

To the Rt. Hon. Andrea Leadsom, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

18 July 2016

Dear Andrea

May I offer my warm congratulations on your new role. Your Department deals with some of the key issues for the future of our country in the new post-Brexit world and I am sure they will benefit from the fresh approach that you will bring to the task.

I want to draw your early attention to one urgent environmental problem facing the country – the damaging levels of air pollution in our towns and cities - and to urge you to consider an early and bold move to inject more vigour into the drive to improve the situation.

I am putting this proposal to you in my capacity as Chairman of the Clean Air Alliance. The Clean Air Alliance is a network of business and professional interests committed to developing practical solutions to the serious problems of air pollution in this country today.

We are today proposing to you and your colleagues the establishment of a high level Clean Air Commission to create a new momentum for the urgently needed action to tackle air pollution in our cities and countryside and to clean up the air we all breathe. We would also request that you receive a delegation from the Alliance at which we could explain our proposal in more detail and would hope to engage your interest and support.

Recent medical reports have demonstrated conclusively that air pollution is a major public health problem in the UK responsible for thousands of early deaths and a great deal of ill health. There is a growing demand for more vigorous action to improve air quality.

Air pollution affects all parts of the country but is particularly acute in some of the poorest and most deprived urban areas where illness is more prevalent and life expectancy is lower. Focusing especially on the air quality problems in those areas could play a significant part in the goal of improving the quality of life for all in an equitable way.

Some changes are already in hand. But they are proceeding too slowly and in too uncoordinated a way to make the impact needed. The members of the Clean Air Alliance believe that UK is currently at a tipping point where an acceleration of action on air quality is achievable and desirable, and could have major health, environmental, economic and business benefits.

In order to drive this forward the Clean Air Alliance is calling for the establishment of a high level Commission to create a consistent and co-ordinated plan of action and to build an effective working partnership between all the public and private sector bodies involved to implement it.

The enclosed paper sets out the case for such a Commission in more detail, and outlines the work it should undertake.

We want to emphasise at the outset that the proposed Commission should be an action-oriented body working to a tight timetable. It is not a question of seeking out new facts and scientific understanding about air pollution and its harmful effects on a lengthy Chilcot timescale. Successive reports from the leading professional bodies (most recently from the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health) have already established quite definitively the scale of the problem and the damage that is being done to the nation's health. The challenge now is to bring together a well-constructed and well-co-ordinated national strategy, combining action by several Government Departments, local authorities, several sectors of business and by members of the public themselves so as to overcome the scourge of air pollution and the enormous burden of ill health it causes.

At the same time these changes need to be integrated with an industry strategy that will support British businesses to deliver the cleaner vehicles, products and processes that will be needed to deliver the air quality improvements, and so to win new opportunities at home and abroad.

The present national air quality strategy is well meaning but is simply not ambitious enough in its objectives or vigorous enough in its execution. Now at the start of a new and reforming administration is a golden opportunity to grasp this nettle and push forward with a strong new Commission charged with creating a stronger strategy and with the standing and authority to reach out to all relevant Government departments (including the Treasury), to business leaders in the key sectors concerned, to mayors and local authorities and to the wider public who will themselves need to be mobilised and empowered to play their part in the changes needed.

Tackling air pollution and improving air quality should not be a party political issue and there is already widespread cross-party support for promoting more vigorous action on these issues – not least in the excellent reports of the Select Committee on the Environment, food and Rural Affairs.

Some commentators have fears that BREXIT may lead to a diminution of the protection given by EU legislation to air quality and to vehicle emission standards. The Clean Air Alliance prefers rather to see this as an opportunity to take back control of our British atmosphere, and to ensure that Government, business, local authorities and the British people as a whole work together creatively to make our British air once again amongst the cleanest and healthiest in the world.

60 years ago, after the Great Smog of 1952, the Conservative Government of the day set up a high powered Commission under Sir Hugh Beaver to tackle the air pollution problems of those days. The report of that body won widespread all party support and provided the blueprint for the great Clean Air Act of 1956 – one of the more successful and lasting legacies of the Eden Government. Our proposal seeks to emulate and amplify that success. It should create an integrated action plan to deal with today's pollution problems, and provide the basis for any new Clean Air legislation that may be needed.

I hope this proposal will commend itself to you and your colleagues. If such a Commission can be established by the Government I know that there will be many bodies and businesses

that will be keen to work with the Commission to help plan the way forward. In particular the Clean Air Alliance and its members will naturally wish to give all the assistance they can to the work.

The lead on air quality matters has always lain with your Department, and I am therefore writing to you as the prime mover on these matters. But of course an effective and integrated action plan for the UK will need to involve several different Departments and of course co-operation with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well. I am therefore copying this letter to your colleagues listed below, hoping that they too will see the advantage of establishing a high level Commission able to work together with you to shape an integrated action plan.

Yours sincerely

Dan Byles,

Chairman, Clean Air Alliance

Copies to:

The Rt. Hon. Philip Hammond MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport
The Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health
The Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid, MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
The Rt. Hon. Gregory Clark, MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
The Rt. Hon. James Brokenshire, MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
The Rt. Hon. Alun Cairns, MP, Secretary of State for Wales
The Rt. Hon. David Mundell, MP, Secretary of State for Scotland
Ben Gummer, MP, Cabinet Office Minister

Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Lesley Griffiths, AM, Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

Michelle McIlveen, Northern Ireland Executive Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs