**[TEMPLATE] URGENT LETTER REGARDING AN EMERGENCY SCHOOL STREET**

Dear [Headteacher],

**[Introduction]**

We are local parents of children at [school] concerned about traffic, air pollution and safe physical distancing around the school gates. We are writing to propose that an emergency ‘School Street’ be implemented on [Road at the school gates] as soon as possible. We note that while School Streets have been on the agenda for some time now, the issue has been given added importance by Covid-19.

The need for prioritising walking and cycling during and in the aftermath of the ongoing pandemic has been emphasised by the Government[[1]](#footnote-1) and the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough[[2]](#footnote-2).

In June 2020, Cambridgeshire County Council Highways and Transport Committee approved county-wide support for School Streets. This is an offer which would fund staff training, signage and cones or barriers to be made available to all 240 schools in Cambridgeshire in order to:

1. enable safe physical distancing;
2. maintain improved air quality;
3. protect the mental and physical health of children by enabling physical activity through travel (especially whilst other options for physical activity are limited); and
4. ease pressure on the public transport network, especially local busses.

**What are School Streets?**

The School Streets initiative is a nationwide scheme which restricts motor access to schools at peak times. The idea is simple: at set times each day during term time, the streets around schools are closed to motor vehicles. Signs are put up to inform drivers of the road closure, and modal filters such as barriers can be used to enforce it. [Note that in June, Secretary for Transport Grant Shapps said he would enable the use of automatic number plate recognition cameras so enforce Pedestrian and Cycle Zones outside of London soon.] Residents, local businesses and blue badge holders can register free of charge for an exemption (online from the council’s website). It means that, at school drop off and pick up times, families can walk, cycle or scoot more safely to the school gates.

**Air pollution and traffic:**

Across the UK, over 2,000 schools are in areas with high levels of air pollution and pollution triples at school run times. Closing the roads around schools reduces exposure to air pollution at the school gate, at times when children and their families are clustered there. It also makes it safer to walk, cycle, and scoot to school (see further below), creating a more pleasant environment and giving children a chance to exercise. It helps to raise awareness among everyone who passes the road closures and schools about the link between vehicle emissions and health problems.

Air pollution is a particular problem for children and pregnant women. According to the World Health Organisation[[3]](#footnote-3):

1. Air pollution impacts neurodevelopment and cognitive ability and can trigger asthma, and childhood cancer. Children who have been exposed to high levels of air pollution may be at greater risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease later in life.
2. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution because they breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants. They are also closer to the ground, where some pollutants reach peak concentrations (*inter alia* because vehicle exhaust pipes are low to the ground), further increasing the emissions they breathe in at a time when their brains and bodies are still developing.

More widely, it should be noted that **106** deaths per year can be attributed to poor air quality in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire[[4]](#footnote-4). The main source of the emissions is road traffic.

**Covid-19:**

The importance of School Streets has been dramatically increased by the Covid-19 crisis. There are two distinct aspects of this.

First, physical distancing. School gates are key locations for potential viral transmission, being chokepoints where large numbers of children and adults gather in ways that heighten risk (e.g. children from different classes mingling). It would be far easier to ensure a 1+metre separation if children and their families could “spill out” onto the road in front of the gate without being at risk of being run over.

Second, air pollution. A recent Harvard study[[5]](#footnote-5) has indicated that an increase of 1 μg/m3 in PM2.5 is associated with an 8% increase in Covid-19 mortality, so a reduction of airborne pollution is an immediate public health priority.

Again, it should be noted that Cambridgeshire County Council has approved funding for School Streets across the region[[6]](#footnote-6).

**Road Safety:**

A final yet important point is the physical safety of children. In 2013, one child a week was killed, and 37 were seriously injured, on UK roads.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Other data from 2017 shows that 37% of these deaths happened on the journey either to or from school.[[8]](#footnote-8) If the establishment of a School Street scheme for [school] can help to reduce the level of local vehicle usage, then there can be reduced risk of accidents.

**Active travel enhances children’s attainment**

The average child aged 5-17 years does not reach the recommended minimum daily levels of physical activity; yet physical activity and fitness levels in school children is associated with better academic scores and improved classroom behaviour[[9]](#footnote-9)9. [School] can improve the health, safety and achievement of its pupils by supporting active travel. It could also achieve associated accreditation using the Modeshift STARS national scheme and become an official Rights Respecting School.

**Conclusion:**

The UK Government, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are strongly supporting the introduction of emergency School Streets. Accordingly, and in light of the other points above, we believe that the introduction of an emergency School Street outside our school is an immediate priority to protect our children and our community. We seek its introduction as soon as possible and are happy to do whatever we can to assist the school in achieving this.

Yours sincerely,

The Undersigned.

**Signatures:**

[Parent 1]

[Parent 2]

[etc.]

**[OPTIONAL] Stakeholder groups in support:**

[Camcycle – if you would like us to sign, send us the finalised version and we will get back to you quickly: contact@camcycle.org.uk]

[Any other local groups who you can persuade to back you – e.g. residents’ associations, community fora, churches, etc. However, we suggest to send this email soon – that is more important than a long list of supporters]

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities/traffic-management-act-2004-network-management-in-response-to-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://twitter.com/MayorJPalmer/status/1270652750901252096> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-10-2018-more-than-90-of-the-world’s-children-breathe-toxic-air-every-day> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/clean-air-zone> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/covid-pm/home> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/CCC_live/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=ew%2F5vptzVQjEiJwebRNaFeCGJzIHWDD9OyTr%2FNqnO4gr0eyR2%2BZC3w%3D%3D&rUzwRPf%2BZ3zd4E7Ikn8Lyw%3D%3D=pwRE6AGJFLDNlh225F5QMaQWCtPHwdhUfCZ%2FLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3D%3D&mCTIbCubSFfXsDGW9IXnlg%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&kCx1AnS9%2FpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2BAJvYtyA%3D%3D=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&FgPlIEJYlotS%2BYGoBi5olA%3D%3D=NHdURQburHA%3D&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBux0r1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCpMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3D> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-09-13/debates/FACC048C-521D-4278-B158-018C0A01C5F2/RoadSafety(Schools)> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/news-and-blog/press-media/top-3-most-annoying-things-about-the-school-run-cars-cars-and-more-cars> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9 <https://www.bristolhealthpartners.org.uk/uploads/documents/2015-08-04/1438695968-active-travel-briefing-paper-summary-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)