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PETITION - NO CONES ON CHESTER ROAD

COUNCIL RESPONSE NOTICE – 24 NOVEMBER 2021

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TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Council – 24 November 2021

Consideration of a Petition containing more than 500 signatures

Petition – No Cones on Chester Road

Lead petitioner, Tracey Haworth introduced the following petition which, at the date of submission to the Council, had 2642 signatures and 1321 of these were from addresses within the Borough.

“The cones on the A56 need to be removed. A new and improved solution with local public consultation to allow better access for all road users.

Local social media forums are full of this very lively debate. The cones cause standing traffic and therefore greater emissions in an area where there are 4 primary schools in close proximity. The residents and businesses in Gorse Hill are effectively boxed in on 3 sides as drivers, the only exits lead onto the A56. At the traffic lights on Thomas Street turning right is much more problematic across the box junction which has standing traffic and an immediate right turn lane onto Davyhulme Road East. We need that other lane open and further information from the public on the other problem areas.

Key workers are struggling to attend their clients, ambulances are being delayed. The cones are affecting our use of our roads detrimentally. Drivers are constantly commenting on the scarcity of cyclists in the lanes and increase of accidents and near misses.

We feel the cones were quite literally sneaked in during lockdown without an effective public consultation.

Some residents say they have written to Trafford Council and have been informed the cones are there to stay. A review is clearly needed.”

In presenting the petition, the lead petitioner anticipated that a transparent debate would lead to a timeline for a new and improved solution, an explanation of the monitoring and communication of the traffic flow problem areas and emissions around the local schools and consideration of the problem areas raised, including Edge Lane and both Gorse Hill estates.

The Lead Petitioner highlighted the following issues:

- It was unlikely that many residents were aware of the priority being given in local plans to pedestrians and cyclists over motorists.
- It was acknowledged that Climate Change was high on the agenda, however, the transition to electric vehicles would take time and it was not always an option to walk or cycle.
- The reality was not just here and now but a short, medium and long term plan for a solution to the future patterns of thousands of road and pavement users was clearly not an easy feat, whilst giving consideration to and balancing Climate Change, the Clean Air Act and the environment.
- The petition highlighted the problematical, proportional use of the highway and additionally, logistical transport of goods and services could not be met by walking and cycling.
- A call for planning and architectural models whereby the designer was informed by users throughout all stages of the process: "the most ordinary people can have the most extraordinary ideas".
- Parking issues in Gorse Hill were exacerbated by the industrial estate in the area and a problem area existed turning right onto the A56 and with incoming traffic off the A56.
- Congestion on Edge Lane trapped buses which then impeded north and south bound traffic on the A56.
- On the school run Children were walking and cycling through increased emissions as a result of standing traffic caused by the temporary coned lanes.
- Signs caused confusion and unclear whether they related to social distancing or cycling.

In light of the petition, a series of questions were posed as follows:

- 1) What is the cost of the cones in comparison to updating the existing cycle lanes with green tarmac and fresh paint and what is the delay?
- 2) How are the traffic flow, congestion and emissions monitored and fed back to residents?
- 3) Will the A56 consultation be free flowing enough to engage all road users and visitors, including collective statements from local stakeholders, services, businesses and sports stadiums etc. and be promoted to be visible on local community boards?
- 4) Was there ever going to be a consultation and if so what was the timeline?
- 5) Why are the cones still there when social distancing has ended?
- 6) Why does a small focus group of cyclists wield so much power over thousands of road users?
- 7) The signatories highlighted the lack of use of the cycle lanes, therefore, apart from occasional use or cycle event, how can this be justified proportionally to our other road users?

Councillor Adshead, Executive Member for Environmental and Regulatory Services and Councillors Butt, Newgrosh and Welton responded to the petition on behalf of the political parties and made the following points:

Councillor Adshead: The A56 initiative, like many introduced in the Borough during the pandemic with Emergency Active Travel Funding, had been assessed throughout the period and adjusted for safety and congestion, as the situation and increased traffic levels had dictated. Looking at how to proceed in the future, it was now an opportune time to seek the views of the public, although admittedly it had taken longer than anticipated to bring all the proposals together. The consultation sought the views of users of the A56 and residents of Stretford and particularly encouraged residents to submit their ideas and visions for the Town Centre and surrounding area. The consultation was in two stages with the first closing towards the end of December 2021 and more developed proposals would be brought forward in due course. Aware of the questions put, a detailed response was being prepared and would be sent to the lead petitioner as soon as possible.

Councillor Butt: Considered the temporary implementation of the measures to have been hugely disruptive and a danger to all road users, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Believed the residents had spoken with one voice and urged the Council to recognise the serious implications that had manifested themselves since the implementation, however, temporary and to address them.

Councillor Newgrosh: Did not consider that residents had spoken with one voice and that it was a divisive scheme with both benefits and detractions. Looked forward to the consultation being carefully assessed before a decision was made.

Councillor Welton: Agreed that the cones need to be replaced with an improved solution that met the Council's new priorities and believed that a high quality cycle lane on the A56 would help Trafford meet all their objectives. The experimental coned lanes had helped many ride their bike on the A56 for the first time but they had impacted journeys by car and bus at peak times. Acknowledged the debate on social media and large petitions both for and against. In terms of the actual petition challenged some of the assumptions it made regarding:

- Cones caused standing traffic and therefore greater emissions: the primary cause of congestion was too many vehicles being driven at the same time and the traffic flow problems come during short periods of high demand, notably the school run or alongside events such as football matches and concerts which pre-date the cones and could only be tackled by creating alternative transport options.
- Emissions: it was likely that the cone lanes had reduced roadside air pollution and noise because there was now more distance between pedestrians, homes, shops and the traffic itself.
- Scarcity of cyclists: claimed that the coned lanes were responsible for a 400% increase in cycling but there was a need to create properly segregated lanes to alleviate peoples fear over safety and ensure that the lanes connect to where people wanted to go.
- Failure: not of the cones but the A56 itself, as a result of infrastructural changes over many years to accommodate traffic flow.

Following the discussion the Leader of the Council, Councillor Andrew Western advised that it was difficult to respond to the petition given that the Council was hearing it in the midst of the first phase of a consultation process, so was unable to provide a compelling response either way as to what was going to happen. The Council wanted to hear from all parties on how they wished it to move forward in shaping ideas and proposals for the future. The challenge was that the petition was one of many that had been drawn up in response to the issue and there were strong views on both sides of the debate.

In terms of the petition that evening, the Council noted its content and, as the Executive Member had indicated, the questions would be responded to. However, the Council was unable to give a definitive response on its future action at that stage, as it wished to hear from residents via the consultation process.

The Leader thanked all that had spoken for highlighting the wide range of views on the issue and the challenges faced and confirmed that the Council was committed to doing all it could, not only to enable active travel in Trafford but also, how it could look to improve the quality of life for the residents of Stretford that had a super highway running through the area in which they lived.