

Bath Clean Air Zone – FoBRA letter to the Bath Chronicle

In assessing the options for a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) in Bath, B&NES Council must give the highest priority to the health of Bath residents and those working in the city, whilst meeting the legal requirement to reduce air pollution. For far too long, the health of residents has taken second place to permitting unrestricted circulation of traffic, whatever the consequences for public health.

The Council's preferred option, a Class D CAZ (including cars), by itself won't do the job, still less a Class C CAZ (excluding cars). Two key locations are forecast to be above the legal limit, others only a little below. This is even before concessions for certain classes such as taxis and Blue Badge holders. It leaves absolutely no margin of safety, given the estimating uncertainties. Previous forecasts of reducing pollution have proved to be grossly over-optimistic.

B&NES should follow the precautionary principle and aim for air pollution levels well below the legal limit in order to ensure compliance by 2021. The Council should urgently consider supplementing the CAZ with traffic management measures to reduce traffic volumes at the critical locations. This might be done by curtailing through traffic in the city centre (George Street and Queen Square), while still allowing access to the centre itself. This would offer the best chance of achieving compliance. A comprehensive city traffic management plan will be required to deter rat-running in residential areas.

A Class D CAZ will hit Bath residents, especially the less well-off drivers of older cars and those who live in the CAZ. It will encourage unwelcome behaviours such as rat-running and parking in residential areas on the edges of the CAZ. The Council is proposing to provide financial support schemes for residents and businesses that need it most, but no details have yet been provided. The modelling shows only a small difference in the impact on air pollution of a Class C and a Class D CAZ, so it might be that a Class C CAZ combined with traffic management would achieve compliance.

The introduction of the CAZ is focusing much-needed attention on transport issues in Bath. Already concerns have been publicised by the haulage industry. The introduction of the CAZ will bring into sharp relief issues such as the need to provide viable alternative means of access to the city, improved public transport, the improvement of park-and-ride provision, freight consolidation and the provision of an alternative route for through traffic, particularly HGVs, that currently uses the A36-A4 route through the city. There is a pressing need to develop and implement a comprehensive Bath transport plan which addresses these issues. The basis for this already exists in B&NES's Bath Transport Strategy, adopted with all-Party support in 2014.

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