

## **Scrutiny Review Panel**

### **The Council's Policy for Active Streets, Play Streets and School Streets**

We have some comments and suggestions for the scrutiny review panel, solely on behalf of our own ward and based on our collective experience.

Marple is a particularly busy urban area where traffic, speeding and parking are all problems regularly filling our casework files. We believe there are two fundamental problems we can't tackle and should be recognised in advance:

- The lack of resources to ensure proper enforcement, including parking but in particular speeding and rat running means that signage is at best ignored and at worst a complete waste of money, recognising that there is a statutory requirement if enforcement is to take place.
- The national culture on driving and road use is pretty poor all round. Whilst progress has been made via education on speeding for some as an alternative to a fine, it remains the case that many people regard themselves as having a right to abuse the roads, inconvenience others and drive in an illegal manner. The classic demonstration is parents dropping children off directly outside school, putting other children at risk, knowingly breaking parking regulations, knowingly ignoring the school's regular request to do otherwise and amazingly, giving abuse to anybody that challenges them, including police officers in uniform.

Faced with this, we should approach this challenge knowing that we are also trying to change culture. Whilst initiatives to open up our streets to pedestrians will inevitably be supported by the community, the reality is that a significant minority will continue to believe they are above the law. We acknowledge some parents are under sufficient time pressures through work and childcare requirements that they need to do things that are not allowed in the regulations. Our hope is that the pandemic will have adjusted people's priorities and there will be a realisation that what amounts to, for example a five minute walk to abide by regulations will put nobody's life out of kilter.

### **Play streets**

We have previously in our ward specifically asked about designating some streets as "play streets". We were actively discouraged in pursuing this, being told of the myriad of difficulties and costs involved. We would welcome a change in approach which addressed whatever are the concerns of the council officers. The paper in front of the panel indicates there is only one play street left in Stockport. We would recommend a review of the rules takes place to ease whatever concerns officers have and then a small number of trials or pilots are undertaken.

We have a particularly suitable one in our ward which is Belmont Avenue in Marple Bridge. The location of the street, closable at both ends without having a major effect on access, eliminating a rat run is in an area where there are a reasonable number of children. It is a short, straight street so that there is good visibility from both ends and this would allow the children to play in the safest of circumstances

### **School streets**

Whilst on the face of it, this looks like a good idea, the practicalities effectively mean this is only going to work in very particular circumstances. We are particularly qualified to talk about the issues outside schools as we have a number that were highlighted in the top 20, when those schools in the borough in most need of traffic control were assessed by a previous exercise. The immediate difficulty is that some schools experience problems on adjacent main roads or main access routes (Ludworth, Mellor, Brabyns and one side of Rosehill – and nearby in the neighbouring ward, All Saints). Placing restrictions on these roads is impractical as would be issuing permits. Nevertheless we think this is worth pursuing when circumstances allow, provided it is recognised that this is not a solution to the general problem.

Again we have a perfect example where this action would help solve a problem. One side of Rosehill School is accessed via Elmfield Drive. This is a cul-de-sac which currently has restricted access markings on the road but which are regularly ignored by drivers. There are a small number of residents on the road who would welcome some sort of action and be very happy to operate a permit system. This particular access route is very well used by pedestrians who follow the rules and park elsewhere to accompany the children to the school. It has been the subject of intense complaint by local residents. Police, parking wardens, school staff and even councillors have failed in their attempts to encourage observance of the access rules.

We believe there is a different approach needed towards safety outside schools generally. We praise and recognise the efforts to use things like different design bollards, yellow lines, school markings and so on but these are still ignored by a significant minority of parents. We also have situations where neighbouring streets become traffic gridlocks, with residents having their drives blocked etc. A classic example is Pear Tree close next to Ludworth school. Given our introductory comments we welcome a universal 20 mph limit outside schools even on main roads but this has to be accompanied by some sort of enforcement. The excellent program, “eagle eye”, which sought to encourage responsible driving by parents via pupil pressure, had some effect but insufficient. This is a shame as it attempted to change culture. It should not be abandoned but it needs reinforcing with enforcement and some sort of imagination to overcome the lack of resource even with the camera car. We believe an initiative that resembles community speed watch, where residents or parents are trained to police the situation themselves so that they can report offenders direct to the police for warning and prosecution. The advantage of this sort of approach is that it involves the community, is not resource hungry and would certainly facilitate a change in culture driven by the community, rather than the authorities.

### **Temporary closures and street parties.**

We have had at least two regular events in our area that have customarily closed main roads without any issue. These events have been organised by community groups who have become experienced and knowledgeable in operating these closures safely and systematically.

During recent years, as the paper says, there has been an encouragement to have street parties for specific events; the royal wedding being one. We believe that this should be further encouraged particularly when we finally come out of Covid restrictions, because of its ability to very quickly and easily build community morale for very little cost. Care needs to be taken in advising citizens rather than in putting barriers in the way; for example choosing flat locations, limiting the closure to allow alternative routes to be taken easily and so on. There will be opportunities to trial this approach for some impending national events. The barrier that needs dealing with is highlighted in the paper

before the committee. This is the requirement for 5 million public liability insurance. For many community organisations, let alone small groups of residents, this puts the prospect completely out of reach. Equally expecting our committees to fund this is not practical because of the high level of insurance cost involved, which is certainly well into three figures. A similar problem exists for events held on council parks and we have an example related to the Marple carnival on the Marple Memorial park where the insurance factor excluded some community groups from taking part. We think the option of self insurance subject to a small fee from the community group might be worth investigating.