

# **Air quality scrutiny review report - part two**

**Environment Scrutiny Commission**

**April 2021**

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## **Introduction**

This is the second report on Air Quality, following on from the first Air Quality report, completed in July 2020, by the previous iteration of Southwark Council's Environment Scrutiny Commission. This was a substantive report, with 20 recommendations, developed over a longer than usual administrative year, because of the pandemic. The overall aim of the first air quality report was to deliver a reduction in overall traffic, and thus reduce one of the main sources of air pollution, with the added benefit of delivering a greener and safer borough.

This administrative year has been shorter than usual, and the main focus of this review has been to track the recommendations of the first Air Quality report, both the ones that are now being implemented, and ensuring that all the recommendations made last year are given due consideration.

Covid-19 has made the implementation of the recommendations much more challenging as traffic has become more unpredictable, public transport use has been negatively impacted the risk of contagion, and officers, and other partners, have been stretched by the demands of the pandemic. However, the pandemic has also seen central and London government funding orientated towards schemes promoting active travel, and the transformative experience of London virtually free of traffic in spring 2020. Many more people are taking up cycling and walking and spending much more time in our local communities, allowing us to reimagine the city.

## **Review scope**

The following objectives for the review were identified at the start of the year. The primary focus has been on the first two, due to the limited time available:

- i. Effective implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN), by the council and partners, to ensure that they deliver better air quality for all Southwark residents, particularly those residents most at risk from the adverse impacts of poor air quality (children, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents, older residents, disabled residents, residents living in deprivation etc)
- ii. Tracking additional council and TFL measures to reduce and mitigate transport emissions in Southwark.
- iii. Making recommendations to the council and relevant partners in order to reduce other sources of air pollution, not covered in depth by the previous scrutiny review on Air Quality in 2019/20

## **Evidence received**

All meetings were held online due and attendance was via video conferencing. The following officers, members and partners gave evidence:

- Guy's and St Thomas Trust Charity (GSTTC) – who are part funding Southwark's LTNs, attended to set out the aims of the schemes.

- Cabinet leads Cllr Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Environment & Roads and Cllr Radha Burgess, Deputy Cabinet Member for Low Traffic Southwark attended twice
- Highways and planning policy officers gave regular evidence.
- GLA transport policy officers attended once for a focus session.
- Emergency services were invited, with the Fire Service and London Ambulance Service both attending.

## Themes

### Greater London Authority's work on transport and air quality

The GLA evidence to the commission covered reports published on inequalities that found that deprived populations and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents are more likely to be exposed to higher pollution. The ULEZ is designed to drive down large scale pollution, particularly NO<sub>2</sub>. The GLA referenced independent research that indicated that the ULEZ will reduce pollution by 71 and 81 for deprived and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations, respectively. The ULEZ will not equalize differences between populations but it will help with health inequalities.

The Mayor's Climate Emergency target of net zero by 2030 means there will be a need to reduce car journeys by 60%. As part of this the GLA is looking at road pricing, however no decision has been made yet. The Mayor's aim is that by 2040 80% of journeys will be by a sustainable mode; currently it is 40%.

The previous Air Quality Review recommended lobbying the GLA to introduce Road User Charging as a matter of urgency, citing the Centre for London July 2018 report on Road User Charging, showing that road user charging is the most equitable way to allocate the use of road space across London. In response to the above recommendation the cabinet has said that it supports the consideration of the use of road user charging and has undertaken to continue to lobby the Mayor and GLA.

In response to the need to encourage much more walking and cycling in London the Mayor and TfL released the Mayor's London Streetspace Plan (LSP), which is focused on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods for residential streets, expanding the cycle network and improvements to walking and cycling in Town Centers.

### Effective implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN)

Last year one of the main recommendations of the Commission was that Low Traffic Neighbourhoods be delivered across Southwark, starting with areas with the highest levels of public transport, worse air quality and most vulnerable populations. The report cautioned that any risk of displacement of traffic onto main roads by Low Traffic Neighbourhoods must be complimented by measures to prevent this and ensure air quality is carefully monitored as our communities live, work, and go to school on both side roads and main roads. The review recommendations were

inspired by learning from Waltham Forest Mini Holland schemes, which the GLA also commended as one of the best examples, when they gave evidence to the Commission in March 2020, saying that community reports that after some initial concerns local people are enthused by these.

