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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Agree to Disagree? Insights into Community Views and Sources of Division in Relation to Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester

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Low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) involve the use of modal filters to limit motorised traffic from residential streets while retaining access for people walking, wheeling and cycling. They can be seen as part of a set of place-based approaches focused at the neighbourhood level. In recent years there has been clear evidence of entrenched positions on such interventions, resulting in LTNs being seen as a divisive intervention despite some studies showing a general level of support. The research informing this paper consisted of 22 qualitative go-along interviews in LTNs and proposed LTNs in Greater Manchester, with the aim of exploring the nuances of public opinion. Our analysis found that there are commonalities that transcend sometimes entrenched positions: aspiration for a better neighbourhood for everyone, concerns about unequal outcomes, and shared frustrations over processes of implementation. A clear difference across the sample was the level of appreciation of, and concern about, walking infrastructure: some saw LTNs to be insufficient in addressing pavement conditions and crossing points. We found that those in our sample who supported LTNs tended to see them as part of a wider programme of interventions aimed at improving mobility, and LTNs were commonly seen as a cycling intervention and were therefore more likely to be favoured by those who cycled or were interested in cycling. The analysis highlights the importance of neighbourhood in place-based decarbonisation and the value of understanding neighbourhoods in the context of the road and public transport networks they link to and the socio-economic context they inhabit.

Keywords: Low Traffic Neighbourhoods; Road Space Reallocation; Active Travel; Mobility; Greater Manchester

1 Introduction

Has any road infrastructure in the UK been as controversial as the low traffic neighbourhood? Low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) are a familiar sight in London and have recently become more evident in other parts of the UK including Greater Manchester, Oxford, and Birmingham. As placed-based approaches at the neighbourhood scale, they involve the use of modal filters to restrict motorised through traffic on residential streets whilst retaining access for people walking, wheeling and cycling (Marsden and Docherty, 2021).

Such road space reallocation, in reducing the space allocated to motor vehicles and improving conditions for active travel and public transport (Cairns, Atkins and Goodwin, 2002), has been an important element of the approach to decarbonising transport in the UK. The approach marks a shift away from a focus on creating capacity for motor vehicles (Creutzig et al., 2020) and a recognition that simply shifting to electric cars, but retaining current levels of car use and ownership, is insufficient to achieve net zero. It is also unlikely to address congestion, inactivity and other problematic aspects of car dependent societies (Newman, Kosonen and Kenworthy, 2016).

Recognising that there has been some visible opposition to these developments and that this has thwarted developments in some places, the aim of this paper is to identify and understand areas of difference and commonality in how residents view LTNs with a view to informing appropriate and effective implementation. There have been developments in LTNs, active travel, and place-based mobility interventions over the last five years, and in some areas we have seen growing opposition and associated setbacks in delivery programmes. Given this changing context, we are returning to our qualitative dataset of interviews from 2020 in order to explore the perceptions and beliefs behind opposition and division, and inform current debates (Larrington-Spencer, Sherriff and Price, 2022).

Existing literature has continued to provide evidence that LTNs have a useful role in reducing and taming neighbourhood traffic (Aldred and Goodman, 2020; Goodman, Urban and Aldred, 2020; Goodman, Laverty and Aldred, 2021), as we discuss Section 2. Researchers have continued to investigate some of the complexities of their impacts, such as the effect on boundary roads. With a few exceptions, the UK research has been focused on London and has been primarily quantitative or spatial. We contribute new insights to this discourse, adding qualitative evidence from Greater Manchester, and contributing to international debates on place-based and experimental approaches to mobility and urbanism. We do not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of LTNs in Greater Manchester, but rather to identify and understand the factors that shape views on these developments.

This explorative approach is important as it enables us to look in depth at the perceptions and experiences of LTN residents, therefore building on other qualitative studies and complementing other data on traffic flows, car ownership and air quality. This makes it possible to understand the nuances behind concerns about LTNs and to understand how these physical changes are experienced by residents. It also provides UK data outside of London, which is in many ways a special case in the UK context: LTNs have been in place in London in some form since the 1970s; London has received substantial investment in cycling infrastructure (Bednarowska-Michaiel, 2023; Aldred, Goodman and Woodcock, 2024); and the public transport is significantly more expansive and integrated than anywhere else in the UK, with buses never having been deregulated, as they were in the rest of the country (Argyriou, 2025). Greater Manchester is particularly interesting given its ambitious 'Bee Network' programme of walking, cycling and wheeling infrastructure and its recent moves towards an integrated system across bus, tram and train that include a bus franchising model (GMCA and TfGM, 2020).

