

B&NES' golden opportunity to tackle Bath's transport woes
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B&NES Council has been handed a golden opportunity finally to tackle Bath's transport problems. The Government has mandated B&NES to bring air pollution from nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) within the legal limit in the shortest possible time. For years this limit has been exceeded across the whole main road network in Bath and large parts of the city centre, with serious consequences for the health of Bath residents. With this mandate comes access to funding.

Air pollution is inextricably linked to motor vehicle traffic, which generates 92% of the NO₂ in Bath. Air pollution should be tackled as part of an overall strategy aimed at reducing both pollution and the traffic congestion which blights the World Heritage Site, in line with the objectives of: the Bath Transport Strategy, approved with all-Party support in 2014; the Core Strategy objective of a largely car-free city centre; and the Bath Public Realm and Movement Strategy. It makes no sense to deal with air quality in isolation from these broader targets.

The Council's main response ("Air pollution plans to help Bath breathe") has been to propose a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) for central Bath. FoBRA would welcome the creation of a CAZ as part of a suite of measures aimed at reducing traffic congestion and air pollution as soon as possible. However, the CAZ will need to cover areas surrounding the city centre to prevent the displacement of traffic and pollution onto nearby residential streets.

However, we believe a CAZ is not the only way of cutting emissions and improving air quality by 2021. Vehicle movement and hence air pollution in the city centre could also be reduced quickly, effectively and cheaply by means of parking control and traffic management. This should include restrictions on coach access to the city centre and freight delivery management. The 'other measures' set out in the Council paper, particularly improving public transport, are essential and should be pursued as elements of a comprehensive Bath Transport Plan.

A purely city centre CAZ would have limited impact on London Road, which has some of the highest NO₂ exceedances in the city. A high proportion of NO₂ on London Road is generated by HGVs, most of which do not go into the centre but use Bathwick Street and the A36 south or west. In the longer term, providing an alternative route for the A46-A36 through traffic will significantly reduce air pollution along this corridor. However in order to resolve the problem quickly, a CAZ should be introduced on London Road.

The Council must not fail to seize this opportunity to address Bath's transport problems. We hope that this will have the support of all the political Parties.

Robin Kerr, Chairman