

Modest measures to curb global warming

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I make no apology for returning this week to the subject that appears to be tearing Richmond upon Thames apart - although in reality is probably only upsetting the vocal minority that sport Chelsea tractors and can afford to leave several vehicles outside their homes.

Over the last five decades any move to limit freedoms to park and drive in Greater London has met stern opposition that reflects the standing and influence of the protesters more than their mass or strength.

When I was chief reporter of the Brentford, Chiswick and Isleworth Times in the 1970s the environmental movement was in its infancy and spearheaded in Chiswick because the Hogarth roundabout had become the busiest intersection in Europe as it fed both then M4 and the M3.

Characters like Derek Beecham (nephew of Sir Thomas), Keith and Melanie Buchan, who went on to found Transport 2000, Neil Jackson, a charismatic airline pilot involved with the Grove Park Group and Irina Brunt the colourful spokesperson for Chiswick House Area Residents Association, led an articulate campaign to put car encroachment into reverse.

The beautiful riverside homes which accommodated the affluent middle classes in the triangle between the Great West and Great Chertsey Roads were being badly affected by rat running traffic, 30 ton juggernauts and the increasing pollution emanating from the



The Malcolm Richards Column

motorway feeders.

As they came from all shades of the political spectrum there were many ideological and personality clashes and a lot of squabbling - but the protesters were united in their aims to limit mindless road expansion and divert freight to rail and waterways.

Mrs Brunt, a formidable white Russian, could scarcely bring herself to breathe the same air as Derek Beecham the originator of Homes Before Roads - although they both campaigned along the same lines at all government, GLC

and Hounslow Council forums on transport.

As an arch Tory Mrs Brunt also clashed with Neil and Olive Jackson, whose views were further to the left and Keith Buchan a radical young environmentalist whose home on the A316 had been made virtually uninhabitable.

Hounslow Council was then under Labour control but those in key positions like leader Alf King and housing chairman George Sykes - viewed the road critics with suspicion while the Tory opposition members like retired headmaster Cecil Pocock and bank manager Thomas Crispin - considered them as threatening as did McCarthy the American liberals!

And when Jim Daly, the GLC member for Hounslow and chairman of the capital's transport committee, put forward proposals for excluding traffic from Leicester Square, most of the establishment considered him certifiable.

Taxi drivers were so vehement in their opposition he received death threats and dead cats were parcelled up and deposited on his doorstep.

Little has changed in the last thirty years.

When the Mayor of London wants to pedestrianise roads or tax drivers for coming into the centre, he is labelled a loonie leftie - even though David Cameron is talking green.

So the current leaders of Richmond

upon Thames' Lib Dem majority who are facing a sea of troubles over their relatively modest proposals to make the heaviest car polluters pay for their sins should take comfort!

As usual the letters pages of this newspaper are taking the debate forward with passion and intelligence. Readers who advocate a tax on aircraft before car owners are penalised may have their hearts in the right place - but are expecting legislators to run before they can walk. The Tories' claim that CPZs are being used as a stealth tax has been effectively refuted by the parking department who points out that all the revenue raised will be spent on improved public transport.

Despise not the day of small things was an Old Testament quotation I used as my motto when editor. It must apply to local authorities too.

Modest measures that penalise those who congest, pollute and despoil, whether it is by road, air or sea have to be introduced with courage and conviction. And now.

Some will work, some will need amending, some will need strengthening.

There will be winners and losers however global warming is restrained. But we are in the last chance saloon as far as halting melting icecaps, rising seas and increasing deforestation is concerned.

A small tax on a big vehicle is a tiny start - but a vital one.