

Dear Mayor of Tower Hamlets,

We were encouraged, but also surprised, to read in [your 16 July letter](#) that you are not against Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), and that you share the ambition of our grass-roots community campaign for Tower Hamlets to be greener and less polluted. However, Save Our Safer Streets, our local group of neighbours, businesses and organisations, is concerned about how quickly you are setting out to remove the schemes in Bethnal Green.

Over the last two years, [approximately £2 million](#) has been spent on this scheme across Bethnal Green. This has helped to reach goals we share with you – reducing pollution and creating a more sustainable environment for local people. The recent changes, including seating areas, parklets and community spaces, have created safer, friendlier and healthier streets for everyone. The schemes are very new but there is already firm evidence of benefits.

We know that you are keen to deliver your manifesto pledge to remove the LTN schemes. However, with very short timeframes, we're extremely concerned that your consultation is being rushed through, before you've shown solid evidence that the scheme isn't working and without exploring the negative impacts of removal. What is happening now is completely different from the [lengthy engagement process](#) the Council held before deciding to implement these schemes. Reversing the scheme will cost us a lot in terms of money, health, wellbeing and our environment, so it's important the consultation process is full and thorough.

We understand that the changes aren't working perfectly for everyone. But instead of ripping out the schemes completely, we're asking you to slow down and carefully listen to your community members' ideas on how to improve on them. This way we can find new solutions that work for all.

We notice that your letter, like your manifesto and the wording of the consultation, doesn't contain any evidence to support your claims about the impact of the LTNs in Bethnal Green. For example, we have no evidence that communities weren't properly consulted, that large numbers of residents have been negatively affected, or that traffic on nearby main roads has increased (in the long-term) because of the scheme. People must be properly informed before filling out consultation surveys. You have a responsibility to provide accurate information and back up your claims, and to date you have not fulfilled that responsibility.

We are especially alarmed to hear you repeat the unsubstantiated claim that the scheme must be removed due to "limited emergency services access." You haven't provided any evidence of this. There has been no public statement from any emergency service calling for the removal of the scheme. In fact, when they talk about LTNs, emergency services such as the [London Fire Brigade](#), say they've not noticed any impact on attendance times as a result of LTNs across the city. They recognise other issues such as congestion are a bigger problem.

The Bethnal Green scheme has been particularly positive for the children in the area. Old Bethnal Green Road, for example, is home to four schools: Elizabeth Selby Infant School, Lawdale Junior School, Mulberry Academy Shoreditch and Oaklands School. [Over half of Bethnal Green's secondary-school-age children](#) attend schools on this road. Before the changes, "[8,300 vehicles a day](#) pass[ed] in front of Elizabeth Selby Infant School and Oaklands School, of which 50% [were] cut-through traffic." Now the figure is more like 2,700. In a borough that, in 2020, had one of the worst records for road collisions, and where [children's lung capacity is 5% lower than the national average](#), it is extremely important to reduce traffic on school roads in Tower Hamlets. Are you suggesting that the children of Bethnal Green will be better off if you bring back busier and more polluting roads in front of their schools?

We're glad to hear you want to help the community cope with the cost of living crisis, but we'd like to see evidence that spending millions to undo a project that cost £2 million will help to achieve that. We'd also like to know that there isn't a cheaper and better alternative. The Save Our Safer Streets campaign includes vehicle owners, many of whom need to drive around the borough for work, who are yet to be convinced removal is the best option. For example, Weavers resident Abul, who has a second job working for a ride-hailing app, has been won over by the changes. He says that the minor inconvenience of getting to the first job of the day is "a small compromise to make" compared to the benefits for his family. Rather than spending money on reversing the LTN scheme, he'd like to see the council investing in supporting electric vehicle use, as well as pushing to improve rates of pay for drivers.

Although one element of your election manifesto talked about "reopening the roads", we respectfully remind you that this wasn't a single issue election and your mandate is not as clear as you say. Voter turnout was just over 40% and parties who supported LTNs received a higher overall vote share in the councillor election. Please also bear in mind that the [2019 Bethnal Green consultation](#), a process specifically designed to gather public opinion on the LTNs, found over two thirds of more than 2,000 respondents supported the scheme.

We agree with you that it's important to listen to everyone, including people from the local area who may have felt excluded in the past. Save Our Safer Streets is keen to work with you and everyone in the wider community, to facilitate conversations and collaborations that explore the best way forward.

To progress towards this, we're now asking you and the council to:

- Openly-share the monitoring and evaluation data about the impact of the new schemes;
- Openly-share data and information to support your new proposals;
- Explain what the Green task force and the Council in general is going to do to achieve carbon-neutral and environmentally positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets before making changes that are likely to have a negative impact;
- Work with experts, relevant stakeholders and the whole community to understand all the issues and to improve the scheme for everyone. (Example solutions might include more camera-enforced restriction points and working with Transport for London to improve Hackney and Bethnal Green Road, but there will be many more ideas);
- Work with local people and businesses to better maintain the pavements, seating areas, parks and plant life in Bethnal Green and across the borough. This is something which everyone would support, regardless of their position on LTNs.

We share your ambition for Tower Hamlets to be the greenest borough in London. However, we think the current consultation is flawed, with the limited "keep" or "remove" options. We should be looking creatively at improvements and shared solutions. We ask you to pause to ensure you genuinely allow everyone affected by this scheme to give their informed input and consider all the necessary evidence.

We look forward to receiving a prompt response.

### **Save Our Safer Streets**

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and co-signed by:

This letter was sent to Tower Hamlets Council and the mayor on 19 July 2022.  
677 people living and working in Tower Hamlets signed the sent letter.  
A total of 943 people living and working in Tower Hamlets signed the letter while it was open to the public.

Also posted at <https://heartbg.uk/open-letter.html>