The article begins with a review of recent research on LTNs and an overview of provision in Greater Manchester. We then describe and justify our methodology, namely go-along interviews and focus groups. This is followed by a thematic summary of our findings, following our analysis of resident experiences with and concerns about LTNs. We conclude by discussing cross-cutting themes and thinking about the implications for how we address traffic at the local level and the ways in which we understand place-based mobility.

2 Context

LTNs as a place-based intervention

LTNs aim to reduce through traffic in residential areas using filters, which can take the form of planters, bollards, road signs and cameras (VanHoose, Bertolini and Straatemeier, 2025). In London, many LTNs are enforced using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, with access maintained for emergency vehicles and there is generally some level of accommodation for disabled people who hold a blue badge/disabled parking permit. Outside of London, planters or bollards are often used to create point closures. LTNs are a carrot and stick method for promoting modal shift from private vehicles to active forms of transport, namely by improving conditions for active travel whilst prompting more circuitous journeys for those driving motor vehicles (Laverty, Goodman and Aldred, 2021). LTNs can be seen as part of a place-based approach to mobility since they focus on neighbourhood level improvements that tend to restrict motor vehicles in favour of walking and cycling.

Whilst our study is UK-based, and there will be elements that are specific to local regulations and cultures, LTNs can be seen to stem from neighbourhood approaches to mobility in Europe such as the Dutch Woonerf (Steinberg, 2015), the Barcelona Superblocks (O'Sullivan, 2020) and the 15-minute city concept that originated in Paris (Nurse, Koksal and Sherriff, 2025). Such initiatives also connect with work on urban experiments internationally, particularly those that seek to test out reconfigurations of street space to "seek a difference balance between motorised and non-motorised traffic in city streets" as well as between "traffic and non-mobility-related, 'stationary' uses of public space" (Bertolini, 2020). Vitale Brovarone et al., for example, studied experimental approaches to pedestrianisation in Italy and noted that "procedural and relational conflicts played an important part in determining the course of the initiative" (2023, p. 103528).

Research on LTNs to date

A wealth of research has investigated the impacts of LTNs, particularly in the London context. There is evidence, for example, that demonstrates positive impacts on levels of walking and cycling (Aldred and Goodman, 2020; Goodman, Urban and Aldred, 2020), and the creation of safer and healthier environments within which to use active travel (Laverty, Aldred and Goodman, 2021; Laverty, Goodman and Aldred, 2021). Data from Waltham Forest LTNs in London show that residents are less likely to own a car, with the statistical significance of this trend increasing the longer the LTN has been in place (Aldred and Goodman, 2020; Goodman, Urban and Aldred, 2020). Aldred et al. (2024) have demonstrated substantial health benefits of LTN interventions due to increased levels of physical activity.

Research on LTNs has sought to respond to public concerns. These concerns relate to their impact on emergency response times and crime as well as potential inequalities in their implementation. Goodman and Aldred (2021) found a reduction in street crime in

LTN areas and other work found no evidence of a negative impact on emergency response times (Goodman, Laverty and Aldred, 2020; Goodman et al., 2021). Attention has been paid to the potential impacts in the area around the LTN, in particular the boundary roads and the people living on them. Thomas and Aldred (2024) report that studies have tended to show a mixture of traffic redistribution and displacement. They update this in their recent research in which they look at LTNs across London, for which they find evidence that displacement tends to dominate – that is, that LTNs are reducing traffic levels. Research in four London LTNs found that the annual distance LTN residents drove decreased by 6% more than in control areas (Goodman et al., 2023), reflecting similar findings to research on the changes to boundary roads (Thomas and Aldred, 2024). Other research found evidence of potential to decrease air pollution and traffic levels (Yang et al., 2022). In terms of equity, Aldred et al. (2021) found that, at the micro-level, residents of London LTNs were demographically similar to residents in areas outside of the LTN, and deprived Londoners were 2.5 times more likely to live in new LTNs (implemented from March to September 2020).

Compared to this wealth of quantitative and spatial evidence, the body of social research on LTNs and the people living in them, to which this article contributes, is less substantial. Hickman and Afonin (2025) use discourse analysis of resident interviews to understand opposition to LTNs in West London. Their starting point is the importance of subjectivity in the ways in which spaces are conceived and understood – "Streetspace is produced by city authorities and transport planners, yet understood and used by residents and other actors in way that are no envisaged" (2025, p. 414). They observe that wider issues such as conflicts between those walking and those cycling, or difficulties in tackling car dependence to achieve greater environmental sustainability remained "undisclosed and unresolved by the antagonistic respondents" after LTN implementation (2024, p. 7). Pritchett et al (2024) provide a comprehensive analysis of qualitative answers received through a Birmingham City Council consultation. Mapping the wide range of different responses and concerns, they note that there is "great strength of feeling among respondents, both in support of and against the schemes" and that, whilst LTNs address some concerns related to the local traffic environment, there are other issues of importance to residents that are not being addressed, leading the authors to question the extent to which ongoing implementation of LTNs will be supported.

