

Proposal by a Dulwich Area B group of residents to work with Southwark Council to find a balanced and pragmatic solution to the 'Our Healthy Streets: Dulwich' proposal that meets its health and traffic objectives and the needs of the whole community.

Our concerns

We are a group of individual residents living in several of the roads in what has been described by the Healthy Streets proposal as 'Area B'. This is the neighbourhood most affected by Phase 3 (the consultation that ran throughout February and March 2020), because the draft proposals suggest changes to all five of the junctions that border the area and allow motorised traffic in and out – specifically the permanent closure of two junctions, and timed restrictions on the remaining three.

As primary stakeholders, we are supportive of the Council's objectives — that is, to reduce pollution and traffic volumes, discourage through traffic on residential roads, make our streets safer and healthier, and encourage walking and cycling.

However, we are concerned that the Phase 3 draft proposals, as they stand, have divided our community. Not all roads benefit: children on some streets will be exposed to greater levels of traffic and pollution than before. Not all sections of the community benefit, either. In the absence of adequate public transport between East and West Dulwich, many of our elderly and less able neighbours, both young and old, are dependent on their cars for basic mobility, and are worried that the proposals will make travel much harder.

Many of us have campaigned for safer streets for a long time, and there is concern that any criticism of the Phase 3 proposals might lead to the Council abandoning the idea of reform altogether. This is not what we want – reform is long overdue. (The Council's reconfiguration of Dulwich Village junction in 2017 is widely believed to have made local traffic problems much worse.) At the same time, we are genuinely worried that the current set of proposals, while seeming radical and transformative, may not be the right way forward – may, in fact, set up new problems and behaviours that will not achieve healthy streets for the whole community at all.

While we acknowledge that the Council has made considerable efforts to consult widely and effectively, the consultation process itself, sadly, hasn't always been helpful. For example:

- 1) a number of requests for information and clarification about the detail of the Phase 3 proposals – information needed to help residents respond to the online consultation – have not been properly answered;
- 2) some of the claims in the Phase 3 process have not been supported by evidence or data;
- 3) many residents say that they were unaware of the consultation's Phase 1 (spring 2019) and Phase 2 (autumn 2019), and didn't receive the leaflet about Phase 3;
- 4) Phase 3 is based on measures that received support in Phase 2 ('What you have told us so far'). But the data does not tell us if, as implied, those who responded in Phase 2 were local residents;
- 5) aspects of the Phase 3 proposals, such as restrictions at the Court Lane/Lordship Lane junction, were introduced during the course of the consultation, changing what was being consulted on, and meaning that responses from different dates cannot be compared.

Towards the end of the Phase 3 consultation process, after the three public meetings and just before the Coronavirus lockdown, six residents' associations conducted surveys to find out what their residents felt about the proposals, and what additional issues they would like to see addressed. In answers to common questions in these six surveys (the results were forwarded to Councillors and Council Officers on 29 March), of the more than 200 respondents:

- 1) 94% believe that whatever changes are eventually agreed, nothing permanent should be put in place without holding a temporary, reversible trial first;
- 2) three out of four people want a solution that does not involve the permanent closure of junctions to all vehicles;
- 3) a similar number of people want more account to be taken of the needs of elderly, disabled and car-dependent residents;
- 4) 94% want Southwark to work with TFL to improve public transport through Dulwich.

A fair and pragmatic way forward

It is clear that while there is strong support for the aims of Our Healthy Streets, and particular anxiety about the danger to children's health from congestion and air pollution, there is considerable opposition to the proposed means. We would like to suggest a way forward. Having looked at other schemes, we believe it would be practical to introduce an area-wide zone which motorised vehicles would not be allowed to enter at certain times of the day unless they were permit-holders. This, in effect, builds on the idea of the School Street proposed for Townley Road, but extends it to a wider area – either Area B only, which is the area that concerns us here, or for the whole Dulwich area, if that is what residents in Areas A and C also want.

While recognising that there may be additional costs involved in controlling through traffic with cameras, we believe the costs incurred would be commensurate with the revenue raised from the sale of permits (and from fines), and that residents might be more willing to agree to permits if this was part of a trade-off that kept junctions open to them. This modified proposal would remove exactly the same number of through journeys (vehicles entering and exiting the neighbourhood within less than 10 to 15 minutes) that the current proposals say are made in the area in a typical day. Like a School Street, which is usually tried out over several months with temporary barriers, the scheme would be easy to trial.

As primary stakeholders, we would also strongly support additional measures to make cycling and walking safer and more attractive, particularly better cycle lanes and improved pedestrian crossings.

We would like to work with Councillors and Officers to develop modified proposals that balance the needs of the whole community, so that whatever solution we reach together can be trialled and win everyone's support. This offer is made in good faith and we hope very much it will be accepted in a similar spirit to deliver a practical and positive outcome for all.