

June 2023 Newsletter

AIR POLLUTION THEME OF THE MONTH: CLEAN AIR DAY



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What is Clean Air Day?

Clean Air Day is the UK's largest annual campaign to raise awareness of air pollution. This year Clean Air Day was on **Thursday 15 June** and the theme was - ***“Clean up our air to look after your mind this #CleanAirDay”***.

Did you know that clean air not only benefits our physical health but can also protect our mental health and reduce the likelihood of developing harmful brain conditions?



The negative physical health impacts of breathing in dirty air – such as asthma, heart disease and cancers – have been recognised for decades, but more recently, researchers are beginning to understand how air pollution can affect our brains and our minds. Being exposed to air pollution is now being linked to conditions such as depression, anxiety and dementia.

So how can air pollution damage our brains? When we breathe polluted air, tiny particles enter the body through the lungs. These tiny particles carry contaminants from the environment, including dioxins, chemical compounds and metals such as iron and lead. These are taken into the blood stream where they travel around the body and can even enter the brain taking harmful

chemicals with them. Once in our brains these chemicals can cause significant harm including inflammation and neurological damage.

The **Clean Air Hub** at www.cleanairhub.org.uk is encouraging us all to:

- **Learn** more about how air pollution impacts our mental, physical and planet's health.
- **Act** by walking, wheeling, or using public transport to reduce exposure and contribution to air pollution.
- **Ask** for support for clean air measures that make it easier for everyone to breathe clean air by getting in touch with your local councillor.

Simple Steps to Help

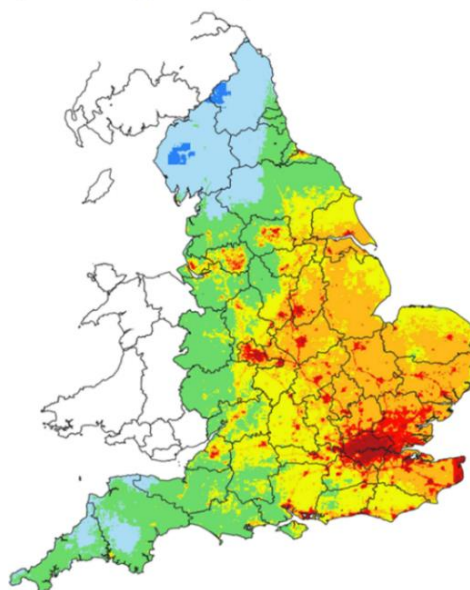
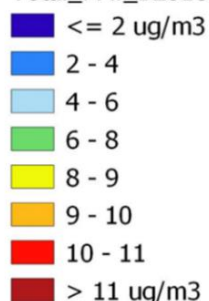
Any changes that we can make in our day to day lives that reduce air pollution emissions contribute to improving our own health and reduce harm to others. We can all lead by example and when you meet others encourage others to do the same. Whether you are at work (you can act as a champion for air quality), as an individual (almost every choice we make has some impact on air pollutant emissions) or as a member of a local community or faith group (you can influence your friends and family) you can share vital information about the harms of air pollution and why we all need to think a bit more about our choices.

Did you know that Birmingham and the Black Country, have some of the worst air quality outside of London? Those areas coloured red and brown on the map have the highest levels of air pollution. Poor air quality is having a significant impact on our population and driving up health inequalities.

Map of modelled PM2.5 concentrations across England in 2018, the base year for the PM2.5 targets (produced by Imperial College London).

PM2.5 Conc.

Total_Pmf_B2018

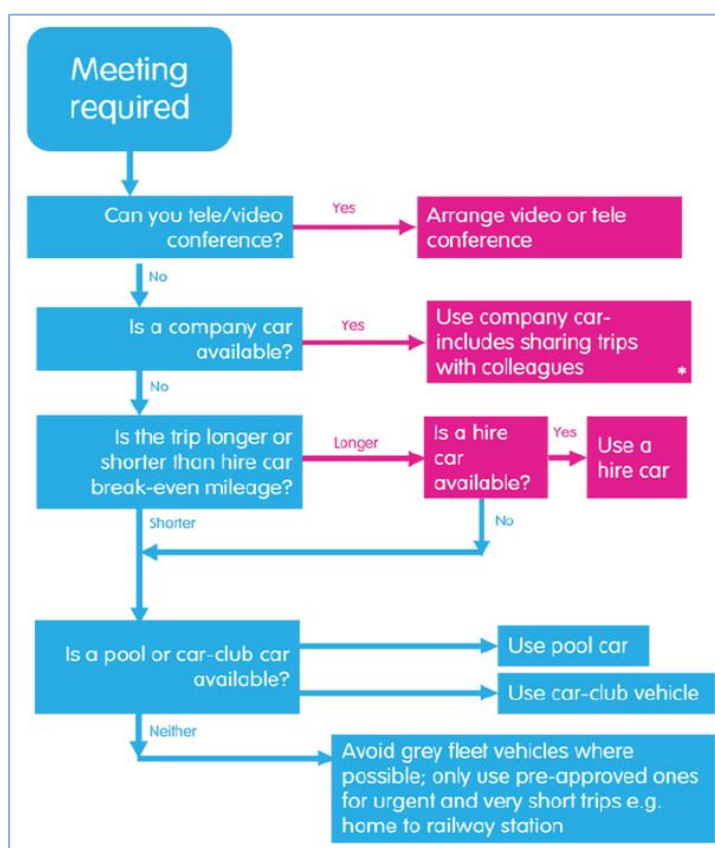


What Can We Do?

