

Dear Residents and Neighbours, (12th October 2019)

I should be interested in specifics about measures needed and the words used (if this does, indeed, feature in the Queen's Speech on Monday). E.g. Incentives to move away from combustion in vehicles including public transport, local authority vehicles, marine traffic inside territorial waters (by international agreement), regulate in-car air-conditioning catalysis/filtering, innovation in scrubbing emissions from industry, tighten up on smoke-free zones, Local Authority investment in real-time monitoring at the local level linked nationally (with website/apps showing trends and providing advice - change routes, don't exercise outdoors, etc). The Queens Speech is on Monday. I have copied below.

Kind regards,
Nigel

“Boris Johnson backs Times Clean Air for All campaign law change.

Kate Devlin, Chief Political Correspondent and Ben Webster, Environment Editor, The Times.

Boris Johnson has backed the Times clean air campaign and committed himself to legally binding targets to reduce pollution as part of his first Queen's Speech on Monday.

The prime minister pledged that a new environment bill would succeed the 1956 Clean Air Act, introduced in response to London's Great Smog.

Praising this newspaper's Clean Air for All campaign, Mr Johnson said that ministers would “improve our environment and the quality of the air we all breathe”.

The Times revealed in May that 2.6 million pupils attend schools in areas where the level of fine particles in the air exceeds the limit set by the World Health Organisation.

Every school in London is above the limit, as are 234 schools in Birmingham and more than 100 in large cities such as Nottingham and Leicester.

Mr Johnson said that he wanted his government to “leave our country in a better state than we found it”, adding: “The Times has powerfully demanded a successor to the 1956 Clean Air Act . . . and I am proud to tell you that this Conservative government will be the one to deliver it. This landmark legislation will set a framework of far-reaching, legally binding targets to reduce plastics, restore biodiversity, improve the quality of our water and — inspired by the brilliant campaign of this newspaper — clean up our air.”

There is expected to be a specific target for fine particles known as PM2.5, the most dangerous form of air pollution because their microscopic size allows them to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.

The threshold and a target date for implementation will be set later, however, meaning that it is not yet possible to gauge the significance of Mr Johnson's commitment.

The Times is calling on ministers to adopt into law the WHO's limit of ten micrograms of fine particles per cubic be agreed at next week's EU summit. Many Tory MPs, including Mr Johnson, opposed Mrs May's plans for a customs partnership with the EU. However, ministers believe that Mr Johnson is better placed to sell the new deal both to Eurosceptic Tories and the Democratic Unionist Party.

A DUP source said that they could support the plans: "Provided it doesn't mean that Northern Ireland is excluded from being able to participate in new trade deals, we could be supportive."

However Arlene Foster, the DUP's leader, publicly warned that her party would back a deal only if it were in Northern Ireland's long-term economic and constitutional interests.

Stephen Barclay, the Brexit secretary, met Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, yesterday. Both described the meeting as "constructive". Mr Barnier said after the two-hour session: "The EU and the UK have agreed to intensify discussions over the coming days."

Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, said: "I have received promising signals from the taoiseach that a deal is still possible. Technical talks are taking place in Brussels . . . Of course there's no guarantee of success and the time is practically up, but even the slightest chance must be used."

Analysis: PM must now walk the walk

Boris Johnson has been full of praise for this newspaper's Clean Air for All campaign, describing it as "brilliant" and saying that it is inspiring him to introduce far-reaching legally binding targets to tackle air pollution (Ben Webster writes).

Our campaign advances a bold manifesto containing five specific measures that would save thousands of lives every year.

The prime minister's language sounds promising but it remains to be seen whether his environment bill really will, as he suggests, be a worthy successor to the 1956 Clean Air Act introduced in response to the Great London Smog. The UK already has legally binding targets for cleaner air under the EU but they are woefully inadequate. If Mr Johnson is serious about stopping the poisoning of our lungs, hearts and brains he must adopt in law the much tougher World Health Organisation pollution limits and set a date by when they will be met.

Meeting those limits will require tough measures to tackle all the main sources of pollution, including vehicle exhausts, tyres and brakes, gas boilers, wood-burning and the use of slurry and fertiliser on farms."