



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Air Quality and
Coronavirus: A Glimpse
of a Different Future
or Business as Usual:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report**

Seventh Special Report of 2019–21

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Seventh Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2019–21, [Air Quality and Coronavirus: A Glimpse of a Different Future or Business as Usual](#) (HC 468), on 11 February 2021. The Government response was received on 9 April 2021 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government Response: Air quality and coronavirus: A glimpse of a different future or business as usual

The Government thanks the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for its report: *Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual*.

Air quality has improved significantly since 2010 and continuing this trajectory of improvement is a top priority for the Government. We are taking urgent action through our ambitious Clean Air Strategy, our landmark Environment Bill and the delivery of our £3.8 billion plan to clean up transport and tackle roadside NO₂ pollution.

The Clean Air Strategy outlines a comprehensive programme of action across all parts of government and, in leading this work, Defra works in close collaboration with a range of key government departments, including the Department for Transport, the Department for Health and Social Care, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

This collaborative programme is enabling us to tackle a range of cross-cutting issues such as health inequalities and fuel poverty and as well as aligning our action on air quality with other environmental goals such as Net Zero.

We are also committed to taking an evidence-based approach to our policy development. During the pandemic, we have been proactive in working closely with our expert groups to closely monitor the emerging evidence and ensure that we can understand how the changes in people's daily lives are influencing air pollution and our exposure to it. This work will help us to continue to develop our world class evidence base and will inform our development of policy.

At the local level, we have committed in the Environment Bill to review the Local Air Quality Management Framework as part of the national strategy review. A key aim of this will be to better align national and local policies actions to deliver air quality improvements.

This will include:

- A review of local level objectives to drive more targeted and effective action in line with our new national commitments.
- The development of a stronger support and capability-building framework to ensure local authorities and their partners have the necessary tools to take the action needed reduce people's exposure to air pollutants.

- Further clarification of the powers and levers that are available to local authorities and the role of newly identified air quality partners in driving this action.
- A stronger focus on reducing the impacts of air pollution on vulnerable groups, communities and places that are disproportionately impacted, e.g. schools, care homes and deprived neighbourhoods.
- Further action to improve public understanding of the impacts of air pollution and the practical steps that can be taken to both reduce harmful exposure and individual contributions to pollution

We understand that public support for the actions that need to be taken to tackle air pollution will be vital to achieving our stretching objectives.

While Government action is key, we cannot achieve this transformation alone. There is a vital role for broader leadership, from the health and environment sectors, businesses and service providers and at the local authority level to build public acceptance for the bolder actions that must be taken to tackle the health impacts of air pollution as a major public health imperative.

The Committee made a number of specific recommendations, which we now consider in detail.

Changes in UK air pollution

1. The report highlights the need for legally binding air quality limits and the Committee recommends that the Office for Environmental Protection (see chapter 3) be empowered to enforce them.

Response

The UK has existing legally binding air quality limits, set out in UK legislation (Air Quality Standards Regulations 2010, National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018). The Environment Bill additionally places a duty on the Secretary of State to set at least two further legally binding targets for air quality, one of which must be to reduce the concentration of ambient PM2.5. Both our existing limits and the new targets fall within the Environment Bill's definition of "environmental law"—this places them within the remit of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), meaning they can be enforced by the OEP once it is operational. In contrast to the European Commission, the OEP will be able to carry out enforcement proceedings against all public bodies for suspected breaches of environmental law, including local authorities, rather than just national government.

Health inequalities and covid-19

2. Defra, working with the Department of Health and Social Care and local health partners, should amend the Clean Air Strategy to include measures to reduce the long-term health inequalities associated with air pollution. (Paragraph 35)

Response

Our Clean Air Strategy outlines a comprehensive and ambitious programme of actions across all sectors of the economy, including proposals for new goals, legislation, investment and policies which will help us to improve air quality and maximise public health benefits. Actions are focused on many different sources of pollution and include

national regulations to reduce emissions from domestic burning, industry and agriculture, alongside stronger powers and an improved framework for local government to tackle local issues. Taking the action set out in the Clean Air Strategy will improve air quality and reduce the incidence of serious illness, improving quality of life for tens of thousands of people.

Defra works closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE) and a number of other stakeholders on the relationship between air quality and health. Examples of this close working include:

- Defra, PHE and DHSC and clinical experts are currently collaborating to improve the Daily Air Quality Index, with the aim of improving the messaging to children with asthma.
- PHE and Defra are also supporting the coordination of the Joint Air Quality Inequalities Project, led by the Environment Agency. The project aims to understand the relationship between air quality and inequalities, how these impact on people, the barriers that exist and what could help to address these.

