

The Future of the High Street

Implementing effective road-reallocation schemes that work better for local businesses

July 2023



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The mission of KR Foundation is to address the root causes of climate change and environmental degradation.

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Cover photo

Charlie Couve

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Introduction



Clear evidence exists for the various benefits of pedestrianisation and road-reallocation programmes for public life and health. By reducing motor traffic, road reallocation measures such as pedestrianisation, low traffic neighbourhoods, or school streets free up space for different uses of local streets, improving population health and the environment. They also allow for a fairer use of public resources, reducing inequality in space allocation and public investments in a context where often more than 50% of the population does not have access to a car.¹

One such use is local shopping. Growing evidence suggests that well planned improvements in the quality of public space provisions help improve the local economy and perceptions of an area, revitalising high streets and their function as socioeconomic centres for local communities.²

However, different schemes will achieve such objectives at different scales and timelines. If not carefully designed considering the specific needs and experiences of different communities, they can create unintended consequences, including for some marginalised groups. Like most measures aimed at reducing car use they generate varying levels of support, conflict and/or opposition.³ It is therefore important to understand what design and implementation processes can better support the successful implementations of road reallocation schemes for local communities and economies.

With this research we hope to provide some insights on ways to ensure effective communication and

¹ In Hackney, where the research took place, [only 35.11% of all households have access to a car or van](#). See also [Possible's study on driving in London](#).

² Lawlor EL, Tasker M, Lee R, et al. (2018) [The Pedestrian Pound](#).

³ Vitale Brovarone E, Staricco L and Verlinghieri E (2023) [Whose is this street? Actors and conflicts in the governance of pedestrianisation processes](#). *Journal of Transport Geography* 107: 103528.

implementation of these interventions for local businesses. To do so, we focused on understanding barriers and opportunities presented by the Stoke Newington Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) for local businesses, with a particular focus on engagement and communication regarding scheme implementation. Introduced in 2022, the Stoke Newington LTN is an ideal case study to investigate this theme, as it is one of the few recently introduced LTNs in the UK which includes a high street.

Researching the high street



A challenging time for the high street

The high street provides an ecosystem of social and economic functions that have been shown to be associated with public health and wellbeing. By harnessing the movement of passersby, high streets create what researchers call a 'place-based movement economy'⁴, typically supported by a range of diverse small independent retailers and businesses. At the same time, by creating a mixed-use urban environment, the high street can create opportunities for social interaction and enhanced social capital, along with more active lifestyles and access to quality local shops.

Such a complex ecosystem has also changed significantly as a result of several overlapping factors that go beyond economic conditions or consumption patterns, and are intertwined with political and cultural aspects of our society. As Dargan suggests, "footfall is therefore influenced by the composition of high street functions, the mix of convenience and comparison retail, leisure facilities, places of work, tourism [...] and the distance people are prepared to travel".⁵

For almost two decades, the performance of high streets in UK cities has been strongly influenced by two key phenomena. First, "the success of 'product aggregators', as exemplified by growth over the period of the major grocery chains and online by Amazon and others".⁶ Competition from large stores, out-of-town shopping centres and online and home delivery options meant that "some business models are now outdated and no longer viable in their historic form, whether in the high

⁴ Carmona M, Gabrieli T, Hickman R, et al. (2018) [Street appeal: The value of street improvements](#). *Progress in Planning* 126: 1–51; Carmona M (2019) [Street Appeal: The value of street improvements](#). Transport for London.

⁵ Dargan EDW (2021) [Footfall and the Territorialisation of Urban Places measured through the Rhythms of Social Activity](#). Manchester Metropolitan University, p. 19.

⁶ GENECON LLP and Partners (2011) [Understanding High Street performance](#). Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, p. viii.

street, shopping centre or out of town".⁷ Online shopping has often replaced the need for "place-based comparison shopping"⁸, offering options that are often more convenient and economically viable.

Second, consumer shopping habits have been reshaped by the economic recession. A 2011 report highlighted how "high levels of retail and landlord indebtedness and public spending cuts are creating a squeeze on consumer spending and household income".⁹ These, combined with "falling real living standards are combining with high energy and utility costs [...] create a climate of nervousness in which even those consumers with money to spend become more cautious".¹⁰ A situation not too dissimilar to that reported by the GLA in January 2023, when the Monthly Report on the London Economy highlighted that "In an indication of the continuing problems faced by retailers as the cost of living crisis bites ONS data published in January showed that the volume of retail sales fell by 1% in December. This followed on from a drop of 0.5% in November. Sales volumes are 1.7% below their February 2020 pre-pandemic levels".¹¹

This trend can be seen in the negative reading of the consumer confidence index¹², which reflects people's views on their financial situation over the past year and into the next. Despite a rise in recent months, the index remains negative overall, with signs of recovery only in the last quarter of 2023.

The above challenges have been greatly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has severely impacted the attractiveness and financial viability of high streets; more businesses are facing rising rents, and opting not

⁷ Ibid, p.43.

⁸ Dargan EDW (2021), p. 20-21.

⁹ GENECON LLP and Partners (2011), p. viii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Douglass G and Farquharson J (2023) [London's Economy Today - Issue 245 - January 2023. GLA Economics \(245\)](#), p.4.

¹² [GfK Consumer Confidence Barometer](#)

to rely on a place-based economy and footfall to ensure their survival.¹³

In this extremely challenging climate, the high street is reinventing itself, using new models of attractiveness, often linked to providing a complete experience for residents that includes a variety of interrelated activities, such as eating out or meeting others, which can help "position a town centre itself alongside online shopping, not in direct competition with it".¹⁴

However, this shift is at odds with pre-existing changes in the urban fabric dictated by car-based urbanisation, which has necessitated a separation of street functions in order to increase the amount of space dedicated to driving and parking, while decreasing shared use, play, and rest. In this context, street reallocation schemes aim to achieve multiple, interrelated objectives, both in terms of improving air quality and addressing the environmental crisis, and in terms of the multifunctional use of public space.

Road reallocations and the high street

Evidence on the relationship between road reallocation projects such as pedestrianisation or LTNs and the high street is unfortunately patchy and mostly based on single case studies.

A 2011 report by the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills highlights the challenges of providing parking when pedestrianising areas, but also suggests that "If high streets are to become places to relax and meet as well as to shop, the provision of green spaces is likely to become increasingly important".¹⁵ The same report examines two in-depth case studies which demonstrate that "[public realm] improvements had influenced behaviours in terms of making visits more

¹³ Carmona M, Gabrieli T, Hickman R, et al. (2018) [Street appeal: The value of street improvements](#). *Progress in Planning* 126: 1–51; Carmona M (2019) [Street Appeal: The value of street improvements](#). Transport for London.

¹⁴ Dargan EDW (2021) [Footfall and the Territorialisation of Urban Places measured through the Rhythms of Social Activity](#). Manchester Metropolitan University, p. 27.

¹⁵ GENECON LLP and Partners (2011) [Understanding High Street performance](#). Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, p. 64.

enjoyable; feeling safer; visiting more often; staying longer; spending more, and even some level of influence over choice decisions to live or work in the centre".¹⁶

The findings resonate with those of a TfL-sponsored study at UCL, which concluded that successful public realm improvements should have as their first priority (or bottom of the hierarchy) the improvement of the walking experience (see figure 1). Such improvements can in turn lead to increases in "retail rental values equivalent to an 'additional' 7.5% per annum" (p.6).¹⁷

A major report by Just Economics also highlights national and international evidence on the benefits of improving the walking and cycling environment for high streets.¹⁸ In particular, the report provides a wealth of evidence that "if more space is given for walking and cycling and less to cars, the absence of customers arriving by car is more than compensated by people arriving on foot or by bike". In particular, case study comparisons suggest that walking and cycling improvements can increase retail sales by up to 30%.

Finally, an earlier study by Phil Jones Associates looking at the economic impact of investment in cycling found that, on a per square metre basis, cycle parking can generate five times more retail spend than the same area of car parking.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid, p.65.

¹⁷ Carmona M (2019) [Street Appeal: The value of street improvements](#). Transport for London, p.5. (also in: Carmona M, Gabrieli T, Hickman R, et al. (2018) [Street appeal: The value of street improvements](#). Progress in Planning 126, p.2).

¹⁸ Just Economics (2022). [Delivering Value. A quantitative model for estimating the true cost of freight via three transport modes](#).

¹⁹ Raje F and Saffrey A (2016) [The value of cycling](#). Department for Transport.

Context:

The Stoke Newington LTN



Located between the Clissold and Stoke Newington London Electoral Wards, the Stoke Newington LTN is a particularly interesting scheme as it includes a wide residential area and a high street (See fig. 1). Stoke Newington Church Street (Church Street) runs through the centre of the area, with a bus gate at the central point of the street, at the junction with Lordship Road. The residential areas north and south of Church Street are filtered using modal filters, creating five 'low traffic zones'.

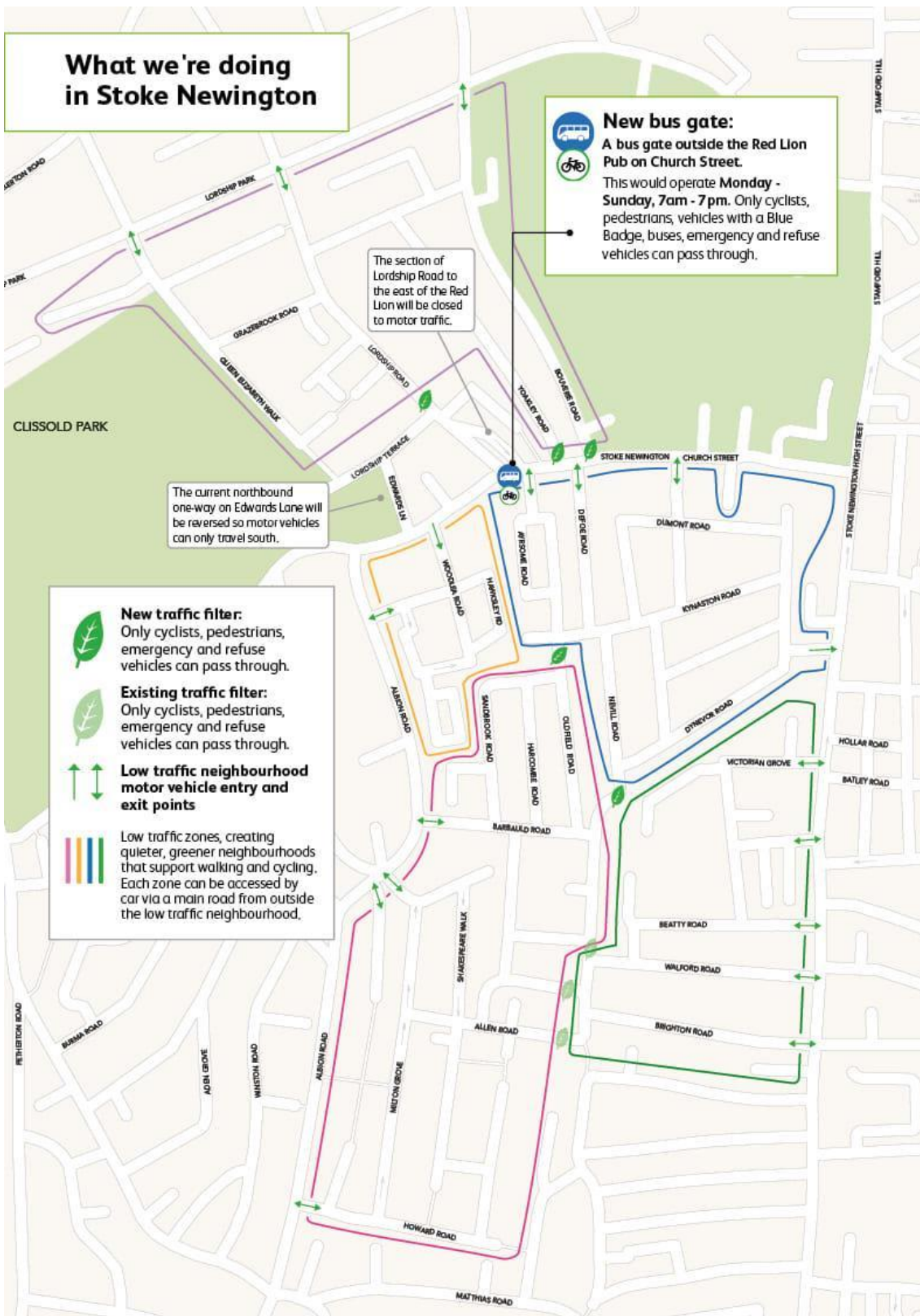


Figure 1: Area map (Source: [Rebuilding a Greener Hackney](#))

Church Street is an interesting case study because, according to the council, it “fulfils many different functions. It is a busy town centre, it is a B-road (B104)

together with Albion Road, it hosts a number of local amenities including schools, Stoke Newington Fire Station, Stoke Newington Town Hall and it is an important street for bus services and walking and cycling routes, amongst other functions. The frontages on either side of the street consist of a mix of residential and commercial premises, including shops on the bottom floor and flats above”.²⁰ The area south of Church Street was filtered as part of an earlier, smaller scheme, meaning that Church Street acted as a boundary road before the new LTN was introduced.²¹

Together with Church Street, the LTN covers an area which is mostly residential, with some shops in Albion Parade and Kynaston Road and a few other local restaurants and businesses on the residential roads.

Based on the 2021 Census²², the area appears more white and wealthy compared to the rest of Hackney, but relatively deprived in a London (and even more so in an English) context. The council report describes the area’s demographics as follows: “Compared to Hackney as a whole, both the Clissold and Stoke Newington wards have relatively more adults and less young adults/children, proportionately more white British and fewer black African and Caribbean people, and unemployment in these wards is proportionately lower than the Hackney average. Looking wider, the Clissold ward is within the 40% most deprived wards in London, and is just outside the top 20% of English wards in terms of deprivation. The Stoke Newington ward is within the 30% most deprived wards in London, and is within the 20% most deprived wards in England”.²³

²⁰ Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm (2023) [OFFICER KEY DECISION CHE S122 – STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET BUS GATE AND LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD \(LTN\)](#). Hackney Council, p.5.

²¹ i.e. Church Street was at the perimeter of the existing low traffic area (see pre-existing filters in Figure 1). Source: Ibid.

²² Office for National Statistics (2021). [Ethnic group – Census Maps](#).

²³ LBH Policy & Strategic Delivery Team (2023) [Stoke Newington Ward Profile \(E05009385\)](#). Hackney Council.

The Stoke Newington LTN, a timeline

The Stoke Newington LTN scheme was firstly introduced as a trial scheme in September 2021, aiming to: reduce traffic, improve air quality, and make it easier to walk, shop and cycle in the area.²⁴

As visible in figure 1, the trial scheme included:

- a 7am to 7pm bus gate on Stoke Newington Church Street with a number of exemptions²⁵
- a further five 24-hour traffic filters, allowing only pedestrians, cyclists, emergency and waste vehicles through, in surrounding roads.²⁶

The LTN was made permanent in March 2023 after an 18 month trial period (see next section). As part of this revision, Hackney Council also introduced improvements to walking provision including widened footways, raising the carriageway to footway level in portions of Church Street, new trees and a number of parklets.²⁷

Engagement events and processes

The idea of a Stoke Newington LTN emerged as part of an earlier proposal for a Low Emission Neighbourhood Project funded by the Mayor's Air Quality Fund. The scheme was announced in June 2019 with the objective of reducing air pollution in Stoke Newington. In the early stages of development there were four local pop-up events focusing on general environmental issues in the Stoke Newington area. This was followed by a two-month engagement programme in January and

²⁴ Hackney Council (2023) [Stoke Newington low traffic neighbourhood](#) | Hackney Council.

²⁵ Exemptions to the traffic filter include: Buses as public service vehicles, Emergency service vehicles, Council waste services, Hackney residents with companion e-badge, or who are blue badge holders and have registered one vehicle for an exemption permit.

²⁶ Lordship Park at the junction with Lordship Terrace, Yoakley Road at the junction with Stoke Newington Church Street, Bouverie Road at the junction with Stoke Newington Church Street, Oldfield Road between Kynaston and Sandbrook Road

²⁷ Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm (2023) [OFFICER KEY DECISION CHE S122 - STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET BUS GATE AND LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD \(LTN\)](#). Hackney Council; Hackney Council (2023) [Stoke Newington low traffic neighbourhood](#).

February 2020, including an online interactive map welcoming comments (on Commonplace), and a community workshop at the end of January 2020 that took place at Stoke Newington Town Hall.

Following these engagement activities, the officers' response was that there was broad public support for the objectives of the scheme, primarily to reduce pollution in Stoke Newington.²⁸ Ideas proposed included a variety of design interventions and modifications to existing infrastructure. It was agreed that the engagement activities were in line with DfT and TfL guidance around engagement as part of an Experimental Traffic Order.

