

Low-traffic neighbourhoods in Ealing: Contested policy making in a polycentric governance environment

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Introduction

Low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) have become an unexpected political battle ground in London and beyond during the Covid-19 pandemic, becoming interwoven with contestations relating to special powers, democracy, inequality, traffic flow and density, air quality, and broader environmental, and climate change related, targets (OneEaling, 2021a; Van De Geer, 2021; Wheeler, 2021). They have caused inter and intra party-political tensions, had letters against them signed by Conservative MPs, fed broader narratives about a 'war on cars', have seen support and opposition voiced within civil society, seen civil society led marches drawing thousands, have fed into politicking in numerous local areas, and even seen a Hackney councillor receive a death threat (Britcher, 2020; Chant, 2020; Elvery, 2021; McIntyre, 2021; The Telegraph, 2021).

LTNs slot into a broader range of policies designed to help lessen negative impacts from motorised traffic. Related measures include School Streets (measures designed to reduce traffic around schools) and cycle lanes (dedicated lanes for cycling) (Ealing Council, 2014). Though the exact shape and range of measures adopted varies between time and location, an LTN could fairly be described as a group of streets where measures aimed at reducing both through and local traffic and

encouraging modes of active travel such as cycling and walking, are introduced. Measures used in implementation can include bollards, speed bumps, monitoring cameras, planters, and signage.

This article explores LTNs, and in particular contestations that have arisen around them since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. It focuses on Ealing Borough in London, where LTNs were managed via the Ealing Streetspace Programme. Conceptually, it locates events in Ealing within a broader UK polycentric governance environment where policy is navigated within a dynamic environment featuring central, regional/city, and local state institutions, along with a multi-level judiciary and contested civil society. Beginning the narrative of events in Ealing in late Spring 2020, it traces the implementation of 9 LTNs via the Ealing Streetspace Programme, campaigns in favour and against them, the use of othering language to describe those driving through neighbourhoods, the fall of the head of Ealing Council that can be attributed (at least in a proximate sense) to the implementation of LTNs, and the running of a consultation by a new Ealing Council leadership team of local residents that led to the removal of 8 of 9 LTNs within a year and a half of their initial implementation. Among other sources, this article draws from official Ealing Council documents, campaign group materials and websites, and media reporting.

This article evolves in three sections. The first section touches on literature related to LTNs and polycentric governance, locates Ealing within the broader UK polycentric governance environment, documents the positions in favour and against LTNs and notes two reasons that make the tensions arising from LTNs implemented in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, at least on first consideration, surprising. Next, it traces contestations and political and policy differences related to LTNs in Ealing. The third section draws out learning points with broader applicability. This occurs with relation to communication strategy, othering, and stakeholder engagement. It concludes by noting that the implementation of LTNs in Ealing during the Covid-19 pandemic should be considered a cautionary tale for those wishing to implement policies with an immediate direct impact on lived experiences at speed and tentatively suggests the learning points teased out in the third section may provide valuable insights for elected officials and policy makers tasked with mitigating climate change.

Literature and policy and political debates

Existing literature on LTNs has explored their implementation from numerous technical policy angles. These include their potential impact on the response times of emergency services (Aldred et al., 2020a), the impact of LTNs and other active travel measures on car ownership (Aldred et al., 2020b) and the related impact on cycling (O'Malley, 2021). Other work, meanwhile, has explored the impact of the insight of Henri Lefebvre that 'space is produced' by 'social structures' instead of 'simply existing' on one LTN in West Ealing. This work, by Robin Hickman, concluded that a 'well intentioned project, aimed at reducing traffic levels in suburban Outer London, had been poorly implemented and was perceived to have gone badly wrong' (Hickman, 2021: 365-67). The technical policy literature provides valuable insights into

the operation of LTNs, some of which are highlighted below. What this article, which has most in common with the approach of Hickman, does, however, is reflect the fact that, as Justin Parkhurst, surmising a broad consensus, asserts; 'policy making is inherently political' (Parkhurst, 2017: 65). It innovates by locating the implementation of LTNs in Ealing within an 'inherently dynamic' (Piattoni, 2009: 164) multi-level system of 'polycentric [UK] governance' that encompasses central, city/regional (in the case of this article, London as a city), and local state institutions, but also encompasses the judiciary and civil society among other actors (Jeffery, 2006; Setzer and Nachmany, 2018: 47-49). It further innovates by drawing learning points of broader relevance from the consideration of LTNs in Ealing.

