

The Oxford Story – Ignoring Consultation after Consultation

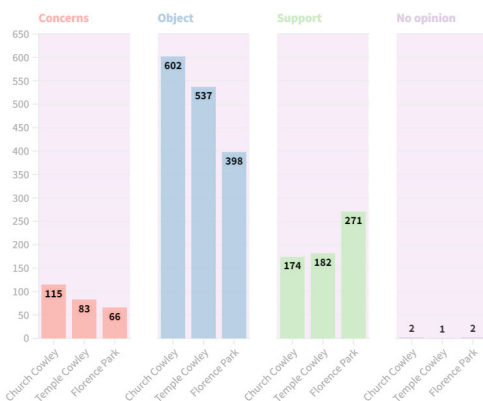
This is a summary of the arrogance of the City and County council across Oxfordshire in considering Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Traffic management policy. The result of every consultation has been ignored and there is a pervasive view across the Council that the councillors know best, and the public should obey them. The proposals the Council have introduced have been designed by third party lobbyists with minimal input from the public. The Councillors do not wish alternative views to be heard and they have comprehensively failed to obey the principles of consultation they pretend to follow.

Oxford is a medieval city that was not designed for cars, and traffic management has been practised for many years. It has one of the highest levels of active travel (walking/cycling), and many residents who rarely use cars. However, there are very active lobby groups linked to academia who have continuously promoted trendy “active travel” schemes. Arising from this all the political parties have jumped on the LTN bandwagon when the government announced potential funding during the pandemic to promote “active travel”.

First LTN – Temple Cowley, Littlemore, Florence Park – introduced in March 2021

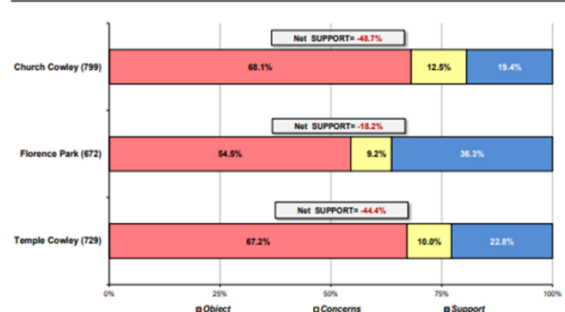
With the pandemic the local Conservative County Council were prompted by lobby groups such as Cyclox and Oxford Living Streets to establish the first Low Traffic Neighbourhood in Cowley in March 2021 using Emergency Traffic Regulations supported by funding from one of Boris Johnson’s green initiatives. The scheme was designed by the lobbyists with minimal input from the public and once introduced as a “trial”. The supporters of the schemes met with like-minded people, but opponents were given no say and there were no public meetings because of the pandemic. A formal consultation which ran from March to November 2021 after the scheme was introduced. The results showed overwhelming opposition with the Oxford Mail reporting: “The combined results revealed 63 per cent of people objected to the plans, 10.8 per cent had concerns and 25.8 per cent supported the scheme.” www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19894407.majority-residents-businesses-object-cowley-ltns-consultation-reveals/. There were 2600 respondents and the County Council’s graphs analysing this are below.

Consultation results for Cowley area's Low Traffic Neighbourhood



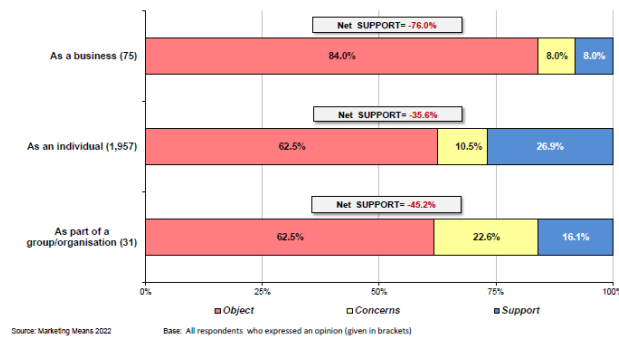
Source: Oxfordshire County Council

Chart Q5a - Please select one of the following that best describes your opinion of the experimental low traffic neighbourhoods within the Cowley Area of Oxford – split by the LTN that people said they were responding to



Source: Marketing Means 2022
Base: LTNs - All who expressed an opinion on that specific LTN

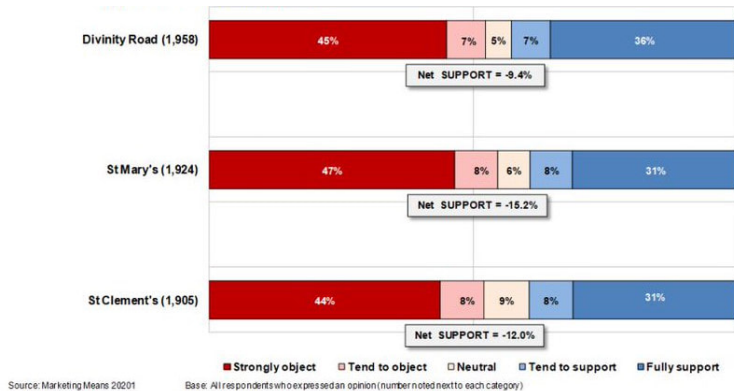
Chart Q5b. Please select one of the following that best describes your opinion of the experimental low traffic neighbourhoods within the Cowley Area of Oxford – SPLIT BY CAPACITY



This crystal-clear opposition was ignored.