Macniven et al (2024) focus on the potential for LTNs to enable healthy ageing, with a case study in Glasgow. Their participants questioned the policy emphasise on restricting car use without accompanying this with more measures for walking, such as improved spatial planning and more pedestrian crossings with longer crossing times. Whelan et al. (2024) conducted a mixed methods study including air quality monitoring and a questionnaire survey. They found evidence that the scheme had improved air quality and seen increased rates of active travel. Their survey revealed a bimodal distribution between those with positive and negative views on the scheme, with a smaller number reporting neutral views. They note that this polarisation had had a divisive effect on the community.

VanHoose et al (2025) consider LTNs as city street experiments, writing specifically about the temporary LTNs that were installed in London using the Experimental Traffic Order to provide more public space during the Covid-19 pandemic and avoid a return to high levels of car use. They look at the ways in which local government actors learn following such experiments. They reflect on the ways in which transitions are multi-actor processes and note that much of the "transformative knowledge" was gained primarily by residents, rather than local government actors, by experiencing LTNs firsthand.

LTNs in the media

LTNs are an evidently divisive intervention (Mason, 2021), even if the public contention portrayed in media does not necessarily reflect the reality of resident perceptions: recent research, for example, from the Department for Transport indicates that almost double the number of residents support their local LTN as oppose it (Walker, 2024). Generally speaking, and at the risk of simplification, "pro" arguments tend to claim that LTNs improve conditions for walking and cycling and result in the evaporation, that is, reduction, of traffic. "Anti" arguments, on the other hand, tend to deny or minimise the occurrence of traffic evaporation and emphasise the health impacts of displaced traffic on residents living on the roads around LTNs – boundary roads.

This division is evident in media headlines since 2020. The Guardian identified 'The new road rage: bitter rows break out over UK's low-traffic neighbourhoods' (Wall, 2020) and The Times reported that 'Tensions [were] rising across the country as drivers complain of a war on the motor vehicle' (Wace, 2021). More recently, The Times reported that Bristol was using the 'cover of darkness of set up low-traffic neighbourhood' (Ellson, 2025), with contractors being protected by 60 police officers and a drone since the plans had been delayed by protests. Mancunian Matters has reported 'conflict in local community as traffic measures divide residents' (Mancunian Matters 2024).

These newspaper articles commonly use conflict imagery, such as "hate", "row", "battle", and "war" and tend to imply the existence of two entrenched positions: pro- and anti-LTNs. Hickman and Afonin (2025, p. 423) also observed this, noting that their interviewees reflected coverage in some popular press by presenting viewpoints with wording that implied "military connotations". Gossling et al. (2024, p. 1), in a study of interventions including Oxford LTNs and the London Ultra-low Emissions Zone (ULEZ), also find that any infrastructure seen to "'disadvantage' vehicle use" can become an "arena for heated political debate". They do point out, however, that these concerns should not be "dismissed as a mere nuisance to public order". They add that we should be mindful of the potential financial impacts on low-income communities and disproportionate impacts upon rural and sub-urban populations, where car dependence may be higher.

The media's role in the public construction of division over LTNs can be situated more broadly within discourse on sustainability and active travel interventions, including the ways in which the domination of the private car as a transport mode is constructed discursively through language (Caimotto, 2020). Media coverage of sustainability and transport commonly reproduce "them" versus "us" narratives. An example is the contrasting of identities of people who cycle and people who drive, which ignores the nuances of these relationships, not least that many people who cycle also drive (Caimotto, 2020).

Similar divisions can be seen in other attempts to reduce levels of driving in cities. Proposals to introduce a Greater Manchester congestion charge, which would have part funded investment in the public transport and active travel networks, was voted out by the electorate in a 2008 referendum (Sherriff, 2015). Media coverage of the congestion charge and campaign messaging around it commonly involved simplification and the production of two antagonistic positions (Sherriff, 2015)., This distorted the information in systematic and varying ways to, it is argued, make it more newsworthy to different audiences (Vigar, Shaw and Swann, 2011).

Divisions over LTNs, 15-minute neighbourhoods, and other proposals to limit car use can therefore be part of an ongoing discourse that anticipates and reacts to the significant changes in mobility. Loader (2023, p. 60) puts this clearly in this discussion of plans in Oxford: "The contest prompted by Oxford's traffic filter plans is the latest signal of a

reckoning with the motor age, a reckoning that challenges the normalised dominance that the car has assumed over the city, and comes to terms with its damaging impact on the safety and quality of urban life."