Defra and DHSC ministers have agreed that our departments will work together on understanding how exposure to air pollution could be considered as part of wider consideration of health inequalities.

In addition, we are currently reviewing the National Air Quality Strategy (including the Local Air Quality Management Framework). A key objective of this review will be to promote and support greater local action to identify and address air pollution inequalities, targeting action at vulnerable groups and communities. Local Authority action will also be supported by additional funding through the Government's Air Quality Grant which has been increased to £8m per year.

3. The Environment Bill should be amended to include a health inequalities target, to reduce the number of deaths associated with air pollution; and to require the Secretary of State to take account of human health considerations when setting or reviewing air quality targets. It should include a duty on all Government departments and local government to work together to deliver these targets. (Paragraph 36) The Committee recommends that the Office for Environmental Protection is given the necessary powers to enforce these limits. (Paragraph 50)

Response

Reducing public health impacts is a primary focus of the process for developing new air quality targets required through the Environment Bill. There is a strong case for taking action on PM2.5 as it is the air pollutant that has the most significant impact on human health. That is why we are introducing a duty to set a target for annual mean levels of PM2.5 in the Bill, and why this target cannot be revoked.

In addition, the Bill requires the setting of another air quality target. In the [environmental targets policy paper](#) published in 2020, we set out our intention for this second target to focus on reducing average population exposure to PM2.5. These two targets together will improve air quality for everyone and will deliver greater public health benefits than either one alone. By focusing on reducing population exposure in addition to reducing concentrations, action will be driven everywhere, and will not just focus on reducing pollution in areas with elevated levels of pollution (hotspots). This will enable the delivery of health benefits across the country, but importantly will also play a role in enabling locations with hotspots to meet a more ambitious concentration target.

We are working with health experts, including the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) to seek their advice, views and recommendations around key aspects of how the targets are developed. As part of this process, we have specifically

asked COMEAP for advice on health inequalities and groups which are at risk from air pollution. Advice on air quality targets will be published in due course.

In considering what targets will be set, as well as the measures required to meet them, we need to assess the costs and benefits of action across a wide range of sources and sectors. We are working closely with other government departments as part of this work.

Achieving targets set through the Bill will require action across multiple government departments. Whilst responsibility for meeting the air quality targets set through the Environment Bill will sit with national government, local authorities will have a role to play in delivering reductions in PM2.5.

OEP

Both our existing limits and any new targets set under the Environment Bill will fall within the Environment Bill's definition of "environmental law"—this places them within the remit of the Office for Environmental Protection, meaning they can be enforced by the OEP once it is operational. In contrast to the European Commission, the OEP will be able to carry out enforcement proceedings against all public bodies for suspected breaches of environmental law, including local authorities, rather than just national government.

Government Strategy

4. The report recommends that the Government makes the following amendments to the Environment Bill:

- (a) That clause 2 is amended to provide for a specific target to reduce the annual mean concentration of PM2.5 to under 10µg/m³ by 1 January 2030, in line with WHO guidelines, and also include an interim target for 2025; and**
- (b) The duties related to "air quality partners" should apply to all levels of government and public bodies, and the power to request contributions to city wide action plans should be extended to regional and city Mayors and combined authorities.**

Response

4a) The Environment Bill provides an opportunity to set air quality targets that will maximise improvement in public health. The environmental targets policy paper published in August 2020 outlined our two proposed objectives for air quality targets set through the Environment Bill—1) to reduce the annual mean level of PM2.5 in ambient air, and 2) to reduce population exposure to PM2.5.

We believe that this dual-target approach to PM2.5 will tackle the highest concentrations of this harmful pollutant and ensure continuous improvement across the country. This approach will ensure that action is taken not only at hotspot locations, but will drive measures to reduce emissions from a wide range of sources that will contribute to reducing PM across the whole country. This approach has been supported by independent expert groups AQEG (Air Quality Expert Group) and COMEAP (Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants). We are committed to following an evidence-based process to set ambitious air quality targets and as part of this will be considering the World Health Organization's guidelines for PM2.5.

Long-term targets will be supported by interim targets, covering up to 5 years. Government will set out interim targets in its Environmental Improvement Plan. These interim targets will set the trajectory towards long-term targets and allow for an ongoing assessment of whether government is on track to meet them. The robust statutory cycle of monitoring, reporting and reviewing, combined with regular OEP and Parliamentary scrutiny, ensures that meeting interim targets is taken seriously.