Within a dynamic UK polycentric governance environment Ealing Council, one of 32 London boroughs, sits institutionally below the Greater London Authority, which itself is split between the office of the London Mayor and the London Assembly. Within the broader UK structure, the London Authority sits below central government (Institute for Government, 2021; London Councils, 2022). Beyond these three levels, there is the judiciary; itself split across various levels, with the Supreme Court at the pinnacle of the judicial system and Magistrates courts, County courts, and Family courts as the most junior courts. Two rungs below the Supreme Court is the High Court, with the Court of Appeal sat between them (Judicial Office, 2022). It is the decision of the High Court to grant judicial review to a case opposing Experimental Traffic Orders (ETOs) issued by Ealing Council to implement LTNs that features in this article. As we shall see, this polycentric governance environment also features a diverse and contested civil society. With civil society actors campaigning against LTNs responsible for the aforementioned High Court submission.

To those who support them, LTNs are an important, inclusive, tool that can help improve air quality locally and feed into broader climate change related goals: both deterring through traffic in residential areas and encouraging people to use alternative, more active, modes of transport such as walking, cycling, and public transport (Berry, 2021: 32,37,45). Such supporters note that a cross party coalition of UK politicians nationally and locally have declared a 'Climate Emergency' in recent years, with targets set to reach net zero at various points between 2030 and 2050 (Bell, 2021). Supporters of LTNs in Ealing concede that from Spring 2020 onwards mistakes were made in the implementation of, and consultation (or most accurately lack of prior consultation) about, LTNs. However, they reject the claim these mistakes undermine the value of LTNs as a policy tool (Van De Geer, 2021). In short, while not a silver bullet, LTNs, it is argued, have the potential to form part of a policy mix, as defined as a focus on 'trade-offs between policies as they impact upon' goals and policy innovation (Flanagan et al., 2011: 704), adopted to improve air quality locally and help meet broader environmental goals. They can also help facilitate social distancing as the Covid-19 pandemic continues. Perhaps the most nuanced version of this position is not a position in favour of LTNs per se, but in favour of a policy mix that leads to a drop in motorised traffic, whether this includes LTNs or not. Other ways this policy mix could be created include road pricing, further bike lanes, and changes to the amount and location of parking (Berry, 2021: 32,42; Van De Geer, 2021).

To their detractors LTNs have, during the Covid-19 pandemic, become an ill thought through and knee-jerk response to the pressures of pollution and climate change that have been forced through via special powers arising from the pandemic (Wheeler, 2021). Rather than encourage any reduction in car use, detractors claim, LTNs shift traffic from newly restricted roads onto roads bordering a newly created LTN (so called ‘boundary roads’), many of which are already busy, though this critique is contested (Neicho, 2021). As such, while it is not denied LTNs reduce traffic, and thus associated problems such as pollution, within an LTN, all that happens, it is argued, is that these problems shift onto boundary roads that remain open (OneEaling, 2021a). To such detractors, LTNs have become an article of faith to their supporters, regardless of any analysis of costs or benefits (CAMTAG, 2021).

Recent contestations around LTNs in Ealing and beyond, at least in part and on a surface level, are surprising for two reasons. Firstly, LTNs have little to do with the pandemic itself. This may seem an obvious point, but it bears some reflection. Traffic calming measures in general, and LTNs specifically, predate the Covid-19 pandemic, and, though they have certainly caused political tensions, and been at the root of policy disagreements, before, these clearly had little to do with pandemic planning. Yet, as a defining feature of international and domestic politics since Spring 2020, the pandemic has impacted and driven politics and policy in unforeseen ways (anonymized, 2020; Tooze, 2021), with events explored here one such example.

The second reason contestations around LTNs may be unexpected is that almost all major UK political actors agree on the need to reduce air pollution and mitigate climate change. Nationally in England, the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Green Party, and the Liberal Democrats all acknowledge the need to tackle localised issues such as air pollution and the structural threat of climate change (Hansard, 2019). This consensus can also be observed in other parts of the United Kingdom, with, for instance, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, and Sinn Féin all committed to reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate change (Plaid Cymru, 2021; Scottish National Party, 2021; Sinn Féin, 2019). It should be here that the Democratic Unionist Party, or at least some within it, appear somewhat of an outlier here. Former Democratic Unionist Party Environment Minister Sammy Wilson MP, for instance, claimed in November 2021 that ‘[t]he biggest fact driving climate change is the sun and earth’s relationship to changes in its orbit [...]. To suggest that our release of small amounts of CO₂ overrides these massive natural forces doesn’t make common sense let alone good science’ (Bradfield, 2021).

