

Dear Mayor of Tower Hamlets,

As residents and business owners, we have responded individually to the latest “Liveable Streets” consultation. We are sending this email as a stakeholder response to the Bethnal Green and Brick Lane proposals, similar to our 19 July 2022 open letter (signed by more than 650 people). Collectively, we support Option 2 of the most recent “Liveable Streets” consultation and disagree with all of Option 1. If it were available to us, we would support an Option 3 to explore improvements to the current layouts, but that is not being offered by the council.

We are a grassroots campaign group which started in July 2022 in opposition to your proposals to “reopen the roads”, based on a firm conviction that the current street layouts are safer, healthier and friendlier now than they used to be, before 2020.

Since last summer, the amount of local evidence to support our position in favour of the current layouts has grown. We now know that:

- Emergency services have not seen their overall average response times impacted by the changes to the roads, and none of them are calling for their removal. This is one of several examples of compelling evidence for the success of the current layouts borne out by [our research into local impacts of the new layouts](#);
- More local respondents and a significant majority of overall respondents said they wanted to keep the current street layouts in the summer 2022 consultation;
- Key stakeholders such as five local schools directly affected by your proposals (Oaklands, Lawdale, Elizabeth Selby, Columbia, Virginia), the Metropolitan Police, Bart’s Health Trust, TFL and local GPs all support the current layouts too;
- More than 3,000 people signed our petition calling on you to “stop, listen and improve”. This is the second most signatures ever on a Tower Hamlets council e-petition;
- Air quality has significantly improved within the areas affected by the new layouts, where there are several schools educating over 2,000 of Tower Hamlets’ young people. And crucially, air quality has improved everywhere in the borough, including the roads near the “Liveable Streets” areas. i.e. contrary to numerous assertions by your administration, these schemes have not displaced pollution, causing harm elsewhere in the borough;
- The scheme has delivered against its stated objectives, most importantly around reducing non-residential through-traffic on local residential streets. The most striking example is that Old Bethnal Green Road (with four schools opening directly on to it), now has more than 6,000 fewer vehicle journeys per day on it; and
- Surrounding roads are unlikely to experience a permanent decrease in traffic should Old Bethnal Green Road and Gosset Street be opened to through traffic (according to the council’s own estimates in their EqlA).

Without evidence of negative impacts, the case for reopening the roads becomes the personal convenience of motorists. We would like to see this weighed carefully against the significant benefits the changes have brought.

Since July 2022, we have spoken to thousands of local people, on the street and on doorsteps and the main themes which have come across are:

save our safer streets

- It would be a huge waste of public funds to rip out the recent improvements. Especially in a cost of living crisis, when households are making difficult decisions about how to save money, it is galling to see the council proposing to waste millions of pounds on removing public infrastructure. If the money is there to put in controlled crossings (included in Option 1), then that money should be committed even if the decision is taken to keep the current layouts. That way, the council would be investing in further improvements, rather than “investing” in destruction;
- Children and other vulnerable people’s safety has been significantly improved by the new layouts. Parents are happier for children to walk to school and to play out on the streets like they used to do decades ago before big, fast and noisy cars made streets unsafe for children. Older and frailer people are more comfortable stopping to chat to friends and neighbours on the street. Many people have talked about how they’ve made friends through the new social spaces created by the reduced car traffic;
- Why isn’t the council looking into potential solutions to the more entrenched problems, such as congestion on Hackney Road, access for emergency vehicles, waste servicing and people with disabilities who are dependent on their car? Lots of people have talked about ANPR camera enforcement replacing some fixed bollards and the need for a bus lane on Hackney Road. It is well within Tower Hamlets council’s control to retain the vast majority of the current benefits at the same time as solving some other problems.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that “keeping and improving” the current street layouts is a much better option for people in Bethnal Green, Brick Lane and everyone who lives, works, studies and visits Tower Hamlets. If you decide to proceed with Option 1 (from the January-February 2023 consultation), you will be choosing to ignore the overwhelming evidence in favour of the current layouts, you will be actively choosing to reintroduce nearly 10,000 more vehicle journeys per day through quiet neighbourhood streets and you will not solve any of the problems you wish to address. Given you are not offering “keep and improve” in the current consultation, we have chosen Option 2 rather than Option 1, because keeping the current layouts is the only way that improvements can subsequently be found.

We hope you listen to us and the thousands of local residents who agree with our position, so that we can all work together on equitable improvements to Bethnal Green and Brick Lane’s streets.

Save Our Safer Streets

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Co-signed by 934 local residents, businesses and stakeholders including:

- 18 medical staff including the Chair of Tower Hamlets Local Medical Committee, respiratory doctors and paediatricians at Barts Health and the Royal London Hospital, and local GPs
- 5 headteachers and 32 teachers from local schools
- 1 social care provider
- Nearly 60 business owners/managers

This letter was sent to Tower Hamlets Council and the mayor on 22 February 2023.