Dear Councillors,

I’m writing to you as I am concerned about the effects of wood burning on air pollution levels, particularly as we move into the winter months.

Although many people have positive associations with wood burning – as a cosy, attractive way to heat a room, or as an allegedly carbon neutral fuel – even the most ‘eco-friendly’ wood burning stoves [emit high levels](https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/assets/documents/reports/cat11/1708081027_170807_AQEG_Biomass_report.pdf) of particulate matter (PM). PM is one of the most [problematic pollutants](https://www.ippr.org/files/2018-10/1539184665_lethal-but-legal-october18.pdf) in London today, and has been [associated with](https://www.blf.org.uk/sites/default/files/BLF%20Response%20Air%20quality%20using%20cleaner%20fuels%20for%20domestic%20burning.pdf) a range of conditions, including decreased lung development and function, exacerbation of asthma, allergies, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder), pulmonary fibrosis and an increased risk of lung cancer. It is also linked with increased morbidity and mortality.

The term “woodburning” includes any kind of domestic fire: both wood burning stoves (including Defra-certified “eco-stoves”) and open fires. It includes bonfires or stoves fired with pellets, briquets and house coal. Although many people believe burning wet wood is the real problem, even burning seasoned, [dry wood](https://erj.ersjournals.com/content/46/6/1577?ctkey=ERJtw186514), releases large amounts of pollutants.

Despite a network of smoke control zones introduced after the Clean Air Act of 1956, the use of wood in domestic combustion activities has been growing in recent years. Emissions from domestic wood burning [more than doubled](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emissions-of-air-pollutants/emissions-of-air-pollutants-in-the-uk-1970-to-2018-particulate-matter-pm10-and-pm25#:~:text=Major%20emission%20sources%20for%20PM10%20and%20PM2.&text=Domestic%20combustion%20is%20a%20major,closed%20stoves%20and%20open%20fires) between 2003 and 2018, and accounts for 38% of PM2.5 emissions in the UK in 2018 (PM2.5 are the smallest and most dangerous particles that are too small to be filtered out by the lungs). This compares with road transport contributing 11% of PM2.5 emissions.

We are in the middle of a global climate crisis, and it is time for us all to look at alternative ways to heat and better insulate our homes. Wood burning still [releases CO2](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/03/wood-not-carbon-neutral-energy-source) and newly planted trees do not absorb as much CO2 as mature trees.

We also in the midst of a brutal second wave of a respiratory pandemic. [Research suggests](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0269749120365489) that there is a link between air pollution and high levels of Covid-19 infection. Many people, including those planning to burn their stove more this year, [are simply not aware](https://airqualitynews.com/2020/11/11/the-public-are-unaware-of-the-health-impacts-of-indoor-fires/), what a significant contribution wood burning makes to air pollution and the knock-on impact on respiratory health.

As the local authority, you have a responsibility to protect public health. I urge you to raise awareness of the dangers of wood burning and ask all residents not to use their wood burning stoves unless they are their only source of heat.

I look forward to hearing from you.