LTNs in British Politics

The situation with relation to LTNs in the UK has changed over the last five years. In February 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a five-year funding package of £5 billion to overhaul bus and cycle links, including the creation of LTNs and "mini-Holland" pilots in London (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022). Within months, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that an emphasis was placed on cycling, as public transport use decreased, and a case was made for a rapid introduction of LTNs (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022). Dudley et al take Oxford as a case study of the difficulties that followed in delivering this programme, arguing that entrenched positions in the community left the local authority in a vulnerable position (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022). In July 2023, then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, took policy in a different direction, ordering a review of LTNs in July 2023, and describing the schemes as "hare-brained" and a "war on motorists". According to *The Guardian,* when a report seemingly deemed LTNs as positive interventions Government advisers asked that "it be permanently shelved" (Walker, 2024). In October 2023, the then Secretary of State for Transport, further stoked division through comments at the Conservative Party Conference that exaggerated the restrictive nature of LTNs: "what is sinister and what we shouldn't tolerate is the idea that local councils can decide how often you go to the shops and that they ration who uses the roads and when, and they police it all with CCTV". In the same month, the Government published the "Plan for Drivers" with the premise that "it's not right that some drivers feel under attack" (Department for Transport, 2023). This document raised concerns about neighbourhood approaches, such as 15-minute neighbourhoods and, with specific reference to LTNs, called for a focus on local support for the schemes and consideration of how to address existing LTNs that have not secured local support. At the time of writing, the policy direction on LTNs of the new Labour Government elected in July 2024 has not been made clear.

3 Active neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester is a metropolitan county and combined authority in Northwest England. It consists of eight boroughs and the two cities of Salford and Manchester. It is currently subject to an ambitious programme of investment in walking, cycling and public transport, referred to as the "Bee Network". At the time of the research in 2020, active neighbourhoods, the terminology adopted for low traffic neighbourhoods, were being seen as part of the vision for a joined-up and high-quality active travel network and to contribute directly to the city-region's decarbonisation strategy, which aims for at least 50% of all journeys being by sustainable modes of transport (walking, cycling, public transport) by 2040 (GMCA and TfGM, 2020).

For this research, four Greater Manchester case study LTNs were selected: Trinity and Islington in Salford, Levenshulme in Manchester, Garside Hey Road in Bury, and Cheadle Heath in Stockport. These case studies were selected to represent the multiple forms of funding that have been used (so far) to implement LTNs in Greater Manchester, as well as reflect different implementation timescales within different Greater Manchester districts. Following our study, the Levenshulme Active Neighbourhood has been expanded in scope following stakeholder feedback. The Trinity and Islington scheme is still in development as part of other measures in the area. The Garside Hey Road scheme in Bury was removed at the end of the

trial and some infrastructure, including a pedestrian crossing, was removed. The proposed scheme in Cheadle Health was never implemented.

There have been mixed developments in other parts of Greater Manchester. Filters were introduced in Withington, Manchester, and, as of January 2025 (Manchester City Council, 2025), most of these had been removed following concerns raised by residents. The Manchester Evening News had labelled this scheme "controversial" and reported residents' concerns about traffic levels around local schools and accessibility for emergency vehicles (Scheerhout, 2024). As of March 2025 a trail of modal in Flixton, Trafford, had been extended by three months whilst temporary traffic lights and pedestrian crossings have been removed following feedback (Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, 2025).

4 Method

In this qualitative study, we collected data by means of 22 go-along interviews with residents and two online focus groups with older people and people working with older people in support roles. This approach was selected in order to understand the diverse experiences and perceptions of residents. Go-alongs were selected as they support the generation of rich "place-based" data due to the potential for environmental and infrastructural prompts to guide discussions (Carpiano, 2009; Evans and Jones, 2011; Warren, 2017). Kostakos et al. (2019, p. 2) describe go-alongs succinctly, locating them "at the intersection of participatory observation and interviewing". It has been argued that they provide a method for the "exploration of space and how people move through it and for understanding its meaningful role in participants lives" (Larrington-Spencer et al., 2025) and that they can, to some extent, avoid the imbalance in the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched inherent in conventional interviewing techniques (Bartlett et al., 2023).

These advantages notwithstanding, the method is not entirely unproblematic: Larrington-Spencer et al. (2025) explore the technique through the lens of care, recognising that there is also an ethics of care towards researchers and warning against a "blanket romanticisation of reciprocity and authenticity in research". Warren (2017) cautions against assuming participants will take the lead, citing examples whereby participants lacked confidence to direct the route. In her work with Muslim women, she found that the notion of the empowered participant was in tension with cultural and social differences and assumed hierarchies such as the cultural authority of "the teacher".