Second LTN – East Oxford – Divinity Road, St Mary’s and St Clements.

The County Council then indicated it wanted to introduce a second set of LTNs across East Oxford. Residents were told it would be a trial. The design was produced by lobbyists supporting the mantra of the 15-minute city using the emergency traffic regulations (ETRO) from the pandemic. No local residents were permitted to comment or amend any of the designs, alternative proposals from some residents for a “slow traffic neighbourhood” were ignored. A consultation was launched in June 2021 with biased questions supported by a barrage of pro-LTN publicity from the council. Despite this, a clear majority 'Strongly objected' or 'objected' to the LTN proposals. As reported in the Oxford Mail, **EAST OXFORD SAYS NO TO ROAD BLOCKS**. The result of the consultation coincided with a change in County Council Leadership with administration moving from a conservative one to a coalition run by the Lib Dems, Labour and Greens. This led to a delay, and some minor tweaking of the scheme.



This new coalition soon showed their views with the cabinet member responsible publishing pro-LTN videos and being forced to recuse himself from decision making.

County Council Decisions in February 2022

In the County Council Meeting in February 2022 the County Council decided to ignore all the consultations and made the following decisions:

- a) To make the Cowley LTNs permanent despite the overwhelming opposition from residents, the clear complaints from many that their views had been ignored

- b) To proceed with the East Oxford LTNs despite the clear majority opposing the scheme, commencing in May 2022
- c) To investigate the introduction of Busgates

The county council clearly believes residents are unable to make decisions and that the county council knows best despite not living in the area. It was very noticeable that where the Liberal Democrats had sitting councillors, they dropped the LTNs in that area to help them retain their seats. This means the more middle-class areas of Headington, and North Oxford have no LTNs, but the Labour voting more working class and deprived areas the LTNs were pushed to proceed.

County Council Proposes the introduction of Busgates

The County Council has asked central government for a grant to electrify buses across Oxford. Having introduced LTNs which have forced all traffic on to the arterial roads used by Buses making the service unusable at peak times they have now stated that Busgates are the answer and have made the introduction of busgates one of the conditions for investment in new electric buses. They have stated that the LTNs are needed to justify the Busgates so they will have to remain whatever the results of the consultation (Duncan Enright).

The plans for busgates have caused immense opposition in the city from businesses and from across the county. The proposals were amended to “permit residents 100 passes per annum” to travel across their own city. A formal consultation was launched with a biased questionnaire that was aimed at proving support for the scheme.

Responses to the formal consultation on Busgates in Oxford City

5697 people responded to the consultation. The details of the demographics are shown in detail in the report. The responses were predominantly from Oxford residents, equally split between genders, and with 72% white British ethnicity, 8% declared non-white British.

Most of the questions were obfuscating and designed to prevent critical points being made. There were two places where comments were permitted these are shown below.

Table 28 asked for comment about those who might be affected:

- 3364 commented
- 51 (1%) indicated support for the proposal
- 110 (2%) did not answer and 129 had comments labelled “other” (i.e., neutral)
- the remaining 5839 comments were opposed to the scheme

Table 29 asked for comments on the benefits:

- 4814 commented
- 656 (7%) could see the benefits and a further 88 (1%) said it was important to reduce traffic
- the remaining 8537 were critical of the scheme and did not see the benefits
- it is therefore clear that over 4000 of those who commented were opposed.

The pro-LTN commissioned a You-Gov poll where they had a self-selected 259 responses that the pro-LTN lobby that commissioned the poll claimed were “representative”.

Table 30 asked “Do you have any comments on the scheme’s challenges”

- 4973 responded with opportunity to comment more than once
- 7979 (86% of the comments) clearly opposing the scheme
- 838 (9% of the comments) supporting the scheme

Table 32 asked “Do you have any other views on the proposals? “(4606 Responded)

The responses were coded by the consultation company.

- 4606 responded but individuals could make more than one comment
- 1606 of the comments were coded as explicitly opposed the scheme
- 509 explicitly were coded as supported the scheme
- 7308 comments were opposing the scheme
- 572 comments supported the scheme
- Of the 4606 who responded over 4000 opposed and less than 600 supported.

This public consultation had a far higher response which was overwhelmingly negative. The council persists in trying to minimise opposition and to pretend there is support for the scheme. Businesses are warning of closures and a major loss of trade that will mean major job-losses. The council doesn't appear to care.

What's next

The Council are planning to introduce the following schemes imminently:

- Expansion of the Zero Emissions Zone which will further damage businesses in the middle of a recession with no real benefit to te residents of Oxford
- Introduction of a Car Parking tax for all local schools and NHS facilities which will force cuts to front-line services and probably drive more teachers and NHS workers to work in other places
- Make the East Oxford LTNs permanent whatever the results of the consultation.

John Skinner, Jan 2023

Appendix 1: Oxfordshire County Council's Principle of Consultation

The council follows the principles of consultation (known as the Gunning principles):

1. Consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage. A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers.
2. There is sufficient information provided, including the reasons for proposals, to allow for intelligent consideration and response. The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response.
3. There is adequate time for people to consider a proposal, participate and respond. The length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation.
4. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.