

Dear Editor,

A number of transport issues of great importance for Bath are coming to a head, with B&NES consultations on air quality, parking and coaches. We broadly welcome the proposals on air quality and parking, but the coach strategy is totally flawed.

Traffic congestion and air pollution have consistently been our members' top concerns. Air pollution is above the legal limit throughout the road network in Bath, and has not improved over the past 10 or more years. The Government has listed B&NES among the most polluted authorities in the country. B&NES is now required to develop and implement a plan to reduce pollution below the legal limit in the shortest possible time. This provides an excellent opportunity for the Council to take forward measures to reduce traffic and pollution, and to overcome the constraints that have impeded action in the past.

92% of air pollution in Bath is caused by traffic. Action must therefore be focused on reducing traffic volumes, particularly the most polluting diesel vehicles. Unlike the 2011 Air Quality Action Plan, the new consultation paper addresses traffic reduction measures, most based on the Bath Transport Strategy which was agreed with all-party support in 2014. However nothing will change unless this plan is actually implemented.

We have long been urging B&NES Council to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution by traffic management and reduced visitor parking in the city centre. Both are part of the Bath Transport Strategy. We are pleased that the parking strategy recognises the need to use parking control to reduce traffic and protect the historic fabric of the World Heritage Site. We welcome its Hierarchy of Kerb Space, which places resident parking above short-stay parking and long-stay parking. This should be applied in the central area, where on-street parking should be reserved mainly for residents and other essential users such as the disabled. This would contribute significantly to reducing congestion and air pollution, as it would deter visitors from driving round and round looking for a space.

The coach parking strategy fails to recognise the severe adverse impact of coach traffic, to analyse the contribution that coaches are claimed to make to the economy, or to attempt to strike any kind of balance between the two. Essentially, the approach has been to ask what the coach operators, drivers and passengers want, and accommodate them without regard to the impact on the city or its residents. Surveys were conducted of the views of coach companies, drivers and passengers, but none of Bath residents. In the view of many residents (and some businesses), coaches are a plague.

The strategy proposes that coaches should continue to be allowed to come into the very heart of the city. Coach demand is forecast to increase by 24% by 2026, but this increase is simply to be accommodated. These proposals are completely incompatible with the Council's stated policies to cut air pollution and reduce traffic, especially in the historic core, and a wasted opportunity to improve our city. Coach drop-offs should be provided at locations outside the city centre, within a reasonable walking distance of it.

The proposal to put four to six new coach bays on Green Park Road is particularly unfortunate. It would gobble up a valuable green space and ruin the riverside setting of Green Park, which is used by young children including a growing number of visiting school groups.

We strongly urge B&NES Council leadership to reject the draft coach strategy and direct that a revised strategy is produced which removes coach traffic from the city centre and contributes to the aim of bringing air pollution below the legal limit as soon as possible. The strategy should be widened to cover all aspects of coach presence in Bath, including illegal parking, engines left running, and the movement of coaches through the historic core of the city. Coaches must be managed, not simply accommodated.

Robin Kerr, Chairman, FoBRA, 15th Oct 17