



The Association of British Drivers

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Press Release – ABD London Region

For immediate release
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Even Richmond Babies Voted for CO2 Permit Parking Charges

Yes that was the conclusion from Tory Councillor Paul Hodgins when speaking at last night's council meeting to scrutinize the proposed CO2 based permit parking charge system.

Council Leader Serge Lourie had previously reported that from the survey of residents there was overall support for the scheme. But Councillor Hodgins pointed out that the survey results had been "reweighted" to take account of the bias in the survey sample (ages of respondents did not match those of Richmond residents with too many older residents responding). And the adjustments had assumed that all residents under the age of 35 were capable of responding to the survey – with younger residents voting more in favour, this adjustment had corrupted the result and in reality the views of residents might be the exact opposite.

But in Truth 63% of Residents Were Opposed

This was backed up by the council's final report which showed that of 2,182 letters, emails and "on-line" comments submitted by members of the public, some 63% expressed opposition to the proposals.

About 150 residents packed the council's conference room to hear the Environment Scrutiny Committee review the proposed scheme. Nine members of the public chose to speak against the proposals and they were scathing of the Liberal Democrats failure to listen to residents. None spoke in favour so where were the environmental lobbyists that usually make a showing at such events?

Rod Keble, who has set up a web site to oppose the scheme, pointed out that the proposal might simply encourage people to move to diesel vehicles which are worse for other pollutants and more dangerous to health. Even the council's environmental expert, Mr Coates, agreed with the figure claimed by the ABD, and by Mr Keble, that the likely benefit of CO2 reduction from this scheme in Richmond might be 0.2%.

Jane Spence and Sandra NacManson suggested there was blatant discrimination being shown against permit parking residents, as only they were being taxed for the pollution they generated while other residents could ignore it.

Jonathan Haydn-Williams, a solicitor by profession, made it clear that he thought the proposal was illegal as it would clearly raise revenue in excess of that needed to administer permit parking zones. But Mr Warner from the Council's Legal Services Department claimed that two eminent legal counsel thought the proposals were legally acceptable. The ABD tends to believe the former rather than latter but it is certainly something we will be looking into further.

Chris Williams suggested that the survey form used by the council was misleading, and questioned whether it had been randomly distributed as claimed.

Councillor Lourie said the survey had been properly done, but he conceded that the statistical analysis might be defective and this clearly needed reviewing.

The Committee ran out of time but members finally voted by 4 votes to 3 (with 2 abstentions) in favour of recommending that the Cabinet should proceed to decide on the matter next week, subject to correcting the statistical problems and other defects in the survey report.

Comments from the Association of British Drivers

Liberal Democrat councillors have still not indicated they will listen to the public – and particularly to those who are most affected by this proposal – namely residents who live in permit parking zones. As we have said before, the ABD deplores the attempts to mislead public opinion and the undemocratic ways that Liberal Democrat councillors are using in Richmond to attempt to push through these proposals.

In our view Liberal Democrat councillors are suffering from a bad case of "environmental hysteria". Michael Gold, one of the Committee Members, even said we are "living in dangerous times". But this proposal will result in an imperceptible reduction of CO2 levels in Richmond, even on the most optimistic assumptions. And as was made clear at last night's meeting, there will be no way to measure the effectiveness of the policy anyway.

We would like to see a less biased proposal, and more emphasis on tackling air pollution generally, not just CO2 levels which is one of the more harmless gasses. And we think all permit parking zone residents should be consulted, and all residents listened to. People do not write letters to the council unless they are very irate, and they do not like their views being ignored. Even environmental experts and non-car owners living in Richmond have opposed these measures.

For further information, please contact:

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About The Association of British Drivers (ABD)

The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Association is a “not for profit” voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our ABD London web site at www.freedomfordrivers.org

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