Air pollution is a problem that affects all of us, but it is almost always those who are the poorest that suffer the most from its impacts, as well as the most vulnerable in our society such as children, elderly and people with underlying conditions.

We can all do our bit to improve air quality, for example by walking or cycling to work or school, or to visit friends and improve our physical health – so where you can, try to swap out those short car trips for a walk or cycle.

Here is a useful flowchart to use when considering arranging meetings at work:



Talking is vital – tell local and national decision makers what changes would make it easier for you to walk more in your local community or encourage others to, and speak to friends, family and colleagues about the harms of air pollution.

According to Global Action Plan, **82%** of people think that air pollution should be a priority for the UK, an increase of 11% over the last three years, while **90%** now report doing at least one thing to help reduce outdoor air pollution.

Explore the options you can take to protect yourself from air pollution, and reduce your own impact at: <https://www.cleanairhub.org.uk/home>

Think before you travel - Before embarking upon any journey look to take the most sustainable travel option and encourage others to do the same.

Learn –find out more about the scale of the problem, the pollutants, the cost to our NHS, the health impact over a lifetime and how to call politicians to action at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution>

Share your experiences – let others know what you are doing to tackle air pollution and help inspire others.

Marking Clean Air Day in Sandwell

In support of Clean Air Day, the Air Quality Team at Sandwell Council worked with faith centres, and the wider community to raise awareness.

We encouraged all our participating faith centres to think about doing something extra to mark Clean Air Day, their ideas included having a car free Friday, litter picking, pop-up air quality information stalls, inviting talks from air quality officers and making personal pledges to reduce harmful emissions.

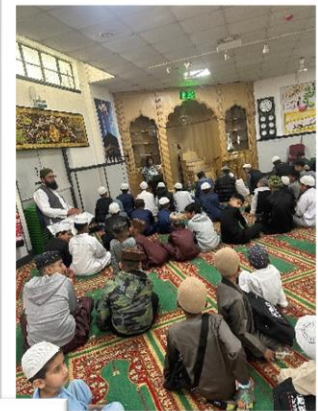
Clean Air Day Talks

Clean Air Day Talks took place at nine of our participating faith centres during the week of Clean Air Day (June 12 – 17). We would like to thank the following centres for hosting these talks;

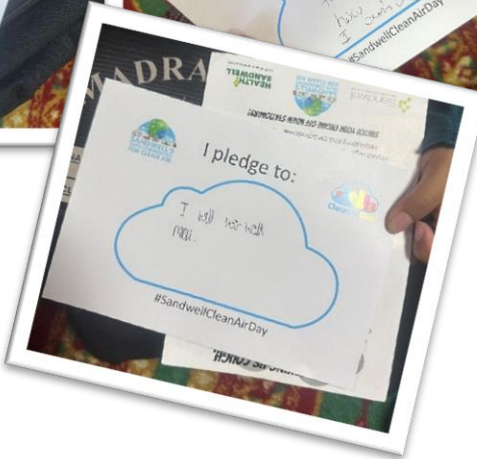
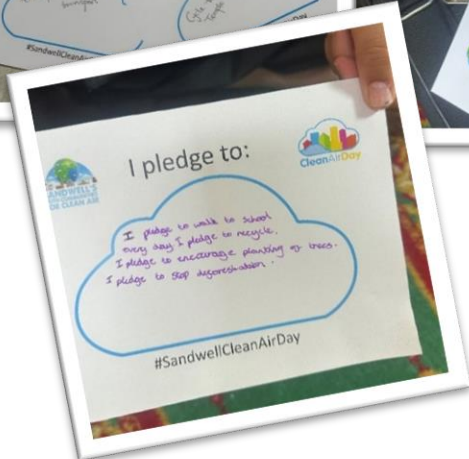
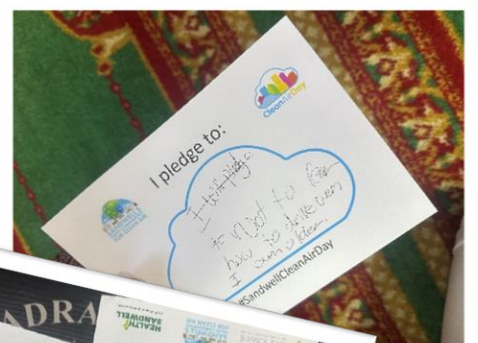
- Shri Pashupatinath Mandir of UK
- Tipton Muslim Community Centre
- Yemeni Community Association
- Wednesbury Baptist Church
- Oldbury Jamia Mosque
- St. Matthews Church
- St. Francis of Assisi
- Holy Trinity Church
- The Balaji Temple