Reflecting the broader national consensus however, at both London (city) and Ealing (local) levels, elected officials, election candidates, and branches of national political parties active across London are, if one takes them at their word, in broad consensus about the need to improve air quality and decrease pollution locally and tackle climate change more structurally (Ealing and Hillingdon Friends of the Earth, 2021a, 2021b; Ealing Green Party, 2021; Ealing Labour 2021a, 2021b). Reflecting this, in April 2019, Ealing Council unanimously passed a motion, proposed by Liberal Democrat Councillor Jon Ball, that committed ‘to make Ealing carbon neutral by 2030’ because of a ‘climate emergency’ (Ealing Council, 2019: pt.13). In short, though they

often differ on policy detail (which is partly what this paper explores), UK politicians at a national, city, and local level all agree action is required. Thus making the furore over LTNs in Ealing particularly intriguing.

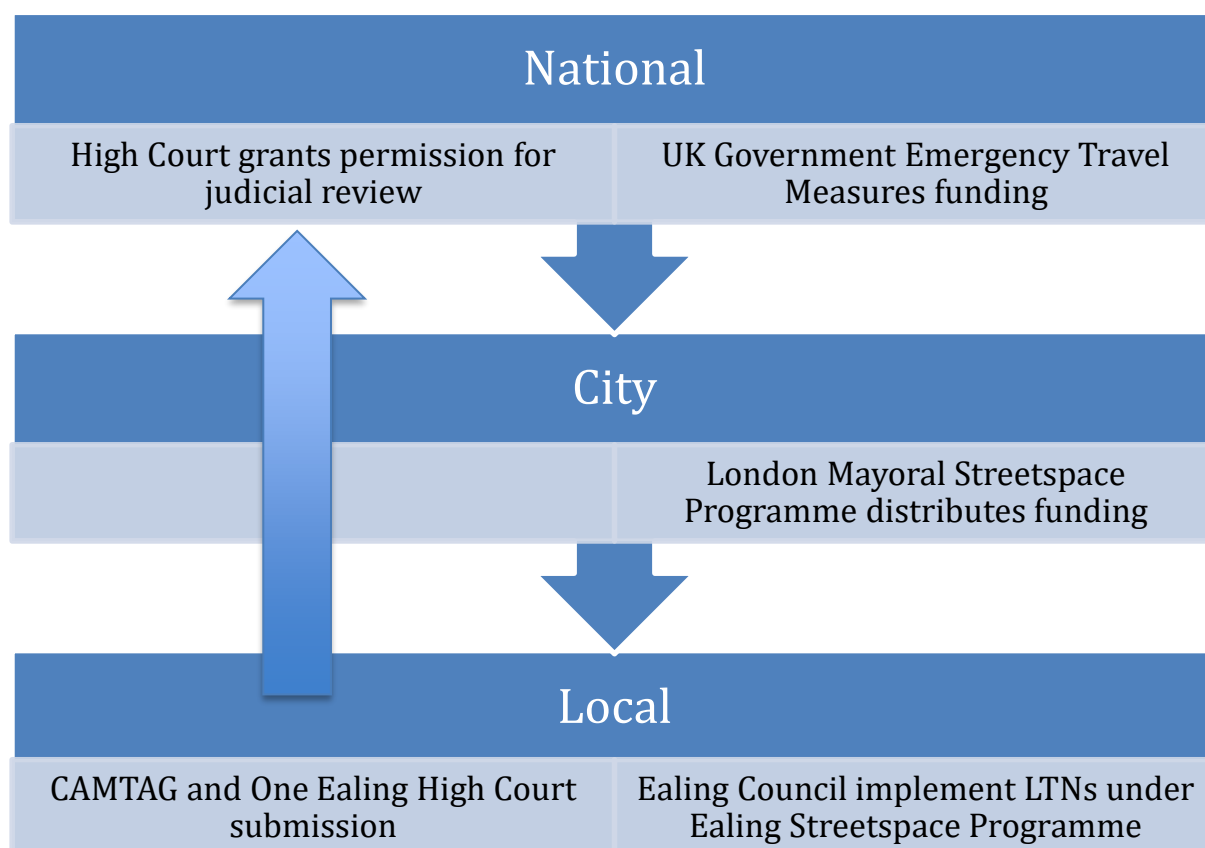
Having touched on literature related to LTNs and polycentric governance, mapped different positions on LTNs, and the broad national and local consensus on the need to adopt measures to decrease pollution and deal with climate change, this article explores the implementation of LTNs by Ealing Council during the Covid-19 pandemic. Following this, it draws out learning points for those wishing to implement policies with an immediate and direct impact on lived experiences at speed.

Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods in Ealing

The implementation and subsequent removal of multiple LTNs in Ealing can be read as an exemplar of local policy implementation within a dynamic polycentric UK governance context. As we shall see, and as shown in Figure 1, this involved funding flowing from central government to Ealing Council via a programme administered at city level by the office of the London Mayor. It also involved the lodging of a legal case with the High Court against the ETOs used by Ealing Council to justify the implementation of LTNs by local civil society actors campaigning against LTNs in Ealing, the granting of permission for judicial review by the UK High Court, and Ealing Council's revoking of its initial ETOs and the issuance of new ETOs the day before the case was due to be heard, essentially making the existing case null and void.

Setting the stage for this process at a national level, on May 12th 2020 Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, announced £250 million of funding for Emergency Travel Measures designed to speedily 'reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians in response to the [...] pandemic' as the UK began to exit its first period of lockdown in Summer 2020 (Browne, 2020). Responsibility for administering funds at city level in London fell to Mayor Sadiq Khan, who set up a programme named 'Streetspace' to do so, with guidance issued to boroughs on May 15th (Ealing Council, 2020). Locally, on June 20th 2020 Ealing Council Cabinet approved the Ealing Streetspace Programme. This programme consisted of 12 School Streets, 6 'pop-up' Cycle Schemes, and 10 LTNs, 9 of which were created (Ealing Council, 2020: 3). The stated aims were to '[e]ncourage active travel measures to enable residents to walk and cycle [...] to assist social distancing, relieve public transport capacity and reduce the need for car journeys' and to 'support the Council's recovery programme, climate emergency action plan and air quality priorities' (ibid, 4). Conforming to central government guidance, these measures were introduced under ETOs, which, per council documentation, meant it was not 'possible (or a legal requirement) to carry out the same level of pre-engagement undertaken for permanent orders.' The ETO process does, however, include 'a six-month statutory objection period from the time the ETO is published' (ibid, 5).

Figure 1: Multi-level map documenting elements of polycentric governance related to Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods in Ealing 2020-21



During the statutory objection period, consultation processes run by Ealing Council included a public engagement exercise on a website named Commonplace, email noticeboards, and a questionnaire for members of the emergency services. By late November 2020, around 11,000 people had visited the Commonplace site, with about 5,000 comments left, whilst approximately 4,750 emails were received (Ealing Council, 2020: 6). Local stakeholders such as emergency services were consulted, though because of an 'administrative error' the London Ambulance Service (LAS) was not informed at the same time as the Metropolitan Police and the London Fire Brigade, who were told 'three weeks in advance of implementation'. This error was rectified after it came to light and, according to Ealing Council, LAS 'described 'subsequent engagement as a model that could be more widely adopted' (ibid, 12). Though as we will see, this oversight continued to be an issue long after it was of any operational consequence.

As per Table 1, LTNs were first introduced under the Ealing Streetspace Programme in late July, with nine operating by mid-November. During the statutory objection period changes were made to the infrastructure used to manage LTNs, as a result of feedback from the emergency services, local residents, and local councillors. Changes included moving planters, altering signage, and installing cameras to replace bollards to facilitate emergency access (ibid, 12-13). Summing up email and Commonplace consultation responses, an Ealing Council report from November 2020

noted '[t]here has been strong support as well as strong opposition to the introduction of LTNs'. It also noted that '[f]ive out of the nine schemes are the subject of a legal challenge currently listed for hearing at the High Court in February 2021' (ibid, 5-6). This legal challenge, reflecting a polycentric governance context, arose from civil society groups OneEaling and the Coldershaw and Midhurst Traffic Action Group (CAMTAG), who aimed to reverse the introduction of LTNs under the Ealing Streetspace Programme (CAMTAG) (CAMTAG, 2021; OneEaling, 2021b).

