

New IAQM Guidance on Odour Assessment for Planning

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires the effects of pollution on health, the natural environment or general amenity to be taken into account in planning decisions. The NPPF definition of pollution specifically includes odour.

Until now, there has been little guidance on how best to carry out an odour impact assessment; and none at all on how to assess the significance of the effects for planning purposes. The Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) – the UK professional body specifically for air quality practitioners – has now issued guidance that addresses both of these needs. Dr Jon Pullen, Operational Director at RPS` Brighton office, was a co-author of the guidance and summarises some of the main points.

There are two general scenarios where an assessment of the impact of odour may be required for planning applications:

- when the proposed land-use activity is itself a potentially significant source of odours (e.g. wastewater treatment, waste management, food and drink manufacturing, industrial and agricultural activities); or
- when a sensitive use (e.g. residential development) is being

proposed near to an existing odorous activity and may be affected by it.

Good practice for assessment of odour impacts

The air quality section of the NPPG advises that "Assessments should be proportionate to the nature and scale of development proposed and the level of concern about air quality, and because of this are likely to be locationally specific." The IAQM guidance helps put some flesh on these bones by summarising:

- what an odour impact assessment for planning purposes should cover; and
- the different assessment tools that can be used, highlighting their applications and limitations. Typical assessment tools include qualitative predictive assessments, detailed atmospheric dispersion modelling, and odour monitoring by "Sniff Tests".

The IAQM guidance requires the air quality professional to >>>



Case Study

Supported by GLA funding, Climate Energy Homes has built 51 highly energy-efficient Passive House affordable residential properties for its client Circle Housing, at the former Carpetright site off the A1306 New Road in Rainham, Essex.

An existing sewage treatment works was located a couple of hundred metres north of the development site. To support the planning application, RPS carried out a multi-tool assessment of odour impacts in accordance with the IAQM guidance.

A combination of desk-top assessment (analysis of complaints data and inspection of dispersion modelling results from the water company) and on-site monitoring using "sniff testing" demonstrated there would be no significant adverse effect on future residents. The development received consent in last July and the first occupants move in this month.

Dr Jon Pullen is Operational Director at RPS Planning and Development`s Brighton office

		Receptor Sensitivity		
		Low	Medium	High
Odour Exposure (Impact)	Very Large	Moderate adverse	Substantial adverse	Substantial adverse
	Large	Slight adverse	Moderate adverse	Substantial adverse
	Medium	Negligible	Slight adverse	Moderate adverse
	Small	Negligible	Negligible	Slight adverse
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

LEFT: IAQM Suggested Descriptors for Magnitudes of Odour Effects

justify that the assessment approach used is suitable and proportionate.

reasonable expectation of amenity.

Guidance on odour-sensitive receptors

The impact of the odour (the odour exposure determined by the amount, pattern and character of odour available for perception by an individual) can lead to an adverse effect on receptors (people in the case of odour). The magnitude of this adverse effect will depend partly on the sensitivities of the receptors, i.e. how responsive the surrounding land users are to odour. The adverse odour effect of most relevance to planning is disamenity.

Properly categorising receptor sensitivities is crucial to a robust assessment of odour effects. Hitherto there has been little official guidance on this; the IAQM has therefore developed a sensitivity classification scheme based on the concept of rea-

Judging the significance of odour effects

For something as subjective as odour, the significance of the effect is a matter of judgement that cannot easily be defined by scientific methods alone and ideally requires a wider societal or stakeholder consensus to be arrived at. The IAQM guidance proposes a general framework of descriptors for the magnitude of effects resulting from the odour impact on a receptor of a particular sensitivity.

This framework will be kept under review to benefit from the feedback of affected or interested parties, be they air quality practitioners, EIA specialists, planners, or communities.

The full guidance is available from the IAQM website at www.IAQM.co.uk

The meaning of 'Disamenity'

Literally "impaired amenity" and, from the government Planning Portal definition of amenity, can be considered to be: a negative element or elements that detract from the overall character or enjoyment of an area. The Oxford English Dictionary defines disamenity as "the unpleasant quality or character of something".

High sensitivity receptor	<p>Surrounding land where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> users can reasonably expect enjoyment of a high level of amenity; <i>and</i> the people would reasonably be expected to be present here continuously, or at least regularly for extended periods, as part of the normal pattern of use of the land. <p>Examples may include residential dwellings, hospitals, schools/education and tourist/cultural.</p>
Medium sensitivity receptor	<p>Surrounding land where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> users would expect to enjoy a reasonable level of amenity, but wouldn't reasonably expect to enjoy the same level of amenity as in their home; <i>or</i> people wouldn't reasonably be expected to be present here continuously or regularly for extended periods as part of the normal pattern of use of the land. <p>Examples may include places of work, commercial/retail premises and playing/recreation fields.</p>
Low sensitivity receptor	<p>Surrounding land where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the enjoyment of amenity would not reasonably be expected; <i>or</i> there is transient exposure, where the people would reasonably be expected to be present only for limited periods of time as part of the normal pattern of use of the land. <p>Examples may include industrial use, farms, footpaths and roads.</p>

LEFT: IAQM categorisation of receptor sensitivity to odours

To discuss how RPS' air quality and odour team can enhance your prospects for obtaining planning consent or discharging conditions, please contact Dr Jon Pullen at: RPS Planning & Development, 6-7 Lovers walk, Brighton, BN1 6AH Email: pullenj@rpsgroup.com Telephone: 01273 546800