

# **Clean Air Zone consultation**

## **Response of Sheffield Green Party**

### **Summary**

- Sheffield Green Party supports a Clean Air Zone to reduce toxic and illegal levels of air pollution in the city, which is responsible for 500 early deaths every year in Sheffield.
- However, this consultation is a missed opportunity for meaningful change.
- Private cars cause half of all traffic-related pollution. The Council should have included a proposal to charge private cars in this consultation.
- The need for this Clean Air Zone is an admission of failure at national and local government level.
- At the same time, the proposals adversely and disproportionately affect public transport and smaller businesses. More detail on the proposals is needed.

### **General comments**

Air pollution is at high, often illegal, levels in the city centre and other parts of the city like Darnall and Tinsley. It is invisible but the effects are real.

Sheffield Green Party has always campaigned on the dangers of vehicle emissions. These contain nitrogen oxides and particulates which have been proven to worsen the risk of asthma, lung and heart diseases, strokes and Alzheimer's disease and which cause 500 early deaths a year in Sheffield alone. Research evidence has shown air pollution can lead to premature birth and low birth weight, and impact on children's lung development. Air pollution is associated with a range of physical and mental illnesses and is known to exacerbate serious conditions like heart disease.

Businesses lose hundreds of thousands of pounds every year due to staff absence caused by conditions related to air pollution.

The Council has permitted a number of developments in the east of the City, such as IKEA and the Meadowhall expansion. Whilst planning conditions have been specified to address air quality, these have been inadequate in practice and, in some cases, bypassed.

However, we note that the Council is only taking steps to consider a Clean Air Zone because it has been ordered to do so by central Government. Even so, the required details were only submitted to government on the very last day that was legally possible.

The fact that the council has only done the minimum required by law is indicative of the lacklustre approach to tackling air quality. Much more could have been done earlier, such as by investing in a workplace parking levy, promoting public transport over private cars and by more effective use of planning conditions.

## **Cars**

Private cars cause half of all the pollution in the city centre and make up 80% of all journeys, many of which are unnecessary.

The Cabinet report acknowledges that the Class C CAZ “will also need additional measures ... in order to achieve legal compliance by 2021.” This is an admission that the proposal to charge these categories alone will be insufficient.

The public is encouraged to drive cars into the city because of the convenience and cost of travel by car, relative to public transport. The low cost of parking a private vehicle in the city centre, in comparison to other cities, is a further encouragement to continue the habit of using a private vehicle rather than choosing public transport.

The convenience for some people who drive is offset against the disadvantage and harm to others, especially those who live and work in the city centre.

Continuing to prioritise private cars also perpetuates wealth inequalities.

We agree with the Science and Technology Select Committee that widespread personal vehicle ownership is unsustainable in the long run, albeit for reasons of carbon reduction rather than NOx emissions<sup>1</sup>. A switch to electric vehicles still leaves large amounts of particulate matter (from brake pads), which is detrimental to health. Sheffield Green Party would like to see far fewer cars brought into the city centre, leaving more space to live and breathe.

Many journeys by car could be switched to bus, tram, cycle and foot travel. Engaging the public is critical to tackling the public health scourge of air pollution. This consultation was therefore an ideal opportunity to engage the public on the key issue of air quality. The council should have consulted on a proposal to charge all types of vehicle.

The decision to rule out any prospect of charging polluting cars was a missed opportunity to gauge public opinion and effect positive behavioural change. There is a pressing need to engage car drivers about how they might modify their behaviour for the common good of everyone.

A proposal to charge private cars even a nominal amount of £1 a day for entering the Clean Air Zone would have the capacity to modify driver behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-49425402>, 22 Aug 19

## **Buses**

Sheffield Green Party believes in encouraging and promoting public transport so that people in Sheffield can choose to leave their cars at home.

Buses need to be given greater priority, both in bus lanes and at traffic lights. There is also a need to make improvements across the board so that buses become an easy, affordable and viable means of travel for most people.

We support the proposal to channel government grants to pay for new, cleaner bus vehicles.

However, we have concerns that the council has only passed these grants on to the two biggest bus companies, First and Stagecoach, and has not given any grant to the smaller operators in the city, such as TM Travel, Sheffield Community Transport, Hulleys or Powells. As well as the appearance of bias towards big businesses over small, local ones, these operators often provide vital links for communities and their loss will worsen the position of people who do not or cannot own a car. It may also harm the innovation of new, more customer focused routes, which some small operators are developing.

## **Taxis and goods vehicles**

We note there is no firm proposal to address the issues faced by taxis and LGVs. These vehicles generally have a legitimate need to come into the city centre, which is not necessarily the case for private cars.