According to OneEaling and CAMTAG, LTNs introduced in 2020 were ill thought through, negatively impacted local businesses, reduced the ability of emergency services to respond to calls in some LTNs, divided neighbourhoods, displaced traffic congestion to boundary roads, and reflected a democratic deficit. Rather than always arguing against LTNs per se, these groups highlighted problems with the implementation of them under the Ealing Streetspace Programme (CAMTAG, 2021; OneEaling, 2021a). These groups garnered significant support, organising, for instance, protest marches in September 2020 and April 2021. Press coverage estimated the September march drew hundreds, with OneEaling claiming 3,000 took part (OneEaling, 2021a; Osborne, 2021). Estimates for the April march range from 1,100-5,000 (Ealing Today, 2021b). There is also a Change.org petition against the LTNs that had over 12,000 signatures as of March 2022 (as well as a counter petition in favour of LTNs that has garnered almost a thousand signatures) (Change.org, 2021a, 2021b).

The High Court submission to challenge five ETOs was filed on 29th September 2020 by CAMTAG and OneEaling (Ealing Today, 2021a), with permission for judicial review' granted in November (Carey, 2020). On February 11th 2021, the day before the legal challenge was due to be tested at the High Court, Ealing Council revoked the initial ETOs, issuing new ones and essentially re-setting the six-month consultation clock. The council agreed to pay the costs incurred by those who challenged the initial ETOs (Ealing Today, 2021a). This was claimed as a victory by those opposing LTNs, with CAMTAG saying it regarded 'the payment of costs – and the fact that the new orders address some of the issues of emergency services access and (to a limited extent) discrimination against the disabled – as a clear admission that Ealing did not give proper consideration to the effects of' LTNs (Ealing Today, 2021a).

The initial High Court submission was filed the day after Councillor Julian Bell, then Labour Party Leader of Ealing Council, survived a vote of no confidence called by a fellow Labour Councillor (Hosseini-Pour, 2020). From Autumn 2020 to Spring 2021, there was opposition to the use of the term 'rat-running' to describe those using residential routes to drive between main roads, personal attacks against Bell, and significant vandalism of the infrastructure used to implement LTNs, with indicative graffiti on a planter reading 'abuse of power' (Osborne, 2020, 2020a). According to Ealing Council, by October 24th 2020, vandalism had cost around £30,000 (Ealing Council, 2020: 17). As we shall explore, the use of the term 'rat-running' was both ethically problematic and flawed strategically.

On April 24th 2021, the second Ealing anti-LTN protest march occurred, whilst on May 10th Bell lost a vote on his leadership of the Ealing Labour Party and was

replaced by Councillor Peter Mason as Labour Leader (Smith, 2021). On May 18th 2021 Councillor Mason was elected Leader of Ealing Council (Ealing Council, 2021d). Criticisms of the implementation of LTNs was central to the response of others to the change in leadership, with Greg Stafford, leader of the Conservative opposition, arguing ‘Mason was a prime architect of the disastrous Low Traffic Neighbourhoods’ (Stafford, 2021). Mason, meanwhile, promised to ‘lead an open, inclusive and transparent council, that engages local people in the challenges we face’ (Ealing Council, 2021d). On May 21st, Mason, and his deputy Councillor Deirdre Costigan, announced that an LTN in West Ealing (LTN21) was to be removed, with the immediate, though likely not the only, cause being roadworks in adjoining roads in the neighbouring Borough of Hounslow. The Labour Party said it remained ‘committed to active travel and tackling climate change. School streets, cycling infrastructure and low traffic neighbourhoods’ as ‘part of its agenda to tackle the climate emergency’. However it ‘reassured local people in all LTNs that they will have the final say on the trial schemes’ (Ealing Labour, 2021b).

Table 1: LTNs Implemented July-November 2020 as part of the Ealing Streetspace Programme as of March 2022

LTN Number and Location	Date of Implementation of LTN Trial	Subject to High Court Review?	Status as of December 2021
LTN 8, Olive Road	Early August 2020	No	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 20, West Ealing North	Late September 2020	Yes	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 21, West Ealing South	Late August 2020	Yes	Trial ended May 2021
LTN 25, Acton Central	Early September 2020	Yes	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 30, Loveday	Early November	Yes	Not supported by

Road	2020		majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 32, Junction Rd	Mid August 2020	No	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 34, Bowes Road	Late July 2020	No	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 35, Mattock Lane	Late August 2020	Yes	Not supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, removed October 2021
LTN 48, Adrienne Ave	Late July 2020	No	Supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, to be made permanent following consultation in Summer 2021
Deans Road and Montague Avenue LTN (subsection of LTN 21)		n/a	Supported by majority of residents in June-July 2021 consultation, to be implemented in the future

Information in table drawn from (Ealing Council, 2021a; Ealing Council, 2021b)