4b) We recognise that improving air quality requires effective action at all levels. To ensure transparency and accountability, in the Environment Bill we have committed to reviewing and updating the national Air Quality Strategy (including the Local Air Quality Management Framework). The review will bring the local and national policy frameworks together and clarify how they work together to deliver air quality improvements. The revised strategy will be published in 2023.

Duties relating to “air quality partners” in the amendments we are making to the Environment Act 1995 are very specific to the Local Air Quality Management Framework. Bodies designated as “Relevant Public Authorities” will be those authorities—after an evidence-based assessment and consultation—relevant to local exceedances of air quality standards and objectives. Mayors and combined authorities have an important role to play to improve local air quality and are incorporated within the LAQM Framework. It is important that there is effective cross boundary local authority co-operation and a strategic approach to working with “air quality partners”; combined mayoral authorities are well placed to help take forward this strategic approach. This aspect of collaborative working will be developed in statutory guidance to which local authorities and designated relevant public authorities must have regard. To apply a general duty in the way suggested (contributing to local air quality action plans) would be too broad brush and would potentially create obligations on bodies which are not relevant to local exceedances of air quality standards and objectives. However, we agree that all levels of government and public bodies will have a role to play in improving air quality. As we review the Local Air Quality Management framework, we will work across Government to explore how we can strengthen our collective action on air quality across the public sector.

5(a) Alongside the PM2.5 target, the Secretary of State should use his discretionary powers in the Bill to set additional long-term air quality targets to reduce NO₂, PM₁₀, SO₂, NMVOCs and ammonia. (b) The Government should also commit to a long-term funding structure for local authorities to underpin their new duties in the Bill.

Response

5a) We already have ambitious and statutory national emission reduction commitments in place for five key air pollutants (nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, non-methane volatile organic compounds and ammonia) as well as legally binding concentration limits for other pollutants. Our immediate focus for target setting is PM_{2.5} because it is the air pollutant that has the most significant impact on human health. This will deliver the commitment made in the 2019 Clean Air Strategy to set a new ambitious target to reduce exposure to PM_{2.5}.

The Government must review its targets through the 5-yearly ‘significant improvement test’. The government must assess whether meeting the long-term targets set under the Environment Bill, along with other legislative environmental targets, would significantly improve the natural environment in England. If not, the government must set out how it plans to use its target-setting powers to close the gap. This ensures future governments will have to assess the need for new targets for environmental improvement. Ongoing stakeholder engagement, expert advice and public consultation will also help to inform future target areas as part of the robust, evidence-led target-setting process.

The UK is a party to the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution and has ratified the amended Gothenburg Protocol which came into force in 2019. The amended Gothenburg Protocol aims to control and reduce emissions of sulphur, nitrogen oxides, ammonia, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter that are caused by anthropogenic activities and are likely to cause adverse effects on human health and the environment, natural ecosystems, materials, crops and the climate in the short and long term, due to acidification, eutrophication, particulate matter or ground-level ozone as a result of long-range transboundary atmospheric transport. The Protocol sets binding national emission reduction commitments which countries are required to meet for

the five key air pollutants. Work has already started at an international level to review this protocol to consider the adequacy of the existing obligations, including emissions reduction commitments and to review progress towards achieving the aim of the protocol. The review of the Protocol will conclude in 2022 with any changes to the Protocol commitments including emission reduction commitments considered by the Parties to the Convention thereafter.

5b) As part of the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) review, we will be looking to review local level objectives alongside developing a stronger support and capability-building framework to ensure local authorities have the necessary tools to take the action needed locally to reduce people's exposure to air pollutants. We will clarify the powers and levers that are available to local authorities and include actions that focus on reducing the impacts to vulnerable groups and communities that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution, e.g. schools, care homes and deprived neighbourhoods.

We have ring-fenced £880m to help Local Authorities tackle NO₂ exceedances and have paid nearly £400m of this to LAs to date. In addition, since 2017, Defra has awarded over £2million per year to local authorities through our Air Quality Grant Programme which funds local action. Through this program, Local Authorities have received £27.5 million since 2010. From April 2021, this fund will be increased to £8m. Local authorities can also access the £2bn funding package for cycling and walking.

Through the strategy we will explore how funding can be better targeted to support LAs in meeting their objectives.

6. As part of the Clean Air Strategy the Government should include a timeline on when the reduction in limits of other pollutants is to be delivered. (Paragraph 58)

Response

The UK has ambitious, legally binding targets in place to significantly reduce emissions of the five most damaging air pollutants (Nitrogen Oxides, Sulphur dioxide, Ammonia (NH₃), Primary particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), and Non-methane volatile organic compounds) by 2020, and 2030.

