

BACK TO SCHOOL – BREATHE A SIGH OF RELIEF OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Luckily, our primary schools are set back from the busy A2, so the density of pollution inside and outside our schools will be less than along the A2.

But that is not the whole story locally ...

Firstly, the A2 cloud of pollution. I jog with a pollution monitor that shows poor air quality on the A2 is regularly shared with the **whole** of Teynham (most winds come from the south east). With light or northerly winds, the 'band' of A2 pollution (Low/Moderate/ High/Very High) can reach Lynsted and Norton Primary School – diluted, but still harmful levels.

Secondly, driving to and from schools. The drive to and from school can concentrate higher levels of pollution than if you walked or cycled - so-called 'active travel'.

Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, said (June 2019): "Walking and cycling to school is a key part of cleaning up the air around our homes and schools. Children are often exposed to the highest levels of pollution inside a car on their commute. If more people walked to school, it really would make a big difference." But, I hear you say, we don't all have that choice. I for one would not recommend cycling on the A2 at any time.

Air conditioning in cars is not regulated, so you cannot rely on it helping you.

Thirdly, idling cars. On 12th August, the Times reported a Conservative think-tank, Bright Blue, wants us to inform on idling drivers and get a share of any fines! In New York, the 'bounty' is 25%; all you need is a smart phone to 'snap and report'. 'Bounty-hunting' isn't part of the Government's thinking - yet. It is **already** an offence to leave your engine idling and fines can come from a refusal to switch off when told to by "an authorised person". Local authorities can do this together with on-the-spot fines (£20). Bright Blue also wants higher taxes on diesel buying (both the car and fuel).

Alternatively, 'idle-shaming' by children who issue 'tickets' to parents guilty of idling outside their schools. Prosecutions in city Clean Air Zones leading to high fines are rare.

Fourthly, children are vulnerable. PM2.5, especially, interferes with growing organs (brain, lungs, heart and blood vessels). Other particularly vulnerable groups include chronically ill adults and the elderly. Ignoring local pollution is a poor gift to our children's future.

Fifth, suck it up! A friend with a lifetime's experience of managing bus fleets shared the story of BlueStar in Southampton. A large air filter was fitted onto a bus roof for 100 days/9,000 miles. It removed 65g of particulates (tennis ball size!). I am not clear if that figure includes PM2.5 particles that are liquid or gaseous? BlueStar are now fitting out five buses on the same route. Parent company, Go-Ahead Group, is considering [running the idea in other parts of the UK](#). I doubt we shall see this innovation as our local authorities have undermined commercially viable public transport through their pricing structures and dominance of "free transport" for some. This means operators have to meet increases in operating costs by hitting smaller numbers of passengers! This is an unintended consequence of "free" travel - "partial" subsidy is not an easy political sell! If buses can't run profitably, they will continue to run a pretty awful service – especially in rural areas.

Another Times report (27th June) tells of a Clerkenwell school that wants a large tower (9 feet tall) air purifier in school grounds to combat passing traffic and idling parents. The size of these "Radic8" towers means the side can be used for advertising to help subsidise the cost – that opens another can of worms! If this is too expensive, I suggest clipped beech hedges because they keep their

autumn leaves all winter – and pollutants stick to leaves. They also give good cover for birds. There are other hedging plants like ivy along fences and walls.

All these measures, including giving children filter masks (up to £47) are not really facing up to the basic problem. Daily, we experience pollution from vehicles, industry, planes, shipping, landfill, agriculture, domestic wood and coal fires, household cleaners, cooking, etc. Today, we are only on the lower foothills of the mountain of pollution that surrounds us and is absorbed by us.

Others have rightly pointed out that there are *many* sources of harmful pollutants at home and outside, as well as international pollution that doesn't respect national borders. But we have to start somewhere in ways that we and our authorities can influence – including planning.

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