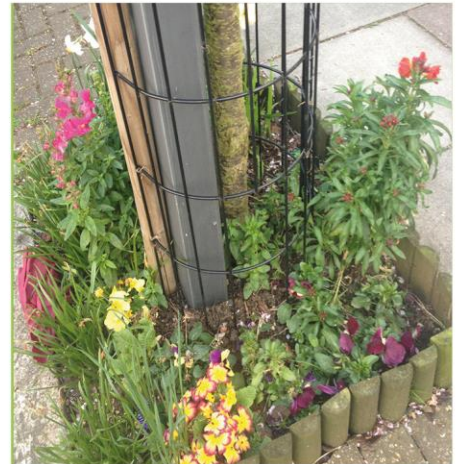
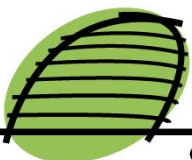


RECLAIMING OUR ROADS: MAKING SPACE FOR LONDONERS



**A briefing by Caroline Russell AM
Green Party Member of the London Assembly
September 2019**



INTRODUCTION

This summer I went out into London to visit schemes across our busy city that are making properly people-friendly streets.

I wanted to look at the different ways communities can claim back their streets, so they are better for the people living, working and playing on them, and walking and biking along them.

Since I was elected in 2016, I have been pushing the Mayor of London to have a proper London-wide car free day¹ and this month we'll finally see one – but this one-off event is the only day the Mayor has managed in his four-year term.

We need a regular programme so we can enjoy our public space, inspired by Paris who have a monthly car-free Sunday.

But it isn't just the Mayor who can calm our streets, reduce road danger and give us our public space back.

Across London people and communities are taking over their roads in small ways, from play streets and school streets, to reclaiming tiny pockets of land like tree pits, or whole car parking bays.

The public realm should be truly for the public to use, not just a place to store space inefficient polluting vehicles that are causing a health crisis in London, and worsening climate change.



Car-free streets can

- Create safe space outside schools
- Tackle the illegal levels of air pollution London suffers from
- Reduce traffic danger
- Bring down stress on our roads, from the noise, fumes and anxiety we feel alongside busy roads
- Enable people to travel in a healthy way, by foot or by bike, which many people are too intimidated to even attempt at the moment
- Recognise the climate emergency – when roads are closed for major events like Ride London, emissions drop dramatically.²

All these benefits are clear – but how do we even begin to get to them?

This report shows what I have found.

Caroline Russell AM
September 2019

SCHOOL STREETS

Journeys to school, especially primary schools, are predominately short local trips that can easily be walked or cycled. But due to busy roads some parents don't feel it is safe to take their children on foot or by bike and feel forced to drive.

This can create a vicious circle where parents who think driving keeps their child safe contribute to busy roads and traffic chaos at the school gate.

School streets are a simple idea to combat this. Roads around a school temporarily close to motor traffic – but remain open to people walking and cycling – at set times when children are arriving or leaving schools.

Bessemer Grange Primary School

In September 2018, Bessemer Grange in Dulwich, became the first Southwark school to trial school streets, with a 14-week pilot.

But this didn't come out of nowhere. The school has a fantastic community of pupils, teachers and local residents who have long led the way to school streets. For the past five years they have organised play streets, where the school road was closed once a month and then weekly, until they persuaded the council to allow a school street closure, with physical barriers, every morning and afternoon.

As part of their work towards making their streets safer I'd met with some of Bessemer Grange pupils in 2017. They told me they felt worried by traffic when travelling to school and wanted to use their bikes and scooters more.³



Imogen and Oliver, pupils at Bessemer Grange Primary School

"We like the school street because it's closed off to cars and fumes and it used to be much noisier and more dangerous."



The success of the scheme is obvious from Southwark Council's own survey shown below.

Almost every factor showed good progress, with the most marked improvement being on the question 'how easy do you think it would be to cross the street?'⁴

It was a long road to securing a school street but an active and involved community got there, after five years of hard work. It can be done!

London Fields School

This summer I also visited Hackney, to see one of their newest school streets around London Fields School. Their school streets don't have physical barriers and allows buses to pass along during the restricted times.

This should dramatically cut traffic and make walking and cycling easier whilst retaining access via public transport, however some parents admitted to me they had still driven and faced a fine.