The previous report made specific recommendations on the introduction of a borough wide programme of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, recommending these should be implemented:

- Over a wide enough area in order to realise the benefits of traffic evaporation, which has been shown to take place when there is a significant reduction of short journeys by car under 2km.
- As a priority in areas with high levels of public transport (high PTAL ratings), poor air quality, lower levels of car ownership, in areas of deprivation and where the programs would impact positively on local schools and hospitals.
- Where traffic may be displaced onto main roads, the council must monitor the impact on air quality, and mitigate negative effects in advance of implementation, possibly by widening pavements and creating cycle lanes, managing traffic to reduce vehicle idling time and introducing green screening programmes.
- In conjunction with the introduction of CPZ and a reduction of parking so the kerbside can be utilised for active travel and public realm improvements (such as pocket parks and cycle parking).
- In conjunction with improvements to Public Transport and other work on adjacent main roads to increase cycling and other forms of active travel.

Southwark has introduced several LTNs, and other measures to reduce traffic , that it is in the course of piloting during 2020/ 2021, with an overall aim of making streets healthier, safer and greener, and contributing to a newly articulated vision of a Low Traffic Southwark.

Many of these measures to reduce traffic have been introduced in 2020 as experimental traffic orders (ETMOs), using the Mayor's London Streetspace Plan funding. Some sites have been informed by previous consultation and community organizing.

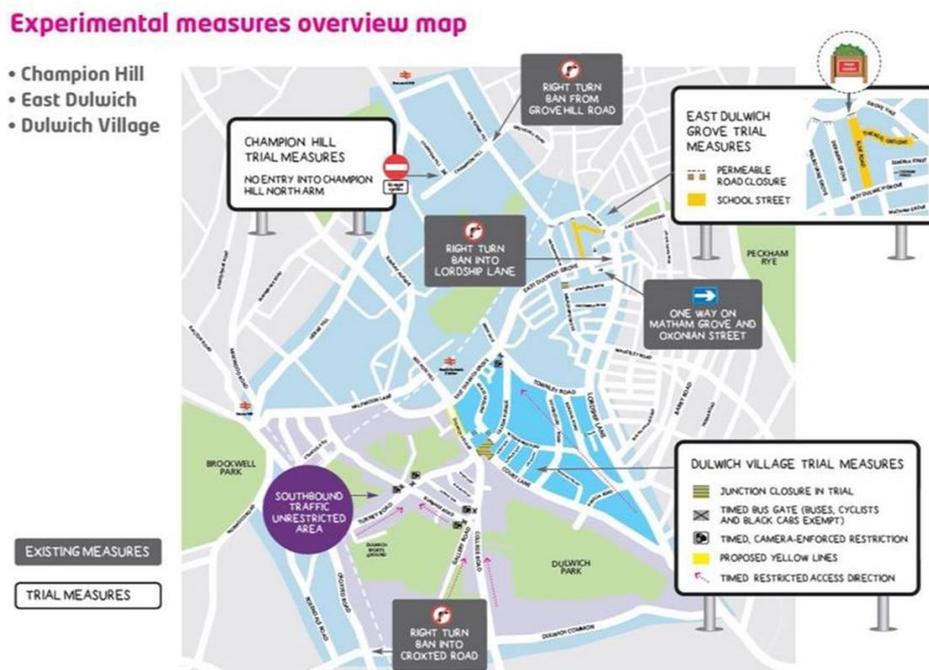
Three LTN sites have been chosen in partnership with Guy's and St Thomas Trust Charity (GSTTC), who are partnering with the council to providing funding for three LTNs in the centre of the borough; Harris Primary & Nell Gwynn Nursery, Brunswick Park Primary and Ark Walworth. GSTTC have a particular focus on child obesity, long-term conditions and air quality which together make a focus on measures to reduce traffic an obvious priority for them. The selection criterion for these schemes is:

- High child obesity

- Poor air quality, particularly around schools
- High levels of social housing and deprivation
- Higher proportions of Black ethnicity populations in the locality
- Local Schools – in order to impact on children and family journeys
- Local parks – in order to increase use

The Commission heard that there will be robust evaluation of the GSTTC schemes with 20% of the budget assigned to this, which is much higher than usual. This is in order to inform future learning in Southwark and London wide. The evaluation will look at changes in behaviour, such as increased walking and cycling, on the streets with schemes, as well as adjacent streets. The number of car journeys will also be monitored. In November 2020 GSTTC told the Commission that the evaluations will not include measuring air quality, as this is challenging to do accurately, however subsequently officers informed the Commission that they are looking at the potential for high tech air quality monitoring equipment, which is welcome.

The monitoring and evaluation of Southwark LTNs will be based on the model the council is developing for the Dulwich Healthy Streets review. Dulwich Healthy Streets has taken a neighbourhood approach, working with the community to address concerns about traffic volume and its impact on the community. Dulwich has the following schemes:



This framework has not been made available to scrutiny to consider as it is not far enough advanced and the GLA election period has prevented consultation with residents and publication.

The commission has therefore only been able to focus on limited aspects of the delivery of LTNs and other measures to reduce traffic.

### **Work with the Emergency Services**

Both Southwark Fire Service and London Ambulance Service (LAS) attended meetings and gave evidence. They stressed the importance of good communication, which they said has improved as the pilots have progressed.