In 2019, we published the [National Air Pollution Control Programme](#) (NAPCP), which set out the technical analysis for how our policies would achieve these emission reduction commitments. In March this year, we published emission projections which indicate that we are now not likely to meet the 2020 target for NH₃ and PM_{2.5}. We are now in the process of revising the NAPCP and will set out the additional measures needed to bring the trajectory of emissions reductions back on track. The new NAPCP will capture the changing context brought about by wider policy commitments, like net zero. Future progress will continue to be evaluated, ensuring the government remains on track to deliver the required emission reductions.

National and Local Action

7. Government should expand the Defra/DfT Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) to include the DHSC, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, HM Treasury, and the Cabinet Office to achieve better coordination and increase its priority within Whitehall. The JAQU's remit should include building support for action on air quality collaborating with local government, the NHS, business, academic and clinical researchers and civil society.

Response

Government established the Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) with a specific remit on reducing NO₂—demonstrating our strong and clear commitment to delivering compliance

with NO₂ limits in the shortest possible time. JAQU is a joint unit led by DfT and Defra. Road transport is the primary source of emissions leading to NO₂ exceedances, and JAQU's focus is on steps that can be taken to address this 'in the shortest possible time' in line with our legal obligations. To ensure the necessary focus it is appropriate that the unit is formed of the two departments that lead on the key policies relevant to delivering NO₂ compliance. NO₂ is a cross-cutting issue and it is right that a clear 'owner' is identified to maintain the necessary focus—expanding further would risk diluting this. JAQU works with other government departments such as DHSC, BEIS, MHCLG, HMT and CO and engages with them when necessary on specific policy areas of mutual interest. JAQU regularly engages with HMT who sit on JAQU's programme board. We consider this approach pragmatic, sensible and beneficial.

JAQU works closely with local government—each individual local area has a named account manager within JAQU leading on regular engagement and support. Additionally, Defra and DfT ministers will carry out a strategic engagement programme with parliamentarians and local leaders in areas implementing Clean Air Zones to ensure there is awareness of the intervention, and an understanding of the benefits it will bring as well as the challenges it may give rise to. JAQU will be disseminating learning from the programme in due course. Academics are engaged through our expert panels, who review local clean air plans. JAQU regularly engages with businesses and industry representative on key issues such as CAZ readiness to better understand potential challenges and ensure deliverability. JAQU also regularly liaises with charities such as the British Lung Foundation and the British Heart Foundation and are discussing how we can work in tandem to help amplify health messages on air quality.

On air quality more broadly, the Clean Air Strategy supports delivery of Government's 25 Year Environment Plan Defra with the agreement of Cabinet Office has established a cross government Director-General 25 Year Environment Plan Board. The Board's remit will focus directly on delivery of the ten 25 YEP goals, including the clean air goal. All of government is playing its part with clear division of responsibility and significant partnership between departments, arms-length bodies, local authorities and relevant sectors. Additionally, we support the Business for Clean Air initiative which set a strong example for businesses to recognise the role they have to play in improving air quality.

8. The Clean Air Strategy should be updated to include measures to reduce air quality impacts from central and local government and other public bodies (directly and from procurement and supply chains). Given the other pressures on budgets, where necessary, extra Government funding should be made available to facilitate this.

Response

Achieving our legally binding emissions targets will require action across society, and it is the UK government's ambition to lead by example. With the wider environment in mind, our commitment to improving air quality extends to improving how we are running our buildings and estates, as well as the sustainable procurement of vehicles, services and cleaning products through our Greening Government Commitments.

Through the Clean Air Strategy the Government committed to further robust action to reduce emissions across the government estate. For example, we will ensure 25% of the central government fleet will be ultra-low emission by 2022 and we want 100% of the central government car fleet to be ultra-low emission by 2030. The Environment Agency is evaluating the use of more stringent emissions requirements from their suppliers under their Next Generation Supplier Arrangements. While government departments already report greenhouse gas emissions from their estate and operations under the GGCs, we intend to extend this to reporting and achieving reductions of air pollutant emissions.

The Government is developing a new GGC framework for 2021–2025 and aims to publish the new commitments later this year.

We agree that all levels of government and public bodies will have a role to play in improving air quality. As we review our Local Air Quality Management Framework (LAQM), we will work across Government to explore how we can strengthen expectations and actions on air quality across the public sector. Through the Environment Bill and revisions to the LAQM framework, the Government is seeking to designate key public bodies as air quality partners required to cooperate with local authorities in the local air quality planning process, including considering actions that can reduce impacts from their own estates and operations.