Question	Before closure	After closure	Change in mean
Overall how satisfied were you with the street (was it a good place to be?)	5.8	7.6	+1.8
How attractive did you find the street?	5.7	6.7	+1.0
How clean did you think the air on the street was?	5.5	6.4	+0.9
How noisy did you find the street?	5.4	6.6	+1.2
How enjoyable did you find the street?	5.9	6.6	+0.7
How easy do you think it would be to cross the street?	5.0	7.8	+2.8
How intimidated did you feel about the traffic on the street?	5.8	6.2	+0.4
To what extent do you agree with the statement that 'this street provides a good environment for people to walk in'?	5.4	7.8	+2.5





While parents at the school gates told me cycling is already popular in Hackney, their overriding concern was about levels of air pollution. This was reflected in Hackney Council's own consultation on traffic reduction which found the majority of people wanted to 'improve air quality (particularly around schools)' so prioritising school streets was an obvious choice.

One parent told me their son has asthma, but they have noticed a dramatic improvement in his health since the traffic was cut outside his school.

"Hackney is the 7th area most affected by poor air quality in London (GLA, 2013) a statistic that has direct implications for people with asthma. Hackney's rate for children's hospital admissions due to asthma was significantly worse than the London average (Child Health Profile, 2014)."
– Hackney Transport Strategy 2015-2025 Evidence Base Paper 2, October 2015⁵

They also told me that the new school street had really cut the stress and noise at school pick up and drop offs. This was something I heard echoed by parents across London who relished the relief from traffic jostling to park at drop off times.

Drayton Park Primary School

In my home borough of Islington, 72 per cent of respondents supported a scheme to bring in a school street for Drayton Park Primary School.⁶

The street is now a pedestrian and cycle zone for 45 minutes at the start and end of the school day. The new restrictions were brought into an area that already has some traffic filtering and cameras are used to monitor the road, rather than physical barriers.

This means that people remained on pavements and weren't venturing into the street space because there was no physical protection from traffic.

Some parents said they hadn't really been given enough notice about the launch of the school streets. This is a shame as bringing in a school street scheme is a real opportunity for boroughs to engage with parents about road danger and the benefits of walking and cycling to help cut air pollution and keep children healthy.



PARKLETS

School streets are timed interventions, but they aren't the only way Londoners can reclaim their streets.

Brenda Puech started the idea of a 'People's Parking Bay' in Hackney, to build a green rest stop for anyone who needed it in a parking space usually reserved for storing cars, I was there to formally open the bay in 2017.

Despite an initial reluctance from councils, the idea really captured public imagination with more than 800 people signing a petition calling for the first people's parking bay to stay in place.⁷

EveningStandard.
WEBSITE OF THE YEAR



Green campaigner wins latest battle with Hackney Council over parking space gardens

JONATHAN MITCHELL | Saturday 2 September 2017 07:29 | 5 comments



Like Click to follow The Evening Standard



Hackney and Islington now host several types of parklets (as they are now known) and I went to see who was creating them and how.

Most of the parklets I saw were built by the community, rather than installed by councils.

What was most inspiring about the parklet tour was the way they see beyond the idea that streets are *for* cars by claiming precious public space for people to grow stuff and chat to each other.



Healthy streets should foster community activity and this is just what the parklets I saw do, from cafes donating chairs, to volunteer gardeners managing planting to cheerful structures that invite people to sit and share.



City Hall Green
Caroline Russell AM

CONCLUSION

Play streets, school streets and parklets are new ideas that have been warmly embraced by people keen to reclaim their roads. And this movement is coming from communities.

Our streets are a great social resource, they host our street parties, play streets, kids on scooters, local shoppers on bikes and more. Just last month the City of London launched lunchtime streets ‘to celebrate the public realm, which allows workers, residents and visitors to enjoy a traffic-free lunch break’.

I’ve seen inspired interventions, such as people adopting tree pits to hedges pruned into the shape of elephants to make them a local attraction instead of a screen for antisocial behaviour.⁸

NEXT STEPS

In this report I’ve highlighted some of the great, people-powered schemes I’ve seen springing up in London. The next step to make truly people-friendly streets is to move on from just having a few hours without cars, to whole low-traffic neighbourhoods, modeled by Waltham Forest’s exemplary mini Holland scheme.⁹

However at the last round of bids for liveable neighbourhoods funding (the new Mini Holland scheme), nearly every borough applied for money but only seven were successful.¹⁰

Annual bidding means some boroughs are waiting a very long time for money that could, with simple but effective interventions like

bollards to filter roads, radically alter streets for the better.