Subsequently, in September 2020 the Experimental Traffic Plan (ETP) lasting 18 months was approved, containing the scheme objectives, and presenting the evidence base and justification for the scheme. The ETP was shared with statutory stakeholders including emergency services, schools, DfT/TfL guidance, other stakeholders including local groups and charities, and businesses. Engagement with local businesses took the form of a Delivery and Servicing Study, conducted by officers collecting video evidence and making observations. A survey was distributed to businesses, seeking information about their delivery and loading practices and requirements. The additional engagement with businesses described by Hackney Council consists of the events and the commonplace website in January/February 2020.²⁹ The type of engagement conducted with businesses seems to differ notably to the engagement with other stakeholders; these often included specific meetings where proposals were presented to the stakeholder, and they were invited to provide specific feedback. As part of the process, residents and businesses were able to give formal feedback until 31 March 2022.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

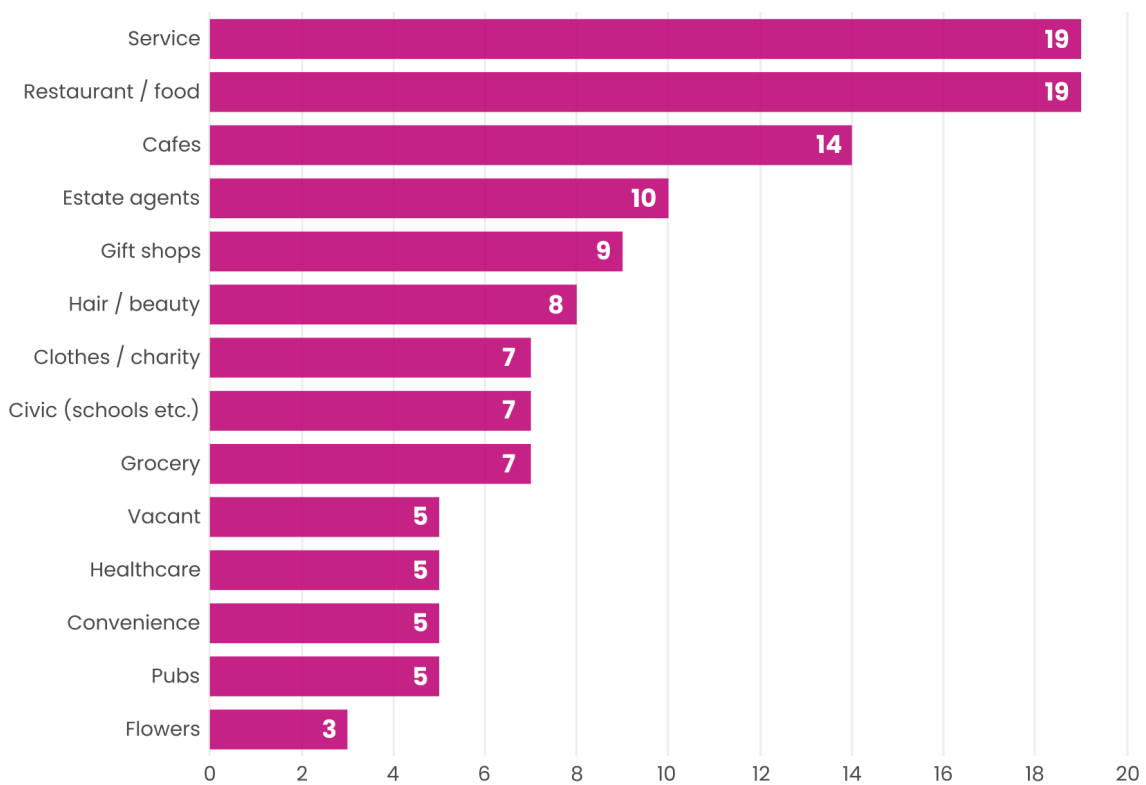


Figure 2. Types of businesses in Stoke Newington (authors' elaboration)

Media coverage of the LTN

The Stoke Newington LTN has been covered extensively by local media, such as the Hackney Gazette, and the Hackney Citizen. Articles are generally published at the same time that key decisions are made or reports published by the council. For example, following the release of proposals for the bus gate and modal filters, the Hackney Gazette notes that initial “reactions from Stoke Newington business owners [. . .] have been overwhelmingly negative”, illustrating these with quotes, and also providing pro-LTN comment from Councillor Mete Coban who is in charge of Transport and Public Realm.³⁰ The Hackney Gazette also identifies a discordance between businesses’ and residents’ opinions on the LTN, highlighting negative and positive anecdotes obtained through interviews.³¹ East London Lines also highlights this split, reporting on the council’s publication of the Officer Decision Document which

³⁰ Hackney Gazette (2021). [‘It’s horrifying’: Stoke Newington responds to LTN plan](#)

³¹ Hackney Gazette (2021). [Residents’ and businesses’ split over Stoke Newington LTN](#)

documents the survey results and shows an almost 50/50 split between those in favour of keeping the measures and those in favour of removing them.³² Other key pieces of information and data are reported, such as the uptick in footfall, the reduction in traffic³³, and the increased number of PCN fines issued across the borough as part of the borough-wide LTN strategy.³⁴

³² East London Lines (2023). [Locals divided as Stoke Newington LTN made permanent](#)

³³ Evening Standard (2022). [Pedestrian and cyclist numbers soar in Stoke Newington Church Street after traffic restrictions introduced](#)

³⁴ Hackney Gazette (2022). [How much has Hackney Council made in LTN fines?](#)

Study methodology



To better understand businesses' views and perceptions of the LTN engagement process, we interviewed several local businesses, selected using a 'random sampling' technique. This method was preferred since: 1) we did not know the full set of variables influencing the perception and views of the shops of interest and 2) asking directly without a screening survey was more likely to be a successful recruitment strategy to capture the views of shop owners without strong feelings on the intervention.

All businesses were assigned a number, and participants were selected using a random number generator (random.org), with the aim of interviewing a minimum of six businesses on Church Street and two in the wider area. Eight was considered an appropriate number due to the relatively small study area and the limited time and resources of the project, and we hoped it would sufficiently reflect a diversity of experiences.

We used a dynamic approach to recruiting – if one business we selected and approached was not interested in participating, we would select another using the same method. Overall, we approached 26 businesses; 11 of the businesses we selected did not want or had no time to participate in the research, and seven did not respond to our engagement. Unfortunately, one participant dropped out at a later stage, so the final sample of seven businesses, included six on Church Street and one in the wider area.

The interviews took place in May 2023 and lasted 60–90 minutes. Questions covered specific business needs, sales and delivery patterns, involvement in the council's engagement processes, their views and perceptions of the process, and their views on the impact of the scheme on themselves and other businesses in the area, including any recommendations they had for improving the scheme and the engagement process.

Interview findings were complemented by the authors' in-depth knowledge of the area, and a review of a second dataset containing 20 walking interviews with Stoke Newington residents on their experiences and perceptions of the LTN, conducted as part of a broader study on the impacts of the LTNs in London.³⁵ We also approached Hackney council for an interview but did not receive a response in time for this report.

Our final sample were all independent businesses who reflected the relative diversity on Church Street, in terms of the type of goods or service, as well as the length of time they have been operating. This included:

- Two gift shops, one which moved to the area fairly recently, and one more established. Both of these businesses rely on customers visiting the shop in person, and both receive small-batch deliveries made by couriers.
- Two service-based businesses, which have been on Church Street for several decades. Part of these businesses' income comes from servicing the local area; one of them relies on several vans for carrying equipment and tools to site; the other deals with customers mostly online. Some of their service also comes from passing tradespeople or maintenance people who may need to purchase, collect or bring them materials.
- One specialised food shop that has been operating for eight years, selling fresh produce. They rely on daily deliveries which are often made at night or early in the morning, but with some daytime deliveries of dried goods. They have a mostly local clientele, with many regular customers coming by foot.
- One independent restaurant that has been on Church Street for almost a decade. They are open evenings only, four weekdays and one weekend day, with fluctuating weekday custom, but very busy weekends. The clientele is both local and

³⁵ University of Westminster (2022). [Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in London Research Study](#).

from further afield. Their deliveries are daily, with food and produce deliveries made during the night or early morning, but alcohol and dried goods arriving in the afternoon.

- One specialised goods shop on one of the adjacent roads, operating for about a decade and relying primarily on local customers walking to the shop.



Figure 3. Church Street. (Photo credit: Charlie Couve)

General perception of the aims and effects of the scheme



Impacts on business operations

With over 100 different businesses, Church Street combines many different needs related to different business configurations, deliveries and customers' patterns, shop owners' travel habits and needs.

For some of the businesses interviewed, after an initial adjustment period following the LTN implementation, there has been little change to daily operations or footfall. Others are however facing new challenges.

Travel times and costs

As intended, and in order to discourage car use, travelling to addresses within the LTN now requires more circuitous journeys. This also applies to local business owners who now face longer travel times to reach the area. For example, one of the interviewees, Liz expresses a personal frustration and links ease of driving to the suitability of the area for business success:

"We travel to work by car and we used to travel to work, it used to take 30 minutes, 30, 35, maybe on a bad day, 40. Now we have to factor in at least an hour [...] just getting in and out of Church Street is challenging. It's just really, it is not a place for cars. It's not a place for people to do business really" (Liz).

Another shop owner extends the complaint to broader scale policies intended to discourage car use and their impacts on the costs faced when using a car:

"Occasionally I will need to drive because I'll be moving furniture or stock or something that I need for the shop, so occasionally I will need to take my car in. I generally will only do that at a weekend because it's easier generally from a traffic point of view. So we've got the LTN and ULEZ and parking charges, everything's increased. I have no choice, when I have to go in by car, I

have to do it by car so it just makes doing business much more expensive when I have to do that”.

Longer journeys by car or van within the area also mean that businesses who offer local services have reduced car trips in favour of other modes. For example, one of the businesses that offers a specialised service to residents reports frustration with the more circuitous routes required to travel to residential roads by car. This meant they are now using porters walking in the area with rucksacks and sack barrows for some journeys or combining more journeys together to reduce the total number of individual trips. Also Liz walks to local addresses when possible:

“It’s a challenge. Getting [to local addresses] is a problem and of course parking is also a problem once you get there. If something is in walking distance, we would absolutely walk. But carrying stuff [becomes extremely challenging]” (Liz).

To support those local journeys with tools or equipment, the council has introduced a new cargo bike rental scheme with two cargo bikes available for rental just off Church Street.³⁶ This has however been received with little confidence by some businesses. For instance, Fred services the local area and carries lots of tools in a van, and does not have faith in the security of the cargo bike boxes to protect them:

“We can’t ride bikes because of too many tools, too many thieves that would relieve us of all our tools in these cargo bikes, because they’re just a bit of plastic or whatever it is . . . all you’ve got to do is put a screwdriver and turn it and it’s open” (Fred).

Similarly, Liz is adamant that cargo bikes are not a safe way of travelling around:

“No. No. No. I don’t think they’re safe, so the answer to that is, “No.” I wouldn’t ask my staff to do that, no. No. Definitely not” (Liz).

These concerns might reflect a lack of trust in an emerging urban logistics option that is quickly

³⁶ Cargo Bike Share (n.d.). [Introducing the UK’s first cargo bike share pilot.](#)

establishing itself in London, the UK and internationally.³⁷ There are many examples of tradespeople and service industry using cargo bikes on a regular basis, providing the same service they would by van. Brought by Bike is a directory of companies and tradespeople that use cargo bikes, and includes gardeners, florists, and plumbers.³⁸ A notable example in London is The Cycling Sparks, an electrician who uses an e-cargo bike to carry equipment and move between jobs, with benefits including reduced costs and faster and easier journeys.

³⁹

Together with more circuitous routes, those businesses that use motorised vehicles for personal or delivery purposes also express concern about higher traffic volumes on the high street and other main roads. Liz continues to stress their frustration:

“The main problem is just traffic. The traffic on Manor Road, in the afternoons, I really don’t know where it comes from, but the traffic on Church Street, it’s often taken us 25 minutes to get from Kersley Road to Stoke Newington high street Stamford Hill. Just in traffic. That can’t be good for anybody. It’s certainly not good for the environment. Certainly not good for the people who live on Church Street” (Liz).

³⁷ Verlinghieri E, Itova I, Collignon N, et al. (2021) [*The Promise of Low-Carbon Freight. Possible.*](#)

³⁸ Brought By Bike (2020). [What is Brought By Bike?](#)

³⁹ Energy Saving Trust (2022) [The Cycling Sparks.](#)



Figure 4. The cargo bike rental scheme in Church Street.
(Photo credit: Charlie Couve)

Deliveries

Some businesses describe how deliveries have become problematic primarily due to two factors: the higher volume of traffic, and the restrictions on vehicles passing along the length of Church Street. Fred faces higher delivery costs and also more unreliable services:

“We used to get deliveries first thing in the morning and now it’s hit and miss, depending on how much traffic there is on a road and where they’re coming from. If they’re in Green Lanes they won’t walk down, because it would take them too long” (Fred).

Similarly, while Eric gets most of their deliveries at night and these have been unaffected, they report missing some of the extra deliveries from smaller companies that arrive less frequently: “it’s gone downhill massively. Because if they’re having to deliver down the street, there’s such a massive detour to get to me” (Eric). The inability of delivery drivers to pass along the length of Church Street means that multi-drops become much

harder, for instance when delivering to multiple businesses on both the east and west sides of the street.

However, most interviewees consider delivery operations to be out of their control and affecting them only marginally, with many delivery drivers having now 'adapted to the changes' two to three months after LTN implementation. For Jen, "Now I feel like they've kind of got used to it, so they know they have to drive around, make a big errand, and it's better". Only a minority seem to face substantial challenges that, for some, would require adjustment to the scheme. For example, Martha reports of other businesses:

"[They] get regular deliveries and have to be in a certain refrigerated van. It's their van but their business permit, it's ridiculous, their business permit slot is one side of the LTN or it's down a side road. So their whole delivery system has been completely upended and takes them a lot longer, it just doesn't make sense. They need to have concessions really" (Martha).

As research and policy suggest, motorised delivery vehicles are a major nuisance in urban areas, contributing substantially to greenhouse gas emissions, pavements obstruction, generating corrosion of public space and being often involved in fatal collisions.⁴⁰ It is therefore crucial to consider how road-reallocation schemes can also facilitate a shift towards reduced motorised delivery trips for the future, as those also contribute substantially to the climate and public life crisis.⁴¹ Although challenges experienced by some individual businesses in Stoke Newington should be addressed (see Recommendation section), they also raise wider questions about whether specific choices in goods delivery are compatible with sustainable urban futures. In such a sense, for example, Liz's descriptions of the challenges that another shop is facing can be read also as a prompt to rethink which type of vehicles are used and for what purpose:

⁴⁰ Linton C, Fuller R and Bray J (2018) *White Van Cities*, Urban Transport Group.

⁴¹ Verlinghieri E, Itova I, Collignon N, et al. (2021) *The Promise of Low-Carbon Freight*, Possible.

“The flower shop has deliveries, massive deliveries. I think she has them on a Friday and maybe she has them on another day of the week. I mean, they are massive trucks that come from Holland or they come from somewhere, I don’t quite know where, and they’re dangerous on the street. They have to- I don’t know how they get out of Church Street, actually. Yes, there’s just no way” (Liz).

The slow acceptance and adoption of cargo bikes for local businesses, while not always straightforward, can be seen as another promising impact of the LTN. Martha talks about how the Stoke Newington Business Association (the SNBA) is considering using Zedify, a local cargo bike operator, to run local deliveries. One member of the SNBA noted how “we’ve all said it will be really beneficial if we had a vehicle that could go through the LTN, that could go through the bus gate . . . That could be a really positive thing that comes from the LTN” (Martha).

As previously described, there are several examples of tradespeople and service industries using cargo bikes very successfully. ZED Waltham Forest is also a good example of how a formal partnership between a local authority (Waltham Forest) and a cargo bike operator (Zedify) can provide a very local service to businesses in an area with traffic restrictions for motor vehicles.

In terms of zero-emissions vehicles, Fred describes how “we spent another 10 grand on top of- instead of buying a diesel van we bought an electric van. We were under the assumption that we could go through the [LTNs] and we could go through the rainbow, because we had a 100% electric van” (Fred). Hackney council does not make exemptions for electric vehicles (EVs), explaining on their website that: “Permitting electric vehicles to pass through filters would be contrary to the scheme’s aims as it would reduce road safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists. It is also important to note that tyres and brake wear on all vehicles are still a significant contributor to particulate matter pollution.”⁴² This

⁴² Hackney Council (2021). [A cleaner, greener and safer Stoke Newington – your questions answered](#)

consideration has foresight particularly with the halting of non-EV sales by 2030 in the UK, and that EVs do little to reduce issues of congestion and road safety.

Roadworks

When considering concerns and complaints with longer travel times it is also important to account for other exogenous factors and events additional to the changes introduced with the LTN. One example of this is a recent building collapse on Stoke Newington high street, which saw the high street closed and traffic diverted. As interviews with residents also clearly highlighted, changes in levels of traffic are often linked to ongoing roadworks in the area. As our interviewees recognise, these complicate the situation for shop owners who drive to work in the morning or delivery drivers:

“The other thing that has happened at the same time and is something that did seem to kick off during lockdown, is the council and all the utilities companies and the IT infrastructure companies seem to embark on a major programme of digging, digging the roads and the pavements up. It made sense during lockdown, the roads were very quiet. But it seems to have gone on and on and on. The number of times other than the bus gate traffic has been restricted on Church Street on the high street and every time that happens there's a knock-on effect and it creates gridlock” (Victor).

Impacts on customers and the area

Interviewees have mixed feelings regarding the LTN, with some supporting whilst others opposing the scheme, as well as different perspectives on how the area has changed as a consequence.

Air quality

For the vast majority of participants, there is agreement on the reduced volume of traffic in Church Street when the bus gate is operating. Many welcome the subsequent reduction in local levels of air pollution. Eric

feels air pollution levels are reduced and enjoys the reduced level of traffic:

"I really like the lack of traffic, I used to have to wipe off this black dust on the front of my shop every week, and it's not quite as bad. It's still there to a degree, but it was really bad, like really, really bad. So you're inhaling those particulates I guess. And now it's not so bad" (Eric).

Similarly, Jen is positive towards the reduction of motor traffic which was affecting their trade:

"Before, it was always like a massive traffic. Not always, but there was often the sounds of engines and it was sometimes smelly and I couldn't even hear customers. Now it's nice because it feels very relaxed and chilled" (Jen).

They are also positive about the widening of the pavement, which has made the area "nicer for people to come here" (Jen). They continue:

"It's also nice that now we can see lots of families cycling together, they feel safer on the street. So there are a lot of things. [...] I'm not sure if it's a positive impact, but I like, as I mentioned, the new- because I understand they want to create this more- it's greener now, I like that they've put the trees, it looks nicer. They've widened the pavement. So also this aspect, I like it as well for my business, but I'm not sure how effective it is. It's just more pleasant for the eyes" (Jen).

Martha also feels now they are able to leave their door open thanks to reduced level of passing traffic.

"In terms of the pollution and what's happened, generally it is better. I know it's better because we tend to have our door open, it's better for business and we're right by the traffic lights. So in the afternoons there was always generally a constant stream of traffic sat at the traffic lights and particularly the buses are the worst things sat there idling" (Martha).

However, Martha is also keen to remark that effects in the area are more nuanced and that localised reduction

in air pollution levels are not to be celebrated uncritically:

“These issues aren’t black or white, it’s not clear cut at all, but if you say anything on either side, you just get – well, particularly if you say, “Actually” – although it might have eased the pollution for Church Street on the surrounding roads and the boundary roads, it hasn’t.” (Martha).

Comparing Martha and Larry shows how there is much variation between individual experiences and perceptions of the environmental effects of the LTN. Both shops are close to the high street, and whilst Martha experiences improved air quality, Larry finds that:

“I mean maybe further down the road, yes [air quality has improved], but here we are so close to the high street and there is the William Patten school which is huge. I don’t know, probably I would guess the air quality has deteriorated because the traffic is insane, it’s insane” (Larry).

With levels of air pollution varying at a very localised level, these recounts show the complexity of accurately depicting air pollution levels and could be accompanied by the use of real-time air quality monitors to complement the wide-range monitor results available based on air quality modelling, such as the ones produced by Hackney council’ showing improvements in the area.⁴³

Footfall

The perception of a quieter road is also associated with reduced footfall during weekdays, which all the interviewed shop owners noted. Jen finds the atmosphere during the week problematic for their business, “It’s just like now it feels there are no people during the week. There’s no cars, I feel like I live in a tiny village, which is nice but then there’s no people in the shop so I don’t have sales” (Jen). Similarly, others associate such quiet with the loss of customers who

⁴³ Heredge J and McGurk L (2022) [Hackney Stoke Newington Church Street Low Emission Neighbourhood Air Quality Modelling Study](#). AECOM.

used to drive to and park in the area to access local shops. Jen continues mentioning some friends who lived in another London area and used to come to Church Street,

“[...]but they actually stopped coming to Church Street because some of them were driving with kids and now there is - because you see, the council didn't provide any kind of extra parking spaces. They closed the street, so now it's impossible to park around here, so actually they've stopped coming to Church Street for shopping, they go to different areas like Chatsworth Road” (Jen).

Not everyone however feels that the lack of parking or car access has impacted customers' choices. For example, Victor however does not agree with Jen's narrative, and believes the bus gate has only minimally impacted footfall:

“I don't think I'm alone, Church Street businesses that most of your customers arrive on bike or on foot. Where do you park on Church Street? If you're coming from any other direction you can park in the side roads in the direction you're coming from and walk onto Church Street. No one was parking on Church Street [...] even before LTNs, where did you park your car? Residential permit parking has been around in most of London for much longer than LTNs have and it was just as effective in preventing driving wherever you wanted by car because you couldn't park it. If you did have to park it, you had to pay a huge amount of money to park it. It's much better to walk or take public transport” (Victor).

For others, the loss of customers is also related to the complexity of travelling by car to and in the area, especially in the bedding in phase and before the signage was changed following businesses' feedback (see later). For example, Martha remembers some old customers that stopped coming to her shop after the scheme was implemented because of fear of being fined:

“One of the biggest things that made me sad was a lot of our older customers and we have, in the weekday, a lot of older generation customers who will come every

single week for a couple of cards. And one of the main reasons they come is just to chat. And I think that's a really important part of our being part of a community. And so it was often a little old couple and they would obviously come and they would park, so live locally and just do their little shopping on Church Street and go. They stopped coming because they were scared, they got put off, and so many conversations I have with people, they would say, "I just don't bother anymore, because I don't know, I don't understand the whole LTN thing, I don't know where I can and can't go and I don't want to get fined." So I think it's put a lot of people off" (Martha).

Finally, two interviewees believe that reduced car journeys on Church Street means shops also lost visibility from those driving by. Liz believes this is the reason other shops are facing challenges in the area:

"I say the lack of traffic on Church Street, people don't see the shops any more. People don't know they're there, people don't know that new shops have opened. It's just, you know, people on the- well, I guess maybe people on the bus will see shops but if we want people to come for something to Church Street, they don't want to come. People don't want to come to Church Street any more because it's too complicated" (Liz).

Martha makes a similar point:

"The reason you have a business on a high street is the passing traffic, because it might take someone like 100 times to go past your shop and then one time they'll decide to stop. And then once they've stopped and they've come in, then they become a regular customer. It's a long game" (Martha).

However, it is unclear how noticing a shop from a car would be different from bus journeys in Stoke Newington. For example, Jen noticed their customers "see the shop from a bus and then another time they get off here and then they come because they were curious by the window" (Jen).

Moreover, despite the perceived reduction in shops' visibility thanks to motor traffic, it is worth highlighting the data that Hackney council have been collecting on Church Street before and after implementation of the LTN. The council reports a reduction in vehicle movements by 53% over 24h and by 60% when the bus gate is operating (i.e. from 7,157 vehicles to 2,833 between 7am to 7pm), and over the same time period, pedestrian footfall increased by over 1,000 a day, to 7,373, and cycling by 38% to 2,362.⁴⁴ The data resonates with existing evidence that "the absence of customers arriving by car is more than compensated by people arriving on foot or by bike".⁴⁵ A previous study in San Francisco shows the first trial 'parklet' increased pedestrian traffic in the area by 37% on weeknights and increased people walking with bikes at the weekend by 350%. A similar scheme in Shoreditch, London, increased takings in an adjacent shop by 20%.

Whilst this data offers a useful insight into the decline in vehicle movements and uptick in active travel movements, the implications of this on business are hard to discern and the on-the-ground experiences and perceptions of business must nevertheless be taken seriously. However, as the next section explains, it is again difficult to discern the extent to which exogenous factors are contributing to reduced business activity.

A complex combination of factors

Although some businesses feel that the scheme is potentially responsible for a drop in footfall, most recognise that it is very hard to separate the impact of different factors or that "it's not really anything to do with the LTN" (Eric).

Businesses in London and nationally have been facing substantial challenges since the early 2000 and especially since 2020, with abrupt changes in customers' behaviours, needs and cash flows. As

⁴⁴ Hackney Council (2023) [Stoke Newington low traffic neighbourhood](#).

⁴⁵ Lawlor EL, Tasker M, Lee R, et al. (2018) [The Pedestrian Pound](#), p.5.

mentioned, the increasing use of internet shopping affected some customers, with Fred remarking:

“The internet is a big scourge for us, but we’ve accepted it. People come in, people go, “What’s that, what’s this, how much is this, how does that work.” We’re very friendly, we’ll tell them because that’s the way we are. And they’ll buy [the same item] on the internet for two-thirds of the price. Sometimes, occasionally they buy it cheaper than we buy it. But that’s the internet for you” (Fred).

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these changes. Martha recalls the time when the scheme was firstly implemented and its complex relation with the Covid lockdowns:

“In terms of when [the LTN] was first implemented, there was quite a few things that went on at that time. It was the September after all of the COVID restrictions lifted, it was that summer, it had been the first summer that people had gone away, and then September was the first September that people going back to school. We’d had the boost when we’d all reopened, we had a boost of trade, people were still working at home, but then that September people went back to school and started to go back to offices. So then we suddenly lost that trade too and then we had all the confusions around the road, so I think all of that mixed together at the same time meant we were all really down. We’ve got a WhatsApp group and all the businesses were just going, “Oh my God, what’s going on? Oh my God, we haven’t got any trade.” I think there was a whole combination of things that happened so I wouldn’t just blame it on the LTN, but I think the timing of it from a business point of view was really bad” (Martha).

The fact that during and immediately after the Covid pandemic local businesses maintained a good level of trade, or even a better level of trade than usual, created a sharp contrast with changes to customers’ lives and the area. However, after the lockdowns ended and an initial peak, many businesses, as Martha mentioned, lost trade; “I think the economic reality of the pandemic

actually started affecting it" (Victor), coinciding also with the first introduction of the LTN.

The situation has continued with the currently intensifying cost-of-living crisis, which has affected business operations and in particular the small and specialised retailers who represent the majority of businesses in Church Street. As Jen remarks:

"People stopped buying products, so it's been quiet recently. Obviously during the pandemic everyone was staying home so they were spending more on the household, but now they are more careful with buying things. My shop is not a shop with things you need, really, it's something that you fall in love with and you want to have it because it's unique or pretty, more like a decorative object. So there are a lot of different factors" (Jen).

Local businesses are facing increasing operational costs. Even in our small sample, three out of seven businesses had changed location in Church Street, often moving a few blocks away or having moved away from another area, due to increasing rent costs or landlords refusing to renew leases. This is not surprising given the general change in the area in which, as Larry remarks, "it's becoming seriously expensive to buy – there's a house that went for five million on Church Street, a couple of weeks, on Church Street. Insane". For Larry, who has been in the area for almost a decade, the high turnover of shops is traditional to the area, given also the competition between shops:

"It's quite an unforgiving neighbourhood. I remember back in the days I counted from the roundabout on Church Street to the traffic lights, I counted like 80 food outlets. It's a lot" (Larry).

