

Deputation of Healthy Streets for Harrow

Harrow Council Transport and Road Safety Advisory Panel

13 OCTOBER 2020

Addressing agenda Items

10. Transportation schemes - review of development and implementation procedure, and
11. INFORMATION REPORT - Parking and Street Space Programme update - 2020/21

Title of deputation:

Harrow needs to plan strategically for walking and cycling, complete the Streetspace trials and plan permanent walking and cycling improvements

Reason for deputation:

Harrow has lost out on many funding opportunities in recent years because of a lack of strategic planning for walking and cycling. The Streetspace schemes are a positive step and Harrow needs to build on them for long-lasting, borough-wide improvements.

Introduction – VC

Good evening Chair, councillors, advisors, officers and guests. Thank you for having us. I represent Harrow Cyclists and our campaign Healthy Streets for Harrow. My name is Veronica Chamberlain and I am a British Cycling ride leader for women. We hear a lot of fine words from everybody about the importance of cycling and walking. I would suggest to you that this Emperor has no Clothes.

I am joined tonight by EB, resident of Headstone South ward, and TF, governor of Roxeth Primary School who cycles regularly in Harrow. E will speak first, followed by T and then I shall wind up.

EB

My name is E, I'm a Headstone South resident. In early 2019, I delivered a petition to Harrow Council which called for Headstone South to become a Low Traffic Neighbourhood – looks like I'm a bit of a trendsetter considering one of the questions asked earlier was requesting another new LTN.

So - why did I (and indeed do I?) feel that Headstone South needed a low traffic neighbourhood?

I used to live in one before I moved to Harrow, so I know what I'm missing! – put simply, you get much reduced levels of traffic and therefore safer and quieter streets with more pedestrians and cyclists. Absolutely, there is a trade-off – you sacrifice convenience when you drive, to achieve this. Indeed, arguably these schemes only

work because they make driving for short journeys less convenient, otherwise why would anyone ever walk or cycle?

And it's not just me – here are some of the reasons given by other residents to explain why they signed my original petition:

"There's just a crazy number of cars buzzing up and down these roads constantly, primarily to avoid traffic lights on the main roads. It's not safe for my kids to cycle."

"I would love to cycle more but it feels very dangerous and the cars treat you very aggressively."

"The traffic on these minor roads makes them really unpleasant for residents and pedestrians."

So – we want to walk and cycle, we want our kids to walk and cycle, Harrow Council wants us all to walk and cycle but I'll say it again - frankly why would they ever do this when there isn't a welcoming and safe environment for doing so?

However, there is now some good news for the petitioners – some LTN trials are now underway in Harrow. However, many other LTNs are going in across London at the same time which has generated some press and unfortunately also perpetuated misconceptions about these schemes – quite a few were perpetuated in the last instance of this very meeting.

To combat this, I therefore believe what myself and other residents would really like to see from Harrow Council is a greater degree of openness and transparency about these trials.

For example, I was asked by multiple different people what the definition of 'success' was for the Headstone South trial. To find out the answer, I had to submit a formal question to a Council committee, then I had to go and pass on the response to all the people who asked the question individually in different forums. This is a very roundabout way of finding out something so fundamental.

Perhaps instead of this the Council would consider using the consultation website to set out some factual information about these types of schemes, and how they support Harrow's strategic goals (as set out in the LIP) of improving health, reducing congestion, and improving air quality, and why it is so important that the trials are of six months' duration.

If it is Harrow Council's ambition to do more of these trial schemes in the future (and I hope it is), I really feel it is worth the time and effort to put something like this together. Each of the schemes will be unique, but the underlying rationale is unlikely to change.

I'd like to finish by thanking the councillors and officers who have worked so hard to make these trials happen. Myself and the other Headstone South petition signatories are delighted with this opportunity to try out other way of making local journeys, and we look forward to seeing how things progress over the coming weeks and months.

Thank you for your time; I'll now hand over to TF.

TF

It's great that there is the motivation for, and investment in, cycling and walking routes.

My children and I walk, run and cycle for health and practical reasons, to be out in clean air, to exercise, for mental health, leisure, and to commute. It is great that there are cycle lanes in Harrow; that the London Cycle Network passes through; and that there are many considerate drivers and other users.

While it is safer cycling in groups, including with children, than as an individual, children and adults are often learning to navigate the routes and it can be intimidating, even with care and guidance. Cyclists do put their flesh on the line.

In Harrow, cars overtake within inches and too fast, even on quiet roads and even with children. This makes cyclists, especially children and inexperienced cyclists 'wobble'. Cyclists can't accelerate or brake as fast as cars – we have slower response times and we're much slower on hills, even slight inclines. We 'wobble' – out from the kerb and gutter, from potholes, cars, or just because we sometimes wobble.

