



Clean Air for Brent First Annual Report June 2017 to October 2018

This is the first “annual” report of our new voluntary body, Clean Air for Brent. It covers the period from our formation in June 2017 up to the time of our first formal Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October 2018.

Executive summary

Clean Air for Brent (CAfB) was formed when local organisations carrying out citizen science projects to measure local air pollution, came together to campaign for cleaner air.

We aim to:

- 1 Raise awareness of the impact of air pollution;
- 2 Champion means of reducing air pollution to effect behavioural change;
- 3 Be a strong and active advocate for policy and legislative change; and
- 4 Be a repository of local knowledge and information in the borough.

Since inception, we have:

- Held four public meetings with prestigious speakers on air pollution and how to tackle it, working in collaboration with Brent Council;
- Run stalls at three local fairs, raising awareness of air pollution;
- Presented on air quality to five local residents’ associations;
- Responded to nine consultations by central government, the Mayor of London and Brent Council;
- Collaborated with the Mayor of London’s School Air Quality Audit programme, which focused on the 50 most polluted schools in London including two in Brent (John Keble Primary and Ark Franklin Primary Academy);
- Commissioned a research study on air pollution and its causes around Chamberlayne Road in Kensal Rise and Harlesden High Street by a team of Imperial College London environmental technology MSc students;
- Developed links with other local and national organisations campaigning for cleaner air, including Friends of the Earth, London Sustainability Exchange, Client Earth and Clean Air in London; and
- Liaised with local, regional and national politicians on air quality issues, including Brent Councillors, London Assembly Members and local MPs.

More information on our activities and achievements is available on our website: www.cleanairforbrent.wordpress.com.

How we began

It all started with diffusion tubes. These are small receptacles which you hang up at around head height in the street for two to three weeks to collect evidence of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Several local groups in Brent - residents' associations or environmental campaigners - set up monitoring exercises of key roads at roughly the same time in 2016. When they came together with the help of the London Sustainability Exchange (LSx), to analyse the results - which were worrying - someone asked:



Mounting diffusion tubes

“Why are we doing this separately? Wouldn't we have a more powerful voice were we to join forces and work together?”

In early 2017, the various groups - Transition Town Kensal to Kilburn (TTKK); Queen's Park Area Residents' Association (QPARA); Transition Willesden (TW); Aylestone Park Residents and Tenants Association (APRATA); Brent Eleven Streets (BEST); Kensal Rise Residents Association (KRRRA); Kensal Triangle Residents Association (KTRA) and Brent Friends of the Earth – came together to discuss and plan a way forward on tackling air pollution in Brent. These meetings, held at Kilburn community centre, were chaired by Cllr Eleanor Southwood, then Brent Council's Lead Cabinet Member for the Environment.

From these meetings, it was decided that a small working group be set up to plan a common organisation. Hence the formation of Clean Air for Brent.

The working group began by writing to the Prime Minister, calling for action on the diesel emissions scandal. This was quickly followed by a public meeting, “The Air We Breathe”, held on 7th June 2016 at Brent Civic Centre, and enjoying the full support of Brent Council.

Simon Birkett (founder and Director of Clean Air in London) and Elliot Treharne (Air Quality Manager, Greater London Authority (GLA)) were keynote speakers at this event, which drew around 80 concerned participants from across the borough; a clear sign that CAfB was in business.



Democracy and transparency

Following the above exciting and encouraging activities, we got down to the hard graft of drafting of CAfB's aims and objectives along with a constitution; the latter being the conduit for electing members to the steering group to conduct day to day business.

The working group, as founding members, adopted the constitution in August 2017. This was presented at a second public meeting in Willesden Library in October 2017, which also had the full support of the Council. At the meeting, priorities for action were discussed with our first Steering Group members elected for 2017/2018 (see below).

Strategic aims

The Steering Group made it an early priority to formulate strategic aims and priorities for our work.

CAfB's four strategic aims:

- 1 Raising awareness of the impact of air pollution;
- 2 Championing means of reducing air pollution to effect behavioural change;
- 3 Being a strong and active advocate for policy and legislative change; and
- 4 Being a repository of local knowledge and information in the borough.