An example of the utility of go-alongs is given by this interviewee who is prompted during the interview by the behaviour of a nearby driver: "Look at some of these small B roads that – actually, should we be allowing HGVs to drive down those roads? No. They can go around and use the bigger roads, as they're supposed to. Let me take a picture of this one. He's turning into a car parking space at the end. I'll send that through" (P2).

The go-along interviews entailed the primary researcher accompanying residents on a participant-led tour of their local (existing or proposed) LTN. Discussions were recorded as audio, and the researcher took reflective notes after the interview. The transcribed data was coded thematically using Nvivo software. A total of 22 residents took part in these interviews, a sample size that suits the in-depth, qualitative nature of this work. The go-along participants represent a range of life stages and living situations as well as levels of car ownership and positions on their local active neighbourhood (**Table 1**).

Across the 22 interviews most participants walked, or walked and cycled, for their local journeys. The exceptions were two go-along participants (P7 and P10), both of whom were unable to walk short distances because of mobility impairment. As in other such studies, such as Hickman and Afonin's (2025) interview study, we do not attempt to claim that the

sample is representative but rather to explore the viewpoints of the interviewees and provide insights that contribute to understanding of the complexity of urban challenges.

A virtual go-along method was developed using a Microsoft Teams meeting in combination with Google maps and photographs. This was deployed with participants who preferred an online research encounter due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst this approach is not as situated as an in-person in situ go-along, the use of maps and photos helped to maintain a connection with the locality. Koskakos et al. (2019) demonstrate that the use of digital landscapes via VR can be an effective way of including a larger or more diverse sample in go-along research, although we should note that we did not have the technological capacity to use the VR headsets as they did.

In addition to the go-along interviews, we included two online focus groups. This was an act of purposive sampling in reflection of the tendency for the go-along interviewees to be primarily younger and middle-aged people. We liaised with Age UK Salford and the Greater Manchester Older People's Network to form two groups consisting of older people and people who worked with older people in a support or advocacy role. The participants were not residents of current or proposed LTNs and the discussions therefore complemented the go-alongs with a broader focus on the barriers to active travel for older people and the potential role that LTNs could have. The inclusion of these online focus groups, as well as online go-along interviews, meant that we could include individuals whatever their level of mobility (Macniven and and Gow, 2024) or need to socially distance.

Table 1: Go-along participants and characteristics, colour coded by position (supportive, ambivalent, unsupportive) on LTNs.

ID	Name	Location	Gender	Employment	Disabled	Ethnicity	No. adults in household	No. children in household	Mode for local journeys	No. cars in household
P1	Kevin	Garside Hey Road	Male	Employed	x	White British	4	2	Walking	2
P2	Natalie		Female	Employed	x	White British	2	0	Walking	2
P3	Anna		Female	Employed	x	White British	2	0	Walking	2
P4	Derek	Cheadle Heath	Male	Employed	x	White British	4	0	Walking & cycling	1
P5	Gareth		Male	Employed	x	White British	4	2	Walking & cycling	1
P6	Ed		Male	Employed	x	White British	4	2	Walking & cycling	0
P7	Andrea		Female	Carer	✓	White British	3	1	Driving	2
P8	Jane	Levenshulme	Female	Employed	x	White British	1	0	Walking & cycling	0
P9	Jeff		Male	Employed	x	White British	2	0	Walking & cycling	1
P10	Ellie		Female	Employed	✓	White British	2	0	Driving	1
P11	Charlott		Female	Employed	x	Asian British	5	3	Walking	2
P12	Harry		Male	Employed	x	White British	2	0	Walking & cycling	1
P13	Claire		Female	Maternity	x	White – other	4	2	Walking & cycling	1
P14	Catherin		Female	Employed	x	White – other	3	1	Walking & cycling	0
	Ben		Male	Employed	x	White British			Walking & cycling	
P15	Tara		Female	Self-employed	x	Asian British	4	2	Walking	2
P16	Winston		Male	Self-employed	x	Black British	2	0	Walking & cycling	0
P17	Terry	Trinity & Islington	Male	Employed	x	White British	1	0	Walking	1
P18	David		Male	Employed	✓	White British	2	0	Walking	1
	Joyce		Female	Employed	x	White British			Walking	
P19	Alicia		Female	Employed	x	White – other	3	1	Walking	1
P20	Stanley		Male	Employed	x	White British	4	0	Walking & cycling	Access
P21	Rob		Male	Unemployed	x	White British	2	0	Walking & cycling	Access
P22	Valerie		Female	Retired	x	White British	1	0	Walking	0

Participant position	Supportive
Participant position	Ambivalent
Participant position	Unsupportive

5 Findings

Introduction

Our conversations with residents illustrated factors that shape experiences of mobility and, in turn, perceptions of and reactions to active neighbourhoods. Based on what they revealed in interviews and focus groups, participants could be placed into three categories: broadly in favour of, opposed to, and ambivalent to the implementation of LTNs (**Table 1**). Whilst participants' perceptions towards LTNs in Greater Manchester differed in this respect, there were in fact many commonalities that transcended these three positions.

