

Council to look into banning larger cars in Edinburgh

The City of Edinburgh Council has backed a call to explore banning Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) from parts of the city amid concern they are endangering pedestrians and creating potholes.

Green councillor Chas Booth said as well as their environmental impact, the large vehicles also have significant road safety and maintenance implications – and even suggested it would be safer to have army tanks with “fewer blind spots” on the roads.

He said the vehicles – which have grown in popularity over recent years – “may be appropriate for a farmer in Fife” but added it was not justified for “a banker in Bruntsfield” to drive one around the city.

However, Bruntsfield Conservative councillor Marie-Clair Munro urged her constituents to “crack on” if they wanted to buy an SUV.

The issue was raised at the Transport and Environment Committee on Thursday as members discussed action being taken by the local authority to improve road safety.

These include increasing the number of pedestrian crossings, 20mph zones and driver awareness events for young, newly-qualified motorists.

Cllr Booth highlighted the “weight and size of vehicles and the impact that that has on road safety”.

He said: “We know that in the European Union, the average mass of new cars increased by 15 per cent from 2001 to 2020. We know that SUVs are the most popular type of passenger vehicle, accounting for 40 per cent of the market share across Europe.

“Now, it may be appropriate for a farmer in Fife to have a Land Rover, but it’s not appropriate for a banker in Bruntsfield – if they don’t also own a farm up in the Highlands – it’s not appropriate for them to have a massive great gas guzzler.”

In recent months Edinburgh SUV owners have been targeted by environmental activists, who said they intended to make it “impossible” to own one in the city. The Tyre Extinguishers group let the air out of around 100 4x4s in the New Town, Morningside and Portobello.

An amendment tabled by Cllr Booth noted that research suggested pedestrian deaths involving SUVs are “increasing at a faster rate than other cars” and that the European Transport Safety Council had called to “ban SUVs in urban areas”. Agreed unanimously by councillors, it called for the next road safety report coming forward in March to “explore the feasibility of steps to discourage or restrict larger and heavier vehicles in the city”.

The council will look at ways that restrictions on SUVs can be enforced through parking permits and environmental orders.

Cllr Booth said: “We know that there are environmental implications because heavier vehicles tend to have more emissions. We know there are road maintenance implications because heavier vehicles are much more likely to create potholes. But there are also significant implications for road safety; in the United States pedestrian deaths are at their highest level for that last 40 years, they’ve risen 80 per

cent since 2009 and a lot of that is due to heavier and larger vehicles.

“Research by Vias Institute in Belgium found heavier cars increase the probability of death among vulnerable road users and we know that larger vehicles are more likely to have blind spots because of their design and they’re also more likely if they are in a crash to create a double impact where the vulnerable road user is hit by the vehicle and then hits the road.

“In fact there was one analysis that shows the Abraham M1 tank has better visibility – fewer blind spots – than many of the gas guzzlers currently on our roads.

“The primary responsibility for this lies with the UK Government because the vast majority road safety on UK roads is reserved and if they were taking road safety seriously they would be taking action on this.

“But we need to look at what we can do at council level to address this as well.”

Cllr Munro joked that “no tanks have gone through Marchmont, Bruntsfield, Merchiston or Greenbank”.

She added: “But I do have to say something about the comment with regards to bankers in Bruntsfield and SUVs. Somebody’s job and how hard they work and what they choose to spend their money on is entirely down to them. That’s their house, their vehicles, that’s where they shop.

“I just wanted to put that on record if anybody’s listening from Bruntsfield, if you want to buy an SUV, crack on it’s your money. It would just be nice if it was electric.”

Auto Express has reported on the weight of the heaviest cars pointing out that it is the electric Mercedes EQS SUV which is heaviest at 2,810kg with the Rolls-Royce Phantom not far

behind it at 2,745 kg. Another plug in hybrid the Range Rover PHEV weighs 2.77kg but pick up trucks such as the Ford F450 weigh 4,000kg (without any load in the back).

Drivers can normally only drive vehicles up to 3,500kg unless they hold an HGV licence.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

