



Environmental Protection
Brighton & Hove City Council
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Brighton

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18 May, 2015

Dear Madam / Sir,

Air Quality Action Plan Consultation 2015

On behalf of Brighton & Hove Friends of the Earth (BHFOE) I would like to welcome the opportunity to comment on the Brighton & Hove City Council Air Quality Action Plan. This comes at an interesting time with the recent Supreme Court ruling on air pollution.

Overall, BHFOE is very supportive of the need to take a more coordinated approach to tackling air pollution and where practicable in a more scientific way. However, this isn't always possible without a lot of modelling, while some of the solutions (such as investing in walking and cycling) can have other health and social benefits and so should be brought forward anyway.

BHFOE believes that a great deal of work has gone into the Action Plan, particularly in explaining the background and the nature of air pollution. However, BHFOE is not so convinced by some of the solutions suggested which it doesn't believe are based on an evidence based approach as espoused in the Action Plan.

The whole issue of air pollution is also a fast-moving area and since the consultation was started, the Supreme Court ruled on 29 April, 2015, that the Government needed to draw up a new Air Quality Action Plan by the end of the year. The ruling also touched on the issue that compliance with the Directive¹ needs to happen in "as short as time as possible"². This means that the Brighton & Hove City Council Air Quality Action Plan also needs to be considering actions in the same light and needs to be revised to accommodate this.

¹ European Union law, Directive 2008/50/EC

² Paragraphs 15 & 16, page 7, paragraph 27, page 12 and paragraph 33, page 14, Supreme Court Judgment on ClientEarth vs Defra, 29 April 2015 - <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2012-0179-judgment.pdf>

Similarly, while the Council has done a fair amount to improve walking, cycling and public transport use, and all of these forms of transport have benefited from investment, there is still much to be done to create a fully connected cycle network which would allow a step change in cycle use. To a lesser extent, walking also needs further investment, while public transport needs urgent action to reduce delays on the bus network, something BHFOE has consistently raised now for many years. To date it has largely been ignored.

BHFOE also believes that the use of modelling to predict air pollution levels with changes in road layouts needs to be approached cautiously. That's because a road layout change could lead to a change in road capacity, which might predict, a greater or smoother flow of motor vehicles initially and possibly a reduction in air pollution. However, this could be short-lived if the changes encourage more people to drive and could actually make the situation worse in the medium and long term. Ultimately, only schemes which facilitate modal shift have any chance of reducing long term air pollution.

In section 5.3.3 on road safety, BHFOE takes issue with some of the suggestions and analysis. For example, the report talks of the need to keep traffic moving, with pedestrian crossings subordinate to this. However, there is no consideration of whether it is more important to keep traffic flowing or whether by doing this pedestrians are kept waiting by the kerbside, exposed to poor air quality for longer and thereby placed at greater risk. This isn't quite so black or white as it seems and the answer could vary depending on the location and the numbers of pedestrians involved.

BHFOE also disagrees with the comments on speed bumps which are potentially misleading. When considering the impact of speed bumps, research has shown that their frequency is the critical factor as to whether there is compliance with the speed limit and whether vehicles accelerate and brake in-between the speed bumps. Above a certain frequency of speed bump cars tend to be driven at a constant speed without increasing emissions. The situation as depicted in the Action Plan is not a given and highlights the need for good design, rather than the avoidance of 'acute' speed bumps.

BHFOE also questions the discussion of park & ride which fails to acknowledge that this has been problematic for decades now because of the impact that it would have on the South Downs National Park. Now that Brighton & Hove City Council is no longer the planning authority for the South Downs, this is likely to be even harder to deliver, or will involve using land which could more usefully provide housing or employment land.

The comments around park & ride are not backed up by any evidence and BHFOE cannot see how part time park & ride sites, other than when marketed for specific events, could prove to be of any use. If they became successful then it is likely that they would increase people's expectation of being able to use them. This would encourage more people to drive to the city but when they weren't available, this is likely to lead to more people then trying to park in the city centre, actually worsening the current situation.

Equally, BHFOE would be totally opposed to any suggestion of a park & ride site on greenfield land near the University of Brighton. BHFOE cannot see how encouraging more people to drive into the Lewes Road corridor is going to reduce air pollution there. It would lead to delays for traffic using Lewes Road both from the extra traffic and as cars would have to cross Lewes Road to access the site. Given the acute housing shortage, if that land is to be developed, it should be for housing.

It is also disappointing that this section does not discuss making better use of existing infrastructure (the railway) to deliver park & ride, or of reducing city centre parking. Unless city centre parking is not removed with the advent of park & ride, there is a real danger that overall, park & ride would just lead to more cars driving into the city with no relief from air pollution.

BHFOE would also suggest that the section on the Biosphere (section 5.3.5) needs revising and is rather confusing. Apart from the name of the Biosphere is incorrect, this section talks more about Bioregional and ‘One Planet Living’ than it does about Biosphere. While the two have overlapping objectives, they are not the same thing.

Comments on specific corridors (section 6)

6.1.1 Castle Square to Lower Dyke Road and Western Road

The comments on this section are particularly disappointing and potentially misleading. It states that existing initiatives in the North Street corridor include improving “*east-west flow through Clock Tower by optimising the phasing of the traffic lights at the key junction*”. Yet this is clearly not happening.

BHFOE has campaigned for changes to be made in this area, including banning private vehicles from travelling through the area (north–south) which cause significant delays to taxis and buses from the station, but also this movement takes time from the east-west traffic flow. BHFOE has also proposed 2-way operation of the junction to increase its capacity (currently the signals only allow buses to go in one direction at a time) and allow more time for pedestrians as well. Brighton & Hove Buses have demonstrated that they can safely operate two-way bus movements at the Western Road junction with Lower Dyke Road so therefore improvements should be brought forward straight away. The recent ruling in the Supreme Court should add urgency to the need to make changes here.