Similar desires: a better neighbourhood for everyone

Across all participants in go-alongs and focus groups, irrespective of position on LTNs, there was a shared desire for the development of neighbourhoods that would improve the everyday experiences of residents. This viewpoint is succinctly expressed by Jane (P1) during a go-along in Levenshulme, who makes a connection between this aspiration and the implications of roads and traffic: "I think there's a lot of people want the same thing, they want less pollution, they want lower traffic, they want that investment and interventions for their roads as well, they don't want to be left behind."

For the older adults participating in the two focus groups, the potential for LTNs to reduce levels of through traffic and create a quiet and safer environment was attractive. Many of the older adults did not have access to a household car and relied upon walking and public transport, or the use of taxis or lifts by family and friends, in order to be able to access shops and services. They considered the provision of space for walking and exercising to be a positive development: "It's a positive experience to use your feet and to have nice places to walk" (Focus Group 2).

This need for enhancement was considered particularly relevant in the context of difficulties in accessing greenspaces. This related to a combination of factors including distance and age-related reduced mobility as well as a reduction, over time, in greenspace: "It would be nice to have areas we can walk around. They [the council] built on greenspaces, developers have bought other greenspaces" (Focus Group 2).

Shared concerns: unequal outcomes

A concern that emerged in the implementation of LTNs is the potential for increases in levels of motor traffic on boundary roads and a subsequent reduction in local air quality. Residents were concerned about the implications for equality. For Charlotte (P11), who had observed a reduction in symptoms of her children's asthma that she associated with there being less traffic on the road during the initial Covid-19 lockdown in the UK: "If certain residents are going to bear the brunt of it... I think that is unfair, and they shouldn't have to suffer."

It is also instructive that perceptions of LTNs were influenced by perceptions of social inequality. In Levenshulme, interviewees were concerned about potential gentrification – "I love the filter, but at the same time I was like, this is more reason for our landlord to increase our rent" (Claire P13). For others, there was a perception that LTNs could improve the neighbourhood at the expense of the boundary roads – "that's almost saying that all of us that live off it, on the other roads that come out, don't exist or don't matter, we're not part of Levenshulme" (Ellie P10).

Conversely, residents of Garside Hey felt that the decision to implement an LTN there was a reflection of their inequality and relative deprivation:

> I guess the perception is people who live in a private estate probably wouldn't stand for and allow anything like that to happen, full stop, whereas somewhere like around here – I don't want to use words that are belittling, but I guess that round here they think people have got less of a choice having stuff done. (Kevin P1, Garside Hey Road)

Interviewees mentioned that they considered the planters to be "ugly" and to indicate that social housing needed to be "penned in". Far from gentrification, they hinted at ghettoization: "keeping the council estate out of the way of the and creating a clean sweep down Garside Hey Road to the more expensive estate" (Kevin P1, Garside Hey Road).

Similar frustrations – processes of LTN implementation

In addition to similar desires in terms of better neighbourhoods for everyone and concerns regarding inequalities – albeit with different perspectives on their resolution – there were also some shared frustrations with processes of LTN implementation amongst participants. These tended to transcend differences in their overall positions on LTNs. These frustrations are important to note as they impact resident perceptions of the capacity of local authorities to implement interventions such as LTNs. They also contribute to increasing friction between residents with differing opinions.

Frustrations with processes of monitoring and evaluation were related to perceived inadequacies in the monitoring that was carried out. Approaches such as traffic counts and air quality monitoring, for example, could enable effective evaluation by providing data on whether LTNs successfully increased levels of walking and cycling as well as whether LTNs negatively impacted boundary roads in relation to air quality and traffic levels. The absence of monitoring was particularly critical for the go-along participants that were ambivalent, who were often waiting on data to make up their minds on whether they support their local LTN. For example, Charlotte commented on the absence of data on the LTN trial in Levenshulme:

> I felt a bit saddened by that, and I'm very – I'm a data person. I use a lot of data in my job, and I felt like there hadn't been any data collection to give you the value of this is what it was before and this is what it is after, so that really concerned me. (Charlotte P11)

Another side to these concerns about monitoring stemmed from the way in which existing data was being used, and how this related to the siting of the LTN. One participant reflected that air quality monitoring had found high levels of pollution on the boundary roads and therefore they did not understand why the measures were going in on the side streets, where pollution levels were lower:

