

Smoke Control Area Public Consultation Results and Analysis

Public Opinion and Council response to the
proposal of designating the entire administrative
area of Oxford City as a Smoke Control Area

Consultation Period:

4th December 2023 – 31st January 2024

Environmental Sustainability Team

Oxford City Council – February 2024

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City Wide Smoke Control Area Public Consultation

Background

An online public consultation was held for an 8-week period between 4th December 2023 and the 31st January 2024. The consultation asked residents to have their say on Oxford City Council's intention to revoke Oxford's current 23 Smoke Control Areas (currently covering 48% of the area of the city), and to replace them by a single Smoke Control Area, covering the entire administrative area of the city.

Several methods were used by Oxford City Council to bring the public's attention to this public consultation during the 8 weeks period it was live. In particular:

- 2 formal public notices were published in two consecutive weeks at Oxford Mail (on the 4th and 11th December 2023);
- 1 formal public notice was [published](#) at the London Gazette on the 4th December 2023;
- Oxford City Council's own press [release](#) on the 4th December 2023;
- Oxford Mail [piece](#) on 5th December 2023 and [coverage](#) by BBC news on the 6th December 2023;
- Live radio interview with Cllr Anna Railton (5th December 2023);
- Physical copies of the notice were displayed at all public libraries and community centers in Oxford city;
- Emails were sent to all Oxford City Councillors letting them know of the public consultation and with a request for this to be widely disseminated in their constituencies;
- A physical copy of the notice and a draft version of the proposed smoke control order was made available for consultation to members of the public at the Oxford City Council's Town Hall;
- Regular posts and videos have been created and disseminated in Oxford City Council's various social media accounts, newsletter, and platforms;
- Emails were sent to members of several stakeholders in the city;
- The information was also passed internally to the various city council teams and was advertised on internal newsletters.

Oxford City-wide Smoke Control Area Public Consultation

Consultation Results

1. Do you live within Oxford City Council's administrative area?

Responses: 443

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	391	88.26%
No	39	8.80%
Not sure	13	2.93%

2. Do you currently live in part of the city already covered by one of the existing 23 smoke control areas?

Responses: 443

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	172	38.83%
No	235	53.05%
Not sure	36	8.13%

3. Have you ever suffered from a nuisance problem related with smoke from a chimney in your local area?

Responses: 425

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	100	22.57%
No	307	69.30%
Prefer not to say	18	4.06%
Not Answered	18	4.06%

3a. If yes, would you be able to briefly explain where and what the problem was?

Note: A short summary of the responses provided under question 3a can be found below:

- 37% report smoke emissions from wood burning being noticeable across a wider area, normally their neighborhood and areas of the city where they live, especially during cold winter nights but without being possible to identify its origin;
- 17% report having been exposed to smoke emissions from wood burning directly by their next-door neighbour;
- 20% refer to smoke emissions from canal boats as being the main reason for smoke nuisance issues in their areas;
- 6% refer to smoke emissions from bonfires and garden waste as being the main reason for smoke nuisance issues in their areas;
- 14% confirm being regularly exposed to emissions from wood burning and having a respiratory condition that exacerbates their symptoms.
- 6% report having been exposed to smoke emissions from wood burning during their commuting or regular walks.

4. Do you have any of the following at your home? Please tick all that are applicable.

Responses: 426

Option	Total	Percent
Open fireplace	62	14.00%
Wood burning stove	117	26.41%
Pellet stove	24	5.42%
None of the above	251	56.66%
Other	9	2.03%
Not Answered	17	3.84%

4a. If you selected “Other” please can you let us know what you use?

Note: A short summary of the responses provided under question 3a can be found below:

- 71% say to be using gas heating (central or gas fire);
- 29% refer to having non-operational fireplaces.

5. How often do you use it?

Responses: 415

Option	Total	Percent
Regularly (more than twice per week)	64	14.45%
Every so often	56	12.64%
Rarely	47	10.61%
Not applicable	248	55.98%
Not Answered	28	6.32%

6. Are you aware of the impacts on human health caused from using wood burning stoves and open fireplaces at home?

Responses: 424

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	402	90.74%
No	4	0.90%
Not sure	13	2.93%
Prefer not to say	5	1.13%
Not Answered	19	4.29%

7. How well informed are you with regards to how to adequately use open fires and wood burning stoves and on what are the most appropriate fuels to use?

Responses: 424

Option	Total	Percent
Well Informed	284	64.11%
Moderately Informed	111	25.06%
Not informed at all	29	6.55%
Not Answered	19	4.29%

8. What type of fuel do you use most often on your wood stove or open fireplace?

Responses: 422

Option	Total	Percent
Defra approved fuel for use in Smoke Control Areas	27	6.09%
Dry/Seasoned Wood (with moisture content below 20%)	122	27.54%
Any wood (regardless of its moisture content)	4	0.90%
Not applicable	264	59.59%
Other types of fuel	5	1.13%
Not Answered	21	4.74%

9. How familiar are you with the city council's raising awareness campaign "Do You Fuel Good", launched to educate and inform people who use wood burning stoves and open fireplaces on the harms they cause, and ways to reduce their impact?

