

GETTING AROUND BATH — TRAFFIC STRATEGY AND AIR POLLUTION

Professor Donald Thomas - Greenway Residents Association, which has responded to the Traffic Strategy questionnaire, urging greater emphasis on residential areas.

pollution

A defining event in pollution by traffic was publication in December 2013 of the EC report on Exposure to Air Pollution by Vehicle Exhaust, under the acronym "ESCAPE."

This project covered a third of a million people in 22 European sites. Oxford represented the UK, more polluted than Bath in the 1990s. ESCAPE examined diesel particulates and petrol exhaust. Nationally, Bath has been required to set up 51 Air Quality Monitoring Zones for petrol fumes. 37 remain persistently above the legal - not to say lethal — limit. That is 40 parts of nitrogen dioxide in each cubic metre of air. 40 parts is the key to what follows.

ESCAPE's small-town Sweden has the lowest level, 8 parts. The highest is 60 parts in industrial Turin. But Bath's Dorchester Street hit 96 parts by August 2012, over twice the limit for the protection of human health. Not all offending sites are city centred. Add Lansdown Crescent, Combe Down, St Mark's Road, Widcombe School and Widcombe High Street. ESCAPE includes a 100-metre zone each side of affected roads which, for example, would bring a refurbished Widcombe Parade well within range of fumes from the new A36.

Even the 40-part figure is now in question. ESCAPE concludes, "Significant adverse health effects occur at concentrations well below currently accepted limits."

Cleaner city centre air alone will not do. Residential roads and pavements are blighted by through traffic, thousands of exhaust pipes daily, some a few feet from doors and windows. One answer may be radical prioritisation of selected access routes in favour of school and public transport, pedestrians and cyclists, using signage, improved pavements, safe crossings and cycle paths, rather than a free-for-all motorcade.

The council may be commended for its initiative. Many people will resent suggestions that they cannot drive where they want, when they want. But publicity is your ally. Childhood asthma or adult onset can now be seen as a consequence of such pollution. Worse respiratory damage can be done to children and adults in rush-hour cars than to walkers or cyclists outside. Cleaner cars cease to be cleaner when they leave the test-bed and encounter "real life" driving conditions. House of Commons 2010 audit records 51,000 deaths annually from this blight. Twenty times more than road accidents. Such truths have been starved of publicity. Let them now be as well-established in our media as weather forecasts or football results.