In June and July 2021 Ealing Council ran a consultation survey on LTNs, with the results published in August. Respondents were broken down into residents, those living on boundary roads, and others. The consultation, which had 22,000 responses, led to residents in seven remaining LTNs opposing them, with the figure eight on boundary roads, and majorities against in the other category for all LTNs. For the combined results, there were also majorities against all the LTNs. The council proposed removing the seven with majorities against them, and, as per Table 1, making LTN48 and a section of LTN21 permanent (Burford, 2021; Ealing Council,

2021b). These proposals were confirmed at an Ealing Council Cabinet meeting on September 22nd (Ealing Council, 2021e: pt.9; Ealing Council, 2021f). The LTNs selected for removal were dismantled in October 2021 (Ealing Council, 2021f; Hill, 2021).

If one adopted only implementation as a metric, then, between July and November 2020, Ealing Council could be said to have successfully introduced nine LTNs within a polycentric governance context under the Ealing Streetspace Programme, utilising central government funding distributed at a city level to do so. However, if one broadens the focus time-wise, and takes into account the ability of civil society actors to bring judicial cases, then a more nuanced and dynamic picture emerges. Indeed, between September 2020 and October 2021 OneEaling and CAMTAG lodged a case which was granted review by the High Court, Ealing Council revoked and replaced ETOs and paid the legal costs of those who challenged them, two anti-LTN protest marches occurred, petitions were launched in favour and against LTNs, LTN related inter and intra party politicking transpired, and the removal of the bulk of LTNs implemented under the Ealing Streetspace Programme took place. In short, this case-study captures a dynamic relationship between local policy implementation, party-politics, civil society, and city and national levels of government, and the potential for judicial cases to influence policy, even if such cases are not actually heard. Having reviewed these events, this article now turns to drawing out learning points with broader applicability.

Discussion

Events pertaining to the implementation of LTNs in Ealing are clearly important in and of themselves, with Ealing Council having spent money funnelled down from a central government fund, 9 LTNs having been put in place and the vast majority having been stripped out after a fractious eighteen months that, among other things, saw a petition for High Court review, protest groups being set up, petitions and consultations causing engagement from thousands, protest marches, national press coverage, £30,000 of vandalism, personal attacks and the downfall of the Leader of Ealing Council. However, beyond the stand-alone importance of these events, one can draw learning points with broader applicability for those implementing policy within a polycentric governance context. To this end, this article focuses on communication strategy, othering, and stakeholder engagement.

Communication strategy

Ealing Council clearly adopted a flawed communication strategy. As a council commissioned report from Urban Movement, a consultancy focused on urban planning, documents, it 'lost control of the public narrative' in mid-June 2020 when initial material shared with residents ensured they 'could easily grasp that some of their existing car journeys would be made less convenient but were unclear, sceptical or otherwise unaccepting about the gain that might justify the pain.' From this point, the council was unable to counter the 'negative reaction [that] dominated discourse on

social media and in other local media' because it 'had not prepared any material that could be used either to explain the need for or benefits of the LTN proposals or to counter the concerns being expressed'. As such it was unable to address 'the public engagement deficit once the LTNs had been implemented'. Furthermore, Urban Movement argue Ealing Council promotional material 'seemed to lean too hard on the pandemic as a core justification for the LTNs', while simultaneously failing to address 'predictable concern that many people would have along the lines of "You're making it harder for me to get around by car at just the time we fear to use public transport"' (Urban Movement, 2021: 8,10,18).

Looking forward, Urban Movement urged that the 'preparation of an engagement and communications plan should be a priority early task in the development of any transport/ highways scheme.' It further suggested Ealing Council strategy should include 'consistent corporate messaging of the pressing need for change in travel habits' in a manner ensuring 'the association of personal action with beneficial outcomes is [...] clear', with a further suggestion that a 'Citizens Panel for Active Travel in Ealing' be created (Urban Movement, 2021: 20). Encouragingly, these suggestions reflect the urgings of the Institute for Government to 'open up the policy process' and 'create new institutions to overcome policy inertia', which are listed among seven keys to policy success; with the former allowing a 'porous and inclusive process' that can help build a 'new consensus' and the latter breaking down 'silos that typically characterise policy making' (Institute for Government, 2012: 17-31). Given the tensions LTNs have caused in Ealing and elsewhere, such suggestions could feed into a more successful strategy aimed at engaging in useful dialogue and policy development, enable more nimble and constructive responses to civil society and judicial engagement and, one hopes, reduce the use of divisive language, which is discussed below.