6.1.2 A23 Northbound Marlborough Place and London Road (Aquarium roundabout to Preston Park)

The Valley Gardens scheme will be essential if pedestrian and cycle infrastructure in this critical part of the city is to be brought into the 21st century. When completed, this will boost walking and cycling into and through the area, providing safer and more convenient facilities for people going across town or accessing the seafront. The scheme, if designed properly, will also remove the hold-ups to the bus network that the current system creates at either end of York Place, the bus stop at the bottom of North Road and the advance bus filter near the Royal Pavilion.

BHFOE would, however, be totally opposed to electric vehicles being allowed to use the bus lanes, as the Action Plan seems to be suggesting. It would not take many electric vehicles to cause significant hold-ups to bus users, which would then increase emissions.

BHFOE is also concerned that in this corridor, no mention is made existing problems, some of which are listed above. Oxford Street junction is another area, where there needs to be improvements as southbound buses are often held up here, while services coming out of Oxford Street, frequently don’t have enough time to exit and this leads to quite long delays. A rephasing of the lights and a more intelligent traffic light system are needed here.

6.1.3 Clock Tower north to Brighton Station and Seven Dials

BHFOE would welcome the suggestion to restrict private vehicles in this area to allow more space for buses, taxis and pedestrians where it is feasible. This would be helped by restricting private vehicles travelling north-south through the Clock Tower junction which needs to be prioritised to address the current hold-ups to the bus network in the North Street corridor.

6.2.1 A270 Lewes Road and wider area

BHFOE has real concerns about the suggestions contained in this section, as they are not evidence based and risk making traffic and air pollution worse. As already described, using existing parking intermittently as park & ride sites would not provide certainty for users and could lead to more people trying to park in the city centre when these intermittent sites were not available. Equally the unreliability could undermine their viability. Linked to this, BHFOE cannot understand how it is sensible to be suggesting building a park & ride site near Watts building / Preston Barracks on greenfield land. This would attract more traffic into the Lewes Road corridor and cause more delays and pollution.

Likewise, BHFOE would be suspicious of any attempt to upgrade Wilson Avenue – Drove Road route. While its purpose would be to relieve congestion, it could actually lead to an increase in car use and overall traffic levels as well as impacting on the South Downs National Park.

BHFOE would be totally opposed to allowing electric vehicles to use the bus lanes here too, even for a temporary period as once allowed it would be harder to then restrict again. It would also impact on cycle safety and bus efficiency along this route.

BHFOE strongly agrees with the need to have a restored rail link between Lewes and Uckfield as this would have significant and wider benefits.

6.2.2 A23 southbound Beaconsfield Road to Pavilion Parade

The implementation of the Valley Gardens scheme will be critical to the success of reducing emissions. In the scheme, all private vehicles will be routed down the eastern side of Valley Gardens. While, this will lead to more traffic on the eastern side, the ‘reservoir’ capacity of the roads will be reduced (not their flow capacity) and the road carriageway will be moved further away from the building frontages where possible. This should help reduce air pollution in the area.

6.2.6 St James Street

While BHFOE understands the reason for suggesting having the traffic flow westbound or downhill along St James Street, it is concerned at the impact that this could have on the area. Research needs to be done on how and why people are using buses in the area. If they are using the buses to get up the hill after they have done their shopping in St James Street, then changing the services around could severely undermine the shops in the area. Few people are going to want, or potentially going to be able to, walk either north to Edward Street or south to Marine Parade with heavy bags of shopping to catch a bus east, up the hill.

6.2.8 Trafalgar Street – Frederick Place

BHFOE would support the idea of a freight consolidation centre serving the city. This would have many benefits in addition to air pollution, particularly on safety and the public realm.

Comments on specific issues

6.9.3 Taxi anti-idling strategy

This needs constant education and promotion. Having the sticker is not enough if the taxi driver then leaves their engine idling when they don't need to.

6.11 Railways and Air Quality

BHFOE would strongly support investment in railway infrastructure to improve services and reduce emissions. At present the unreliable services, particularly at weekends and bank holidays, are reducing the potential to bring more people into the city centre in a clean and efficient manner. The Council needs to lobby for improvements to address these issues.

7.1 Development and Buildings & 7.3 Policy Commitment from developer contributions for air quality

BHFOE is particularly disappointed that no mention is made of car parking and its role in encouraging more cars into the city centre, causing more congestion and pollution. This is an area that the Council does have some control over and it should be doing its utmost to reduce car parking in new developments, particularly in the city centre and adjacent to bus corridors. Failure to do so could have serious economic repercussions for the city centre and undermine city centre bus services, reducing their reliability and increasing their costs.

The problem with the current planning system is that the investment in clean alternatives often pales into insignificance compared to the amount spent on subsidising car use. For example, the cost of the new car parking at the Royal Sussex County Hospital is likely to be over £10 million, while the money allocated to walking, cycling and public transport is only around £1 million. Unless this imbalance is addressed, the planning system is going to perpetuate the subsidy of car use which is only going to exacerbate the current air quality and congestion problems. This Action Plan needs to address these issues.

BHFOE is also concerned at what is meant in the Action Plan when it is suggested that developers pay for 'short access roads' in and around Rottingdean. BHFOE would be very concerned at new roads here and their possible impact on the South Downs National Park.

If you have any questions about our comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Todd

Planning & Transport Campaigner