Taxi drivers and businesses with vans need to know whether retro-fitting technology will be acceptable or whether the only way to comply with the CAZ requirement is to purchase new vehicles. In Sheffield Green Party's view, retro-fitting would be preferable because of the very significant energy cost consumed in the production of new vehicles.

Because the focus of the CAZ specification is based on "Euro" standards, which relate to the condition of the vehicle when it was new, the benefits of retro-fitting technology have not been addressed by this proposal under consultation.

Sheffield Green Party has been contacted by engineering businesses which have researched and developed retro-fitting products and have sought the assistance of the council to trial them. It was disappointing to note that this was not followed up by the authority.

There needs to be consideration of how retro-fitted vehicles are charged if they do not quite meet the stringent conditions of low emission vehicles. It is important to avoid an all-or-nothing approach to charging. Either there could be a further period of time when retro-fitted vehicles are exempt or they could be charged at a much lower rate.

## **Walking and Cycling**

Sheffield Green Party supports measures to improve walking and cycling rates. These modes of travel are better for individual health than driving and they also contribute to the improvement of other people's health, through reduced pollution.

There needs to be a far more developed network of segregated cycle routes. Cyclists should not be forced to share a lane with buses, as this is dangerous. It can also slow buses and thus negate the benefit to public transport of installing bus lanes in the first place. The lack of safe cycling space is an equality issue as more women than men feel unsafe when cycling with traffic on congested streets.

Sheffield Green Party would like to see the CAZ as an opportunity to enlarge and develop pedestrianised areas in the city centre.

## **Workplace Parking Levy and other progressive policies**

We believe that the need for this CAZ in Sheffield demonstrates the failure of effective planning in previous years.

Sheffield Green Party councillors have repeatedly called for the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy, which would address behavioural change in the decisions employers make about giving perks to staff in the form of free parking. Where employers choose to charge staff for parking, it would encourage those staff to make realistic decisions about their choice of travel. It would also raise revenue for significant transport improvements.

The success of the workplace parking levy in Nottingham has paid for an extension to the tram system and has also meant that the city does not need to have a Clean Air Zone at all<sup>2</sup>.

Far too often, employers incentivise car travel by offering staff with their own cars subsidised or free parking when they do not offer any incentives to those who travel by bus. Employers could be encouraged to offer equal incentives, such as arranging for monthly or yearly travel passes, with costs recouped from wages. This would increase bus and tram travel in place of cars.

The way that people travel to work, to shop and for leisure can change. Sheffield Green Party wants to see a vision of a cleaner, safer city centre to live, work and play in. This means minimising vehicles to the essential only, such as those needed to ensure equal access for disabled people.

## **Electric vehicle charging infrastructure**

As noted above, Sheffield Green Party believes in the need to get people out of cars and onto public transport or other forms of travel. However, electric

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transportnottingham.com/no-clean-air-zone-for-nottingham/>

vehicles have a role to play in that they produce no NO<sub>x</sub> and less particulate matter and CO<sub>2</sub>.

The provision of electric vehicle charging points is therefore important. However, Sheffield City Council has failed to put in electric charging infrastructure to date (Nottingham has over 200 charging points), and has often failed to require developers to provide electric charging points as planning conditions. For instance, SCC required IKEA to provide five EV charging points but agreed to IKEA's later request to install just one.

### **Displacement**

We accept the principle that setting the charging zone on the Inner Ring Road captures a very large proportion of the city's traffic. It has the potential to effect change because of the number of journeys that pass through the city centre or via the ring road. However, the purpose of the ring road is to divert traffic onto it, so as to keep it away from smaller residential roads.

We have not seen any assessment that addresses the anticipated impact on streets immediately outside the zone. This needs to be addressed.

We believe that some traffic, that would otherwise travel a short distance along the ring road, will be tempted to travel through small, residential streets to avoid the charge. For instance, a van travelling from Bramall Lane to Ecclesall Road would usually travel over a short section of the ring road. To save a £10 charge, this would be likely to increase journeys through the back streets of Sharrow.

The proposal only considers charging for driving on the ring road as a whole. It would be possible to consider charging only for certain segments of the ring road.

Potential rat-runs should be identified and a package of suitable measures should be addressed. These could include closing off local streets to through traffic, whilst maintaining full access for residents.

### **Use of revenue**

Funds created by the Clean Air Zone must be ring-fenced and publicly accounted for to show they are being put to good use to improve public transport. This is to ensure public confidence in this important health measure.