A couple of businesses also mentioned the post-Brexit changes in international trade affecting their operation or meaning part of their usual customers had moved away from the area. Larry noted how "Many regulars moved out of London, sadly. [...] I would say it's a Brexit related exodus" (Larry), demonstrating the multi-scalar

precarity that increasingly characterises local economies and societies.

Fears for the future

As a consequence of these factors, many businesses have concerns looking ahead, especially in terms of their ability to economically survive in the area. In general, as Liz remarks, “the future of businesses is very challenging. For small shops I think it is very, very challenging [...] I know a lot of shops are seriously struggling. [...]” (Liz). This is, in the interviewees’ views, particularly due to the reduced sales on weekdays. Although, for Martha, “the biggest positive effect [of the LTN], is more people coming out on the weekend because it’s a less polluted environment”, still this would not ensure enough income as “if you’ve got no customers throughout the week, then that makes it very hard to survive”. Martha feels this is of concern also for the fabric of the area and its public life, as shops are a fundamental part of the local community.

“I know a good number of [businesses] are all questioning whether they stay on Church Street, whether it is financially worth them staying on Church Street. And that’s worrying because that will be a long term impact, these things don’t happen quickly but it will be a long term impact and it will change the fabric of the street, which I don’t think necessarily for the better” (Martha).

Only Victor expressed an unproblematically positive attitude towards the future of the area and the scheme, especially when considering its broader aims of increasing area attractiveness and liveability.

“Well, I am broadly in favour of the LTN. I’m certainly in favour of the broader aims of the LTN. I hope that it becomes normalised and people- which I think will happen, people will get used to it, because people do. [...]. And I hope that my hunch that the thing that’s affecting business at the moment is indeed the state of the economy, and the economy gets better and things pick up and everyone forgets about the LTN and stops complaining about it. But we have to persist and we have the benefit of cleaner air. How long that will take,

obviously, is dependent on lots of different factors. But yes, I remain in favour of reduced traffic and cleaner air” (Victor).

In the next section we reflect on the way businesses’ views and perceptions of the LTN evolve and entangle with a very complex engagement process. We will consider how the missed opportunity of clear communication of scheme visions and aims may have reduced trust in the scheme, potentially contributing to increased fears of businesses and concerns for the future of the area and their survival.

The engagement process, a missed opportunity



'A great confusion'

When asked about their first impression of the scheme, businesses recall 'a great confusion' in the area, and a very challenging first few weeks. We previously mentioned the challenges with receiving deliveries when the scheme was first introduced - confusing and misleading signage was cited in many interviews and contested by local businesses. Particularly of concern was the sign indicating 'Church Street Closed' on the junction with Church Street and the high street which, for Martha and others, meant:

"People just assumed they couldn't turn on to Church Street. We said, "You've got to be clear that people can still come on to Church Street, it just means they can't drive to the end of Church Street." And it didn't feel like business is open as usual, people just went, "Oh my God, what's happened to Church Street, we can't drive down Church Street anymore" (Martha).

The confusion was further enhanced by a perceived disconnect between the pre-implementation engagement actions and the implementation, as Liz recalls and as we explore in more detail in the next section:

"I think there was a consultation, but all these consultations are all very vague and confusing. We did hear about it for sure but then it was more or less implemented overnight. When we saw chaos on the roads then obviously you know it's truly up and running" (Liz).

Difficult communication

The Stoke Newington engagement process included several engagement activities since June 2019 including leaflet communications, meetings, and ad-hoc communications with relevant stakeholders.

Despite such a large number of opportunities to get to know and give feedback on the scheme, in many of the interviews, there was a discrepancy between those who took part in the engagement process and those who felt they had not had the opportunity to do so. Surprisingly, some businesses (e.g. Eric and Fred) reported not being informed at all of the scheme or being invited to take part in any consultation activities. Others, such as Jen, said they received all the leaflets, a questionnaire, and recently leaflets outlining the impacts the scheme has had on air pollution and vehicle movements.

Those who described a lack of letters and leaflets received from the council feel that there was an intention to exclude those who would be likely to have opposing views, such as businesses that rely on vans. Distrust of the council is described by Fred, who believes there was a plan to silence opposing views:

“The council turn around and say, “We’ve targeted all the shops and we’ve given leaflets to all the shops.” Well that’s not true because they know who’s vocal and who isn’t. So all the shops that were vocal against it never got an invite or never got anything” (Fred).

Despite this, the council claims to have delivered leaflets and questionnaires to 150 businesses, but only received 51 returned questionnaires, suggesting that potentially recipients did not notice the letter.⁴⁶ In support of this claim, even when businesses had read the leaflet, shop owners report to have often dismissed it or developed a distorted perception of what was happening, due to a mix of having limited time or interest in deciphering all the information. For example, Larry was initially excited about seeing Church Street entirely pedestrianised:

“I remember reading it and saying, “Oh cool, they’re going to make it pedestrian.” That’s what I understood. And I said, “Pedestrianisation in Church Street would be lovely, especially for business.” But it turned out it wasn’t pedestrianised. What I sensed was, what I understood was they would pedestrianise this, completely block it to

⁴⁶ Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm (2023) [OFFICER KEY DECISION CHE S122 - STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET BUS GATE AND LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD \(LTN\)](#). Hackney Council.

traffic. Obviously I didn't spend hours reading through the documentation. But it wasn't - vague or very well described, that's what I can say" (Larry).

Jen reported not receiving a leaflet and, although knowing later about the online consultation, did not take part, considering that:

"I'm really busy, I can't just- I'm not going to go online and start looking for this stuff that I've not been told about it. We pay a lot of money, like business rates and stuff, someone should just send a letter or anything" (Jen).

Only a minority of participants are positive about the consultation material received. For example, Jen felt the online map for the area was "well-prepared, all their colourful leaflets, maps. Because for me it was difficult to imagine how it would work, so their kind of detailed architectural maps, they were okay".

To improve difficult communication or lack of knowledge of the scheme businesses suggested a more in-depth, in-person and tailored engagement, that would consider the needs and views of local businesses as vital actors in the social fabric of the area. Martha suggests:

"The reality can be really different, and stuff that you just wouldn't know would happen maybe until it's implemented... [...]that was the big thing [...] ... the people who were coming up with the scheme, they need to come down to the reality and to see how the whole thing works and [...] just real life. And I think that was a big missing chunk of the whole thing" (Martha).

A decision already made?

The complaints regarding the unsuccessful communication with the council were entangled with the general feeling that the trial was not really a trial, and a decision regarding permanence had been made early on. This comment is repeated in relation to the trial period which, as Liz told us, many didn't trust as: "once

they did the trial period, it was obvious that it was going to be made permanent" (Liz).

Interestingly, Victor reads the fact that making the LTN permanent was already decided as a fact that the council should have shared openly, without presenting it as an ostensible trial period, but rather sharing more widely the vision behind the scheme and the purpose of engagement being fundamentally about redesigning but not removing the scheme.

"One of the things that the council have been repeatedly accused of is having an agenda, which obviously is an absurd accusation because they're a politically elected council, of course they have an agenda. They're elected on the basis of their agenda. If they didn't have an agenda we would have something to complain about.

"But that agenda clearly does include the fact that they want to introduce LTNs for very good reasons. But I don't think they've been so great in promoting- in actually saying, "Yes, this is our agenda. This is what we're trying to do." There are a lot of consultations and they did say that it was a short-term experiment and obviously the people who were against it will say, "Ah, well, they've already made up their minds," and actually I think they probably had already made up their minds, because that was part of their agenda. But it was an open agenda" (Victor).

Contested evidence

Although supportive of the council's agenda, Victor raises a second issue with the evidence provided by the council to justify the scheme continuation, which others also share. Some participants feel there is a dissonance between the data provided by the council around traffic reduction, air pollution reduction, footfall, spending, and shop owners' perceptions. As we discussed, some shop owners (e.g. Liz) say pollution and traffic has worsened, whilst others say it has improved (Jen).

Particularly, Victor is greatly disappointed with the council's communication strategy and particularly felt

there had been 'manipulation of data' to show the success of the scheme:

"I did have a problem with the way Hackney communicated with people. Because they made, and continue to make, lots of plainly untrue statements about how business is booming on Church Street. And they're taking data from - I think it's Mastercard. And - well, Mastercard transactions have gone up, that doesn't mean that everyone's business has gone up, because also coinciding with the pandemic and the LTN was a general switch, a lot of businesses went cash-free, partly as a result of the pandemic. Also lots of people's cards, mine included, changed from Visa to Mastercard because of changes in the banking industry [...]. So of course Mastercard's transactions went up" (Victor).

Similarly, although Jen did not know about this Mastercard data⁴⁷, they felt the council should have asked businesses for pre and post implementation income and spending figures.

