

Frequently Asked Questions – Walworth

What changes have you made in Walworth?

We have installed experimental transport measures including permeable road closures - this is a closure to motor vehicle traffic which still allows access to pedestrians and cycles – on Amelia Street, Cooks Road, Chapter Road, Alberta Street and a ‘bus gate’ – this is a closure to motor vehicles which still allows access for buses, emergency vehicles, authorised vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists – on Carter Street.

These have removed motor vehicle through-traffic on these roads and created low-traffic street environments for the community.

More permeable road closures are planned for Merrow Street, Browning Street, Walworth Place and Blackwood Street.

Why did you decide to make these changes?

The COVID-19 social distancing restrictions drastically changed the way people were travelling and using their local area. Public transport use was discouraged and saw an 80% reduction in capacity which meant that many people who would usually take the bus or train either chose to use a car, if they owned one, or walk and cycle. Southwark Council was urged by the [government to make quick and significant changes to their road layouts](#) to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians to help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel.

Traffic studies before the pandemic showed streets in the West and East Walworth area, most notably Browning Street, Kennington Park Place, Cooks Road and Manor Place were being used as motor vehicle through traffic routes between the A2 and the A3 by large numbers of car drivers entering and exiting the area without stopping. With the expected increase in car usage that the lockdown restrictions could bring about and the increase in people walking and cycling in their local areas we needed to act quickly to help protect local streets and re-purpose them for the local community, pedestrians and cyclists.

We also engaged with residents, businesses, schools and local groups from October – December 2019 to find out how we could make the area healthier and more pleasant for local people. 62% of respondents were either very supportive or somewhat supportive of measures to reduce through-traffic. Additionally reducing through-traffic, tackling air quality and encouraging walking and cycling were the most highlighted measures.

How will you assess/monitor the impact of the changes?

We will be collecting traffic data at key sites in the area, including the residential streets and the bordering distributor roads. Video surveys will be periodically

installed around the area at key junctions and high footfall areas to assess how the streets are being used by the community. We have 15 air quality monitoring sites in the Walworth area which will help us to monitor the air quality impact of these changes.

We will also be monitoring community feedback provided through the Commonplace map and meetings with key community stakeholders which will include residents associations, businesses, local community groups and schools.

The monitoring criteria we are using to assess the scheme are:

- Net changes in traffic in the residential area
- Modal shift towards walking and cycling, with particular focus on the journey to school and short-trips
- Qualitative feedback from residents, local community and businesses
- Use of public space by the community for active travel, leisure or play
- Net changes in traffic on the distributor roads in comparison to London-wide traffic changes

We will be publishing the results of monitoring via <https://walworthstreetspace.commonplace.is/news> so please subscribe for updates.

Will there be other changes as part of this project?

Proposals are in place for further measures in the West and East Walworth area to support the low-traffic neighbourhood, this includes permeable road closures and camera access filters. We are also working closely with Transport for London on footway improvements around Kennington Tube station making this area safer for pedestrians.

The measures are **experimental** which means we are trialing the measures to see how they work for the community. Changes can be made if required and continuous community feedback will be sought, as well as other monitoring data such as traffic and pedestrians counts. This will help us judge whether there is a need for further interventions.

Monitoring will be carried out on the bordering and peripheral roads to assess any potential traffic displacement some of the roads being considered are John Ruskin Street, Walworth Road, Brandon Street and Albany Road. The data gathered will be considered in the ongoing phases and whether mitigation measures are required.

At this stage it is likely that some further measures may be necessary to ensure the objectives of this scheme are achieved. Any such measures will be publicised closer to the time before they come into effect.

What is the timetable for this project?

Our planned evaluation timetable - making use of your feedback and additional monitoring data, is as follows:

- Primary evaluation for amendments - Autumn 2020
- Secondary evaluation for amendments – Early 2021
- Final Evaluation – Autumn 2021

How will residents be able to feedback?

We have set up a feedback website at <https://walworthstreetspace.commonplace.is> – this is for feedback on the local impacts of the changes.

People can also send in their comments to highways@southwark.gov.uk – we may not be able to respond individually to all comments, but they will all be considered as part of the evaluation process.

As part of the initial evaluation in Autumn 2020, we will again be asking residents and others for their views on the measures, at the same time considering other monitoring data, with a view to making any improvements that may be necessary.

Before any decision on making the changes permanent, there will be a further stage of public consultation at up to 18 months from the start of the project.

What is a ‘low-traffic neighbourhood’ and are there any examples of them?

‘Low traffic neighbourhoods’ are groups of residential streets, bordered by main or ‘distributor’ roads (the places where buses, lorries, non-local traffic should be), where ‘through’ motor vehicle traffic (often described as ‘rat-running’) is discouraged or removed. There are lots of ways you can make a low traffic neighbourhood, but the main principle is that every resident can drive onto their street, get deliveries etc., but it’s harder to drive straight through from one main road to the next. With through traffic gone, the streets in a low traffic neighbourhood see dramatic reductions in motor traffic levels and often vehicle speeds. And it’s not just the passing traffic that tends to go down. While residents in a low traffic neighbourhood can still do all their journeys by car if they want or need to, the far quieter, safer-feeling streets enable residents to switch to more healthy ways of getting around, particularly for short journeys.