9. The Government should also update the Government Buying Standards (GBS) to extend the mandatory requirement to procure only zero tailpipe emissions vehicles, except in exceptional circumstances, across the whole of the public sector by 2025. The Government should also set out in their response to this report how many organisations covered by the existing GBS have used the exemption for exceptional circumstances and why. The Committee looks to HM Treasury to incentivise sustainable public and private transport. (Paragraph 72)

Response

Departments across government are committed to transitioning to cleaner, greener vehicles. The Government Fleet Commitment (GFC) commits 100% of central government cars to be Ultra Low Emission (ULEV) by 2030, with an interim target of 25% by 2022.

The progress departments have made towards meeting the GFC will be published in the 2019–20 Greening Government Commitments annual report, due to be published in Spring 2021.

Following the announcement last November of the Prime Minister’s Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution including the 2030 phase out date for new petrol and diesel cars and vans, officials from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) are working with ministers in DfT and BEIS to make sure the GFC targets are still ambitious and aligned to wider government policy.

Due to operational and safety needs, there will be vehicles that by the target dates cannot yet be transitioned to a suitable electric vehicle alternative, but we are working do so as soon as the electric vehicle market grows, and further models become available.

10. The Government should, in its response to this report, set out revised timetables for when all the proposed CAZs in England will be implemented and ensure that they are “the shortest possible time”. It should set out the current position with regards to those local authorities which have decided to introduce alternative measures to CAZs, and for those authorities which may be reviewing their proposals because of the pandemic. It should also review what further resources are needed to ensure those timetables don’t slip further.

Response

The Government has assessed Clean Air Zones (CAZs) as the fastest means of achieving NO₂ compliance at a national level. Clean Air Zones do have significant social and economic impacts, and the Government has been clear that they should only be used where local authorities are unable to identify equally effective alternatives to delivering compliance with NO₂ limits in the shortest possible time. Local authorities including those developing clean air plans can introduce a Clean Air Zone if they choose to.

Where Clean Air Zones (CAZs) are being implemented, they are being delivered as quickly as possible. Bath introduced the first CAZ on 15 March 2021 and Birmingham will follow on 1 June 2021. We continue to work with Bristol, Tyneside, Sheffield, Bradford, Greater Manchester and Portsmouth to confirm go live of their CAZs which are expected in late

2021/early 2022. Liverpool's CAZ is expected in 2023. We will communicate with further details on CAZ go live dates in due course.

Covid-19 has delayed Clean Air Zone delivery timelines and we agreed with delays to go live dates requested by Local Authorities during the March 2020 lockdown. Local Authorities are also keen to understand the potential medium-term impacts of covid-19 on traffic flow and air quality. Focussing on ensuring compliance is maintained long term, we expect local authorities to deliver their previously agreed measures unless they provide JAQU with robust evidence demonstrating a need to revise those plans.

In the case of Leeds CAZ, early action from Leeds City Council supported by £6.2 million Government funding for taxis, PHVs, HGVs and buses upgrades and a behaviour change communications programme mean Leeds are now below the statutory NO2 limit (40 micro grammes per metre cubed). This has been confirmed by air quality experts in Leeds City Council and the evidence approach has been reviewed by an independent expert panel. We will continue to monitor NO2 levels in Leeds and other cities and take appropriate action where required to maintain compliance.

Please see below a table on progress with Local Authorities implementing non charging measures:

Local authority area	Progress summary
Blackwater Valley	Delivered traffic management measures. Implementation complete. Blackwater Valley continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.
Bolsover	Developing non charging measures to work towards compliance. We will review these and will provide further updates when appropriate.
Broxbourne	Developing non charging measures to work towards compliance. We will review these and will provide further updates when appropriate.
Derby	Delivering traffic management measures.
Dudley	Bus retrofit (managed by TfWM see below). LA is delivering signal upgrades in 3 areas with optimisation technology. Final traffic count expected in Spring 2021.
Fareham	Taxi incentive scheme. Implementation of measures complete. Fareham continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.
Hampshire	Measures include optimised signalling at roundabout and cycle infrastructure. Implementation of measures complete. Fareham continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.
Leicester	157 of 165 buses retrofitted through Clean Bus Technology Fund. Developing non charging measures to work towards compliance. Developing non charging measures to work towards compliance. We will review these and will provide further updates when appropriate.

