

BRENT FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Report on discussion with Councillor Ellie Southwood with members of Brent Friends of the Earth.

11th October 2016

Written by Pat Dale on behalf of Brent F.o.E.

The following issues were raised; - Cllr Southwood (ES) described the relevant Council policy, likely future policies and her own views as to future action. FOE members (FMS) expressed their own concerns and suggestions as to how their actions could help improve the environment in Brent.

Air Pollution.

All agreed that the current situation could not continue. The new London Mayor had already made an initial statement as to his intentions which were very comprehensive and would be consulted on.

ES explained that the measures open to Brent Council were limited, much was the responsibility of the GLA and TfL such as the establishment of enlarged and effective Low Emission Zones and the licensing of taxis and “greening” of the bus fleet.

Discussions were proceeding over how to extend the restrictions of the central London congestion zone into an ULEZ extending between the North and South Circular roads, vehicles had to be recognised electronically, a major task. Brent was reviewing its Air Quality Action Plan, it would shortly go out for consultation. Focus would be on cutting car use, favouring cycling and the use of bus and tube. Travel Plans would be emphasised for schools and businesses and the Council would hope to set an improved example of its own comprehensive Plan.

Differential car parking charges could and would discourage the use of Diesel and high emission cars. The use of electric vehicles had already been anticipated by the installation of 58 charging points which were being reviewed, but she had been told that there was a shortage of sales facilities for electric vans and presumably cars as well. Many people had recently bought Diesel cars thinking that with a lower CO2 emission level they were helping to control climate change, only to now find that they were creating more local air pollution. It was unfair to expect them to sell their cars unless, as had been suggested, there was a compensation scheme. ES was also considering re-introducing the former scheme which restricted the entry of delivery HGVs to certain hours.

FMS made a number of suggestions for action by both the Council and members of concerned organisations .

1. Much unnecessary emissions arose from idling engines, - vehicles queuing, waiting (especially near schools), parked while delivering goods There was no reason why any parked vehicle should keep their engine running. The Council did have the power to issue fixed penalty notices for such an “offence” though there would be difficulties in enforcing it. However publicity explaining

the consequences of idling could be directed at schools and local businesses as well as in the Council's Newsletters.

2. The Council could encourage car clubs, possibly through parking charges.
3. More publicity and pressure should be directed at householders to preserve a green garden and not concrete or tile over areas for a car park. Householders wary of additional work in a garden might be tempted by drawing up a plan for a simple low maintenance front garden and promoting it.
4. Tree planting should be encouraged. Possibly the Planning Committee could be asked to give additional guidance on promoting additional shrubs and trees in all green areas.
5. School and business travel Plans could be promoted more and publicity given to results of good Plans in Council Newsletters.
6. Safer walking routes could be promoted which would include keeping children and pushchairs on the inner side of pavements (emission pollution dilutes very quickly away from the road), and, walking routes through roads with less traffic could be highlighted.
7. More information about the availability of electric vehicle charging points was needed.
8. Voluntary monitoring for the irritant Nitrogen dioxide emission has been encouraged by many organisations and a start had been made locally which showed high levels, way above the legal limit had been detected in the Queens Park and Kensal Green areas. It would be necessary to supplement and not to duplicate the present monitoring system in Brent and the Council should issue the last annual Record of the results from their own monitoring sites, and their location in order to avoid duplication and to compare results in different sites. – possibly on the Council web site.
9. Brent FOE had produced an information leaflet for distribution and there were posters available from Head Office.. Could the Council have a regular feature in their newsletters?

Transport Policy.

ES reported that the Brent Long Term Transport Policy 2015 – 2035 had recently been published. Those FMS who had read it congratulated the Council on the policies and the layout which was easy to read and emphasised the essentials of walking and cycling policies. Half a million pounds had been made available for safe cycle routes and there was a need for safe cycle storage. ES made it clear that she hoped to get a 20 mph limit extended to as many Brent roads as possible. Comments were made about the state of the roads, the pot-holes and paving stone cracks. She explained that with the huge fall in government financing pot hole repairs had to be rationed. Smaller ones were being left undone and there was no solution until more funds were allocated.

