

MIKE OLLEY

We must not let our streets continue to be a killing zone

It's time for action to make the city a lot safer for road users, writes **MIKE OLLEY**

GOODNESS me! Once again, Birmingham's streets are in the national headlines, this time tagged as one of the UK's most perilous cities for pedestrians.

Ranked sixth, with more than 54 casualties per 100,000 people, these distressing statistics clearly highlight the vital need for safer streets and improved road injury reduction strategies.

My friends at Better Streets for Birmingham, staunch campaigners whom I hold in high esteem, though we sometimes differ in our views, have been vocal about this issue for ages.

Co-chair Martin Price distressingly observes: "It is absolutely heartbreaking to hear of another life lost or altered forever due to road incidents... that could be any one of us."

Who could disagree with Martin's passionate plea for safer roads and prioritised pedestrian and cyclist protection? Birmingham's alarming ranking calls for immediate and decisive action.

Yet, while I stand with Martin on the need for safety, my approach to solutions like bus lanes calls for a touch of restraint.

Bus lanes are essential for promoting public transport and reducing reliance on cars. However, they should be applied thoughtfully.

It's not practical to enforce low-use bus lanes round the clock, which can lead to delays for other road users.

A more sensible approach would involve planned, time-sensitive enforcement that supports public transport without inconveniencing drivers too much during quieter hours.

Putting in place new measures to enhance safety, improving pavements, developing cycling networks, and strict enforcement of speed limits are all crucial. Nonetheless, achieving these changes is hampered by councils no longer training highway engineers but instead relying on expensive external contrac-



Better Streets for Birmingham are campaigning to make our roads safer - and improvements are definitely needed



Former councillor Dennis Minnis

Perhaps the epithet should be "Labour the Milk Sabre."

It's time to rectify the "all-party milk snatch" and invest in our children's health. A glass of milk is more than just a drink, it's a step towards better mental health and brighter futures.

So, I stand with Cllr Mackey. Let's bring milk back to Birmingham's schools.

tors. Until we revive a robust city engineers' department, I'm sceptical about our ability to effect significant improvements.

Through modern investments and sensible policies, Birmingham can transform its streets into safer spaces for everyone.

So, it's time for Birmingham City Council, the Commissioners, and the West Midlands Combined Authority to step up.

I FOUND it ironic when Tory group deputy leader Cllr Ewan Mackey (Sutton Roughley) promoted re-introducing milk in schools after a damning report on plant-based substitutes possibly affecting mental health.

The irony lies in the historical backdrop of "Thatcher, the Milk Snatcher," who ended free school

milk for children aged over seven in the 1970s to cut costs, leaving a lasting imprint on many.

Yet a recent study praises the mental health benefits of semi-skimmed milk, linking it to lower risks of depression and anxiety.

Considering Birmingham's ongoing child poverty issue, reintroducing free milk could offer a cost-effective boost to both physical and mental health, especially since many children depend on school for balanced meals.

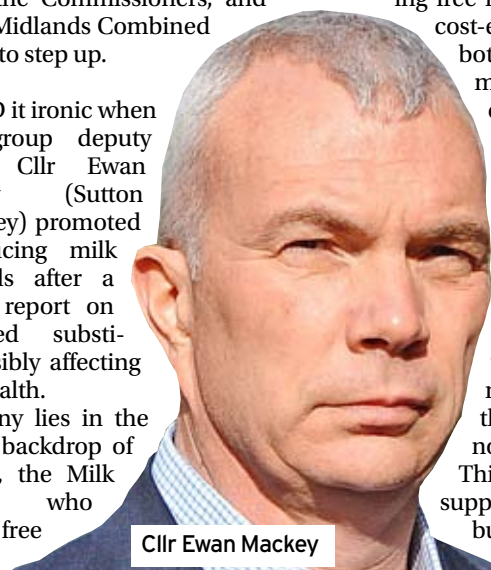
Mental health issues among our youth have spiked; prevention is crucial. If milk can be part of the solution, why not bring it back? This move could also support local dairy businesses and farmers, bene-



Free school milk for over-7s was ended in the early 1970s

fitting Birmingham's economy and its future generations.

However, reflecting on history, it wasn't just Thatcher. Labour's Harold Wilson halted free milk for children over 11 in 1968, along with James Callaghan who eliminated it for the under-sevens in 1977.



Cllr Ewan Mackey

MAY I express my sincere condolences to the family of former Cllr Dennis Minnis, and in particular his partner Michael.

Dennis passed away just over a week ago. He was a lovely chap. He first arrived on the city council as a Liberal in 1969, until 1981, when he joined the Labour Party and shortly after left the council.

It was as a fellow lefty we served together. I knew him well and was very fond of him.

He won the Edgbaston seat for Labour in 1994, a task most of us believed to be impossible. But Dennis did it.

For his day job, I knew him to be an enthusiastic champion for St Basils, a very well-respected homeless youth outreach and accommodation charity.

Good on you, Dennis, rest well, you made a great difference for many, God Bless you.

■ Mike Olley served on Birmingham City Council from 1991 to 2005, when he was made an Alderman.