

Press Release

Date:	19 July 2022
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Mayor Rahman: please don't rush to rip out our pocket parks, say 650 Tower Hamlets residents

More than 650 residents, businesses and organisations in and around Bethnal Green, including Oaklands School on Old Bethnal Green Road, have signed [an open letter to Tower Hamlets Mayor Lutfur Rahman](#), asking him to revisit his approach to re-opening roads in the area and the borough.

The open letter, which attracted over 650 signatures in two days, comes after the mayor's [tweeted message on 16 July](#), in which he made claims about the recent changes to road layouts without providing the data to back them up.

In its response, community group Save Our Safer Streets calls on him to do more to ensure he listens to everyone in the community who would be affected by returning high volumes of traffic to residential streets.

They want his team to slow down and consider new solutions that work for the whole community, rather than rushing to remove the planting, shared spaces and road layouts completely. Proceeding with the mayor's plan, they say, would waste the £2m already spent on the scheme and wouldn't solve any problems

"There are so many immediate and long-term benefits to these lovely new spaces," said Rob Andari who lives locally and is involved in Save Our Safer Streets. "Old Bethnal Green Road is a joy now. Local people feel a greater sense of community. People meet and chat in the new public spaces and pocket parks. It's much safer to walk along it with fewer speeding cars and pollution. Quality of life has massively improved without the traffic."

Save Our Safer Streets is concerned that the consultation's time frames are too short, that it lacks any supporting evidence and - crucially - doesn't offer any alternative solutions for the local community. The pre-existing problems of congestion, poor air quality and a lack of sufficient public spaces will not be solved by going back to the previous approach to the roads, the group says.

The group also points to a previous consultation that showed huge local support for the scheme, with over two thirds of residents saying they would welcome the changes.

Despite concerns about the process, Save Our Safer Streets is encouraging all residents, students, workers, visitors who care about Bethnal Green's calmer, friendlier and safer streets to share their views on the public consultations which are now live.

Derek Clifford, 81, who has lived on Old Bethnal Green Road for 46 years, says he has made “so many friends” by sitting on the chairs at the junction of Canrobert Street and Old Bethnal Green Road.

“It’s a lovely spot!” he says. “I don’t want it spoiled. People have got used to it now, we love it here. We don’t want more changes! If they take away these red chairs, it would kill me. Where else am I going to meet people and talk to my friends? There’s nowhere else for me to go.”

Mehraj Alam, 45, who lives on Teesdale Street and runs a local business, has also come to appreciate the changes to Old Bethnal Green Road.

“I was livid when they first introduced it,” he says. “I drive for work, and it’s made that less convenient for me. But I have two kids at schools along this road and it has made the school run a much more pleasurable experience. It’s great to walk along there and see other families on the way to school, it feels a lot safer without the morning rush of cars.

“We’ve bought our eldest a bike to get to school now and it’s nice to know he’s not breathing so many fumes. I think it’s not just good for our kids, but for kids in future years.”

Mehraj has some frustrations with the scheme, however, and some suggestions for improvements. He says what he really wants is for his voice to be heard.

“I think we need to calm down a little and talk this through,” he says. “We have to find a middle ground and work together. Just as we’re getting used to the new street, they want to change it back, but they need to talk to us properly first. It affects our daily lives, not theirs!

“What we need to do now is move forward as a community.”

Rob agrees: “We’re already starting to see the local community come together over this,” he says. “We know we won’t all agree on everything, but there are too many good things about this scheme to chuck it in the bin now. We just want the Council to slow down and listen to the whole community. Keep and improve rather than panic and remove!”

The consultation on Tower Hamlets Council’s proposals to remove the Liveable Streets scheme is now live. Affected residents should receive a survey through the post or can complete a form online at talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/LSBethnalGreen.

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Notes to editors

What is Save Our Safer Streets?

An informal, growing group of residents in and around Old Bethnal Green Road who do not agree with the Mayor of Tower Hamlets’ plan to remove all the “liveable streets” in the borough. They are focusing on generating widespread support for keeping the Old Bethnal Green Road scheme (and others), with a view to working with the council and the whole community on ways the scheme can be improved once its removal has been avoided.

More information: <https://heartbg.uk/>