

Dear Councillor Asser,

I am writing on behalf of Newham Cyclists. The current Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the existing imbalance between motor traffic and pedestrians/cyclists and the benefits of reducing motor traffic in Newham in terms of -

1. cleaner air in a borough notorious for its poor air quality (by [some measures](https://londonist.com/london/news/most-highest-pollution-toxic-london-boroughs) the worst in London and the UK), and
2. a better environment for active transport, a key way of delivering health and environmental benefits to residents in a borough where there is enormous unfulfilled potential for increased walking and cycling.

We recognise and appreciate that it has become LB Newham Council policy to improve air quality and increase active transport. However, it continues to be the case that these sound policies have not been translated into improvements in practice. We are encouraged that the new administration appears willing to engage with the active travel agenda taking root at TfL and among other boroughs in London, but Newham remains some way behind best practice. Achieving improvements in practice requires further political impetus in the face of entrenched opposition from the motor car lobby.  It also requires all Council officers, not just those directly concerned in the promotion of sustainable transport, to recognise the imperative of giving proper priority to walking and cycling.

We strongly urge that the Council build upon the external impetus for such improvements given by the current Covid-19 crisis, using all the new powers and means at its disposal, both in the short term and the long term.

In the **short term** you will be aware of relaxation of the advertising requirements for making traffic orders which ought to facilitate action beneficial to walking and cycling.

Measures that could be taken include:

* Temporary widening of pavements/footways to facilitate walking whilst respecting social distancing requirements;
* Temporary cycle lanes;
* Filtering residential streets to remove cut through motor traffic and closing streets to traffic;
* Motor traffic calming;
* Re-phasing pedestrian crossings to create shorter waiting times and increase crossing times for pedestrians.

These are not radical suggestions but actions that are being put in place and contemplated in other urban areas both in the UK and Europe. Examples can be found in [this article](https://rdrf.org.uk/2020/04/20/transport-in-the-time-of-the-coronavirus-crisis-what-we-need-to-do-now-update-20th-april/) and [here](https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/parking-review/news/65244/lambeth-to-widen-pavements-to-make-streets-safer-for-pedestrians/). It is notable that Newham has one of the highest percentage of streets that do not meet the minimum requirements of non-road space to permit [pedestrian social distancing](https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/65342/most-london-pavements-not-wide-enough-for-social-distancing-says-ucl-research/). It cannot be acceptable that just as Newham already suffers from such bad pollution, congestion, deprivation (and COVID death rates), its residents will also miss out on the active travel infrastructure which promises solutions to all of these problems, now being explored by other London boroughs.

Examples of areas ripe for such treatment in Newham are:

1. [Burges Road/High Street North/East Ham London Underground station/Lidl frontage public realm and pedestrian priority area](https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@51.5370816,0.0509585,215a,35y,39.47t/data=!3m1!1e3).
2. [Upton Park London Underground station/Queen’s Road/Queen’s Market/Green Street/Plashet Grove public realm and pedestrian priority area](https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@51.5322654,0.0347085,423a,35y,39.37t/data=!3m1!1e3).
3. Reinstatement of the Cheering Lane (E20) School Street (with exceptions for residents and loading) as 24 hr operation and enforced.
4. Shrewsbury and Odessa Rds where permitted pavement parking to facilitate rat running precludes use of the pavements in such a manner as to respect social distancing.

We appreciate that traffic enforcement has been stretched by the current crisis. Newham Council have announced that “Parking enforcement will continue to deal with dangerously parked vehicles, or vehicles causing an obstruction” by implication relaxing other parking enforcement requirements.

However parking enforcement must focus on danger and obstruction to pedestrians and cyclists and not simply to other motor vehicles and traffic flow. For some time the LB Newham has experienced lax enforcement against obstructive highway “illegal” parking, particularly with increasing motor vehicle parking on the footway and cycle lanes. Now is the good time to seek to change the attitude to motor vehicle parking in the borough which is so often inconsiderate of pedestrians and cyclists.

We have already noticed a steady increase in motor traffic since the initial period of the Covid -19 lockdown, not to say instances of “ultra speeding”. Once the lockdown requirements are eased there will be a strong incentive for those with access to motor vehicles (which still constitute less than half the households in the borough) to use their cars for journeys that could be done by active travel or public transport modes.

That will effectively exacerbate the problem already faced by Newham prior to the Covid -19 crisis. Newham could not cope with this level of motor vehicle use then and, even more so will not be able to cope with any increased use of motor vehicles.

To prevent further air quality, health and environmental degradation the Council should take firm **long term** action. This requires a step change in approach which firmly rebalances the priority away from motor vehicles and in favour of active travel and public transport. Transport resources must be directed towards the following:

* Implementing existing proposals for a parking permit system that properly reflect the public cost of on-street parking;
* Making residential areas Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) deterring general cut through motor traffic;
* Remove pavement/footway parking (including by overhang) and not sanctioning any further instances;
* Ensure that new residential/building developments are car free wherever possible;
* A blanket 20 mph maximum speed limit throughout the borough except for trunk routes;
* Ensure through routes have good quality cycle lanes and tracks;
* Make bus lanes 24 hrs operational and enforced;
* Ensure that all new works on roads and junctions have good quality provision for pedestrians and cyclists including the concept of [Pedestrian Priority junctions](https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@51.5562887,0.0138885,3a,80.3y,108.07h,73.07t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sG2u1vq3oCXrdYVkkzidlVQ!2e0!7i16384!8i8192) at side roads;
* Adjust the current phasing of lights to advantage pedestrians and cyclists;
* Enforcement of the rules on parking, loading and speeding;
* Effective School Streets, with this successful scheme being expanded radically across the borough, bypassing the onerous consultation wherever possible.

Newham should also be seeking maximum leverage from new infrastructure developments, including via an Infrastructure Development Levy (IDL) scheme, to improve the borough in these ways.

The current Covid-19 crisis has shown that it is possible to improve air quality in Newham, to improve the health of its residents by having a culture of active travel and improving the public realm for all. This is an opportunity that must not be missed and would be in line with the [Mayor of London’s Streetspace Plan](https://www.bikebiz.com/mayors-streetspace-plan-could-see-cycling-increased-tenfold-post-lockdown/). The message from the Council should no longer be that the motor car is more important than walking or cycling.

I am copying this to Councillors R Tripp and D Blaney, Murray Woodburn and Jon King (Newham Recorder), Newham Cyclist Officers and will be putting a copy on the Newham Cyclists website.

Yours,

Arnold

Arnold Ridout

Co-ordinator, Newham Cyclists

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