Martha who is a member of the SNBA summarises clearly how the perception of the decision being already made links to mistrust of the council's use of evidence:

"I didn't ever feel like we were being listened to, even [as part of the business association] I felt- [the council] always basically came back with, "Well, we have to see figures." I felt like they always were treating us like, "Well, you're just moaning and what figures have you got to back up what you're saying?" Whereas it's just not black and white like that and I talked to all the businesses about it. We said, "No-one's just going to give their figures over to the council and two, there are so many different factors that you can't just take figures out, it doesn't tell you the story, it doesn't tell you the whole picture, so you can't just isolate them" (Martha).

⁴⁷ Hackney Council (2022) [Stoke Newington Church Street - Healthy Streets Project Interim traffic update](#).

Building a collective voice: the role of the business association

The Stoke Newington Business Association (SNBA) was formed in 2022 with a council grant of £50,000 to run local events and promote Stoke Newington as a retail destination. It has also played a significant role in mobilising businesses' voices and communicating these to the council, particularly regarding challenges that businesses have faced around the LTN.⁴⁸ To date, the association includes between 60-70 independent Stoke Newington businesses who pay a membership fee. The association aims to organise events to attract footfall in the area and is in direct link with the council's area regeneration director. As such, the business association allows a dialogue to happen with the council, and successfully drove through some partial changes to be made to the LTN in response to impacts experienced by businesses. The association is recognised by several participants as a useful resource for businesses on the street, in terms of information dissemination, liaison with the council, and also a general sense of camaraderie in feeling part of a group.

For example, following initial issues with signage on the high street, the SNBA highlighted to the council the importance of editing the signage as it was affecting business activity, and the council agreed to change the signage from 'Church Street Closed' to a 7am-7pm restriction sign (see figure 5).

⁴⁸ Wright TL (2022) [Hackney Council grants Stoke Newington Business Association £50,000](#). In: *Hackney Post*.



Figure 5. The bus gate with the new signs. (Photo credit: Charlie Couve)



Figure 6. One of the signs on Church Street. (Photo credit: Charlie Couve)

Similarly, after gathering the comments of several businesses that had not received the consultation material, the SNBA contacted the council to ask for a second leaflet drop to be made. Martha recounts the process as:

“That was good in that one, they listened, and two, that we have that point of contact and we’re an association because they listened and took us seriously and realised that it wasn’t just the one odd business phoning up and moaning about it, that actually this was across the board” (Martha).

The association has been awarded a £50,000 grant by the council to support its activities, particularly around working with young adults with disabilities, and offering work experience opportunities for disadvantaged students in local schools.



Figure 7. A delivery cargo bike on Church Street. (Photo credit: Charlie Couve)

Reducing trust

In the interviews, the shared frustration with the scheme's effect was often enhanced or directly linked to a broader frustration with the council. As discussed above, many businesses acknowledge that the LTN is most likely only minimally responsible for loss of trade. However, their frustration and, often, lack of trust in the council, had emerged often in episodes not linked to the scheme. The lack of trust was however transferred to and used to frame many of the comments and views on the LTN.

For example, Fred, who feels businesses' needs are ignored by the council, refers several times to a meeting with the Mayor and a promised not maintained by him:

"Like we had the great open day, where they opened up the cargo bikes. And had a chat with the Mayor and he said, "Send me an email." I sent about six or seven emails, still waiting for a reply. So I don't deal with that well. . . . there's a couple of councillors that just won't answer emails. I mean the Mayor won't answer the emails. You know, if you make them feel important they'll answer the email. But if you're in any way sort of asking awkward questions, they just won't reply. They just won't reply" (Fred).

Similarly, Eric also shares that they "try to deal with [the council] as little as possible, because I don't think they're very good". When asked why, they recall an example around waste management:

"I had - it's a daft thing- the bins. I cancelled the contract and they still kept on coming for about a year without me knowing and then I get a massive bill through, and I've not even used their waste services, stuff like that. In general, just fairly incompetent I'd say" (Eric).

Once trust is broken in other situations, the perception of an unresponsive council gets transferred to the LTN, the related engagement process and its effects. A more recent frustration frames many of the comments by local businesses who are particularly vocal about the council's approach. Before explicating this, it is worth

noting that local authorities have faced unprecedented challenges over the past decade of austerity. Across the UK, particularly in cities, local authorities have experienced the greatest cuts in public spending. Hackney council has experienced a £140m, or 45%, reduction in core funding since 2010, with growing demand and costs of core council services such as social care.⁴⁹ These cuts have likely had significant impacts on resourcing, particularly around activities such as planning consultation, especially in the context of implementing their decarbonisation agenda.⁵⁰

In several interviews, the new Stoke Newington/Town Hall Market is mentioned as a common bone of contention. This is a new pop-up market promoted in the area by the council. Businesses felt excluded from the process of setting up the market, which is made up of shops from outside Stoke Newington, several of which operate at Broadway Market in London Fields. The frustration is enhanced by the fact that many businesses only found out about the market via Instagram, rather than formal engagement and consultation processes. Many interviewees used this market as an indicator of the council generally 'not listening' and not properly communicating with local businesses. Fred's tone is also elucidating:

"We had a Zoom meeting with the councillors, because they're going to put a market at the top of Church Street. Again great space, they can put a market. The discussion was, "Can we make suggestions on who you are going to put there?" They put a coffee shop, they put a cheese shop, which we've already got in Church Street. They put a card shop, and we've already got one in Church Street" (Fred).

Jen received a leaflet about the market and is still strongly frustrated with the decision:

"I got this leaflet about organising a local farmer's market out Stoke Newington Town Hall, so it's at the end

⁴⁹ Hackney Council (2019) [Council calls for end to 'regressive cuts' and rethink of funding reform.](#)

⁵⁰ Verlinghieri E, Haines-Doran T, Marsden G, et al. (2023) [The role of funding in the 'performative decarbonisation' of transport in England.](#) SocArXiv.

of Church Street. I was really against it, I said no, because it was really unfair. We were shocked, because after putting us through the scheme so we've already lost sales, they wanted to bring a market. And instead of trying to help us they were putting extra money into a new thing, and pushing all the crowds instead of to our shops to a new thing" (Jen).

Those negative feelings towards the council around issues such as the market affect how businesses perceive and narrate the LTNs. The small adjustments made to the confusing signage was perceived as a small victory, but interviewees felt it did not compensate for the several frustrating occurrences that the business community talks about within the SNBA and on WhatsApp groups.

An additional frustration is around the sense of a divide in the local area and local community, which is also associated with the scheme. Martha is mindful of the broader negative impacts on the community because of the conflicts:

"The divide that the LTN has caused within the community - in terms of people are for or against - is massive. And I'm really negative, so negative, because it was like bloody Brexit and it happened locally. That is a big thing that if anyone does LTN stuff, it's so polarising" (Martha).

As this report has illustrated, individuals have their own perceived reality of the effects of the LTN. Combined with frustrating interactions with the council, the LTN in Stoke Newington has become a highly divisive issue for businesses and residents alike.⁵¹

⁵¹ Gregory J (2021) Residents' and businesses split over Stoke Newington LTN. In: *Ham & High*.

Suggestions for improvements



Interviewees were asked about their thoughts on improvements to the LTN scheme itself and to the processes of communication and engagement. A group of responses included a complete removal of the LTN however Hackney council have made it clear the LTN will stay. The following subsections focus on highlighting constructive ideas and tweaks that could be made to the scheme and to processes of engagement, to improve businesses experiences and support for the LTN.

Improvements to engagement and communication

A key takeaway from our analyses was that overall, there is widespread support for making the area more pleasant, reducing air pollution and congestion, and improving road safety. Many interviewees do essentially support the LTN, however this is often veiled by the frustration and confusion around the engagement process, the way the scheme and subsequent decisions were communicated, as well as the broader rationale of the scheme. As Larry says, "It's such a complex issue . . . I kind of love it and hate it".

Some of these suggestions could be implemented now to improve relations between businesses and the council, and others are aimed at avoiding conflicts in similar future schemes.

- Communicate a clear vision informing the scheme from the earliest stage, including specific aims of the scheme and the relation of the scheme to the council's wider activities and interventions. The interviews highlighted how the initial framing of the scheme around air pollution meant that the air quality aim was clear and widely supported, while other aims such as road safety and modal shift were less clear, as well as

the placement of the scheme within Hackney's broader low carbon futures vision.

- Acknowledge early on that significant traffic restriction measures are likely to be polarising as car use has been strongly normalised for many decades⁵²; be forthcoming about the various benefits and shortcomings it may cause for different groups, within a framework that stresses the overall benefits and the urgency around public health and the climate emergency.
- Develop a specific engagement strategy for businesses and high street rate payers. As this report has demonstrated, business owners have different needs, views and constraints to residents, and as such should be engaged separately and their responses considered separately, rather than amalgamated with the responses of residents. Consider conducting engagement activities by type of shop, for example a session with restaurant owners, and a session with grocery shops.
- Hold more in-person business communication and engagement activities, for both individual and group engagement, such as in-person visits and pop-up events. Businesses are more likely to feel heard and that their specific needs, views, and concerns are being taken on board. This will also offer businesses an opportunity to ask specific questions to avoid confusion, for example around the exemption of electric vehicles. Business owners are very busy and facing a range of hardships, so authorities should assume a level of passivity, and that they may struggle to take an active role in engagement activities.
- When physical engagement materials are circulated, follow up with intended recipients at an alternative time to ensure they received these materials. Business owners may have been away,

⁵² Walker P (2023) '[Motonormativity: Britons more accepting of driving-related risk.](#) *The Guardian*, 17 January.

or the leaflet may have been discarded on the assumption it was junk mail.