> I think people are upset as well with that, the fact that a report that identified all illegal levels of pollution on boundary roads. It has been used in a bid submission where actual interventions are going in the on the side streets, which probably have the much lower pollution level. I think people are upset. I think they're angry. I think they're frustrated. All sorts of emotions. Betrayed. I think betrayal's a big one. (Kevin, P1)

Frustrations with processes of communication related both to how local authorities initially communicated the plans for an LTN trial and to the ongoing processes of communication leading up to and during an LTN trial. In general, residents received flyers through their doors to inform them about an upcoming LTN trial or consultation on implementing one. For residents who were not already actively engaged in local walking and cycling campaigning, these flyers were sometimes overlooked or had not been received: "I was told there was something came through the post, or something. You get a lot of junk mail, and it goes. It got lost and you don't really see it" (Tara, P15). In Garside Hey Road, Natalie (P2) observed a similar concern: "There was a bit at first because there were loads [of people] going, 'What is this? We've not been told. You've not put a leaflet through.'"

There was also concern around ongoing communication, and particularly the role that councillors had in the process. Participants considered that councillors and council officers

should be providing information and also spend more time promoting the scheme and working to allay concerns regarding it. This was articulated by Jane (P8): "Someone really does kind of need to champion it… And it's the project team and the councillors who should be really working to communicate." Participants felt this lack of clear ownership exacerbated friction between those for and against the LTNs within the community as residents, instead of councillors and council officers, stepped in to advocate for the scheme.

Whilst these concerns about effective and democratic engagement are reflected in recent LTN literature (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022; Pritchett, Bartington and Neil Thomas, 2024), the interviewees suggest that the context created by the Covid-19 lockdowns added a further layer of challenge characterised by a reliance on online communication:

> There was no way to have a public meeting, there was no way to engage; it was all online. The toxic nature of that, that it is, I think that definitely made it a lot harder, and also just made it nastier – because people were already struggling with something strange, in their experiences and the anxieties round about that. Then your schemes coming in and changing, and we can't go and speak to anyone: we can't see the councillors at the surgeries, and we can't go into meeting; we can't all thrash this out and be civil about it. It just amplified it. (Natalie, P2)

Unequal experiences – places for walking

Perhaps the theme around which there were the greatest differences and inequality of experiences was infrastructure for walking. This affected those who were walking the majority of their everyday journeys. LTNs were not considered to be an improvement to walking experiences as they were not, in their current form, addressing many of the factors that impede the pedestrian experience – for example, pavement parking, poor pavement conditions, and lack of dropped kerbs and crossing points. Tara described the pavements during a go-along:

> Then you've got the pavements that are up even, up and down, and it's just, it is a struggle. This road round here with cars coming round, it is bad. I have to actually get the children to walk on the pavement, the ones that walk. I have to take the buggy on to the middle of the road. Sometimes you do get the children, because they have learned, "Stay with me, follow me on to the road," and it just feels like you'd have a heart attack. (Tara, P15)

Similar discussions on the importance of pavement infrastructure were covered in the focus group discussions with older adults. While, as discussed, the idea of active neighbourhoods was considered positive by older adults, the absence in investment in pavement infrastructures was considered to detract from the ability to support older adults to actively access their local neighbourhood. For example, participants in the focus group discussions described having to stare down at the ground to prevent themselves from tripping over as they walked. As one older person expressed: "I am so sick of walking in my area looking at the pavements" (Focus Group 2). Another noted how pavement conditions contributed to her isolation: "I don't drive, and it's impossible for me to walk to the shops because of the state of the pavements" (Focus Group 1).

The absence of dropped kerbs was another factor inhibiting older people's mobility: "my husband has an electric wheelchair, and he can't manage the pavements. He can't get on and

off" (Focus Group 1). Older people in the two focus groups noted that, in addition to wheelchair users needing such kerbs, they are also necessary for people with reduced mobility as well as parents pushing prams:

> What I do find is there's not enough sloped kerbs. You get them for someone's drive and maybe at a corner, but if you've got a long street area there's no slope. They need to put a lot more sloped kerbs in, not just for wheelchairs, people with prams, people using walking sticks. (Focus Group 1)

Participants saw a need for dropped kerbs at frequent points along pavements to enable them to cross filtered roads within LTNs and therefore be able to take the most efficient walking routes to destinations: "they shouldn't just be on corners as it's harder to cross the road on a corner, especially if there's no traffic lights" (Focus Group 1).

Older people considered pavement parking to further exacerbate their difficulties in walking in their local areas. Pavement parking commonly narrows available pavements, increasing difficulties in walking, particularly if older people must then navigate out into the road, an issue accentuated by a lack of dropped kerbs. Older people also attributed poor pavement conditions to vehicles parking on the pavements and expressed disappointment in their local representatives for inaction around pavement parking: "Parking on pavements? If the councillors aren't going to do anything then democracy isn't good anymore. Ears are deaf" (Focus Group 2).