LAS said that the combined impact on ambulances of traffic schemes and the pandemic had been very complex with massive peaks and troughs, across London. The cumulative impact of all schemes including LTNs, pop-cycle lanes, school streets, utility works and loss of major infrastructure had impacted on the Trust times. Overall there has been more traffic on the road with an average increase of 2 minutes in response time.

They reported that Southwark Council has implemented a larger number of schemes than most, and in a short period of time, which speaks to a high level of ambition. Crew staff are asked to report any delay due to traffic congestion, road layout or schemes that impact on their ability to respond to patients or egress patients to hospital, for patient safety monitoring. The total number of reported incidences pan London is 171, and in Southwark this is 51. An incident does not necessarily mean something adverse has happened. They gave the Commission assurances that Ambulance times remain good in Southwark.

LAS have a preference for cameras rather than physical barriers to prevent circulation. They recognize the benefits of the LTN schemes and are keen to find solutions, emphasizing the importance of the council in continuing to engage closely with LAS during the design phase. The cabinet lead, Cllr Catherine Rose, reported that fortnightly meetings are now established and working well.

Similarly Southwark Fire Service emphasised that the importance of early engagement. The Fire Service priority is establishing attendance times; with a target of the first appliance taking 6 minutes to arrive, and the second 8 minutes. They reported that on occasions static barriers had been problematic; however, they reported that after consultation with the Fire Service these bollards were now moveable. The Fire Service said they did not necessarily have a preference for moveable bollards over planters, in all occasions, and they appreciated costs and other design issues. Their approach has been to visit traffic schemes and look at the route, planters, barriers, access and egress and overall impact of LTNs.

### **Recommendation one**

***The framework to evaluate the LTNs ought to be provided in full to scrutiny to review, and this ought to summarize work with the Emergency Services, including LAS preference for cameras.***

### **LTNs impact on the local economy**

Last year the scrutiny commission heard that LTNs have the potential to impact positively on local high streets, if managed well. The Mayor's Covid recovery plan focuses on a Green New Deal, which means High Streets for all, thinking differently and building on localism. These are 60s type visions for cities. Throughout Europe cities are adopting a more local approach, with the Paris 15 minute city being the most famous. Encouraging increased use of local businesses on our high streets ought to form part of the LTN evaluation framework, however the commission acknowledge this is challenging during the pandemic with many businesses closed for extended periods.

### **Recommendation two**

***When evaluating LTNs the council ought to measure footfall on high streets, where it is possible to establish a baseline. The council also ought to outline work undertaken with traders to ensure that any difficulties (e.g. receiving supplies) are addressed and that the opportunity to maximize footfall and support the local economy is delivered.***

### **Schools impacted by air pollution- particularly schools in areas with high proportion of residents with low incomes and from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.**

The School Streets programme is established and working well, with over 39 schemes now operational, 31 of which have been implemented this year, which is a huge acceleration in the programme. The council is aiming to install 60 schemes and has contacted every school in Southwark.

School Streets are aimed at making the roads around local school safer and less congested, and a key priority in tackling air pollution as children are particularly vulnerable.

A recent GLA report showed an 18% reduction in people driving to school<sup>1</sup>. This is an encouraging finding but there is more work to be done to get a modal shift to active travel.

The Commission is keen that this work is expanded and that there is additional work with those schools located in areas of high pollution, particularly with low income and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and young people, given the higher health

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/schoolstreets-improve-air-quality>

risks face by these populations. The GSTTC schemes are a welcome complement to the School Streets programme.

### **Recommendation three**

***The Council should conduct an analysis of schools that might be more disproportionately impacted by air pollution compared to other schools (looking in particular at schools with higher proportions of students on free school meals or with students that have English as a Second Language)***

***Where these schools are on main roads, the analysis should identify actions that can a) be tied in with the Low Traffic Southwark strategy to reduce traffic on those main roads and b) mitigate the impact of that traffic in and around the school itself.***

### **Increasing public transport provision around the Aylesbury Estate and in the South of the Borough**

The commission is concerned that excessive parking levels are envisaged as part of the regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate, rather than a focus on increasing levels of Public Transport (PTAL) through the life of the regeneration scheme.

The south of the borough is a site of a number of pilot measures to reduce traffic initiatives, including Low Traffic Neighborhoods; however, it is an area with poorer PTAL. LTNs work best where there is good public transport and people can reach amenities easily by walking or cycling.

### **Recommendation four**

***Focus on increasing PTAL in regeneration areas and where levels are low, e.g. the south of the borough, in order to reduce parking levels in new developments as close to zero as is possible***

### **Measures to encourage active travel in people communities who are not presently using cycling and walking to get around.**

The first Covid 19 lockdown saw a very significant rise in cycling rates and sale of bikes as people have sought safer ways of getting about and made the most of periods of reduced traffic. The Commission heard that the council is rapidly scaling up the provision of cycle hangers, which is welcome news.

