

Labour Group motion regarding the Liveable Streets programme

Proposer: Cllr Dan Tomlinson

Seconder:

This Council notes:

1. Tower Hamlets' status as a busy Inner London borough provides us with immense challenges as well as a great opportunities in terms of transport.
2. We have more vehicles passing through the borough each day than anywhere else in the country, with many drivers from other boroughs cutting through Tower Hamlets, and at the same time we are one of the most well-connected boroughs in London when it comes to public transport.
3. Many local vehicle journeys are essential for the economic life of our borough, business owners and taxi drivers contribute to the local economy and at this time of economic hardship we need to do all we can protect and support businesses.
4. Further, although 1 in 3 local car trips in the borough are for journeys less than 1.2 miles, there are many reasons why local residents may need to make journeys via car.
5. However, it is not sufficient to simply blame our congestion and poor air quality on outsiders. There are too many local vehicle journeys that are short and could be better carried out by other means. The school run sees massive traffic flows at many schools and it is often tempting to get in the car for very short journeys when other choices could be made.
6. We must recognise how significant the health impacts of pollution are – particularly in a borough like Tower Hamlets with such a young population. We know that even though we have one of the lowest rates of car ownership of anywhere in the UK, 77% of the population in Tower Hamlets live in areas that exceed recommended limits for air pollution.
7. The introduction of school and play streets which recognises the needs of our young population and enables us to create areas where children can safely walk or wheel to and from school.

This Council further notes that:

1. The 2018 Tower Hamlets Labour local election manifesto, whose commitments and policies were adopted into our local Strategic Plan, stated:

'Tower Hamlets has many main arterial roads going through it, serving the strategic Transport for London road network. Through-traffic should by and large stick to these main roads but many of our residential neighbourhoods have seen huge increases in rat-running traffic, making them more dangerous, noisy and polluted. We will create low traffic neighbourhoods, keeping through-traffic to main roads, in any residential area where residents want them, with an ambition to have started on at least half of the borough's neighbourhoods by 2022.'

and

'We recognise that many residents need their cars - for work, for family – but we recognise too that levels of congestion and poor air quality mean that something must change. Electric and lower emissions cars will help, although for many those are not easy to afford and Government must help through a scrappage scheme or other measures. We will recognise the many essential reasons residents and businesses have for driving in our borough, including for family and employment reasons, and will respect and facilitate these.'

2. The Liveable Streets programme was introduced in 2018 with the stated aim to:

'improve the look and feel of public spaces in neighbourhoods across the borough and make it easier, safer and more convenient to get around by foot, bike and public transport.'

and

'to reduce people making 'rat runs' and shortcuts through residential streets to encourage more sustainable journeys and to improve air quality and road safety.'

3. The Liveable Streets programme, as with equivalent schemes in other areas, has seen polarised debate with very strong views on different sides.
4. That the implementation of bus gates and road closures in particular have significantly divided views.

This Council believes:

1. There is an urgent need to improve air quality in Tower Hamlets, and we need to do all we can to make residential streets safer for everyone, particularly for children and pedestrians.
2. That a vital part of the Liveable Streets scheme is about making our communities safer for everyone.
3. That we need to reduce 'through traffic' from other boroughs, whilst recognising that many local vehicle journeys are essential for our local residents, but also that for real change to happen local drivers need to use their cars less often too.
4. That our streets and roads are in need of investment, and that Liveable Streets is delivering such investment following detailed and wide consultation.
5. That any large changes we make to the way roads work will be controversial, but that doing nothing and letting the current situation continue is also not an option.
6. That the Mayor and Cabinet Member should review how we engage with residents on Liveable Streets to identify how we could engage more.

This Council resolves:

1. To ensure that we meet our 2018 manifesto commitment.
2. To continue to listen to all residents via detailed and open consultation when making changes to the way our roads work, making sure that views from across our diverse community are heard and considered in full.