

Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 7:33 pm

I have published a new video in my 'Labour could' series this morning. In it, I argue that by law we are meant to enjoy clean water and safe food, but air quality is very largely ignored in law. This is absurd because improved air quality in this country would save hundreds of thousands of lives, save the NHS a fortune and massively improve productivity. The gains would massively outweigh any costs. Labour should be delivering it.

<https://youtu.be/fNf951RqOf4?si=liS4FMrYjoQn6iKV>

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=pxqj7-1678a91-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=c73a3a&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&button-skin=3267a3

The transcript is:

I've been making a quite long now series of videos on what Labour could do without spending a great deal of public money because, as we all know, Rachel Reeves is trying to tell us that there is no money left. I don't agree with her, but within that constraint there are still lots of things that Labour can do that, so far, we've heard nothing about.

Let me give you another example. Labour could require that there be clean air in public spaces.

Now, this would impose some cost on the government, I admit. It would impose more cost on the private sector because many public spaces are, in fact, now, of course, private. So, what am I talking about when I talk about public spaces?

I mean places where people congregate. So, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, concerts, pubs and so on. All of those have dirty air as a characteristic.

So, too, do workplaces and schools and hospitals.

Now, why does this matter? Well, it matters a lot.

We have regulation on clean water and we're supposed to enjoy it, even though our water companies aren't that good at always fulfilling their obligations.

We're meant to have clean food. And thank heavens we do still have sufficient enforcement to ensure that is usually the case. As a consequence, people aren't ill for that reason.

But we know that vast numbers of people are ill because of dirty air.

How do we know that? Well, COVID was the most obvious example, of course. 230,000 people are believed to have died as a consequence of Covid, which was always an airborne disease. It was capable of being controlled by the use of what are called HEPA filters. If only those quite cheap units had been put into public spaces, the number of people who would have died would have fallen considerably.

And that will be true of the next pandemic, wherever it comes from. Whether it be another form of COVID, or bird flu, or flu itself, whatever it is, clean air will reduce the risks to us.

But there's more benefit than just that, although that's enormously significant. The other benefit is that there's a massive increase in productivity, particularly in the workplace and in schools if people work in clean air.

It's been estimated that if you had clean air, simply using these filters, in schools, then you would increase the amount of effective learning time by more than 10 percent per week. You could either cut down the length of the term, or you could send children through the school process quicker, or they could just learn a lot more because they can concentrate when the air is not full of carbon dioxide, which these filters reduce as well.

We all know the phenomenon of being, well, sluggish after lunch. When I do public talks, the two o'clock slot is always the graveyard moment for any speaker. You know nobody's going to pay attention because everybody is slumped in their chair. Clean air helps avoid that risk. Of course, some of it is induced by having just eaten, but if you have clean air, then you don't get that sense of sluggishness that arrives.

And imagine this happened in the workplace as well. We have a government obsessed about the lack of productivity in the UK. Clean air could by itself be the biggest contributor to the increase in productivity in the workplace in this country, massively

increasing our gross domestic product as a consequence.

And people would feel better as well.

But let me be clear, whilst I am therefore saying that this will have a cost, I firmly believe that the benefits will massively outweigh that cost. So what I'm proposing is not only net neutral, it's almost certainly a massive net gain to the government.

So why won't they do this? I genuinely don't know. Doctors have been arguing for clean air for ages. They know the risks. They know the benefits. They know that this will massively increase people's well-being by improving their productivity and their concentration.

So come on Labour, please do it. You could, you could do it quickly, and you could massively change the way in which our whole society works.