

Wealthy will always slip through net

There is no fury like a motorist roused, I was constantly reminding readers during three decades in the editorial chair of this newspaper.

And no one is more aware of this than the current leader of Richmond upon Thames Council Serge Louie.

So it was very brave of him to encourage his Lib Dem majority to put forward a revolutionary parking scheme that would penalise four by four drivers and some households who own more than one car.

Since the seventies when traffic restraint measures were pioneered, the reaction to proposals for bus lanes, road humps, chicanes, speed limits or traffic exclusion in Richmond Park was all too predictable. Out of the woodwork and into the news columns and letters pages of this newspaper came the reactionary armies – literate, articulate and equipped with convincing counter arguments and statistics.

The same hysteria was generated when the Greater London Council put a bus lane over Kew Bridge – and even that most radical of Lib Dem opinion formers Jenny Tonge supported its removal because it inconvenienced some gas guzzling drivers.

Kea Livingstone, however, fished the



The Malcolm Richards Column

motoring lobby head on when he courageously introduced his congestion charge for central London. On the eve of its implementation it seemed that every Londoner and organ opinion was opposed to the idea and that the entire capital would grind to a halt. He is meeting the

same kind of anger on extending the scheme to include the affluent pockets of Kensington and Chelsea and HammerSmith – and it is only to be hoped that he will again screw his courage to the sticking post.

Coun Louie and his colleagues may have gambled on the fact that with David Cameron promising severe measures to tackle climate change, he might find a more favourable reaction when his council was the first in the country to come up with radical proposals.

Alas, nothing changes in the Tory hinterland and Coun Nicholas Trar and his supporters have turned out in force to find sound reasons why this relatively modest proposal would not work – and would hit average families, with the rich able to buy their way out.

The same argument – that the poor would be worst hit – was used by mayoral hopeful Steve Norris when he vowed to abolish the congestion charge.

Apart from income tax all taxes must hit the poor harder than they hit the rich! This is a fact of life in a capitalist society and all governments can do is find safety nets to protect the underprivileged.

We already have some in London where there are free bus passes for the over

sixties, the handicapped and schoolchildren – the “real poor” cannot afford to run cars anyway.

More relevant is the argument that those living in the borough whose roads are not affected by CPZs and who have driveways will escape the charge and continue to drive their environmentally damaging vehicles regardless.

But it was a former prominent Conservative councillor June Robinson who remarked in this newspaper that life is not fair – never has been and never will be.

Whatever scheme you devise to encourage people to behave responsibly there will be anomalies.

The wealthy always find ways to slip through the net. That is how they became privileged in the beginning and how they remain so.

We are not going to reduce climate change by one simple all-embracing measure. There are going to have to be thousands and thousands of minor proposals like these by local and central governments the world over.

And most of them will have loopholes and opponents will label them as ineffectual gesture politics.

But you have to start somewhere.

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