CAfB's five-point plan:

- 1 Raise awareness of the health risks of air pollution;
- 2 Reduce the use of diesel vehicles in the borough and the level of idling;
- 3 Increase walking and cycling;
- 4 Secure cleaner, greener public transport across the borough; and
- 5 Green the borough to provide greater protection from air pollution.

We have made more progress with our four aims and point 1 of the plan than with the remaining four points of the plan. They remain a challenge for the year ahead.

Public activities – working with Brent Council

As already indicated, our first two public meetings were planned in close co-operation with the Council and were in venues they kindly provided. We also received regular policy updates and appreciated the fact that Jennifer Barrett, the Council's lead officer for air quality, attended some of our planning meetings.

Our third public meeting took place in April 2018 at Harlesden Methodist Church Hall. The main speaker was Professor Martin Williams, air quality scientist at King's College London, and former official at Defra, involved in international air quality negotiations, who provided some of the background to the EU legal limits which are embedded into UK law. Jennifer Barrett gave a full briefing on Council activities. In addition, we publicised manifestos on air quality policy we had obtained from Brent's political parties; a key theme in May 2018 local elections.

We were also pleased to collaborate with the Council and with colleagues in Brent Friends of the Earth to plan and take part in events to mark national Clean Air Day 2018 on 21st June at the Civic Centre. The events included a jumbo anti-idling pledge for drivers to sign, an anti-idling event at a local school and an evening panel session attended by Barry Gardiner MP and leading councillors. CAfB hosted the latter and launched an important study on Air Quality in Brent by Imperial College MSc students (see below).



Pupils from Ark Franklin Primary Academy on National Clean Air Day



Barry Gardiner MP signing the clean air pledge

A second collaborative event was the Brent contribution to London “Car-free Day” in Cricklewood in September 2018. Currently, this comprises closing one or two streets in participating boroughs. It provides an opportunity for dialogue about air pollution with those directly affected; however, for the future we would like to see the Mayor of London backing the initiative and enough streets being closed to make a significant impact.



Campaigning on London Car-Free Day with Brent Council

Other public activities

We held stalls at the Queen’s Park Community School Summer Festival at which students awarded us the most sustainable display, the Field to Fork festival at Ark Franklin Primary Academy in NW10, and at Queen’s Park Day in September 2018. All these occasions provided good opportunities for dialogue with members of the community.



CafB stall at Field to Fork Festival

At Queen's Park Day, around 120 people signed our contact sheets, some of whom have become actively involved in our work.

We gave talks or presentations at the following residents' groups: Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum, Kensal Rise Residents' Association (also attended by Ark Franklin Academy parents), Cairnfield Residents' Association, Kensal Green Residents' Association and Willesden Sixty Plus Group.

Studies and surveys

We did our best to influence and collaborate with the Mayor of London's School Air Quality Audit programme, the results of which were published in May 2018. The programme focused on the 50 most polluted schools in London and included two in Brent: John Keble Primary in Harlesden and Ark Franklin Primary Academy in Kensal Rise. We were disappointed that the findings contained no new research information and confirmed what was already known about the adverse location of the schools. The recommendations concentrated on mitigating measures that the schools might take rather than addressing the heavy traffic levels which were the cause of the pollution.

Alongside this work, CAfB was fortunate to be able to commission, without cost to ourselves, a short research study of the areas around Chamberlayne Road in Kensal Rise, and Harlesden High Street. This was carried out by a team of Imperial College London environmental technology students as a pollution management option in their MSc course. It was published as *A study of Air Quality in Brent* and is on our website: www.cleanairforbrent.wordpress.com.

As well as marshalling a great deal of existing air quality and traffic data, the authors carried out traffic counts and surveyed stationary drivers in the rush hour. This work revealed the extent of commuting traffic travelling through these key arteries in Brent during peak periods. As a result, it can provide indicators for policy to reduce peak period traffic and the pollution it produces. We shared the report with the Council.

