

Labour Group Motion on Petition for Debate: Save our Safer Streets

Proposed by: Cllr Asma Islam

Seconded by: Cllr Sirajul Islam

This Council notes that:

- Tower Hamlets has one of the highest levels of motor vehicle traffic in the country so there is a need to reduce vehicle use, as the Mayor said in his 28 September 2022 announcement. This is largely due to vehicles travelling through the borough, because Tower Hamlets has the lowest levels of car ownership in London with approximately only one third of households having access to a car. With the average lung capacity of a child in Tower Hamlets five per cent less than the national average, the Council's aim to tackle low air quality in the borough is important. With transport making up a significant portion of the borough's pollution, the trend towards an increase in vehicle miles in Tower Hamlets must be reversed.
- The implementation of the Liveable Streets was started by the previous Labour administration to reduce traffic and pollution in residential areas in Tower Hamlets, to create safer and more people-friendly and connected neighbourhoods. The target outcome was for all of our residents to enjoy a better environment with cleaner air and less noise and to find it easier and safer to walk and cycle locally.
- While the Liveable Streets schemes that were adopted were targeted at some of the more deprived residential areas in the borough, where there was the most need for capital improvements and had been developed following a thorough consultation with local residents, all areas across the borough should not have been treated the same and should have been directed by community support.
- School Streets, which was developed alongside the Liveable Streets programme, had the aim of identifying improvements such as removing areas where idling cars congregate and reducing traffic levels near schools significantly, making local children both healthier and safer. This policy was a big success and led to a 30% reduction in pollution near schools.

This Council further notes that:

- 3,094 local people signed the "Save Our Safer Streets in Tower Hamlets" petition, which is the second-highest number of people to complete a petition on the council's website ever, and the most with regard to any road scheme. There is clearly a significant number of local people who feel strongly that the Liveable Streets schemes are working enough that they are campaigning extensively for their retention.
- A climate emergency has been declared by the council in 2019. The Mayor has an ambition for Tower Hamlets to be the greenest borough in London, including being a "net zero borough as soon as possible". Actions to support a transition away from private car use and towards sustainable travel options including public transport, walking and cycling have to be part of that process.

- Transport for London has written to the Mayor of Tower Hamlets expressing concern about the complete closure of Liveable Streets, which could be detrimental to the local environment.
- Healthcare professionals, including the Leaders of Bart's NHS Trust, have also written to the Mayor in response to his proposals, to express their concerns about the lack of evidence for his proposals, set against the established public health evidence that schemes which promote walking and cycling are "necessary measures in our response to both climate change and health inequalities."
- Schools across the borough have also opposed the Mayor's complete opening of the roads amid concerns that it will increase air pollution in the area.

This Council resolves:

- To remove Liveable Streets from the October cabinet agenda, to allow the council and the Mayor sufficient time to explore each scheme against consultation results, evidence and consultation views, including local health services and TfL.
- To ask the Mayor to seriously take into consideration the use of ANPR cameras to enable selective closure, allowing vulnerable residents and emergency service access, while discouraging through-traffic..
- To publish the results from the public consultations which finished on 7 August 2022 for transparency, as there has already been more than enough time to analyse the results fully. And to publish any evidence to support the council's claims about the impacts of the Liveable Streets schemes to date.
- To create a working task force for each of the Liveable Streets schemes, with residents, ward councillors, local businesses, key stakeholders and officers, in order to find out what is working in the scheme and to develop bespoke solutions to issues in each area, where these are needed. The list of areas should include areas where implementations have already been removed and where the original plans were never implemented fully.
- To engage in a meaningful dialogue with TfL and GLA to discuss wider issues such as traffic calming, public transport and pedestrian and cyclist safety, which will support the council's 2019 Transport Strategy commitment to achieve 90% of journeys in the borough to be made by walking, cycling and public transport by 2041.
- To ask the Mayor to consider carefully the financial implications attached to removing the Liveable Streets schemes and what other urgent priorities could be funded instead.
- To implement any changes to Liveable Streets schemes on a case-by-case basis and ensure each scheme is guided by each area's diverse communities and stakeholders, along with thorough research and engagement mentioned above.