- Supplement in-person and physical engagement materials with digital outreach and communication. The council has the email contact details of all businesses through their business rate payment accounts, and the materials could be sent as a PDF which is easier to store than a piece of paper. Maintain this digital communication through, for example, a regular newsletter updating businesses on modifications to the scheme and any meetings or upcoming opportunities for engagement and feedback.
- Ensure clarity around external communication, both in terms of signalisation of measures and restrictions, and the information provided to external users of the street such as courier and delivery companies. For instance, ensuring mapping services (e.g. Waze, Google Maps) are provided with the information early on enables them to communicate forthcoming changes through their map. Avoiding early stage confusion is crucial to make a positive first impression and experience of the scheme.
- Engage with businesses to collect current and historical spending and transaction data. This will offer a much more accurate representation of businesses' success than anonymised Mastercard data, and identify particular businesses or areas of the street that may need more support or promotion.

Acknowledge and communicate the complexity of times ahead when introducing schemes such as LTNs, ensuring that available support and alternatives are communicated to businesses either directly or through channels such as the business association. For example, make sure businesses are aware of alternatives like cargo bikes, as well as key pieces of information that may help businesses reduce their costs and overheads. For example, ensure council-published information

around key topics such as ‘Business rent increases’⁵³ are well circulated and promoted to businesses.

Improvements to the scheme

In the LTN Officer Key Decision document⁵⁴ section 6.57, the council outlines some of the potential alternatives proposed during the engagement process that were considered and rejected during scheme development. Some of the suggestions made by interviewees mirror these. For example, Larry proposed that the whole street should be pedestrianised and only open to delivery vehicles in allotted time periods, enabling restaurants and cafes to utilise the shop frontages with outdoor seating. In the document, Hackney council highlight that this would have significant negative impacts on local bus routes, local businesses, and the Fire Station. Maintaining sufficient carriageway widths is important to enable the free flow of key bus routes, as well as emergency vehicles. Alternatively, Eric noted that the operating hours could be reduced to 8am – 4pm, however the council highlights the importance of enveloping the main commuting, school run, and shopping hours with the 7am – 7pm time period.

Several interviewees suggested changes to the scheme that would directly benefit themselves, for example linked to their particular commuting patterns. The following bullet points highlight some realistic suggestions based on the interviews’ findings that hold potential to create wider benefits for multiple needs and users, without conceding the main objectives and vision of the scheme. The suggestions are likely to be useful to the implementation of similar schemes.

- Introduce measures that support businesses to make use of vehicles that are currently permitted to pass through the bus gate and modal filters. For

⁵³ Hackney Council (2023) [Business rent increases](#)

⁵⁴ Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm (2023) [OFFICER KEY DECISION CHE S122 - STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET BUS GATE AND LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD \(LTN\)](#). Hackney Council.

example, consider how a partnership with a cargo bike delivery service could be used to serve the delivery needs of businesses on the street, exploring the potential for a micro-consolidation centre in a vacant unit on Church Street, and a cargo bike. The ZED Waltham Forest scheme acts as a useful precedent for such a collaboration between a local authority and a cargo bike logistics provider in a context of borough-wide traffic restriction measures.

- Conduct a trial that exempts certain business vehicles from the bus gate restrictions. Eligibility should be determined in terms of the extent to which the sustenance of the business depends on their vehicles moving freely and regularly along Church Street, for example Premiere Cars, or servicing vehicles. This could also include a stipulation about low and zero emission vehicles. The effects on traffic flow, air quality, and congestion should be measured before and during to inform a decision regarding such a trial. It is possible that the impacts on the area would be negligible, but would help businesses reduce their journey times, costs, and general sense of frustration with the scheme.

Conduct a multi-faceted impact assessment that includes existing measurements such as modal flow figures and footfall, but also recognises that Church Street is a significant element of the local town centre economy. Assessment should include both quantitative figures such as business revenue, and qualitative perceptions around business and customer activity.

Suggestions for businesses

- Consider forming or joining a local business association or alliance. This has been shown to be beneficial in terms of developing a collective voice, and a unified approach to communicating with the local authority. Businesses also cited the

local business association as a useful way of disseminating information, as well as promoting the local area.

- Where you can, seek out information about forthcoming changes to the local area using online council resources and social media. Local authorities' budgets have been significantly impacted in the past few years, and as such councils may lack the resources to run extensive communication campaigns.
- Take a proactive approach to changes that are proposed or likely to be implemented, and explicitly stress the support that will be needed. For example, consider and make clear the impact you expect on the busiest times of the day but also carefully assess the differential harms and benefits associated with what you might ask for.
- Think about how much the business depends on people arriving or leaving by car versus people arriving by foot, bike, or public transport, before adopting a strong anti-LTN view. More generally, consider that other businesses may be promoting particular narratives that reflect their own interests rather than the interests of the wider business community and neighbourhood.

Suggestions for other actors

- DfT / Active Travel England / TfL – develop supplementary guidance on engaging small businesses regarding traffic management schemes such as LTNs. Toolkits and frameworks for engaging residents already exist⁵⁵, but as this report has demonstrated, the needs and constraints of businesses are different to those of residents, and therefore a different engagement and communication strategy is necessary. This could include case studies of where business

⁵⁵ TfL (n.d.) – [APPENDIX SIX \(A\): SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE ON LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS](#)

engagement has been constructive and well-received by both businesses and the local authority.

- Promote the Business Rates Relief Scheme⁵⁶ to relevant businesses who may be struggling or unlikely to stay abreast of such schemes. The recently announced scheme offers retail, hospitality and leisure businesses a 75% business rate relief up to £110,000 per business.

⁵⁶ GOV UK (2023) [Business rates relief](#).

Conclusions



In September 2021, Hackney council introduced a trial LTN in Stoke Newington that transformed the street, and the way people move around the area. Following ongoing consultation, the scheme was made permanent in January 2023. Since implementation, there have been a variety of demonstrable environmental benefits on Church Street and in the surrounding roads, including a reduction in traffic flows, congestion, and an uptick in walking and cycling.

Following engagement with seven businesses in the Stoke Newington LTN area, this report has illustrated some of the unique experiences of business owners, highlighting their opinions on the LTN as a traffic intervention, as well as their experiences of communication and engagement with Hackney council. Overall, the interviews reveal widespread support for making the area more pleasant, reducing air pollution and congestion, and improving road safety. However, several interviewees, notably those who rely on vehicles to commute to, or for, work, articulated a negative opinion of the LTN. Others offered a more nuanced perspective, broadly supporting the objectives of the scheme and often the scheme itself, acknowledging the complex reality of a scheme introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and an increasing financial crisis. As such, they highlight the difficulty of discerning the scheme's effect on a perceived overall decline of some businesses in the area. They however raised concerns with the approach taken by the council in terms of communication and engagement which has certainly damaged the scheme's reputation.

From our interviews, it appears that engagement and communication activities were inconsistent across Church Street businesses. Some interviewees, such as Jen, received questionnaires, maps, and several leaflets informing them about the scheme and opportunities for engagement. On the other hand, interviewees like Eric

and Fred reported to have not received any information. The extent to which this was just unlucky or down to poor distribution, is also contended by our interviewees.

Overall, there seems to be an ongoing issue in terms of communication and engagement with the council, extending beyond the LTN to anecdotes about waste management, and more widespread concerns about a pop-up market which local businesses feel threatened by, and excluded from. Even in cases where businesses support the scheme, these frustrations with the council can take precedence and taint positive discourses around the LTN.

Any criticism of Hackney council must be situated in the context of reduced funding and support for local authorities over the past 13 years, and a rise in unexpected events such as the cyber-attack that crippled the council's operations in 2020. Whilst we make a number of constructive recommendations, we do also recognise the council faces significant financial and resource related constraints.

Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the difficult climate faced by small independent businesses in terms of their survival and wider precarity, which is likely to also affect their openness to streetscape changes.

In addition to this report's recommendations, support from central government departments such as the DfT and Active Travel England, as well as city authorities like TfL, would be hugely beneficial in setting guidance around the often-overlooked but significant processes of communication and engagement. As outlined in a report on LTNs by the Centre for London, an LTN Knowledge Hub would be a beneficial resource in inter-borough and cross-context learning.⁵⁷ Additionally, as demonstrated here, LTNs are only one part of the solution to create better street environments, and must be supported by measures that, in this case, enable businesses to function and flourish by ensuring core activities can be maintained and that footfall is encouraged.

⁵⁷ [Centre for London \(2022\) *Street Shift – The future of Low-Traffic Neighborhoods*.](#)