Responding to consultations

We have responded to the following official consultations:

- "Tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities" HM Government, June 2017;
- The Mayor's Transport Strategy for London, October 2017;
- The Mayor's Environment Strategy, November 2017;
- House of Commons Joint Committee Enquiry Improving Air Quality, November 2017;
- Brent's Air Quality Action Plan, January 2018;
- The Mayor's ULEZ proposals, February 2018;
- Brent Council proposals for Kensal Corridor, March 2018;
- Defra consultation on its "Clean Air Strategy", August 2018; and
- Brent's LIP3 response to the Mayor's Transport Strategy, November 2018.

Our overall views are perhaps best set out in the response to Defra of August 2018. We should also mention in view of its importance that we supported the ULEZ proposals in general, but argued that the North Circular Road should be included since it is one of the most polluted traffic arteries in London, and that London taxis should not be exempted from the charging regime but treated in the same way as mini-cabs.

In our response to Brent's Air Quality Action Plan, which is of great significance for Brent residents and road users, we continued to express in public what we had said since first consulted informally, which is that the Plan is very disappointing because it does not prioritise the most polluted locations in the borough. Our media release, which is available on our website, explains this in more detail.

We also made a long but unsuccessful submission to the Brent Council Planning Committee about a proposal to site a new school on Wembley Hill Road at a point which was the most polluted in the area available to the developer.

Partners and colleagues

We have been fortunate to work with experienced partners and colleagues across London. LSx, acted as a midwife in our formative period – and kept in touch. Client Earth, environmental lawyers, stimulated some of our sponsoring bodies and then set up the Clean Air Parents Network, in whose activities we take part.

On the academic front, Imperial College not only enabled us to commission research from their MSc students but invited us to other citizen science occasions, while the London Air Quality Network, based at King's College, gave us free places at their Annual Conference in 2017 and 2018, thus providing access to the cutting edge of air quality science nationally and internationally.

Simon Birkett of Clean Air in London remains a friend. Locally we maintain links with Friends of the Earth, working with them on Clean Air Day.

Dialogue with politicians

We have had fruitful meetings with London Assembly Members Caroline Pidgeon and Navin Shah. Both have offered to table questions to the Mayor of London for us in the London Assembly. We have also attended Air Quality meetings/receptions at City Hall and at the House of Commons – the latter hosted by Tulip Siddiq MP.

Communications

We are keen to share all the information we can about air quality issues and what we are doing to campaign for reductions in pollution. Our website www.cleanairforbrent.wordpress.com is frequently updated with news of what we do and links to major new reports. We also send out a short newsletter, announcing forthcoming events and enclosing copies of our inputs to consultations and the like, and communicate through Facebook and Twitter as well.

The Steering Group and Officers

Under our constitution the AGM elects the Steering Group, following which the Group appoints officers as required by the constitution or as we feel are needed for effective working. As a result, we shared out tasks for 2017-2018 as follows: Chair – Fiona Mulaisho, Vice-Chair – George Currie, Treasurer – Robin Sharp, Website and Newsletter – Janey McAllester, Media – Sarah Crawley, Facebook and Twitter – Ed Round, Creative – Victoria Secretan, Schools – David O'Brien (co-opted later). This has been above all a team effort.

Finances

There is a separate financial report for the year but in summary we received £576 in donations from individuals or founding bodies, and had net assets of £254 at the end of October. Queen's Park Area Residents' Association (QPARA) kindly looked after our small funds until we could open an account with Metro Bank.

Conclusion

This has been a successful year for CAfB, including Robin Sharp, our Treasurer, being named as a Community Champion in the 2017 Pride of Brent Awards in recognition of his work with CAfB and other community organisations in the borough over the years. On a personal note, I would like to thank Steering Group members for all their hard work, professionalism, encouragement and commitment to delivering the excellent achievements set out above.

As a result, and despite being so young, CAfB is now one of the leading voices on air quality matters in Brent. I would also like to thank our members for the support given to CAfB through the year and hope we can continue to count on this in the coming years!



Fiona Mulaisho
Chair, Clean Air for Brent

as at November 2018