

Report which contrasts Aspire 2022 manifesto pledges with the Liveable Streets consultations

14 April 2023

What your manifesto said

The relevant section of [your manifesto](#) is titled 'A council that listens to you' and on page 26 there are seven separate pledges which are relevant to Liveable Streets:

I pledge to:

....

- 2. Reopen our roads, and abolish the failed Liveable Streets scheme, which has seen emergency services and vulnerable residents' access blocked*
- 3. Recognise that jamming up main roads reduces the speed of traffic, so queuing vehicles emit more fumes, not less*
- 4. Only introduce traffic reduction measures through consultation with, and by the consent of the people of this borough*
- 5. End the practice of 'consultation' being nothing more than you being asked to rubber-stamp a decision which has already been made.*
- 6. Work with residents, community groups and other interested parties to develop plans and ideas together*
- 7. Carry out consultation which is fair and worthwhile, on the basis of the 'Gunning Principles' devised by Stephen Sedley QC. The principles are:*
 - a) Consultation must begin when proposals are being developed (not after decisions have already been taken)*
 - b) Proposals out for consultation must include enough information and explanations so that those being consulted can properly respond*
 - c) There must be adequate time for those being consulted to consider the proposals and respond*
 - d) Consultation responses will be considered before a decision is taken and how the responses were taken into account will be made clear*
- 8. Ensure that everyone affected by any proposals will be notified and can have their say. This pledge is at the start of my manifesto because it is so important to me that the community is at the heart of my administration*

How the latest consultation falls short of your own pledges and established standards

The overriding message of the election campaign was that the views of residents would be taken into account, demonstrated by the Aspire manifesto including a commitment to the legal minimum requirements for consultations.

We welcome your commitment to make sure that consultations are not simply “rubber stamps” of already decided policies, to develop plans with communities, and to make sure consultations are carried out to the legal minimum standard (see your election pledges 5, 6, 7 and 8).

In delivering your policy of “reopening our roads”, we assume that you don’t intend to undermine these general principles around decision-making. These are noble and important pledges which should be honoured by you as the Mayor. You hold significant power over hundreds of thousands of people’s day-to-day lives, as the Executive Mayor who also has a majority of elected councillors. Therefore, running and being seen to run good consultations on your proposals is essential in order for there to be accountability, confidence and trust in the local democratic process.

Taken together, these pledges are a good summary of what the average citizen expects from their local government.

Reviewing your performance against each pledge:

Pledge 5. End the practice of ‘consultation’ being nothing more than you being asked to rubber-stamp a decision which has already been made.

and Pledge 7 a. Consultation must begin when proposals are being developed (not after decisions have already been taken)

- The Mayor’s foreword in all the consultation materials conforms with your language at council meetings since the election. E.g. “We have received strong feedback from residents and stakeholders reporting adverse impacts from the scheme”. At all opportunities, previous claims of negative impacts are repeated, without being backed up by evidence or balanced by any “strong” feedback in support of the current layouts.
- Given how the facts as presented in the consultation materials do not match the claims made by the administration right up until a day before the consultation started, it would also be reasonable to expect the consultation materials to be explicit in admitting where previous claims by the council are not actually supported by the evidence. E.g. the consultation materials say “Average NO₂ levels reduced by 20.13% on Bethnal Green Road and 23.29% on Hackney Road compared to 20.93% for the comparable A roads in the Borough” but they don’t go on to say “... and we therefore want to correct the claims we made during the election and until today.”
- The council should also be clear about the significant amounts of missing information within its proposals. E.g.:
 - The general public has at no stage been informed about the impact of the new street layouts on how many people walk and cycle and feel safe doing so, in the affected areas. Given this was the main objective of the schemes in the first place,

this sort of information is surely essential in order for people to reach a considered opinion about the new layouts.

- The lack of any financial information in the benefits / costs comparison between Option 1 and Option 2 is clearly misleading. Implementing the council's recommended option would clearly cost millions of pounds, whereas Option 2 would obviously incur significantly less costs for the council.
- The absence of direct TfL input into one of the most emotive sections (congestion on boundary roads) is not acknowledged. [We now know that TfL's view on this issue](#) is that it opposes the council's proposed removal of low traffic neighbourhoods and they are explicit that the removal of existing infrastructure to support active travel will undermine the target of more people choosing sustainable transport options on a daily basis. This is part of the bigger point (relevant to pledge 6 – see below) that your consultation has not incorporated any feedback from stakeholders who disagree with your proposals, but regarding pledge 5, it is concerning that your materials do not acknowledge uncertainty and any deference to TfL's greater expertise on the issue of displaced traffic and how to support the bus network.

