

Residents' Briefing: Air Quality Monitoring Station at West Hill, Hastings

Dear Resident,

This note provides additional information about the Air Quality Monitoring Station (AQMS) that the Environment Agency, on behalf of DEFRA, has installed at West Hill. It supplements information you may have received before construction started. Given the level of interest in the works, we have widened the distribution, so this may be the first time you have seen it. This briefing will provide information on:

- Remaining work that is required to connect electricity to the AQMS
- What the purpose of the AQMS is and what public health benefits it brings to the residents of Hastings

Initial works and issues found

Groundworks began on 17 June 2026 at West Hill to connect mains power to the AQMS. This work was planned and undertaken by UK Power Networks on behalf of the Environment Agency and required a trench of approximately 28 metres to lay a new power cable between the AQMS and an existing underground power cable.

However, during these works the contractor identified that the local power network maps that show the location of underground electric cables are inaccurate. Regrettably, additional trenching will be required to trace the cable to its connection point with the main network on Plynlimmon Road.

We understand the disruption this will cause and apologise for the inconvenience. It is the responsibility of UK Power Networks (who are the Distribution Network owners) to maintain accurate power network maps and to connect installations to the power network.

Remaining Works

An additional trench of approximately 30 metres will be required to investigate the location and identity of the local cabling before the AQMS can be connected to the power network. Unfortunately, this is the only feasible way to complete the works safely. Smaller, exploratory trenches were considered, but this would not be a safe approach as it could result in misidentification and incorrect connection of power cables. The planned dates for the works are as follows:

Dates	Activities
Tuesday 14 July to Wednesday 15 July	Groundworks for trenching to identify Low Voltage ID for cable jointing – temporary fencing will be installed
Thursday 16 July	Electrical connection to connect the AQMS to the power network
Friday 17 July	Complete reinstatement of the highway no later than 6pm (in accordance with permit requirements). Start reinstatement works to the unmade ground trenching.
Week commencing Monday 20 July	Complete reinstatement works of unmade ground trenching if this cannot be completed on Friday 17 July. Further visits may be required due to the extent of the works. The safety fencing will be removed once the trench reinstatement is complete and all DNO site activities have completed.

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Access to West Hill and the children's play area will be maintained throughout the works and no footpaths through the park will be blocked.

The reinstatement of the ground will be completed by UK Power Networks, who are responsible for these works. This includes the backfilling of the trench and the re-seeding of the grass. We accept that a hot summer is not the ideal time to re-seed grass. The area will be monitored by us and our contractors, and further seeding will take place if needed.

A Street Works Permit has been issued by East Sussex County Council for the remaining works, permit number KZ500/73674684 and UK Power Networks are exercising their statutory powers to connect the AQMS to the power network. No wayleave or consent agreements are required by Hastings Borough Council for these works.

Following the connection of power to the AQMS our contractors will install the monitoring equipment. A period of calibration and quality assurance of the monitoring equipment will then begin and it is estimated data from the AQMS will be published from September 2026.

Once connected, the Hastings AQMS will measure levels of microscopic particles that can cause damage to human health when we breathe them in. The scientific name for these particles is PM_{2.5}. PM_{2.5} is defined as any pollution particle smaller than 2.5 microns that is suspended in the air we breathe. 2.5 microns is twenty times thinner than a human hair. It isn't visible to the naked eye but is a hazardous airborne pollutant because it can penetrate deep into the human body and is linked to various diseases and cancers.

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PM_{2.5} particles come from a variety of different sources such as road transport (exhausts and brake/tyre wear), domestic combustions, industrial processes and some natural sources like wildfires and farming.

Poor air quality is the biggest environmental threat to public health in the UK and contributes to the early death of tens of thousands of UK citizens every year and costs the NHS billions. Measurement of ambient PM_{2.5} levels are important to understand its concentration, sources and distribution so that interventions can be put in place to reduce ambient levels and improve public health.

Why does Hastings need PM2.5 monitoring?

Hastings was identified as an area in Southeast England that lacked sufficient PM_{2.5} monitoring. Various locations in Hastings were considered and, following strict siting and assessment criteria, West Hill was decided to be the best location. A public park was chosen for the AQMS as it represents the average air that the people breathe as they go about their daily lives, whereas locating the AQMS next to a busy road/junction would give falsely high readings for the amount of PM_{2.5} people are exposed to.

The purposes of the Hastings AQMS and the benefits it will bring are:

- **Helping people stay informed** – Residents can check current air quality, receive alerts when pollution levels are high, understand how air quality changes throughout the year, and make informed decisions about activities such as exercising outdoors or travelling. This information can be found at <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk>
- **Supporting local air quality plans** – The monitoring data helps inform the Hastings Air Quality Strategy and the Sussex Air Quality Partnership. These programmes support local initiatives, such as encouraging taxi drivers to switch to electric vehicles, to improve air quality across Hastings and Sussex.
- **Protecting people's health** – Air quality monitoring provides the information needed to issue health advice and pollution alerts during periods of poor air quality, helping to protect vulnerable people and reduce the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses.
- **Identifying pollution hotspots** – PM_{2.5} monitoring shows where pollution levels are consistently higher. This allows targeted action to reduce pollution where it will have the greatest benefit for public health.
- **Measuring the impact of improvements** – Continuous monitoring shows whether actions to improve air quality are working. In Hastings, historic monitoring found that particulate pollution fell following transport improvements, including the opening of the Bexhill–Hastings Link Road. Without ongoing monitoring, it would be difficult to demonstrate these improvements.
- **Understanding the local health impact** – In 2023, it was estimated that around 4.8% of deaths in Hastings were linked to long-term exposure to particulate air pollution. Monitoring helps quantify this health burden and supports action to reduce it.
- **Supporting better decision-making** – Reliable PM_{2.5} data provides evidence to help shape transport planning and inform decisions on new planning applications.

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- **Supporting long-term research** – Continuous monitoring builds long-term datasets that help researchers and public health professionals better understand local environmental health risks and assess the effectiveness of interventions over time.
- **Tracking progress towards national targets** – UK legislation sets targets for reducing PM_{2.5} pollution and population exposure by 2040. Data collected by the Hastings Air Quality Monitoring Station (AQMS) will be used to measure progress and demonstrate compliance with these targets

Further information on PM_{2.5} and the Hastings Air Quality Strategy can be found here:

<https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/networks/network-info?view=aurm>

https://www.hastings.gov.uk/content/air_management/ASR2024.pdf

<https://www.eastsussexinfofigures.org.uk/jsna/air-quality-in-east-sussex/>

For any additional enquiries or information please contact enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

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