Nottingham	Delivering measures including ULEV try-before-you-buy (taxi) scheme.
Reading Borough Council	Delivering retrofit programme with 65 of 79 buses retrofitted.
Sandwell	Delivered measures including signal optimisation and bus upgrade. Implementation of measures complete. LA continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.
Southampton	Taxi EV charge points measure now complete. LA implementing other taxi measures including taxi incentive scheme and ULEV taxi trial.
Stoke on Trent and Newcastle under-Lyme	Newcastle completed bus retrofit work before combining with Stoke. Additional package of non-charging measures being developed to work towards compliance. We will review these and will provide further updates when appropriate.
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Initial work has changed due to covid-19 impacts. LA is working on completing grant bids that were underway. LA is developing a plan to identify measures to bring about compliance. We will review these and will provide further updates when appropriate.
South Gloucestershire	Delivered measures including traffic management measures. Implementation of measures complete. LA continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.
Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)	Delivered bus retrofit programme on behalf of Dudley and Wolverhampton. Implementation of measures complete.
Wolverhampton Council	Delivered signal upgrades in 3 locations in addition to road widening in one of these. Bus retrofits managed by TfWM (see above). Implementation of measures complete. LA continues to provide monitoring and reporting information to JAQU.

11. The Government’s framework should ensure that all CAZs are class D (i.e. charging zones) and include time-limited exemptions for people with reduced mobility to help them adapt. (Paragraph 88)

Response

The measures implemented by local area—including CAZ—are developed by local areas and informed by local modelling data and area needs. The Clean Air Zone Framework (CAZ) in England first published in 2017 ensures consistency between CAZs by setting out the principles local authorities should follow and codifying CAZ classes. Class D CAZs include charging older more polluting passenger cars in addition to commercial vehicles. Considering the potentially significant economic impacts of CAZs Government has been clear that local authorities should implement the minimum class of CAZ needed to deliver NO2 compliance in the shortest possible time to minimise the economic impacts on those

affected. We are confident this approach strikes the right balance. The impacts of covid-19 have further emphasised the need to take account of the economic impacts of CAZs on areas and sectors that may already be struggling. The Framework makes provision for Local Authorities to provide time-limited exemptions for CAZ charges and these are likely to include people with reduced mobility where relevant. For example, Bath and Birmingham will be exempting vehicles registered with disabled and disabled passenger tax classes.

12. The JAQU should work with local authorities and interested charities to review the scope and accessibility of its evaluation programme, to ensure that it can be used effectively at a local level to design new interventions and build support for them. (Paragraph 89)

Response

We continue to work collaboratively with local authorities to ensure evaluation outputs are useful, providing them with regular updates on ongoing research in their Local Plan areas.

Our recent publication of the first annual report of the JAQU evaluation of local NO₂ plans further illustrates our commitment to ensuring local authorities have the best available information to inform design of their local plans. Please see link for further details: [\[here\]](#)

Knowledge sharing is an important part of our evaluation and we are organising an event in the coming months to share learning from the evaluation to date with local authorities. We intend to establish this as at least an annual event going forward.

Green Economic Recovery

13. The Clean Air Strategy is reliant on local action and should therefore be updated not just to reflect the overall impact of the pandemic, but also its differential impact on local economies. (Paragraph 95)

Response

The Clean Air Strategy sets out how the Government will drive and enable greater local action on air pollution. We are currently conducting a major review of the Local Air Quality Management Framework. We will work closely with Local Authorities and their partners throughout the review process to understand the differential impact of the pandemic and reflect this in our new approach. This will include developing a stronger support and capability-building framework to ensure local authorities have the necessary tools to take the action needed locally to reduce people's exposure to air pollutants and minimise the impact on local economies.

Local authorities implementing CAZs can access Clean Air Funding to mitigate the impacts of CAZs. This can include grants for businesses and individuals to upgrade vehicles.

14. The Government should:

- (a) review policies that rely on vehicle fleet turnover to ensure there is not a slowdown in the removal of older and more polluting vehicles;**
- (b) develop financial incentives and support to encourage businesses to invest to reduce their impact on local air quality; and**
- (c) support the development of robust standards and processes for air quality audits. (Paragraph 96)**

Response

14a) CAZs are specifically designed to increase vehicle fleet turnover to remove older, more polluting vehicles from our roads. We expect this to help counter any impact from covid-19. Local authorities implementing CAZs can access funding from the Clean Air Fund to support individuals and businesses impacted by the zone. This typically includes grants to support upgrade to newer, cleaner vehicles. We are actively working to better understand the potential impacts of covid-19 on fleet turnover and other societal changes that could affect air quality and achieving compliance with NO₂ limits.

