

Conservative Mayoral hopeful seeks ULEZ review

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Surrey's Conservative shadow authority opposition leaders have thrown their weight behind a London mayoral candidate's pledge to review the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ).

Braintree MP Sir James Cleverly resigned from the Tory shadow cabinet at the end of August to stand for Mayor of London in 2028 - aiming to be the first Conservative to hold the office since Boris Johnson.

He told The Telegraph that he would conduct a full review of the London ULEZ if elected, vowing to end what he called Labour's "war on motorists".

The ULEZ requires drivers of high polluting vehicles to pay a daily fee of £12.50 to travel within its boundaries. It initially only covered London's inner boroughs, but was expanded to include the outer London suburbs in summer 2023.

But this expansion was met with fierce opposition in Surrey and the other Home Counties, where many commuters regularly drive into London and are forced to pay ULEZ charges.

Following Sir James' announcement, the Conservative opposition leaders on Surrey's two shadow councils told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) they fully support a review of the scheme.

West Surrey's opposition leader Councillor Jane Austin (Conservative: Waverley Eastern Villages) said: "ULEZ does not stop at the London boundary in terms of its impact.

"Surrey residents travel into London every day for work, to run businesses, visit family and access services."

Advocates of the ULEZ argue the scheme is a vital programme to improve air quality in the capital, and have pointed to studies showing vast drops in pollution following its implementation.

However, critics argue it places punitive charges on owners of older cars, many of whom may not be able to afford greener alternatives. A scrappage scheme to replace older vehicles ran until September 2024, but this was only available to London residents.

Councillor Austin added: "At a time when households and businesses are already under considerable financial pressure, I think it is entirely reasonable to review the impact of the expanded scheme - including whether the claimed environmental benefits justify the financial burden being placed on residents and businesses outside London."

Surrey County Council opposed the 2023 expansion of ULEZ, and refused to allow Transport for London to install signage and cameras in the county related to the scheme.

East Surrey opposition leader Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) told the LDRS: "Surrey County Council opposed the ULEZ expansion from the outset because of the lack of support and the impact it would have on Surrey residents.

"We therefore welcome James Cleverly's commitment to look again at the scheme and properly examine its economic and environmental consequences."

Councillor Lewis also called on the West and East Surrey administrations, which will take responsibility for Surrey's highways next April, not to implement "blanket anti-motorist policies" in the county.

He said: "Whether it is blanket 20mph limits, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods or other restrictions, changes need to be evidence-led and take proper account of the needs of residents and local businesses."

East and West Surrey Shadow Authorities were contacted for comment. The Mayor of London's office also did not respond to requests for comment.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: Sign for London ultra low emission zone (geograph 6183970) David Hawgood / Sign for London ultra low emission zone / CC BY-SA 2.0

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