

19 Sept 2024 - Liveable Neighbourhoods

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The Full Business Case for the first phase of our Liveable Neighbourhood programme goes to WECA for approval tomorrow. It includes 11 Liveable Neighbourhoods—four fewer than originally planned.

As I mentioned earlier in response to the Climate and Nature Progress Report, we urgently need to reduce car journeys and miles if we're serious about meeting our climate emergency targets for 2030. Last week, a cabinet response revealed that between 2019 and 2022, traffic levels dropped by just 1.14%. That's nowhere near good enough, given the target is a 25% reduction by 2030.

Liveable Neighbourhoods are one of the most effective ways to help us achieve these goals, while also creating healthier, quieter, and safer streets for everyone.

Some of the proposed schemes look promising, particularly in areas like The Circus and the Pulteney Estate. However, four of the 11 proposed Liveable Neighbourhoods don't include any restrictions on through traffic—despite this being a key requirement for the WECA City Region Sustainable Travel Settlements Low Traffic Neighbourhood Fund. The areas in question are Temple Cloud, Entry Hill, Chelsea Road, and Lyme Road.

Instead, these so-called Liveable Neighbourhoods propose minor improvements, like a zebra crossing, traffic lights, or a one-way street. While these changes may improve road safety, they fall far short of the transformative benefits that Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) can offer.

Through traffic restrictions—such as bus gates or modal filters, like the planters on Southlands—deliver far greater benefits for the cost. This higher Cost Benefit Ratio is crucial if we're going to make real improvements for residents within our limited budget.

We only need to look at Bristol City Council, which is moving ahead with an LTN trial in East Bristol, including over 10 through traffic restrictions—three camera-enforced bus gates and eight modal filters. Meanwhile, South Gloucestershire is on track to deliver multiple sustainable transport corridors alongside its Liveable Neighbourhoods programme.

When Councillor Clyde Loakes from Waltham Forest visited Bath in 2020, he urged us not to "tinker." But with four of these schemes, that's exactly what we're doing—tinkering around the edges. If we want to give people real alternatives to car use, as outlined in our Corporate Strategy, we need to be bold.

If we fail to secure the remaining £3.87 million from WECA tomorrow, it won't be because WECA is enforcing the rules too strictly. It will be because B&NES didn't follow the rules.

So my question is: how is our leadership working with WECA to ensure the best possible outcomes for our residents? How are we providing them with safer, healthier streets and genuine travel choices?