



Birmingham City Council
Council House,
Victoria Square,
Birmingham
B1 1BB

Sent by email

Tuesday 1st June 2021

Dear Cllr Ward, Cllr Alden, Cllr Hunt and Cllr Pritchard

Welcoming Birmingham's Clean Air Zone

Birmingham is about to take a great step forward in protecting the health of those who live, work and visit the city from its current levels of illegal and harmful air pollution. We are therefore writing to you, the leaders of the local political parties in Birmingham City Council, to let you know that you have our full support on the Clean Air Zone.

We represent the leading health, transport and environmental experts and NGOs that have long been advocating for urgent and ambitious action to tackle the country's toxic air. Air pollution affects all of us, across every community, from the time that we are in the womb right through to old age. It is estimated to cause the equivalent of 900 premature deaths each year in Birmingham alone and affects the quality of life of thousands more.

Analysis by Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation has found that over 10,000 school children in the city are currently breathing dirty air on their way to and from school. It is of great concern that children, older people and those people with existing health conditions are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution. People on low incomes, those from ethnic minorities and outdoor and transport workers are also disproportionately affected by what are often higher levels of air pollution. This is, particularly in the case of people on low incomes, despite contributing less to the problem.

The UK Government's and the Council's own research has shown that Clean Air Zones are the most effective way to meet legal limits of air pollution that should have been met in 2010. The failure to meet these legal limits has resulted in a generation of children growing up in Birmingham, and across the country, who should have been able to breathe much safer levels of air quality.

The introduction of Birmingham's Clean Air Zone gives us hope, but more importantly assurance, that this public health crisis is finally being addressed. ClientEarth has been forced to take the UK Government to court three times to reach this point and all of our organisations remain committed to ensuring that people in the city and across the country can finally breathe clean air.

We understand, however, that implementing a Clean Air Zone is not an easy task so it is important to recognise that the Council has been exemplary in embracing this challenge passed down from central government. From the outset, the Council has demonstrated a clear understanding of the problem and has not shied away from making the difficult decisions needed to put people's health



first, whilst ensuring that help and support is provided to people and businesses to move on to cleaner forms of transport. We would like to see more leadership like this replicated across the UK.

The Council has understood that this is an opportunity to protect people's health from the biggest environmental health risk in this country and across the world. There are also clear economic benefits as the cost burden associated with public health on the city has been estimated at nearly £1 billion annually and improving air quality in Birmingham has been estimated to provide a £25 million per year benefit to the local economy. The drive for cleaner air will also drive demand for the clean tech solutions that the West Midlands is in a prime position to deliver as part of the wider green, and hopefully also healthy, recovery.

You can be proud that Birmingham is the first to implement a Class D Clean Air Zone outside of London, which will address the key sources of illegal air pollution - particularly diesel cars that are the biggest source of emissions of nitrogen oxides at most locations in and around the city centre. However, the evidence shows that there are no safe levels of air pollution and so the Clean Air Zone should be seen as a welcome first step. It is clear that more needs to be done and that the success of this will rely on local and regional leaders and the UK Government working together to drive even greater ambition.

We urge you to maximise the benefit of the Clean Air Zone by extending it to cover a greater number of pollution hotspots in the city and help accelerate the transition to a zero emission transport network. Wider action to tackle toxic air also needs to be increased and accelerated, including: the roll-out of safer streets for walking and cycling, cleaner public transport options, help for drivers and businesses, and funding for targeted schemes outside schools, hospitals and care homes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance not only of protecting public health but also for the need for a green and healthy recovery that will help level up our communities and create a fairer society. We congratulate you on taking this ambitious step towards making Birmingham a healthier and better place for those who live and work in the city.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Woolnough, Chief Executive, Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation

James Thornton, Chief Executive, ClientEarth

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, Royal College of Physicians special advisor on air quality and UKRI clean air champion, University of Southampton.

Damian Testa, Head of Policy and Communications, British Safety Council

Roger Geffen, Policy Director, Cycling UK

Oliver Lord, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Clean Air, Environmental Defense Fund Europe

Sonja Graham, Chief Executive Officer, Global Action Plan

Connor Schwartz, Climate Lead, Friends of the Earth

Stephen Edwards, Director of Policy and Communications, Living Streets

Please note that this letter has been copied to all Birmingham City Council councillors, the Mayor of West Midlands, and Ministers Pow and Maclean.