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THE PRIME MINISTER

9 March 2017

Dear Professor Grigg

I am writing to thank you and your co-signatories for your letter of 14 February about diesel vehicles and air quality.

The Government remains committed to improving air quality across the UK. Poor air quality is the fourth largest risk to public health, behind only cancer, obesity and cardiovascular disease, and it disproportionately affects some of the most vulnerable in our society, including the elderly, people with lung and heart conditions, and the very young.


Harmful emissions from transport contribute significantly to the air quality challenge we face. This is why, since 2011, the Government has committed more than £2 billion to increase the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles and support greener transport schemes. In addition, the Chancellor announced in the Autumn Statement that a further £290 million would be invested to support electric vehicles, low emission buses and taxis, and alternative fuels.

I agree with you that one of the main reasons our cities continue to face pollution problems is the significant levels of NO_x emissions that diesel vehicles produce. We have been taking action to tackle this. In October 2015, we helped secure an EU-wide agreement to introduce more stringent emissions testing across member states, ensuring that vehicle manufacturers live up to their low emission promises. We have also introduced a new programme of Clean Air Zones to enable focussed local action to reduce emissions. The zones will encourage the replacement of old, polluting vehicles with modern, cleaner technologies, such as ultra-low emission vehicles.

All local authorities have powers to introduce Clean Air Zones. However, in recognition of the persistent nature of the air quality problems in some cities, the Government has required Birmingham, Derby, Leeds, Nottingham and Southampton to put Clean Air Zones in place. These will exist alongside the planned Ultra-low Emission Zone in London. Ministers are also engaging with local authorities that have chosen to establish Air Quality Management Areas, to ensure all levels of government are working together to improve air quality.

We will be launching a consultation in the spring on our proposals for a revised national air quality plan for nitrogen dioxide. We will be keen to engage with interested parties throughout the consultation, including health professionals across the country.

Thank you, once again, for making your views known on this important issue.

Yours sincerely


Professor Jonathan Grigg