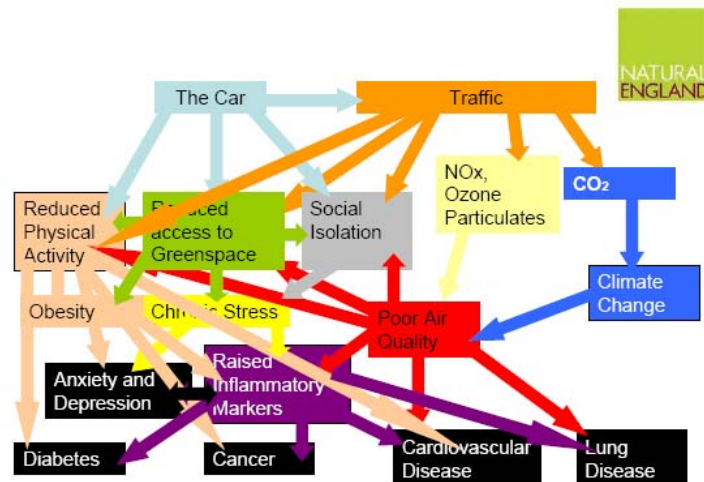


**Report of and comments on the IAQM Health, Wellbeing and Air Quality Workshop, Friday 4 April 2008, held as part of Environmental Protection UK's Spring Workshop Highgate House hotel Northampton**

**Bernard Fisher**

The Institute for Air Quality Management and Environmental Protection UK held a joint informal Workshop on the theme Health, Wellbeing and Air Quality in the afternoon of Friday 4 April, following Environmental Protection UK's Spring Workshop. Our two friendly medical advisors led the discussion, Professor Stephen Holgate (University of Southampton) and Dr William Bird (English Nature). They both gave inspirational talks designed to question our current view of air quality and its effects on health. They argued against restricting our view of air quality to the narrow paradigm of air quality management, instead one should consider air quality as just one of a range of factors which has an impact on community health.

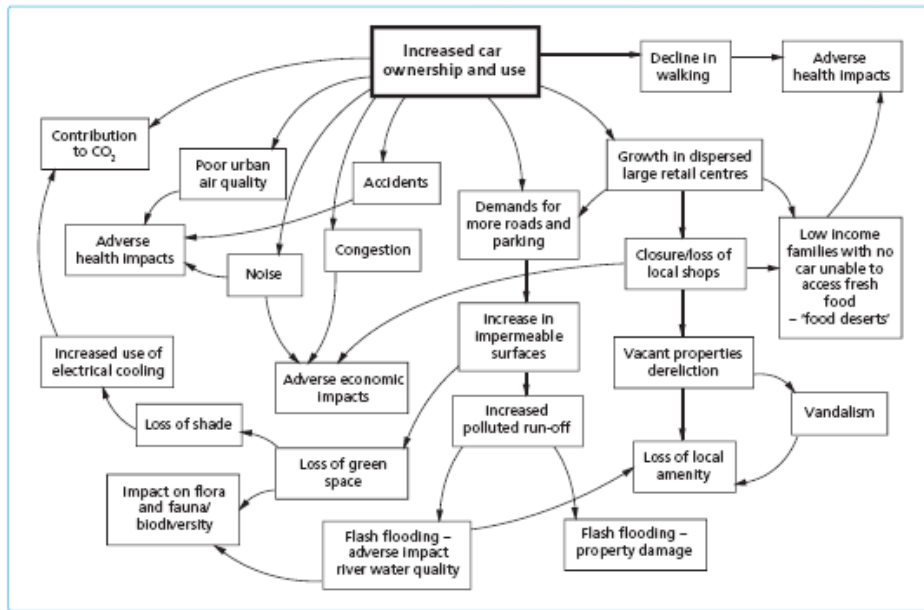
William Bird emphasised the other reasons why groups experiencing poor socio-economic conditions are more vulnerable to air quality, these include existing chronic diseases, destructive health behaviour (heavy smoking and drinking), poor diet, chronic stress and poor housing. One of his illustrative examples is reproduced below; it shows the interactions between activities linked to poor air quality and various health outcomes.



William's particular interest is to address the social ills that have crept up on modern society by encouraging greater physical activity, access to green space and reducing social isolation. Stephen Holgate drew on the recent report on the Urban Environment of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which discusses the same issue. The report emphasises that the urban environment is a complex issue and as an example the figure below taken from it shows multiple interactions between cause and effects, in this case arising from increasing car ownership.

FIGURE 1-1

Part of the web of connections between increased car ownership and use and environmental and social outcomes in urban areas<sup>15</sup>



A step towards the solution is to consider these complex problems in a more holistic way. The question is whether this requires legislative intervention or voluntary action through individual initiatives. Local government and the health service should be working together to reduce car dependence, increase walking and cycling and the availability of green space, accepting that there may be conflicts between measures. Health Impact Assessments should be embedded within local authorities, while Environmental Impact Assessment should be truly embedded in urban and transport planning. The question for the Institute for Air Quality Management and Environment Protection UK is how to encourage good practice. One should look broadly for solutions, and reductionist science alone cannot solve complex problems.

The day following the Workshop I attended George Bernard Shaw's play Major Barbara written in 1905. Shaw was concerned with society's ills, mainly poverty, and whether the Salvation Army relief efforts should rely on financial support from dubious sources. Should those with a social conscience rely on ill-gotten gains or will this ultimately merely aid the status quo and be an ineffective way to societal change? After 100 years, although poverty in western society has been greatly reduced, social ills have not been eliminated. The famous quotation in Shaw's play is that Society cannot be saved until "professors of Greek take to making gunpowder or the makers of gunpowder become professors of Greek". The equivalent for us today might be that social and environmental conditions cannot be made fair and equitable until the "air quality managers become life style gurus or life style gurus become air quality managers"! The Institute for Air Quality Management should be grateful to William and Stephen for shaking up our current perceptions, much as Shaw would have done to his theatrical audiences at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century!