Responses: 427

Option	Total	Percent
Very Familiar	149	33.63%
Familiar	58	13.09%
I have heard about it but not very familiar	72	16.25%
I have never heard about it until now	148	33.41%
Not Answered	16	3.61%

10. How well informed are you with regards to what you are/are not allowed to burn within a smoke control area?

Responses: 426

Option	Total	Percent
Well Informed	199	44.92%
Moderately Informed	163	36.79%
Not informed at all	64	14.45%
Not Answered	17	3.84%

11. Do you agree with the proposal to expand current Smoke Control Area legislation to the entire administrative area of Oxford?

Responses: 442

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	230	51.92%
No	188	42.44%
Not sure	15	3.39%
Prefer not to say	9	2.03%
Not Answered	1	0.23%

Note 1: From the analysis, 5.65% of the responses are either not sure, prefer not to say or did not answer. If those contributions are removed (for clarity), the redistributions of the percentages would be as follow:

YES – 55%

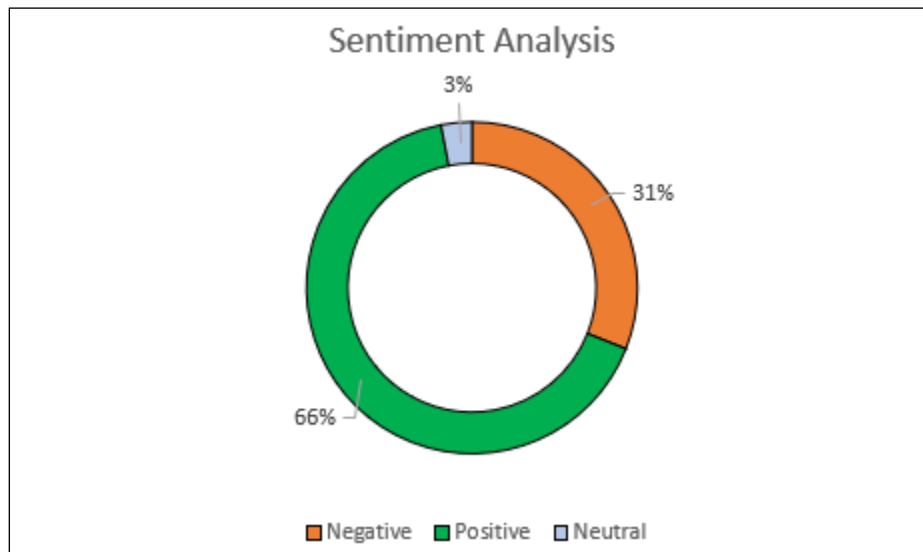
NO – 45%

Note 2: From the analysis, we can also gauge that at least 14% of all the “NO” voters, have done it under the mistaken assumption that the city council was proposing a complete ban of the use of wood burners. If those contributions were to be removed (for clarity), the final redistribution of the percentages would be as follow:

YES – 59%

NO – 41%

12. Do you have any comments with regards to the proposed expansion?



Key issues/Concerns raised

In summary:

- 189 comments were received;
- Concerns were voiced on how this proposal will affect the poor and more vulnerable, with some questioning whether adequate compensation will be given to people for this new imposition/obligation;
- Some comments related to respondents' concerns about air quality that were outside the scope of this consultation. These included references to road traffic being the biggest contributors to air pollution and reference to the need to create legislation to ban or restrict the conduction of garden bonfires on an urban environment;
- Some residents refer to the lack of adequate awareness raising, lack of public health and PM data to support this decision, lack of information being passed onto residents and the community;
- Some residents referred to the need to bring moored vessels and boating communities into the scope of the new Smoke Control Area legislation, with a recognition of them also being serious contributors to wood smoke emissions in the city;
- Some residents are fully supportive of the measures but express concerns on how the new smoke control area will be adequately enforced;

- Some comments highlight the importance of the communication aspect, that awareness raising will be crucial and highlight the importance of continuing to communicate, educate people on this issue from now until implementation stage;
- A few residents express concerns about whether this proposal will encourage people to shift to non-sustainable fuels as a result.
- A few residents express concerns about the implementation time perhaps being too soon, not giving them time to change to a new appliance.

A more detailed analysis of all the comments received, together with Oxford City Council's response to them is provided in **Appendix 1** below.