I was pleased to see the Mayor recently announced 16 new healthy streets officers for boroughs, and I hope sharing expertise is a key role.¹¹

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Mayor should support boroughs to bring in trials, with funds that they can access more quickly than liveable neighbourhoods.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Boroughs should be braver with trials. Trialing parklets and school streets allows people to see the possibilities, before permanent works go in, and residents can help iron out any hiccups.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The new healthy streets officers must help boroughs with their bids for the Mayor’s liveable neighbourhoods fund.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I would like to hear more from Londoners who want to reclaim their streets, or to tell me about how projects and programmes they're running aim to cut traffic and open the streets up to people walking and cycling.

Please get in touch with me if you have any comments or suggestions.

Caroline Russell AM, Green Party Member of the London Assembly

Tel: 020 7983 4388
E-mail: Caroline.Russell@london.gov.uk
Address: London Assembly, City Hall, London, SE1 2AA

Alex Ingram, researcher

Tel: 020 7983 4358
Email: Alex.Ingram@london.gov.uk

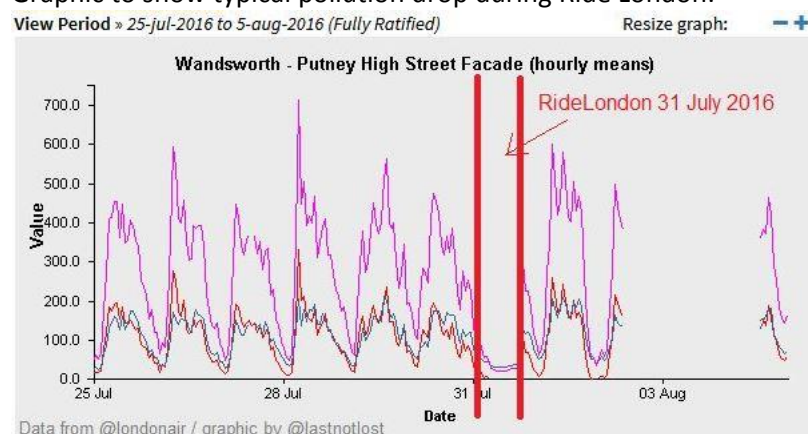
This report sets out my views as an individual Assembly Member and not the agreed view of the entire Assembly.

References

¹ Caroline Russell MQ 2017/2064. Car-free days <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2017/2064>

² Air pollution dips alongside RideLondon route, again. Cycling Industry News, Aug 2019
<https://cyclingindustry.news/air-pollution-dips-alongside-ridelondon-route-again/>

Graphic to show typical pollution drop during Ride London:



Key: Nitric Oxide (ug m-3) Nitrogen Dioxide (ug m-3) Oxides of Nitrogen (ug m-3 as NO2)

³ Caroline Russell MQ 2017/3957. West Norwood section of quietway 7
<https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2017/3957>

⁴ School Street Road closures. Southwark Council, 2018 <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/transport-and-roads/school-street-road-closures?chapter=3>

⁵ Hackney Transport Strategy 2015-2025, Evidence Base Paper 2, October 2015
<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/7015/Policy-base/pdf/transport-strategy-2015-25>

⁶ Air quality projects. Islington Council, <https://www.islington.gov.uk/energy-and-pollution/pollution/air-quality/air-quality-projects/drayton-park-school>

⁷ Please let the People Parking Bay in Hackney remain. <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/please-let-the-people-parking-bay-in-hackney-remain>

⁸ Hedges to marvel at: get the street in shape. The Telegraph, Sept 2012
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/9551112/Hedges-to-marvel-at-get-the-street-in-shape.html>

⁹ 'Mini Holland' scheme in Walthamstow hailed as major success as traffic falls by half. Evening Standard, Nov 2016 <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/mini-holland-scheme-in-walthamstow-hailed-as-major-success-as-traffic-falls-by-half-a3389936.html>

¹⁰ Caroline Russell MQ 2018/2513. Liveable Neighbourhoods bids from boroughs (1)
<https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2018/2513>

¹¹ TfL launches new programme to help transform London's boroughs into safer, greener, healthier places. Aug 2019 <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2019/august/tfl-launches-new-programme-to-help-transform-london-s-boroughs-into-safer-greener-healthier-places>