In early summer 2020 the government announced that despite fewer people travelling overall during the crisis, there had been a 100% increase in weekday cycling and at weekends the increase has been up to around 200%, compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. The Department for Transport data measured cycling levels for the tightest lockdown period, spanning March 16th to June 1st, which was indexed

against the equivalent day of prior years' data<sup>2</sup>. There is also evidence that new cohorts of people are taking up cycling, which is welcome news<sup>3</sup>.

### **Recommendation five**

***There is evidence of a far broader demographic audience being attracted to cycling during the pandemic as traffic levels have fallen. Targeted work is needed with women, low income, older people, disabled people, children and young people and some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to increase cycling rates.***

### **Work to reduce emissions caused by online shopping and increase sustainable freight**

The GLA officers told the commission that they are promoting sustainable freight with large companies such as UPS and DHL, who are working on consolidating their electrical fleet. Some people in the gig economy, who work for delivery companies, have benefited from the Mayor's London wide scrappage scheme.

Southwark officers reported that it is larger companies that are making the switch as they have the capacity to invest in expensive new technology. Sainsbury's is one such company, and they have found it as quick to use cycle freight to deliver food as vans. The council is working with local hospitals to encourage the switch to freight. However, officers reported that smaller companies are finding it harder to make the switch for two reasons; the first is that the freight industry has a small profit margin so this makes it difficult to be flexible. The other barrier is the lack of distribution sites in the north of the borough, because of the higher rent and the low profit margin.

A scheme where businesses could try out trailers and e cargo bikes, to see if this were right for their business, prior to investing, was proposed, as this could demonstrate the amount of bulky freight that it is possible to move by bike. A similar approach has been used successfully in Waltham Forest to encourage take up of e cargo bikes. Officers cautioned that it could be complicated and expensive to deliver something like this during a pandemic with limited resources.

### **Recommendation six**

**Work with Business Improvement Districts to deliver Nests to enable the delivery and pick up of online shopping.**

**Follow up on Recommendation 15 of the Air Quality report and understand how sustainable freight is being worked into other Southwark strategies including the Movement Plan, as part of regeneration schemes and if the council is using sustainable freight for in-house services, where possible.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cyclingindustry.news/cycling-levels-up-by-up-to-300-during-uks-lockdown/>

<sup>3</sup> Add evidence Living Streets

## **Recommendation seven**

**Implement a pilot e cargo scheme in 2022, once the current focus on LTNs and school streets is embedded, and we are firmly in recovery from the pandemic.**

## **Delivering Low Traffic Southwark and responding to previous recommendations.**

The previous Air Quality scrutiny review made a number of recommendations focused on driving down traffic overall with work on reducing traffic volumes on main roads needed to compliment the delivery of LTNs. The amount of work involved in staff delivering the LTNs, as well as the more ambitious vision of reducing emissions, and thus private car use, over a shorter time period due to the climate emergency, has meant that a complete response to all the previous recommendations, and a revised Movement Plan has not been yet been provided.

While recognizing the constraints on member and officer capacity and the huge amount of work undertaken in recent months, to obtain a clear picture of the strategy for addressing Air Quality in Southwark the Commission needs to:

- understand the plan for delivery of the recommendations of the previous Air Quality scrutiny review (see below)
- Be able to scrutinise the proposed Low Traffic Southwark strategy
- Be able to scrutinise the revised Movement Plan.

## **Recommendation eight**

***The commission therefore recommends that once the LTN review is completed that more time is given over to responding to each of the commission's previous recommendations and that officers and cabinet leads return to the commission with a detailed operational plan outlining how Low Traffic Southwark will be delivered and provide a full response to the below:***

- 1) Develop an operational plan with partners to implement this, focusing on structural changes, informed by the ambitions of the Movement Plan and its associated deprivation data.***
- 2) Viability testing of the target to reduce traffic by 90% by 2030***
- 3) End the current diesel contract for Southwark fleet vehicles and switch to EV as soon as possible. Swap EV for sustainable transport / freight. Revisit our procurement strategy to ensure subcontractors have EV or a sustainable fleet. Set a cut-off date for compliance so that subcontractors have time to make the switch. (marked to be considered)***

- 4) Southwark adopts a maximum charge for bike hubs/hangers that ensures that is cheaper than car parking by space (marked to be considered)**
- 5) An update on charging for parking in the borough including the development and implementation of the emissions based charging policy and if this will include reductions in car parking provision.**
- 6) A borough-wide greenery programme to use native hedges to screen to against air pollution, ecological planting and also improve the environment and place making. Examples include allotments and wildlife sanctuaries. (marked to be considered)**