

Councillor Tim Warren
Leader of B&NES Council
The Guildhall
Bath
BA1 5EB

4th August 2017

Dear Councillor Tim,

Air pollution in Bath

I wrote to you on 15th December last year about the urgent need for B&NES Council to tackle air pollution in Bath. This is, and has been for some years, the highest priority of FOBRA members.

Since then, we have had the latest (2016) nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) data for Bath, which show no improvement. NO₂ pollution has been virtually unchanged over the 10 to 20 year period during which it has been monitored. Successive Councils have allowed this situation to continue.

Most recently, the Government's Air Quality Plan of July 2017 has named B&NES as one of 29 local authorities with the greatest problem due to excessive levels of NO₂ pollution. As I understand it, B&NES will now be required to produce a local plan to reduce this pollution below the legal limit; with the initial plan needed by March 2018 and the final plan by December 2018. See:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/633270/air-quality-plan-detail.pdf

With these developments in mind, I hope you will agree that it is time that the Council got serious about reducing air pollution; not only because B&NES is going to be held to account by the Government, but more importantly because of the grave impact on the health of residents and others of these high levels of air pollution.

What is to be done? According to B&NES' own data, 92% of NO₂ pollution in Bath is caused by traffic. A large amount of this is due to diesel cars, but unfortunately the Government does not appear willing to take action, eg through the tax system, to reduce diesel car use. Action must therefore be focused on reducing traffic volumes, particularly of the most polluting diesel vehicles.

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I fear that no amount of encouragement and exhortation will persuade people not to drive into and through central Bath, if it suits them to drive-in, and if they can. They therefore have to be actively discouraged, by making driving-in less attractive (or impossible, in the case of through traffic). Hence we are urging you to reduce vehicle access to the city centre by means of parking control and traffic management.

It should be self-evident that destination parking creates traffic. Every parking space attracts a car, usually several times a day. City centre parking generates traffic in the city centre and on the approaches to it. We should like to see public off-street parking reduced, as set out in the Bath Transport Strategy. We should also like to see on-street parking in the Central Zone reserved mainly for residents and other essential users, such as the disabled (in fact, most of the spaces are permanently taken by residents; on average only about 70 on-street spaces in the Central Zone are occupied by visitors at any time, but people drive round looking for a space, adding to the congestion and air pollution). Those who feel they must drive-in can use the car parks, where there is still plenty of capacity, but visitors and commuters should principally be expected to use the Park and Ride sites (P&Rs), where there is also spare capacity. We should like to see the P&Rs operating later into the evening, with secure overnight parking.

We also believe that traffic management should be used to remove traffic congestion and pollution from sensitive city streets. This too is part of the Bath Transport Strategy. It should include the Georgian gems such as Queen Square and The Circus. The present state of these iconic spaces and the wider historic core is a disgrace to the World Heritage Site. We need a comprehensive traffic management plan for the city centre.

One element of a plan to reduce air pollution is likely to be a Clean Air Zone (CAZ), so it is good that the Government has promised local authorities access to funding for CAZs. We believe there should be a CAZ covering the whole of central Bath, with traffic management to forestall 'rat-running' through the surrounding residential areas. However, while a CAZ may help eliminate the most polluting vehicles, it would be far from a complete solution to the problems of congestion and pollution.

An alternative route for the A36-A46 through traffic must be found so as to enable the highly polluting HGV traffic through the city to be restricted. This is a serious problem in its own right but it also impacts on traffic throughout the city. We should welcome a CAZ on the A4 London Road and the A36 through Bath, but this may not be possible as the Department for Transport is unlikely to allow B&NES to limit traffic on this route in the absence of an alternative route acceptable to Wiltshire. There isn't one at the moment, so an alternative needs to be found. We hope that all parties can agree on the urgent need for a proper feasibility study, with a sound evidence base, to analyse the problem and propose cost-effective solutions.

Because of the great importance of this subject, and because the subject, and its more obvious solutions, are not party-political (in fact, quite the opposite) as I'm sure

you will agree, I have passed copies of this letter to the leaders of the main party groups in the Council, and our MP. I shall also be releasing it to the Bath Chronicle. I hope in this way we can start a wide ranging and active debate to address Bath's serious pollution problems and their urgent amelioration. I stand ready, as Chairman of FoBRA, which is a founder member of the Bath Alliance for Transport and the Public Realm, to take part in such a debate, and to assist in agreeing solutions and their rapid implementation, as part of the Bath Transport Strategy.

With my very best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Robin Kerr, Chairman

Copies to:

Mrs Wera Hobhouse, MP
Cllr Mark Shelford
Cllr Dine Romero
Cllr Neil Butters
Cllr Robin Moss
Cllr Sarah Bevan