

PUBLIC FORUM CLOSED AS RESULT OF LOCAL COUNCIL LEGAL THREATS.

The No To Bike Parking Fees campaign has reacted swiftly and robustly to flimsy allegations from Westminster City Council attempting to link it to criminal activity and an alleged 'hate campaign'.

The No To Bike Parking Fees Campaign is currently leading the protests against a new charge levied on powered two wheelers by WCC in their parking bays, which has led to public outcry and has led to accusations of the introduction of a stealth tax. Its purpose is to ensure the abolition of charges for on-street parking for powered two wheelers.

Under legal advice, due to WCC's stance, the campaign has been forced to close its public forum, in which motorcyclists, scooter riders, and commuters were able to discuss the issues openly and without censorship. This has unfortunately served to restrict and stifle a legitimate form of public debate regarding an issue which has become more central over passing months.

The No To Bike Parking Fees Committee, headed by Warren Djanogly, stated:

'We as a committee are and always have been open and transparent in our discussions, and have always been against antisocial or illegal activity in relation to this issue. The brazen attempt by WCC to link our Committee, made up of volunteer citizens and commuters, to alleged criminal activity is yet another diversionary tactic to steer attention away from the core issue –of an unjust stealth tax dressed up as a parking charge.'

The BMF (British Motorcycle Federation) have demanded a public apology from WCC for the implication that the BMF supports illegal activities.

Parking bosses are currently trialling a charging scheme whereby for a minimum of £150/year, more than a resident's car permit, motorcyclists can park in a dedicated bays which were previously free. It is being sold as an experimental scheme, but to date no meaningful experiments have been carried out in relation to expanding of bays or installing of security devices.

The council has used meetings with the BMF and MAG (Motorcycle Action Group), and also meetings with NTBPF, to claim that consultation has taken place, and stifle wider debate on the issue, and has already been forced to quietly remove references to 'consultation' with these groups from their website after objections from those organizations.

In response to specific examples given:

"Issuing a number of inflammatory statements on the internet including the threat that anyone who supports motorcycle parking "must accept the consequences of their actions" and calling for the "gloves to come off" and "total war" against Westminster staff."

These do not constitute in any sense dangerous comments, and have been picked from forums in which a wide range of opinions were given. To attempt to take these out of context without understanding the nature of the forum is cynical and manipulative in the extreme.

"Posting the home address of a council officer on the "No to bike parking fees" website in a move designed to cause alarm and distress."

This issue was openly dealt with by NTBPF as soon as it was brought to our attention, and confirmation was received from Westminster's legal team that the matter was closed. We are surprised that it has been raised again, and are seeking clarification of the reasoning behind it.

"Emailing council contractors from a fake email address purporting to be from Cllr Danny Chalkley, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport. It is an offence under the 1972

Local Government Act to impersonate an elected official and this matter is now in the hands of the police."

WCC have yet to establish who this email was from and no member of the Committee has ever impersonated **any** member of the council. We welcome a police investigation into this matter and are confident that any attempt to smear the Committee with this allegation will be unsuccessful.

"Publishing Cllr Melvyn Caplan, Cabinet Member for Finance's, personal mobile number on the internet and bombarding it with phone calls. Council work numbers have also been published and repeatedly called for long periods of time."

These issues were again openly dealt with by NTBPF as soon as it was brought to our attention, and confirmation was received from Westminster's legal team that the matters were closed.

"Recording phone conversations with customer service staff and posting them on the internet. It is an offence under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Ripa) to record a phone call if the recording is passed on to a third party."

This issue was openly dealt with by NTBPF as soon as it was brought to our attention, and confirmation was received from Westminster's legal team that the matter was closed. We are, again, surprised that it has been revived, and are, again, seeking clarification of the reasoning behind it.

"Calling for the vandalising and removal of motorcycle parking signs that provide vital information for motorcyclists wishing to park in Westminster."

No member of the Committee has ever called for this action, although during debates in the forums contributors have had discussions during which activities such as this have been mentioned. There has never at any time been any evidence that people have actually gone on to perform these acts, and it is clear to all that these statements were made within the wider frame of heated debate and posturing.

"Illegally fly-posting and obscuring traffic signs and shop windows on Oxford Street."

No complaints have been received from any retailers in Oxford Street to our campaign Committee, and any papers attached to windows were part of a legitimate protest and affixed using only blu-tak. The remainder were handed to pedestrians and shop-keepers as a way of highlighting the trade that the area may lose as a result of people staying away from the borough due to the charges. To label this as illegal fly-posting is clearly misleading. At no point were riders on the demonstration directed to obscure traffic signs.

The council's legal team did send a letter to the Committee, phrased in an advisory fashion, only 48 hours before the press release was sent out.

Cllr Chalkley said: "If councillors and council officers continue to be targeted in this way we will report those responsible to the police and will not hesitate to pursue legal action to bring an end to such behaviour."

In response, the Committee stated today: "We join Cllr. Chalkley in condemning any acts which may constitute harassment, but have yet to see any examples that would justify a press release such as this.

"The issuing of such unsubstantiated allegations in such a way as to slander our campaign is an attempt to frighten into submission the very people he claims to be listening to, and the forced closure of our public forum shows not only the level to which it has stifled public debate, but also highlights the responsible outlook and ethics of this campaign."

Ends-

Notes to editors:

Media requesting more information should contact the campaign on chairman@notobikeparkingfees.com

Further information on the group can be found at www.notobikeparkingfees.com or <http://www.31st-march.com>

The use of **solely** pay by phone for parking on street constitutes a breach of the Disability/Discrimination Act 1995.

The council has indeed introduced an extra 2,000 bays for motorcycles to park on street and in secure and covered carparks.

However, by January 19th 2009, introducing the extra motorbike parking bays had cost the Council £302,000, of which £23,000 was on the bays themselves, rather than the 'charging apparatus' (Verrus/the apparent 'consultation'). Income for the Council had reached £2,272,000, contradicting a comment made by Alistair Gilchrist in January 2007 (<http://londonbikers.com/forums/shwmessage.aspx?ForumID=58&MessageID=164620>) that the scheme is not revenue raising.

Under the current scheme it costs a minimum of £150/yr for motorcyclists to park in a motorcycle bay. Under the weekly rate this would be £260/yr and the daily rate up to £450/yr. The figure of 50p/day quoted by WCC is misleading as it would require the user to park every available day of the year and take no holiday time at any point to achieve this figure.

The No To Bike Parking Fees campaign is an unfunded voluntarily run organization.

The No To Bike Parking Fees Campaign has the support of:

THE TAXPAYER'S ALLIANCE
THE DRIVER'S ALLIANCE
BRITISH MOTORCYCLE FEDERATION
MOTORCYCLE ACTION GROUP
ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH DRIVERS