Sandwell's air quality team really enjoyed visiting all these centres, and it gave us a much better insight into local perceptions and concerns about air pollution and active travel. We discussed a wide range of air quality issues from the most obvious ones such as driving cars, lighting bonfires, barbecues and wood burning stoves, to the less obvious ones such as the impact of using home delivery services, using aerosol spray cans and lighting candles. We also discussed active travel options and found groups who were keen to learn to ride, as well as

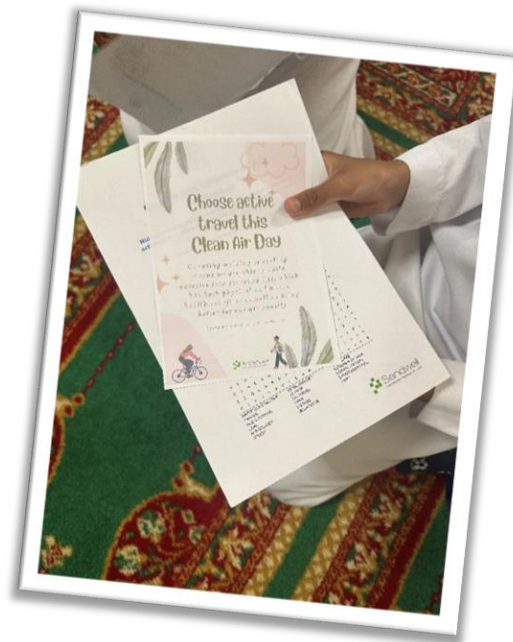
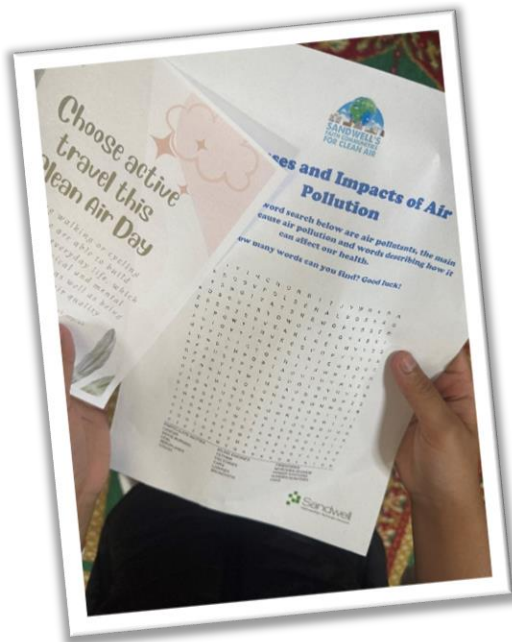
listening to concerns raised, including the cost of buying a bicycle as well as wanting to build confidence to ride on roads in Sandwell.



We were also really encouraged to see so many people making pledges to make their own changes to help reduce air pollution, a few examples included driving less, walking to school, cycling to the temple, using less gas and taking public transport.



The children at the Oldbury Jamia Mosque also got involved, they completed air pollution worksheets and word search puzzles to help them find out more about the topic in a fun way.



Clean Air Day Bike Bus

On Sunday 18 June, Sandwell had its first 'Clean Air Day Bike Bus'. This was a led ride, organised by British Cycling's Steve Brown and our Active Travel Officer, Suzy Street-Hall in partnership with the Guru Har Rai Sahib Gurdwara, West Bromwich.



Faith centre members, residents and air quality officers cycled along a 12-mile route, starting and finishing at the Guru Har Rai Gurdwara Sahib in West Bromwich, with stops at the Yemini Community Association in West Bromwich, The Church of St Francis of Assisi in Wednesbury, Wednesbury

Baptist Church and the Centre for Oneness in Wednesbury. The cycle ride was routed along 'quiet' streets with lower levels of traffic and air pollution to demonstrate that cycling can be a practical and safe alternative to private car use.

A special mention should also be given to Deb and Neil who generously laid on refreshments for all the cyclists at Wednesbury Baptist Church.



We are keen to run more led cycle rides or 'Bike Buses' with our faith centres in the future, so if you think this is something your centre would be interested in or just want to find out more, then please don't hesitate to get in touch with our Active Travel Officer Suzy Street-Hall, Susan.Streethall@sandwell.gov.uk.

If you have any questions about any of the items featured in this or previous newsletters, or maybe you have a story you would like to share about what your centre is doing to help improve local air quality, please contact us at pollution_control@sandwell.gov.uk.