

focus

The power of privileged car use comes with responsibility

was delighted that my comments on the proposed bus lane for New Bridge have stimulated such lively and intelligent discussion – and I have no problem at all in being savagely attacked by those who disagree.

But I must defend myself against Anne Zutana Kaye's accusation that I was sneering and patronising when I referred to those of us who live in this beautiful borough as "privileged" and her suggestion that I am using the word opprobrially.

My dictionary defines privilege as those "fortunate in having a special advantage or opportunity to do something", which unquestionably fits the vast majority of Kew residents.

In any case, all of our readers are advantaged by living in one of London's loveliest districts where the countryside meets the town.

This is opposed to the top of a tower block in Hackney or a sprawling

municipal estate at the Elephant and Castle.

Those of us who have cars – and the majority do – are much better off than those who have to rely on public transport. On a broader plane, we are all internationally advantaged in that we live in a country which has a fine national health service and a state that will provide you with basic needs if you find yourself penniless.

There is no question that we are privileged compared with 90 per cent of our fellow human beings and need to remind ourselves of this every day.

With global warming now acknowledged by 90 per cent of the world's scientists to be fuelled by our excessive carbon emissions, we have got to look to every means to cut down on our consumption.

Motoring and flying are among the principal causes and so every move that encourages people to get out of their

cars and planes and into the trains and buses is a step in the right direction.

Bus lanes are part of this green revolution and when introduced they do hit the 'privileged' – that is those who can afford to drive around in their own luxurious little tin boxes even though they may not be wealthy by current UK standards.

I certainly consider myself very advantaged to have a comfortable modern car, to be able to drive on well-maintained and regulated roads and to breathe comparatively unpolluted air (I can remember the smogs of the fifties which killed thousands of Londoners every year until the smokeless fuel regulations were put through Parliament).

I have just returned from India where the majority are an under-privileged population living on or below the headline in cities that are gaseous and dirty and dangerous as their government

has not grasped the need of traffic restraint.

Anne Zutana Kaye's friend who needs an ambulance to take her home after hospital radio therapy treatment will evoke everyone's sympathy and hopefully there is a charity somewhere that will provide for her need. But she is a poor example to cite by someone who disapproves of bus lanes as ambulances need to get their patients swiftly to hospital and only a priority track can ensure that at peak times.

And she is still privileged to enjoy the medical treatment that is free and highly professional. In Africa and Asia such facilities are not available.

All but the ostich global warming-deniers (and there are plenty of those around) will want to see the quality of our lives maintained and we will have to accept that many privileges are going to be lost in the coming decades.

Mr Fletcher, who claimed last week

that the bus lane will be a total disaster, wants to encourage "the free flow of traffic to prevent pollution and misery," something we all desire. He does not suggest, however, how that can be achieved.

Does he support road pricing, for instance? Does he not accept that better, faster buses and tubes are the key? Long ago, we rejected plans for motorway rings around London which would have brought chaos and devastation.

Apart from bulldozing half of Kew to widen the North and South Circular roads, there is no way that can be brought about without limiting car use.

I am 69 years old and I have no children, but I am passionately concerned that the next generations will be able to live in the kind of green and pleasant land I have enjoyed. Unless we stop using our cars less we will be leaving a terrible legacy – and there will be fewer privileges than ever.