



Air Quality: Can the UK feasibly reach WHO targets? A devolved perspective

23rd April 2026

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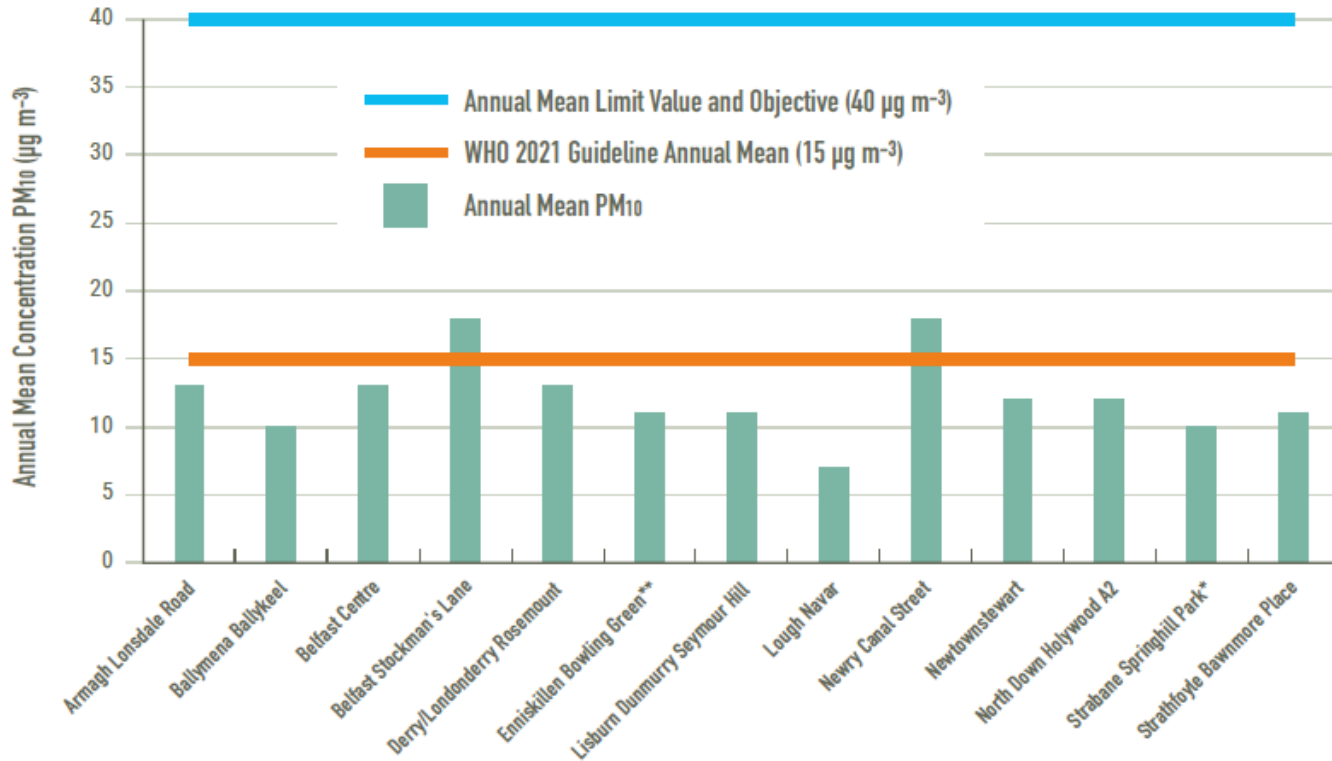
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Can Northern Ireland meet WHO targets?

Figure 4.1: Annual Mean PM₁₀ Concentrations, 2024



* Asterisk indicates sites with < 85% data capture.

** Two asterisks indicate sites with < 75% data capture, and data annualised.

PM 10: Annual mean

- Compliant with limit values and objectives
- Mostly compliant with WHO air quality guidelines
 - Exceedances occur in two roadside sites
- Source: Air Quality in Northern Ireland 2024. DAERA. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/air-pollution-northern-ireland-2024-report>

Can Northern Ireland meet WHO targets?