Appendix 1

Percentage	Summary of comments received from the formal public consultation	Oxford City Council Response
Responses in Agreement with the proposals (124 in total)		
10%	Support the proposals, but express some concerns related to how it will be adequately enforced.	Oxford City Council's Environmental Sustainability team is working together with colleagues from Environmental Health and the Enforcement teams on this. All the city's enforcement procedures are currently being updated and DEFRA has provided the City with some extra funding to increase enforcement capacity that will support the implementation of these proposals.
2%	Support the proposals based on the equality it brings.	In support of the proposal, no response required
34%	Support the proposals as they bring clear Public Health gains.	In support of the proposal, no response required
9%	Support the proposals but highlight the importance of also developing legislation to restrict the conduction of bonfires in an urban environment	There are currently no specific national laws governing the use of bonfires, but there are laws covering their impacts on others and the environment. Pollution from bonfires can fall within the definition of statutory nuisance and should be reported to Oxford City Council when defined as such.
7%	Support the proposals but highlight the importance of continuing to communicate and educate people on this issue from now until the implementation stage.	Oxford City Council expects to be developing within the next few months new campaign materials as part of its ongoing Do You Fuel Good? Campaign, in order to improve communication and awareness raising with residents on what this expansion means to them.
8%	Support the proposals but highlight the importance of	The Council might decide to bring moored vessels into a future expansion of the SCA, but this would be subject to a separate public

	bringing moored vessels under the scope of this legislation too	consultation exercise. The City Council recognizes the vulnerability of some of these communities, and as such believes that any future proposal for the inclusion of moored vessels into scope of SCA legislation should only be considered after adequate boating community engagement work has been delivered to identify and address the barriers for adoption of cleaner fuel types.
2%	Support the proposals but express concerns about if this encourages people to shift to non-sustainable fuels.	All the fuels burned are non-sustainable, as they all emit air pollutants as a byproduct, which will contribute to climate change. These proposals aim to minimise the emissions of pollutants that directly cause negative impacts to our residents, from a human exposure perspective. Less smoke means less exposure to noxious air pollutants, which has a direct and immediate positive impact on the health of all our residents and communities
2%	Support the proposals but express concerns about implementation time perhaps being too soon, not giving residents enough time to change to a new appliance.	According to the DEFRA's guidelines, there is a period of 6 months that needs to be accounted for, from the moment the secretary of state (DEFRA) decides to approve the city's proposal, until the new Smoke Control Area is formally adopted. This is precisely so that adequate time can be given for people to become aware of what will happen, for the city council to communicate the changes adequately and to give residents enough time to prepare.
26%	Other comments	These comments do not particularly refer to any reason why these proposals should be adopted. They are in most cases just personal opinions and views that show agreement with the proposals.
100%		
Responses NOT in agreement with the proposals (58 in total)		
43%	Are against the proposals, based on the assumption that they introduce a complete ban of wood burners	The proposals do not include a complete ban of wood burners
12%	Are against the proposals, as	These proposals will deal with equality in its broadest sense, as they

	<p>they have concerns about how this will affect the poor and more vulnerable, with some questioning whether adequate compensation will be given to people for this new imposition/obligation.</p>	<p>will allow for everyone to be covered by the same smoke nuisance legislation. At the moment, 48% of Oxford Administrative is already covered by Smoke Control legislation. One of the most vulnerable groups within the city (the boating community) was left outside of these proposals, precisely due to the need to find a way to adequately support these communities. With these proposals the poor and more vulnerable will also be more protected from the negative exposure to wood burning emissions inside their homes, as by burning the right fuel or using the right appliance, they will be exposed to less smoke inside their homes.</p>
4%	<p>Are against the proposals, as they are against boaters (who are considered by them the biggest wood smoke polluters) having been left out of scope of these proposals.</p>	<p>Oxford City Council's response to the question on boaters has already been highlighted in one of the notes above</p>
4%	<p>Are against the proposals, as they do not address the biggest source of air pollution: road traffic emissions.</p>	<p>Contrary to what people might expect, Domestic combustion is already a bigger source of Particulate emissions (PM2.5 and PM10) than road traffic. According to DEFRA, domestic emissions contributed 29% to total UK PM2.5 emissions and 15% to total UK PM10 emissions in 2022, with most emissions from this source coming from households burning wood in stoves and open fires. Road traffic emissions contributed to 18% of total UK PM2.5 emissions and 16% of total UK PM10 emissions in the same period</p>

10%	Are against the proposals, based on lack of adequate awareness raising, and/or lack of public health and/or PM data to support this decision, and/or lack of information being passed onto residents and the community.	These proposals have been widely advertised in the community (please refer to “background” chapter in this report). Oxford City Council also launched last year a city-wide campaign “ Do You Fuel Good? ” to educate people and raise awareness of the negative impacts of wood burning. That campaign is still live and is supported by robust evidence and studies conducted by several reputable institutions which show the negative impacts to human health of exposure to PM2.5 emissions. The city has plans to continue to develop campaign materials focused on the new Smoke Control Area proposals during the next few months.
27%	Other comments	These comments do not particularly refer to any key concern with the proposals. They are in most cases, personal opinions and views that do not relate with the subject of this consultation.
100%		