road, which cause two-thirds of the pollution, according to the council.

Mike Weston, operations director of London bus services announced there 10 new hybrid buses and 13 Euro 5 diesel buses will be running in Putney by October.

He said: "In practice these buses will be allocated to routes 14, 22 and 74.

"As part of the Government's recent announcement of more green bus funding we will be exploring whether more of the 22 new buses could be hybrids."

Jonathan Callaway, deputy chairman of the Putney Society, said: "This is a positive first step, but there is an awful lot that needs to be done.

"The TfL meeting went well and featured some robust pressure from the two Wandsworth Council officials present to prioritise Putney High Street when further hybrid buses are introduced.

"We can only hope TfL listens to us."

The society conducted its own research last year and found excess levels of NO₂ concentrated around the



Teeming with traffic: Putney High Street

Deadlinepix WA58831

high street, Putney Bridge and Putney Hill in many areas, *see map, right*.

Simon Birkett, of the campaign group Clean Air London, which estimated there were 148 premature deaths in Wandsworth from pollution in 2008, was scathing about the lack of effective action to tackle the problem.

He said: "It is a national disgrace that Putney High Street has breached in three days the legal limit for a whole year for NO₂.

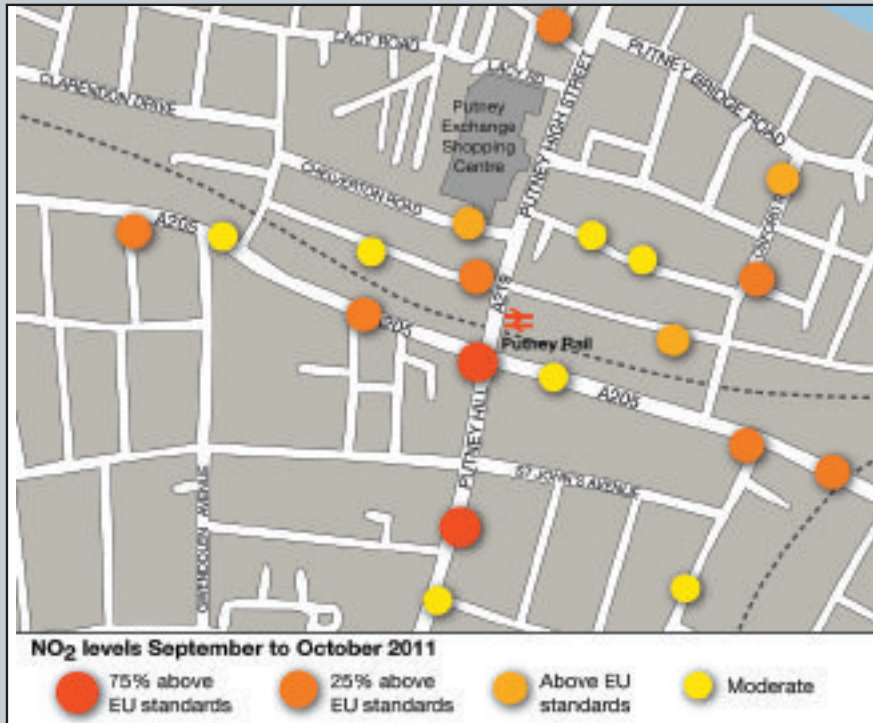
"The Mayor and Wandsworth Council have failed totally to tackle this problem.

"The solutions are simple – we need fewer and cleaner vehicles, buses must be retrofitted with filters, and people should be warned about the dangers of air pollution with advice on protecting themselves and reducing pollution for themselves and others."

Asked what the council has done to reduce pollution a spokesperson said: "Wandsworth has a vast programme of air quality initiatives – most of which are co-ordinated by a dedicated team in our environmental services department.

"Much of their work is focused on raising awareness and tackling vehicle emissions, which are the primary cause of air pollution in London."

It has monitoring stations across the borough, produces yearly reports on air quality control which it uses to lobby



Our mission

Pollution is a silent, invisible killer that affects the health of all of us – from babies to pensioners who have been breathing down poisons all their lives.

This year the Wandsworth Guardian pledges its support to all those campaigning to finally address the problem.

It is time to turn the vast amount of hot air produced on this issue into concrete actions.

In the coming weeks and months we will turn the spotlight on many aspects of the problem and see what is really being done, or not, to reduce pollution on our streets.

Next week we look at the impact on local children and schools.

Useful advice

- There are three council run sites continually monitoring NO₂ and particulate pollution in Putney High Street.

It also has a number of diffusion tubes around the borough and a permanent monitoring station at the town hall.

Residents can listen to a daily summary of air quality in the borough based on readings from

this equipment by calling 020 8871 6433.

- The London Air Quality Network's website at london.air.org.uk also provides information where people can view levels on a map. The network records pollution levels across the whole of Greater London and is managed by King's College London's Environmental Research Group.

the transport authorities. With Putney's own MP Justine Greening now Transport Secretary, campaigners are determined to drive the issue to the top of the agenda.

At the start of the Olympic year the Mayor of London has also pledged to improve air quality in the capital.

Last week he announced fines for drivers of the most

polluting heavy diesel vehicles and on Tuesday launched a campaign to stop engine idling.

He said: "From January we are ushering in even higher environmental standards to curb pollution and ensure fresher, healthier air for all.

"Delivering cleaner air is key to my goal of creating a better quality of life for Londoners, 2012 is also an historic year

during which the eyes of the world will turn to London and I want people to experience a cleaner, greener city before, during and after the Games."

□ **Have you been affected by air pollution in Putney? What do you think should be done to tackle it?**

Call the newsdesk on 020 8722 6344 or email arucki@london.newsquest.co.uk

Measurements are collected hourly or twice daily from monitoring sites which are processed, checked and then published on the website.

- There is also a free text message service for anybody who wants updates and alerts on the air quality.

To sign up visit airtext.info to be sent alerts to your home phone, mobile or by email.

- University College London has set up a website allowing people to conduct their own air quality research.

Anyone who signs up needs an hour to set up the monitors, an hour to take them down after four weeks and then they need to drop them off to a local co-ordinator.

Visit mappingforchange.org.uk or email l.francis@mappingforchange.org.uk for more.

The three types of pollution scientists are most worried about are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) and ozone.

NO₂ is a nitrogen gas molecule formed by emissions from both diesel and petrol-run vehicles.

Experts have linked it to respiratory problems and asthma attacks

Dr Ben Barratt, deputy manager for air quality monitoring at King's College London, said: "Putney is bad for NO₂ because it is a narrow street on a hill with lots of traffic, so it can't disperse."

The closer you are to a running vehicle, the higher the amount you will inhale.

Those walking on the kerb will experience more pollution than those walking close to the shops.

High levels of it are a strong indicator of the presence of other dangerous pollutants from vehicle emissions, such as fine particulates PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}.

PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} are fine particles given off by vehicles that can get into the blood stream and even the brain

Dr Barratt said these are the most worrying types of pollution because they can lead to breathing and cardiovascular problems including strokes and heart attacks and even the brain.

They can travel a significant distance, dependent on the weather.

Concentration levels can be particularly bad on calm sunny days as it is slow to disperse.

Ozone is formed by different types

of pollution reacting with the sunlight and is linked to respiratory problems.

It is often visible as a brown haze or summer fog on particularly bad days.

Dr Barratt said: "People have different reactions to the different forms of pollution.

Ozone might affect somebody who has hayfever."

NO₂

PM₁₀
+ 2.5

Ozone