Figure 4.2: Annual Mean PM_{2.5} Concentrations, 2024



* Asterisk indicates sites with < 85% data capture.

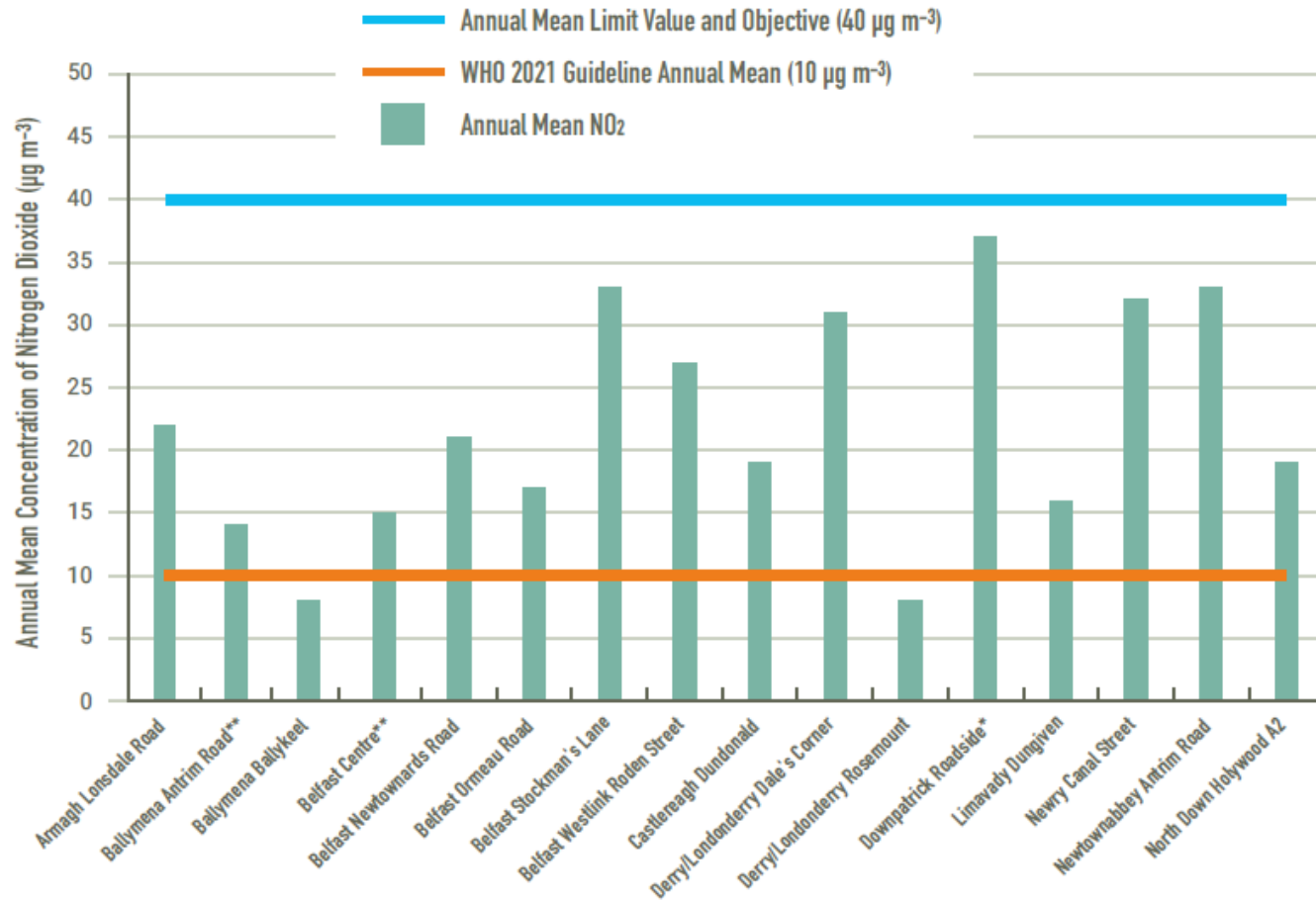
** Two asterisks indicate sites with < 75% data capture, and data annualised.