Ways to promote sustainable and healthy eating.

FMS explained that FOE had started a campaign on this subject, based on the fact that the huge increase world wide in meat eating had led to an unsustainable rise in the number of cattle and other food animals being kept. This had in turn led to takeovers of agricultural land needed for crop raising, a huge increase in cereals

used for the feeding of the animals and an increase in greenhouse gases from animal intestinal gas. All of this affected climate change adversely and was also depriving many poor communities of land to grow their own crops, or, leading to the destruction of rainforest and other woodland.

The solution was to encourage the eating of vegetables and cereals rather than meat. A diet with plenty of vegetables and fruit has long been known to be essential for good health. It was agreed that education on what to eat must begin in schools, though it was still necessary to convince the parents. ES agreed that the Council could and did stimulate healthy diets in schools but was doubtful if the Council could justify any further action except in their own staff canteens. FMS suggested that possibly an article explaining the concerns could be included in the Brent Journal.

The Use of Glyphosates in both private and public gardening.

FMS stated that Glyphosate is a weedkiller that has been widely used in recent years both domestically and in agriculture, notably in conjunction with the cultivation of GM plants, In many countries exposure has been high and it has become clear that the substance is toxic and has adverse effects on the kidneys, liver, and intestine, as well as the endocrine system and the immune system. There may also be neurological damage. In 2015 the International Agency for Research on Cancer reported that it was a probable human carcinogen. Since then several countries have banned its use though the EU Safety Committee is still looking at the evidence. This has been raised before with the Council.

It is FOE's view that any substance with so many risks attached to its use should not be available for use by the public or by workers even though at the present moment it is not banned in the UK.

We do not believe that workers in Brent parks and green spaces should be exposed however carefully it is used. It is very difficult to practice no contact methods out of doors and we question the degree of personal protection that can be offered especially when there is a cancer risk..

There are not, unfortunately any chemical alternatives that can be said to be safe to use. All require special protection measures though the ill effects of others are not so extensive. We are told that weed control on paths should be manually removed and can be minimised by filling in cracks between paving stones and regular raking, as we do in our own gardens. This may require more man hours but there is a savings on chemicals!

ES promised to consider the matter further.

Local Energy Production

FMS reported that **Brent Pure Energy** had now been set up having been promoted by the FOE Solar Power Campaign and attracting non members to join and create a separate enterprise. Solar Panels had now been installed in the first interested school, Queens Park Community School and were already producing electricity. Enough members of the community had invested in the project to pay for the installation and all would earn a small return while also benefitting the school who would receive "free" electricity.

ES was aware of this development and fully supported it. She was asked if the Council would push for other schools and public buildings to consider similar

developments. Although recent government actions had reduced the financial advantages ultimately money and CO2 would be saved.

ES said that the Council had a carbon reduction programme which was promoted in schools and of course the Civic Centre was an example. She said that the Council had carried out energy efficiency assessments in a number of buildings being restored with recommendations on improvements required but had never had any such service to offer to the public. At the moment the costs of providing Such a service would be prohibitive.

Other Ways of tackling climate change through local initiatives.

ES believed that their waste policies should have such an effect through the recycling of a wide range of materials and the separation of food waste,. Proposals had been made for a gasifier incinerator which , it was claimed would create energy though the claims of overall carbon saving were disputed by FOE and other organisations. The proposal had not been taken up .

Possible Heathrow Expansion.

ES was asked if the Council might now be prepared to oppose the expansion of Heathrow. She did not believe there was time before the expected announcement of the Government's decision to reconsider the issues. If there was a further delay then it would be possible to reconsider the issue. There had been an assumption that expansion would bring much needed jobs to Brent.

FMS said that this hope did not have much factual information to back it. The main objection locally would be the enormous increase in traffic through the area, plus some extra noise and the effects of the extra emissions from the additional flights on the agreed CO2 targets for climate change relief.

It was agreed that a Report would be made of the discussions and a copy sent to ES for further consideration.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Southwood for agreeing to come to the meeting and listen to Brent FOE's concerns.