The low traffic neighbourhood in Waltham Forest’s mini-Holland saw motor traffic levels fall by over half inside the residential area and by 16% even when including the main roads. For more information about the scheme in Waltham Forest see [here](#). Independent studies have been carried out which show that as a result of the low-traffic neighbourhood introduced in Waltham Forest life expectancy has increased for residents, see research [here](#). You can also find out more about the air quality benefits that have been gained by the low-traffic neighbourhood in Waltham Forest [here](#) where the number of households exposed to more than the EU recommended

maximum amount of Nitrogen Dioxide has dropped dramatically, from 58,000 in 2007 to just 6,300 in 2017.

Southwark is trialling low traffic neighbourhoods across the borough as part of its response to Covid-19. Many other London boroughs are doing the same. It has long been recognised that the dominance of motor vehicles on local streets is a factor in poor air quality, contributing to multiple health issues. It may also be a factor which limits people's ability to choose active travel options resulting in higher levels of childhood obesity and poorer health outcomes for life.

What is a permeable road closure?

Permeable road closures are created using bollards, planters or other street furniture, to block motorised traffic, whilst allowing pedestrians and cyclists to filter through.

These localised closures often create extra space to provide places to sit, small play areas, tree planting etc. Placing these closures carefully within the neighbourhood allows residents to access and park along these roads, whilst discouraging through traffic.

What is a 'bus gate' or 'camera access filter'?

It is possible to restrict access to through-traffic by using cameras to monitor vehicles entering and exiting a street. This system is usually enforced using 'access only' signage.

Data is collected and analysed in real time by software that checks each vehicle against a list of approved vehicle registration plates.

The software can be provided with a list of authorised vehicles such as buses and emergency services to still permit access to those streets.

How is this being funded?

This scheme is funded through the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Travel Fund. Any measures made permanent following public consultation will be funded through the Mayor's Air Quality Fund in support of the Walworth Low Emission Neighbourhood.

What about Emergency Services?

Emergency services are informed as part of the statutory consultation process which is required in the Experimental Traffic Order making process, in addition, officers have liaised directly with the services to keep them informed of the measures and seek feedback.

The measures are designed to ensure that vehicle access to streets for residents, emergency services and deliveries are still maintained. Where a 'camera access filter' has been installed emergency services will be exempt from this as well as any traffic management in the area such as one-way systems. The local streets will still remain permeable for emergency vehicles and we are working with the emergency services to ensure the measures can work for them with minimal impact on response times.

What about disabled/elderly residents?

The measures still allow vehicles to access streets just not drive through from one main road to another. So those that may still require vehicle access for themselves, carers, families or taxis will still be able to and also still have access to parking on the street with the appropriate permit.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been carried out before the scheme was implemented to ascertain where there may be benefits or dis-benefits to particular groups. Any actions in this document were included in initial proposals. This document is updated throughout the trial. As vehicle access is to be maintained the EQIA showed mainly benefits to these groups due to the safer, more permeable street environments and reduced traffic.

What about businesses?

It is absolutely vital that the measures we put in place support local businesses, which have been hit hard by the Covid-19 crisis. We will be working closely with businesses to ensure that measures help them to operate and help bring customers to their doors. There is considerable evidence that areas of easy pedestrian access and more attractive street spaces are beneficial for shops, cafes and similar businesses. The permeable road closures in high footfall areas should allow for easier access to the businesses there, and better use of the pavement space.

If further measures are required, we will consider business needs very carefully, including customer and staff parking and access for deliveries.

What about schools?

Childhood obesity is a particular concern in the Walworth area as it exceeds national average. One of the key objectives of the measures is to re-purpose the streets for the local community so they can lead healthier more active lifestyles. This is particularly important for school children in this area where we want to increase childhood physical activity by creating spaces for play and prevent childhood obesity.

We will be working with local schools in the area throughout the trial period to gather feedback regarding how the measures are impacting them and considering this in any amendments to the measures going forward.

Will traffic be displaced on to nearby roads?

Studies show that predictions of traffic problems caused by low-traffic neighbourhoods almost always fail to materialise, and that significant reductions in overall traffic levels across an area can happen as a result of people making a wide range of behavioural responses to the new traffic configurations.

The most comprehensive study of the phenomenon of disappearing or “evaporating” traffic was carried out by Sally Cairns, Carmen Hass-Klau, and Phil Goodwin in 1998 and followed up in 2002. See [here](#).

This brought together experience from 70 case studies of roadspace reallocation from general traffic, across 11 countries, with opinions from 200 transport professionals. It shows that traffic does not behave like water moving through pipes, finding an easier path as another narrows. Instead it is a force of human choice, driven by people making all sorts of different decisions when driving conditions change. The respondents in the Cairns study, for example, changed their mode of travel, chose alternative destinations or the frequency of their journey, consolidated trips, took up car sharing or didn't make the journey at all.

In half of the case studies, over 11% of the vehicles which were previously using the road or the area where roadspace for traffic was reduced could not be found in the surrounding area afterwards.