PM 2.5: Annual mean

- **Compliant** with **limit values and objectives**
- **Not compliant** with **WHO air quality guidelines**
 - Only compliant in a remote site (Lake Navar)
- Source: Air Quality in Northern Ireland 2024. DAERA. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/air-pollution-northern-ireland-2024-report>

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Figure 4.3: Annual Mean NO₂ Concentrations, 2024



Nitrogen dioxide: Annual mean

- **Compliant** with **limit values and objectives**
- **Not compliant** with **WHO air quality guidelines**
 - Only compliant in 2 urban background sites
- Source: Air Quality in Northern Ireland 2024. DAERA. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/air-pollution-northern-ireland-2024-report>

Can Northern Ireland meet WHO targets?

- Monitoring data show NI is largely not compliant for NO₂ and PM_{2.5} but mostly compliant for PM₁₀
 - → **Not meet WHO guidelines today**
- Trends – where available – suggests that annual average levels of PM_{2.5} and NO₂ have been stable since 2020
 - → **Unlikely to meet WHO guidelines in the near-term** (assuming similar trends)
- What are the key air quality challenges facing Northern Ireland?



Key challenges for NI?

+ Belfast most congested city in UK, study claims



Traffic at a standstill in both directions on the Ravenhill Road in Belfast (Peter Morrison)



James McNaney
Business Reporter

21 Jan 2026 6:18 AM

- **Traffic pollution**
 - Low levels of active travel and rural character → car dependency
 - Urban NO₂ is a significant problem
 - In Belfast, responsible for 4 declared AQ management areas (main arterial roads)
- **Routes to WHO compliance**
 - Unclear – EVs, active travel, etc. all play a role but NI still highly car-dependent
 - Not clear that LEZs/CAZs are suitable options
 - Requires investment & behavioural change

Key challenges for NI?

Forecast high air pollution in Northern Ireland

Date published: 8 January 2024

High and moderate levels of particulate matter are forecast across Northern Ireland until Friday. There is potential for isolated areas of high air pollution to occur during this period.

The high levels of pollution are expected as a result of increased home heating emissions along with the forecasted cold, calm weather conditions, which prevents these pollutants being dispersed.

For further information and hourly updates on levels of particulate matter (PM10 & PM2.5) as well as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone and carbon monoxide please see the Department's website:

<https://www.airqualityni.co.uk> and for advice see

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/air-pollution-and-health>

Latest news

- **Solid fuel burning**

- Domestic burning for home heating – including coal burning – is much more prevalent in NI compared with other parts of UK
- Winter PM levels are approximately twice as high as summer PM levels
- Benzo(a)pyrene levels are higher than UK average

