

Jamie Hughes statement

Air pollution is now causing more deaths than smoking. Except unlike smoking, we have no choice in the air we breathe and it affects everyone, especially children and babies (4.). Leading experts are calling this a public health emergency (5.) and calling for urgent drastic action. Pollution causes a vast number of serious health issues, both physical and mental, with an estimated cost to the UK economy of £20bn a year (10.).

Bath is infamous for its pollution levels. Legislation states Nitrogen Dioxide levels must not exceed national limits more than 18 times a year, yet on London Road the levels are being exceeded twice every weekday (12.). In short, the air we breathe is literally illegal - and for some reason all pollution monitoring stations in Bath have recently been closed. Also; fine particulate matter, produced by all vehicles, is so harmful there is no safe level. The council have recently declared a climate emergency, so I'm wondering how you consider the clean air zone, which doesn't include cars, to be anywhere near significant enough to combat what you yourselves have called an emergency? Councillors have said "Bath will only comply with national standards if a dramatic reduction in car use along London Road takes place" and that "...everything from cars to coaches had to be included to hit the target". So by leaving out cars, you've acknowledged your plan will fail before it's even begun. Surely, having since declared a climate emergency, your plans now need re-evaluating?

I respect the potential concerns of local businesses, but we're talking about the health and future of our children. I'm sure many companies suffered as a result of the abolishment of slavery or child labour. Do we regret these changes now? The smoking ban wasn't popular with everyone at the time, but if a cafe was full of smoke now, we would probably chose not to take our children there. Yet our children are exposed to toxic air every time they go outside.

It's horrible feeling so powerless, knowing what is happening to my family - we can literally taste the pollution when we go outside. The only power I have is to campaign, protest and to talk until that light goes red. But you have real power. If the drinking water in Bath was found to be poisonous I'm sure you would act. Action is needed that is proportionate to the problem. With the current clean air strategies, it feels like you're tackling a wild fire with a water pistol.

One scheme I'd like to propose, which wouldn't penalise drivers financially, is 'Car-Free Sundays' in central Bath. This wouldn't be the only answer, but it would be a step forward. This is already happening elsewhere (11.) and it would show us what this amazing city could be like without traffic. Even if just for one day a week, it would get us out of our cars. It would set an example for the rest of the UK. Why not embrace the challenge to be a leader in tackling this crisis? Imagine Bath with more space for cycling, walking and for children and nature to thrive. We must be forward-thinking and radical in our approach to making Bath a healthier place to live, work and visit. Not in a few years time but now. Clean air is a basic human right. The climate emergency has been declared, now serious action must be taken. Our health is in your hands.