Othering

Literature documents the negative effects of othering, a process which establishes 'in' and 'out' groups, thus creating hierarchical relationships to the detriment of 'out' groups (Strani and Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2018). Such othering alienates 'out' groups and is related to political polarisation (Creutz-Kämppi, 2008; Dougherty and Schraedley, 2021), while inclusive processes have been shown to increase the likelihood a policy is seen as generating 'widely valued social outcomes' (Compton et al., 2019: 123,132). Yet, embedded in official materials from Ealing Council about LTNs are the terms 'rat-run' and 'rat-running' (Ealing Council, 2021, 2021g). Used colloquially to describe a driver cutting through a residential neighbourhood to travel between two main roads, these terms have long featured in Ealing Council materials (Ealing Council, 2017: 2), and were still being used in materials prepared in August 2021 and still online in February 2022 (Ealing Council, 2021h). As such, rather than use a more neutral and less loaded alternative, Ealing Council adopted a term that labelled motorists using certain routes vermin. Moreover, even when it became clear LTNs had become a divisive issue, there was no course

correction, and such othering language has continued to be used. Interestingly, a brochure on LTNs from Transport for London, the city level body managed by the London Mayor that manages public transport and some roads in London, from September 2020 does not use the terms 'rat-run' or 'rat-running', but instead the more neutral 'short-cuts' and 'short-cut' (Transport for London, 2020). Demonstrating that the adoption of othering language is not inevitable, with alternatives available.

As we shall return to below, such othering is ethically problematic, yet it is also strategically flawed. Strategically, using such terms means that one loses any moral high ground from the outset, and leaves one open to similar attacks in return. In an op-ed published after his removal as head of Ealing Council, for instance, Julian Bell was still using the term rat-running, but tellingly he did so in a paragraph that also documented how those involved in the protest marches had 'marched to the council offices with "Julian Bell – end this hell" placards.' He further notes that 'the "Bell" and the "end" [...] [were] placed together to make a further well-loved phrase' (Bell, 2021). Such personal attacks are to be condemned, but it would be hard to deny that the continued use of the term rat-running by individuals such as Bell and institutions such as councils has also contributed to mistrust and division. Evidence of this can be seen, for instance, in placards held at anti-LTN marches, with indicative examples reading 'RESIDENTS AREN'T RATS! STOP TRYING TO CONTROL US' and 'We're NOT RATS, Remove Your TRAPS', and a banner from OneEaling used at a march reading 'Residents are not 'Rat Runners!'' (OneEaling, 2021a; Osborne, 2020a).

The use of the term rat-running is also ethically troubling. It deliberately conflates drivers taking certain routes with vermin, thus othering them and labelling them pests. Such othering, and the division it contributes to, can have real world effects. As noted above, a Hackney councillor received a death threat in relation to LTNs, while in recent years, two UK MPs have been killed in attacks carried out at their surgeries (ITV News, 2021). In wake of one of the aforementioned killings, Speaker of the House of Commons Sir Lindsay Hoyle called for political discourse that was 'kinder and based on respect' (Hoyle, 2021). Turning to the specifics of language around LTNs in Ealing, the use of the term rat-running is depressingly reminiscent of the use of terms such as 'cockroach' in widespread outbreaks of violence (Roozen and Shulman, 2014: 169). This is not in any way to compare the scale or scope of events in Ealing with such violence. Yet, political leaders at all levels have a responsibility to promote respect and adopt language that reflects this. Indeed, leaders from across the spectrum have criticised divisive language and behaviour (BBC, 2021; Starmer, 2021). Terms such as rat-running clearly run counter to such criticisms. In short, the othering represented by the term rat-running is, like the failure to engage with key stakeholders explored below, a strategic own goal, as well as ethically troubling.

Stakeholder engagement

As noted above, while carrying out its initial stakeholder engagement, Ealing Council failed to inform the London Ambulance service (LAS) it was installing LTNs as