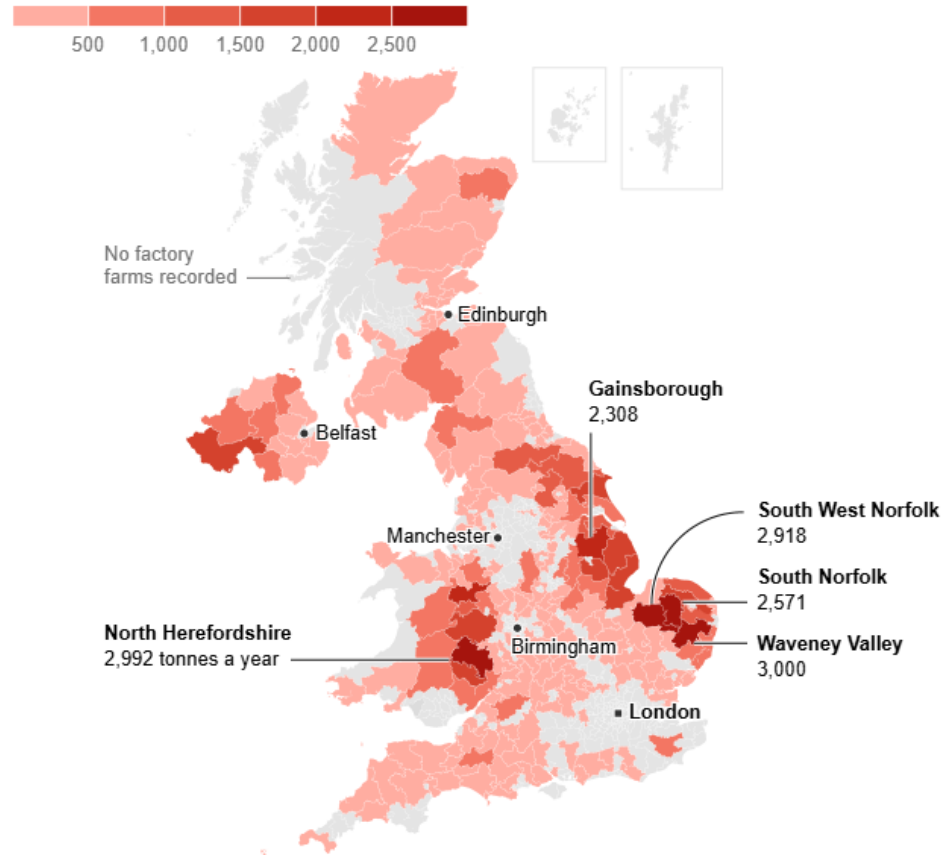
- **Routes to WHO compliance**

- Ban sale of smoky coal and wet wood (already done in ROI)

Key challenges for NI?

Ammonia pollution hotspots

Estimated ammonia emissions from animal waste produced by factory farms, tonnes a year

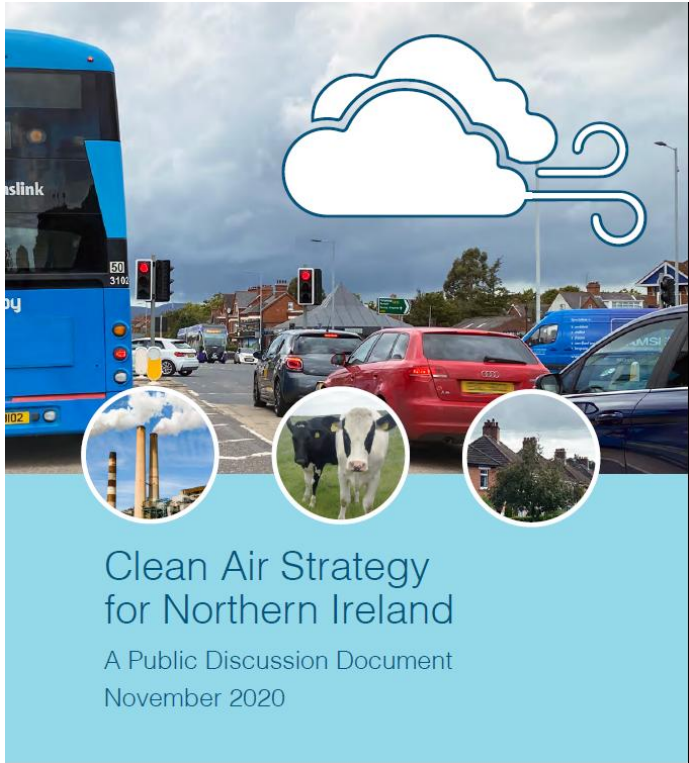


Guardian graphic. Source: Peter Brooks, CIWF-UK, Sustain. Note: based on emissions from manure production and its usage on farms within the constituency

- **Agricultural Ammonia**

- Ammonia emissions have continued to rise despite declines in other key pollutants
- Beef and dairy farming significant contributor but poultry too
- NI is a disproportionate emitter (12% of UK emissions vs. 3% of population)
- Contributes to secondary PM
- **Routes to WHO compliance**
 - Ammonia Strategy should be published without delay

Recent Progress: Developing a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland



Autumn 2020
Discussion Document issued to public consultation. Invited views and sought ideas

NI FM resigned (Feb. 22)
– Executive unable to make significant decisions

Executive restored (Jan. 24)

Summer 2022
Public synopsis of responses published

Spring 2021
Consultation closed and responses analysed

Latest
Preliminary findings discussed with Minister and inter-departmental working group set up





ADR

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thanks for listening

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