14b) The Government is already exploring the role of using appropriate financial incentives that drive sustainable change and help us meet our air quality and wider environmental commitments. The department is working closely across government to ensure they deliver the expected outcomes and do not result in unintended consequences. This work continues and will develop as we update our National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) and policy options are developed, and evaluation is undertaken.

For example, the UK's first ever Sovereign Green Bond will be issued this year and will exclusively finance projects that will tackle climate change and wider environmental issues such as air quality.

More broadly Defra has been working across Whitehall to ensure that ambitious policies which offer financial support for businesses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions deliver reductions of other pollutants in parallel. Industry have told us they want as much join up as possible between net zero and air quality, both in terms of policies and finance for businesses, and BEIS and Defra work together to ensure this alignment. For instance, the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund (IETF) incorporates both equipment emissions standards and local air pollution considerations, and the projects are also assessed on their wider environmental impacts and benefits. IETF is a clear example of how energy policy can help incentivise AQ pollutant emission reductions.

There are also certain areas where tensions could potentially exist between decarbonisation and air quality objectives which will need to be taken into account when designing financial incentives. For example, we know that Electric Vehicles still release non-exhaust particulate matter as a result of brake, tyre and road wear. Our Air Quality Expert Group published a report in July 2019 which found that an increased mass of electric vehicles could potentially increase tyre and road wear, but that the use of regenerative braking could reduce braking emissions. We will initiate research aimed at filling the knowledge gaps in this area. However, this highlights the point that financial support for electric vehicles will need to be carefully designed to ensure that decarbonisation and air quality objectives are delivering in parallel. The Government is also working with its international partners to develop procedures to test and evaluate emissions from tyre and brake wear, with the potential to produce future regulatory standards.

The UK has also been at the forefront of reducing industrial pollution, using a proportionate framework of regulation to require industry to improve their environmental performance. Businesses have responded with investment and innovation to meet these standards. Larger industrial facilities undertaking specific types of activity are required to use Best Available Techniques (BAT) to reduce emissions to air, water and land. There is also a comprehensive programme of local authority environmental permitting in place for smaller installations.

Now we have left the EU, we are consulting on a future process for determining future Best Available Techniques within the UK and are working in collaboration with the devolved administrations and regulators across the UK to ensure continuity and regulatory certainty for UK industry.

Finally, through our Air Quality Grant Programme, Local Authorities may undertake projects that offer support or work in partnership with businesses to implement measures that deliver air quality improvements. This Programme has funded over £27.65 million since 2010.

14c) The Government is supportive of actions businesses are already taking to understand their air quality footprint and take practical steps to reduce it. For example, the Business Clean Air Taskforce (B-CAT), convened by the charity Global Action Plan with support from Defra. B-CAT have developed the Business for Clean Air initiative which helps businesses to develop and deliver their own Clean Air Action Plans. Eight major businesses initially signed up to the initiative and many others have since joined them.

15. As restrictions are lifted, the Government should work with local authorities and providers to reassure the public that public transport is safe and to promote its use. We welcome the Government's efforts to help maintain public transport capacity through financial support to providers, given the likely shift in public behaviours this will need to be maintained for a period after restrictions are lifted. The Government will also need to consider whether the financial stress providers are under will slow their move to cleaner vehicles and whether further public investment will be needed to maintain momentum. (Paragraph 102)

Response

The government's policy has been to reassure the public that public transport is safe to use, even in the context of current restrictions. Our message has been that the public must adhere to the 'Stay Home' guidance, other than for essential journeys; but where essential journeys must be undertaken, it is safe for them to be undertaken on public transport, provided that Government safety guidance is followed. As restrictions lift, we will work with operators and local authorities through a range of stakeholder engagement channels to reinforce the message that public transport is safe to use.

Going forward, the government's forthcoming National Bus Strategy will focus on the needs of passengers so that more people want to use the bus, and will set out how national and local government and the private sector will come together to serve local communities. The Department for Transport recognises that buses will continue to play a significant role in helping the economy meet our net zero ambitions and improve air quality. As set out in the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution and Spending Review 2020, the Government will invest £120m in 2021–22 to start the delivery of the 4,000 zero emission buses announced by the Prime Minister last year. Further details on how the first year of funding for the 4,000 zero emission buses will be distributed will be announced in the spring.

The Government is currently providing up to £27.3m per week of emergency bus funding through the covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) scheme. This funding will continue until it is agreed that it is no longer needed. The government will work with operators and local authorities to ensure that the transition from emergency CBSSG funding to long-term recovery is timed appropriately.