Cycle lanes can be brilliant, but in Harrow, cars are often on them – parked or moving. Pedestrians are on them, even children on trainer wheels, which is good training for them, but they may be going so slowly that a standard cyclist can't stay upright behind them, or pass. Cycle lanes stop suddenly – they just disappear, leaving you in unexpected conflict with cars and other route users – do you go under a car or crash into a pedestrian? Cycle lanes may well be necessary on main roads but breathing deeply noxious fumes is not ideal. Our lungs benefit from green routes and back roads – it keeps us healthy and is more pleasant. Cycle lanes are important, but if they are not well-planned, they may add very little value.

My children cycle to school and for leisure, as do I, and for work and health benefits. My children have had close scrapes, even under my watchful eye. In London, I have been hit by drivers 'playing chicken' with me and drivers making sudden right-hand turns, damaging me and my bike. One of my brothers was knocked off his bike on a roundabout locally, damaging him and his bike. My other brother came off his bike hitting a blind obstacle in the gutter when his attention was caught by a car. He's an experienced commuter and ended up with a broken elbow and weeks off work. My sister simply doesn't cycle. That's just my siblings and I as experienced London cyclists. Cyclists do put their flesh on the line.

There are many considerate, responsible route users, but cycling is hazardous. For the benefits of cycling to be gained, routes need to be made safer and pleasanter.

As a school governor, we are very aware of parents parking up on kerbs and around the school, putting 'little people' at risk as they are not visible. Children will run on to school or out. Cars are a hazard for cyclists and pedestrians, but parents choose them for safety and comfort. We need to break this link, to make people safer and healthier, walking and cycling.

With what I outline above – would you choose to walk and cycle with your children or recommend it for other vulnerable users?

VC

Since 2013 I have led 297 cycle rides with over 1500 participants for this borough including women of BAME communities, with disabilities using adapted cycles, on e-bikes, young and elderly. They all tell me the key barriers to cycling are driver behaviour and dangerous road design.

Harrow's activities to date have given the illusion of doing something, and spending lots of money, without tackling the real barriers to cycling. The Emperor has no Clothes.

In 2013 Harrow's 'A Vision for Cycling in Harrow' aimed:

"To increase the modal share of cycling in the borough and to make Harrow a safer place to cycle"

No target was used. We respectfully suggest to this Panel that unless you set SMART objectives, you will never achieve them, and nothing will change.

Council plans say we have 41km of cycle lanes. Again, the Emperor has no Clothes. These are not cycle lanes, they are white paint in which cars can park. We have no cycle lanes to modern design standards.

Harrow has lost out on funding opportunities. Twice the Wealdstone Liveable Neighbourhood was turned down. The expertise of Harrow Cyclists was not used. The Goodwill to All junction had funding from the developers of the Kodak site but no cycling improvements. We need a planning policy which prioritises walking and cycling improvements from planning gain funds.

Thousands are being wasted. Imagine your child comes home from school and says, 'Now I have done Bikeability, can I cycle to school?' So do you say 'Oh yes, great idea! Or more likely definitely not, it's too dangerous.' There is no point in teaching children and adults to cycle when there is nowhere to cycle. Even the parks have a bylaw against it.

Harrow Cyclists advised against wasting hundreds of thousands on rebadging exercises called Quietways, sending cyclists down indirect routes; there was no rationale for these routes. Unsurprisingly they are hardly used.

Officers have recently submitted a bid for a cycle route from South Harrow to the Town Centre, without consulting Harrow Cyclists. Surely it would be better to take expert advice.

Looking at Streetspace, which we generally support, Cycle lanes along dual carriageways finish short of the junctions. As part of the review process, they need to be joined up at each end with safe infrastructure at junctions.

The word which infuriates most people concerned with cycling is 'encourage.' It's almost as if, when you spend money on encouraging people to cycle, miraculously driver behaviour will improve and the roads will become safe. Really?

If you ask cyclists what would get more people cycling, it's not fun events in parks or leaflets about school cycling routes. It's safe, direct cycle routes and better driver behaviour. Why would this panel waste its time not addressing the top priorities? Campaigns to 'encourage' cycling are not useful unless you have the right conditions to back them up.

So please, Panel: Give the Emperor some Clothes. Harrow needs a strategic overview of the borough's road network

which roads are the desire lines and need cycle lanes
which junctions need to be made safe for cycling and walking
how to minimise cycle wait times
where low traffic neighbourhoods are needed.

We also need support measures such as

cycle parking at destinations
cycle hangars in areas of flats
driver education on safe driving around cyclists

With a strategic plan, officers can engage the community, and implement the plan as funding becomes available.

Chair, thank you for your time and attention.