Pledge 6 - Work with residents, community groups and other interested parties to develop plans and ideas together

- The 2023 consultation materials contain some of the results from summer 2022 ([albeit inaccurately](#)) and most of the interested party responses received during summer 2022 (albeit with some notable omissions, such as Oaklands School, the school which stands to be most affected by the Bethnal Green proposals), however there is no sign that any of the previous engagement has materially affected the council's preferred option. This seems to fly in the face of pledge 6, given the quantity and nature of the objections shared during summer 2022:
 - A majority of people in the affected areas and a large majority of overall respondents said they wanted to keep the current layouts in summer 2022. So where is the sign that they have been listened to in any way in the council's latest proposal for 'option 1' in 2023? For every single current layout which prioritises walking and cycling, the council is still proposing to revert it to a design which prioritises car driving.
 - The list of important interested parties who told the council in 2022 that they support the current street layouts is extensive. They are all important because of their duties around public health, public safety, transport, wellbeing of children, or because of the quantity of people they represent and there is no sign that any of their views have been taken into account by the council or affected the council's preferred option...
 - TfL wrote to you in summer 2022 to argue against removing the current layouts and then they [wrote again to you in February 2023](#) to say that *Tower Hamlets misrepresented their position on the proposals in its 2023 consultation materials* (emphasis added)
 - In 2022, Bart's Health Trust's consultation response said "We are concerned

by the proposals to reverse elements of the Bethnal Green, Bow, Wapping, and Brick Lane schemes... Without sufficient time or data, our view is that it is a challenge to undertake a further consultation where insufficient information is available to provide an informed view. It is important for us to understand how these proposals align with our agreed North-East London ICS Green Plan and that it pays sufficient regard to the London Plan and national policy.” The 2023 consultation doesn’t show a change of approach by the council, doesn’t enable people to reach an informed view with this information in mind and it shows no regard to existing policies.

- The ambulance and fire services express a preference for a removal of fixed bollards in summer 2022. Nevertheless, a potential ANPR camera-enforcement solution was dismissed out of hand in the 2023 consultation.
- The Metropolitan Police Service explicitly expressed support for the current layouts (“In summary, the MPS is concerned with the plans to remove these measures both in terms of a potential increase in crime, specifically ASB related, and also increasing road danger.”). However, the police’s strong support for the current layouts is buried in the appendix, rather than being included in the main consultation materials.
- The headteacher of Oaklands School launched the [“Save our safer streets in Tower Hamlets” petition](#) after the summer 2022 consultation closed. It gathered 3,094 signatures, which is the most signatures ever for a roads-related petition on the Tower Hamlets website. It had a clear set of asks (stop, listen, improve), which were set out at a council meeting in October 2022. The [petitioners were not listened to at the meeting](#), were not asked any questions by a single one of the Aspire councillors present, their requests for a follow-up meeting with the Mayor’s office in order to discuss the proposals in more detail have been rejected, and most strikingly the complete absence of any option to improve the current layouts in the 2023 consultation (i.e. an option 3) demonstrates that community groups are not being involved in the development of the proposals.

Pledge 7. Carry out consultation which is fair and worthwhile, on the basis of the ‘Gunning Principles’ devised by Stephen Sedley QC. The principles are:

a) Consultation must begin when proposals are being developed (not after decisions have already been taken) - addressed above

b) Proposals out for consultation must include enough information and explanations so that those being consulted can properly respond

- The summer 2022 consultation was almost totally absent of supporting information, so the 2023 consultation is in stark contrast. The Mayor’s foreword says, “This second stage consultation provides more detail on our proposals and the data which supports them.” The problem this time is that the information is presented in a confusing and misleading manner, to the extent that it fails to enable “those being consulted [to] properly respond”.

- The main [consultation booklet itself](#) which was delivered through letterboxes in the affected areas, was twenty pages long in the case of Old Bethnal Green Road and it was riddled with confusing information to the extent that surely a significant portion of respondents just relied on skewed and misleading mayor's foreword in order to reach their own conclusions. It contained:
 - misleading presentation of previous consultation results (e.g. there was no clear summary of the data which shows that the current layouts had led to improvements on a number of measures; and using the heading "responses from within the scheme area" but then actually only showing responses that used the unique survey reference number);
 - blurry plans (e.g. for the 2019 proposals);
 - incomprehensible technical diagrams and confusing questions (e.g. for the "new public realm improvements" around Pollard Row - so confusing that a [clarification about the survey had to be issued](#), which itself didn't exactly clear things up); and
 - unreadable graphs (e.g. for "congestion on boundary roads").
- Moreover, the whole structure of the 2023 proposals, which are presented as "Option 1: Remove the Liveable Streets closures and implement a series of areawide improvements to the public realm to encourage active travel" versus "Option 2: Retain the current scheme" isn't justified by any information or explanations. Five of the most affected headteachers wrote to you on 30 January 2023 saying, "You are furthermore confusing matters by saying that schools such as ours will only be able to benefit from improved pedestrian crossings if the current street layouts are removed. Why should we have to choose between a safe, low-traffic area for our students and a zebra crossing outside our school? Controlled crossings in sensible places would significantly improve the current layouts, without the need to re-introduce thousands of dangerous and polluting vehicles every day around our schools."
- Meanwhile, the Option 1 vs Option 2 approach was inherently confusing in the consultation questions. The tick box for overall preference was followed by a table suggesting that one could cherry pick improvements and retain major elements of the scheme. As such, selection of Option 1 means different things for different people, undermining its utility in demonstrating support for those committed to ripping out all the current layouts (which is the summary of Option 1).
- In short, local people were not empowered to share their informed views about the council's proposals.