part of the Ealing Streetspace Programme. As per media reporting, this omission came to light after Ealing Central and Acton MP Rupa Huq requested details about LTN schemes and related consultations (Ealing Today, 2020). As of November 2020, subsequent engagement was, however, characterised by the LAS as best practice. Likewise, changes were made to numerous LTNs, in part due to feedback from the emergency services (Ealing Council, 2020: 9,12). Yet, as of February 2022, the website of OneEaling contained the following claim, '[t]he Council have repeatedly claimed the emergency services have been consulted, but in practice there has been no detailed information or preparation, and duty crews have found that planters are too narrowly spaced to allow emergency vehicles through' (OneEaling, 2021b). Critiques of LTNs along these lines are often fleshed out with a picture of an ambulance crew unloading equipment at the entrance to an LTN or a picture of the back of an ambulance parked up in front of planters at the entrance of an LTN, alongside personal stories of those who have been impacted negatively by LTNs (Ealing Today, 2020; Kouimtsidis, 2020; OneEaling, 2021c). More structurally, Garrett Emmerson, who headed LAS until August 2021, noted in September 2021 that 'in certain situations low-traffic neighbourhoods have delayed responses', though he was speaking generally rather than about Ealing specifically. Emmerson also stated that 'in most cases wherever we raised issues or problems with boroughs they were very responsive to doing something about it, taking things out' (Blackburn, 2021).

It is clearly dangerous, and counterproductive, to install LTNs that impede the emergency services. Likewise, failing to inform one branch is an oversight that could have tragic consequences. Yet, the critique that there has not been substantial consultation with the emergency services does not appear to hold up to scrutiny. Likewise, research on the Waltham Forest LTN in the borough of Waltham Forest found that between 2015-2020, LTNs did not impact 'overall fire engine response times inside the LTN area', suggesting LTNs do not inherently inhibit the emergency services (Aldred et al., 2020a).

Longer term, it appears that the biggest impact of the failure to initially inform LAS is that it gave LTN opponents a line of critique that could be deployed endlessly, far beyond the time it was of operational relevance. As such, for those at any level looking to successfully implement policies at speed, whether transport related or otherwise, the experience of Ealing Council following the failure to inform the LAS illustrates the need to engage key stakeholders from the start.

Conclusion

This article has explored the political tensions related to LTNs in Ealing Borough during the Covid-19 pandemic within a polycentric governance environment. In doing, it has traced the use of central government funds (via the London Mayor's office) in the Ealing Streetspace Programme, the implementation of 9 LTNs by Ealing Council, the removal of the bulk of these, and related contestations and politicking. In doing, it has added to the literature on LTNs, providing a novel exploration of the politics relating to them, especially so in the case of Ealing. It has also illuminated how a

multiplicity of actors such as civil society groups and the judiciary can, when interacting with each other, impact policy within a polycentric governance environment. Interestingly in the case of the judiciary, the ability to feed into events even before a case has been heard has been shown. This article has suggested those seeking insights with broader applicability could reflect on the communication strategy adopted by Ealing Council, the ethical and strategic issues generated by the othering created by the use of the term rat-running, and the initial failure of Ealing Council to inform LAS.

The implementation, and in most cases subsequent removal, of LTNs in Ealing since Summer 2020 stands as a cautionary example for those working at all levels of government wishing to implement policies with an immediate and direct impact on lived experiences at speed. Though any attempt to create 9 LTNs in a single go would likely have caused some pushback regardless of when it occurred, the evidence in this article suggests that had some different choices been made, then the Ealing Streetspace Programme may have been more successful. This article further illustrates how such speedy implementation can cause curious alignments and disjunctures between national and local level political scenes. Put in place as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ealing Streetspace Programme saw funding released by a Conservative Party central government that, via a Labour Party London Mayor, was used by the Labour Party controlled Ealing Council. Locally, while not opposed to LTNs in principle, the Ealing branch of the Conservative Party has campaigned against LTNs paid for by central government funding within the Ealing Streetspace Programme.

Further research into LTNs could explore the similarities and differences between the strategies adopted by London councils in spending city level Streetspace funding, and whether events elsewhere reflect Ealing. Work could examine if events in Ealing have fed into broader perceptions of LTNs, and whether any of those who opposed the Ealing Streetspace Programme see any future for LTNs in the borough. An October 2021 press release from the Ealing Conservative Party highlighting a refusal by the Ealing Labour Party to refuse to rule out future LTNs suggests the Ealing Conservative Party would not foresee any such future, but more work is needed to confirm this more broadly (Ealing Conservatives, 2021). Looking further forward, it would be useful to understand if the tensions and campaigning that the Ealing Streetspace Programme set in motion are a harbinger of the democratic politics that may result from much larger suites of policies that likely need to be implemented to mitigate against climate change. If this is the case, then the learning points in this article may take on greater importance, with a need for elected officials and policy makers to consider how best to develop communication strategies in an inclusive manner, to avoid alienating language, and ensure best practice is followed in stakeholder engagement. Doing so may help elected officials and policy makers, whether at a local, regional, or national level, navigate inevitably tough climate change driven policy choices.

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