

## **To Move or Not to Move – Is that the Question?**

### **The future of Transport in our Borough**

Facts can be a big turn off, I know. But what about these? The number of road traffic collisions involving injury rose 13% across London in 2014 (compared with the previous year). For the first time, more pedestrians were killed than all other deaths on the city's roads put together. Traffic congestion is likely to rise 25% in Inner London. In our borough, the number of people injured on our roads rose to 1,124 people last year.

That's the background against which Cllr Jonathan Cook, Deputy Leader of the Council, spoke at a packed meeting of Wandsworth Living Streets. He pointed out that the number of people living in the borough will rise to a third of a million in ten years' time. Many of the additional people will want to bring cars with them, but we cannot take much more traffic on our roads. (Two-thirds of the vehicles on Wandsworth roads are private cars.) There are only two ways to go – expand public transport and get more people walking or cycling short trips.

#### **What Wandsworth Council is doing**

He painted an optimistic picture of all the things Wandsworth is doing – its Road Safety Strategy, its new Cycling Strategy, and its plans to transform stretches of Lavender Hill, Balham High Road and Tooting Broadway based on 'better, holistic street design'. He pointed to the successful changes at Clapham Junction and outside Wandsworth Town Station. The Wandsworth Gyratory will go by 2019, provided local residents agree to the plans later this year. It will be replaced by a transformed people-friendly and commercially vibrant local town centre. The Council also wants better street crossings, and is open to residents pointing out where additional crossings are needed. It is all making a difference, he argued. Already we make nearly a third of all our journeys on foot. And the share of trips by bike has crept up to 5%, while the proportion by car is falling slightly.

Cllr Cook was followed by Dave Irwin, an urban planner and member of Wandsworth Living Streets. His starting point was that today 36% of all trips in Wandsworth are still done in a car (compared to the London average of only 24%). What's more, the average distance of these car journeys is only one and a half miles. He then presented WLS's Policy Proposals on the future of Transport in Wandsworth entitled *Can we do better than this?* You can see them at <http://wandsworthlivingstreets.org.uk/vision-statement/>

#### **Encouraging more walking and cycling; less use of the car for short trips**

Three messages for the Council stood out. The Council could be much more ambitious and active in making life for walkers and cyclists safer, easier and more attractive. And in discouraging car ownership and car use through various measures, including higher parking charges (I didn't know that a resident's parking permit only costs 44 pence a day!) Dave Irwin also advocated the Council encouraging more mixed use developments where accommodation for business premises

accompanies new housing – which means fewer people having to travel outside the borough for work.

### **The health gains of a different transport future**

The second policy prong the Council should pay serious attention to is maximizing the health benefits flowing from a different approach to the Borough's transport future. The potential gains are huge: Fewer people killed and injured. Improved air quality. Less noise. A street environment less intimidating for children and older people. A move away from diesel vehicles, the most polluting and noisy of the lot. On this latter point, the Council has already persuaded Transport for London to replace its diesel buses on Putney High Street; we need them phased out on all our borough's roads. The Council could also discourage us from buying diesel cars in future by charging much more for a resident's parking permit for such vehicles.

### **Some streets have their main function as *places* where people need to be**

And thirdly, the Council must bear in mind that some streets do not exist primarily to facilitate movement. They exist as *places* – locations where people shop, work, socialise. Just think of how Northcote Road or St John's Hill have been transformed in recent years, including the Council's contribution in attractively re-paving the sidewalks. Streets like that (and what other streets would you recommend for such a transformation in Battersea?) need to be treated in a wholly different way from other roads – more street trees, wider pavements, occasional benches for people to sit on, more cycle parking, a lower speed limit of 20mph, pavements continuing across side roads where they join the street, and a treatment of the carriageway that signals to everyone that such streets are places where people have priority.

### **The real question is *how* we move in London**

And so back to the question about the future of transport: 'To move or not to move?' That's clearly *not* the question! Of course we need to move around our borough and travel to Central London and further out. The real question is *how* we move. We are privileged, compared to other cities in Britain, to have a superb public transport system. We can do our health a lot of good walking the short trips, and cycling. The one thing we can't go on using is private cars for short trips. The congestion caused is unfair to the commercial vehicles and emergency services that have to use the roads. The sheer number of private cars on the roads is hurting all of us because they poison the air we breathe. And the current tumult of traffic makes the public street realm we use for local shopping, socialising, and getting to work noisy, the pavements over-crowded, and the whole ambience thoroughly unpleasant. I think the Council has 'got' this. But we residents can help Councillors develop a greater sense of urgency and more imagination in transforming our streets. We all value the quality of life in our borough. Changing how we move can make a really big difference.

Robert Molteno

Member of the Battersea Society member

Secretary, Wandsworth Living Streets ([www.wandsworthlivingstreets.org](http://www.wandsworthlivingstreets.org))