c) There must be adequate time for those being consulted to consider the proposals and respond

- The 2023 consultations were all three weeks long (23 January to 12 February for Old Bethnal Green Road and Weavers; 30 January to 19 February for Brick Lane) which is extremely short.
- The summer 2022 consultations were four weeks long, as were the relevant consultations by the previous administration in 2019, which fed into the original decision to implement the new street layouts. Local Government Association guidance is for consultations to be longer than this, but at least conforming with established local practice would be expected.
- Given the significance of the proposed changes, it is unreasonable to claim that three

weeks is “adequate time for those being consulted to consider the proposals and respond”. This is especially true given the council gave itself six months to review and assess and then publish the results from the summer 2022 consultation. Why should the general public have to rush, whereas the council can withhold key information for many months?

d) Consultation responses will be considered before a decision is taken and how the responses were taken into account will be made clear

- We will clearly have to wait until the officer report is published for the decision-making meeting before we can be sure on this point. But the council’s approach to date (the summer 2022 consultation, the silence from the council for six months, the unfounded claims in councillors’ and the Mayor’s statements, ignoring a petition signed by more than 3,000 local people and stakeholder feedback in affecting the preferred option in the re-consultation of 2023), gives us real cause for concern.
- A further failure, which is mentioned briefly above, relates to the misuse of “unique survey reference numbers” by the council in both consultations. Given the way the council ended up reporting on the summer 2022 consultation results by [focusing exclusively on responses from residents that used the reference code](#), the consultation materials and the survey in 2023 should have been explicit and prominent in saying “If you have a survey reference number and do not use it, then your response will not be treated as a local response”. However, on the paper copy of the survey there is no mention of how other members of a household could use the printed reference number online. And on the website it just said “All paper surveys sent out to addresses within the consultation boundary will have a response reference code for each address to be used for online responses if that is your chosen method of response. This code is for the household and can be used for responses from each member of the household.”
- The summer 2022 consultation did not say that it was a “first stage” or “preliminary” consultation. In fact, at the 1 August 2022 cabinet decision relating to the council’s new strategic plan, the council was explicit (see page 31 point 8.2) that it intended to “Commence process for reversing any schemes (if agreed) in Oct 22” after the summer 2022 consultation. This therefore gives the impression that the council is moving goalposts in response to the first consultation not delivering the result it expected. Therefore, how can local people trust that the re-consultation in 2023 (the “detailed consultation”) will in fact lead to a decision and then implementation?

8. Ensure that everyone affected by any proposals will be notified and can have their say. This pledge is at the start of my manifesto because it is so important to me that the community is at the heart of my administration.

- Last but not least, we agree that it is the council’s duty to do everything within its power and resources to spread the word about its consultations and proposals to everyone in the affected areas, but this administration has not done this.
- As stated above, there was a council meeting on 18 January, the agenda of which included the presentation of two roads-related petitions and a mayor’s update. As it transpired, consultation packs were hand-delivered to addresses in Bethnal Green from 19 January

before the consultation portal properly opened on 23 January. As a result, it is impossible that the mayor, his cabinet and all his councillors were not aware of this fact, nevertheless not one of the 25 elected Aspire politicians announced the imminent new “Liveable Streets” public consultation. This deprived local people from hearing about the consultation first at a proper, public council meeting, which would have also been picked up by the local press present. Instead, it was mainly promoted through an envelope through the post, which many people will have ignored.

- Equally, a proper effort to ensure that people heard about the consultation and got involved, would have included the council organising drop-in meetings and exhibitions about their proposals in appropriate local venues, such as community centres, tenants and residents’ associations, schools, places of worship. In fact, this is exactly what happened under the previous administration, with drop-in events in 2019 and 2021 when the schemes were implemented and then re-evaluated by the previous administration. What did the council do in 2023? Certainly no publicly advertised consultation events.

To conclude this review of the “reopen the roads” consultation process against the Aspire manifesto pledges, on each pledge, your administration has abjectly failed. Due to the number and severity of its flaws, it should not be valid as a supporting argument for removing the current street layouts.

Consultations are not referendums and they are always imperfect. But there are significant ways in which the consultation which you have carried out skews towards the removal of Liveable Streets. This undermines trust in the democratic decision-making process and doesn't allow for a free and fair evaluation of public sentiment on this important issue.

We therefore hope that you will reconsider your approach, which would demonstrate that you give equal weight to all parts of your manifesto, deliver on your pledge to be a listening Mayor and recognise that there were many reasons that people may have voted for you personally and for Aspire councillors rather than on the single pledge in relation to roads.