16. During the first lockdown in spring 2020, active travel increased significantly, facilitated in part by timely Government action. It is important that this progress is not lost, and the Government must match its rhetoric on a longer-term shift to active travel with sufficient funding. (Paragraph 114)

Response

The Government has now provided over £200 million of funding to local authorities across England in this financial year to increase provision for cycling and walking through the Active Travel Fund. A further £257 million of funding was announced at the Spending

Review in the autumn for further measures in 2021/22, the majority of which will go to local authorities.

Cutting congestion and vehicle emissions in our towns and cities is absolutely key to improving air quality and building a greener transport network. The Government is working closely with local authorities to tackle their nitrogen dioxide exceedances. Heavily built up areas will also benefit from the Prime Minister's ambitious plans to boost cycling and walking and vision that half of all journeys in towns and cities are to be cycled or walked by 2030. This includes a £2 billion package of funding for active travel, which is the largest amount of funding ever committed to increasing cycling and walking in this country which was announced by the Prime Minister in July 2020. The Department for Transport plans to announce further details in due course of how funding will be allocated to local authorities in the next financial year.

17. The report recognises that there remains a mixed picture on implementation across the country, reflecting both local needs but also in some place the willingness of local leaders to make the case for changes which take time to bed-in. Engaging the affected communities and adapting schemes in response to feedback and experience will be vital to embedding long-term changes, and the need to do this should be reflected in Government funding for schemes. (Paragraph 115)

Response

In order for Local Authorities to gain access to the second tranche of Active Travel Funding the Department has made this funding subject to them agreeing to and meeting conditions, including the introduction of proper consultation, with residents, businesses and services on all schemes supported by the funding to ensure that schemes will work for all users.

18. Where appropriate, temporary school streets introduced during the pandemic should be made permanent. The Government should be ambitious about increasing the number of school streets by working with local authorities, schools and civil society groups to develop a strategy to put them in place for every school where one would be appropriate, including measures to reduce parking and idling outside schools and the introduction of 20mph speed limits. This should be supported by an effective system of monitoring to help identify local exceedances of legal limits. (Paragraph 116)

Response

The Active Travel Fund has encouraged local authorities to look at how people can use their streets in other ways to than being simply vessels for cars. Local authorities have been able to use Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders to introduce 20mph zones, install raised tables and/or dropped kerbs at crossings or side roads to introduce low traffic neighbourhoods and school streets. A number of authorities are making their schemes permanent following successful trials, using tranche 2 funding.

On 28 July 2020, the Government announced its plans to implement the moving traffic enforcement powers in Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. This will enable those local authorities outside London with civil parking enforcement powers to apply to the Secretary of State to take responsibility for enforcement of moving traffic offences from the police. This would include moving traffic contraventions such as School Streets.

The Department has started discussions with key stakeholders on some of the complexities involved and work is underway on drafting regulations and statutory guidance. Implementation will require a number of statutory instruments to be made covering matters such as enforcement, level of penalties, approved devices, adjudication, representations and appeals. However, it is not possible at this stage to say when in 2021 the powers will be available to local authorities.

The Department for Transport/ Government is developing a bold and ambitious Transport Decarbonisation Plan to achieve net zero emissions across all modes of transport, which we expect to publish in Spring 2021. It will set out a credible and ambitious pathway to delivering transport's contribution to carbon budgets and meet net zero by 2050.

19. The Government needs to ensure that the Planning White Paper delivers the wider infrastructure development, especially in rural areas, that can help reduce car journeys such as fast broadband to enable working from home. In its response to this Report, the Government should set out specifically how its planning reforms will improve air quality, and support the modal shifts and changes in the built environment that are needed to reduce pollution from road transport.

Response

Consultation on the Planning for the Future White Paper closed on October 2020. The White Paper set out Government's ambitious plans for reform of the planning system. More detail is required on some of the proposals, and MHCLG is undertaking further detailed policy development on the individual elements. No decisions have been made on the details at this stage. In considering how to take forward its proposals for planning reform, Government will consider how those reforms contribute to different environmental objectives, including air quality.

The Planning for the Future White Paper set out our commitment to protect our natural environment, supporting net gains for biodiversity and progressing our efforts to address climate change. These reforms will leave an inheritance of environmental improvement with environmental assets protected, more green spaces provided, more sustainable development supported, new homes that are much more energy efficient and new places that can become the heritage of the future, built closer to where people want to live and work to reduce our reliance on carbon-intensive modes of transport. As the Environment Bill completes its passage through Parliament, spearheaded by proposed reform to environmental assessment, this will help us be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.