Sources of division

LTNs as interventions for cycling

Whilst those who both cycled and walked for transport in their local neighbourhoods tended to be supportive of LTNs, those who predominantly walked were less supportive, or were ambivalent. Those who primarily walked for their local journeys and were not in favour of LTNs, tended to perceive LTNs to be a cycling intervention. For example, according to Charlotte (P11) in Levenshulme, "it seemed like it was more geared towards cycling, the whole thing. The leaflet that came through seemed like it was all geared towards that [cycling], so I didn't really get involved." Similarly, Terry (P17) in Trinity and Islington noted that "we [Terry and his neighbours] assumed it was all to do with cycling at first," with Alicia (P19) identifying street changes as ways to make cycling safer: "I think the reason why they want to close Mount Street is because the crossing with the Blackfriars Road is dangerous to bikes."

LTNs in context of transport policy

We can observe that the opinions of participants on LTNs tended to be influenced by how they perceived these developments within broader policy area of modal shift in Greater Manchester. Those who were supportive tended to see LTNs as one component of wider processes, such as further LTNs, more comprehensive cycling networks, and the forthcoming reregulation of buses (and anticipation therefore of more frequent buses, better coverage, and a London-style pricing system) in the region (GMCA, 2021). During a go-along in Levenshulme, Jeff (P9) discussed seeing LTNs as the first step in wider progress on reallocating road space and supporting walking and cycling:

> Everyone's seeking to reduce car use, and you've got to start somewhere. If you can get a behaviour change in the zones... It might not have a big impact on reducing the overall traffic on the boundary roads but it's a start.

Jeff also spent time during the go-along reflecting on the wider changes that need to happen on boundary roads, such as implementing width barriers to reduce numbers of HGVs and bus gates to improve overall vehicle levels on boundary roads.

Conversely, those who were ambivalent or unsupportive tended to perceive their local LTN as more of a singular, isolated intervention, rather than placing it within a wider set of changes. These interviewees considered any inequalities produced through LTNs to be a fixed, rather than changeable, outcome. For example, Jane (P8) felt that supporters of LTNs considered the boundary roads as the space where more traffic *should* go: "then it almost felt like we were becoming somewhere where people could say, that's where the traffic should be, and that's where it should go." This perception is very different to what Jeff (P9) is saying in the previous paragraph, as he is actively campaigning for interventions to improve boundary roads and therefore evidencing that he is making connections between the LTN and the surrounding area.

A similar perception relating to the notion that the LTN is disconnected from wider mobility and planning policy is demonstrated by Valerie (P22) in explaining her opposition: "I think the main thing is, if you want to encourage people to leave their cars behind, the one thing you've got to do first, is improve public transport." Whilst Valerie perceived her local LTN to be disconnected from improvements in public transport, measures to increase levels of active travel in Greater Manchester were in fact going hand in hand with improvements in public transport (GMCA, 2021), as discussed previously. This highlights the importance of communication and emphasises the value of placing local developments in the context of other initiatives and changes.

6 Discussion

This paper has contributed to developing understanding of LTNs in the wider context of place-based mobility interventions. It continues the process of extending the scope of UK LTN research beyond London and of building on quantitative and spatial studies with in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the residents of LTNs and proposed LTNs. The research involved gathering qualitative data to contribute to understanding of resident experiences of LTNs. We set out to add nuance to a debate that is often polarised, as evidenced in the media, social media, and politics.

The contribution is therefore not limited to LTNs research, but extends to how we best approach place-based interventions in a broader sense, particularly those that could be at risk of being rejected due to the perceived impact on car users. A recent example is London's Ultra Low Emissions Zone (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022). Our research demonstrates similarities in the ways in which LTNs are perceived across our sample of 22 participants and indicates that these similarities transcend positions on their LTN, that is, whether they are in favour of or opposed to the LTN. These common positions include a desire for better neighbourhoods for everyone, concerns regarding potential inequalities, and frustrations with processes of implementation and monitoring.

Our analysis provides insights into how to approach the development of LTNs in order for them to be both acceptable to residents and effective in reducing motor traffic. Communication is clearly important, and like any development, there needs to be a process that informs residents about plans in a way that is consistent and clear. As part of this, residents feel they need to be able to input into conversations about the plans and have their voices heard. We have seen that the Covid-19 pandemic thwarted these processes by limiting community interactions to online spaces. This arguably demonstrates the value of those in-person interactions when they are possible once more. This, interviewees felt, made it more difficult to have discussions in the community and we should also note the

potential for digital exclusion, particularly of older residents (Pantić et al., 2021). Pantić et al. look at participation in planning more generally following Covid and note the potential for online methods to have a more rigid discussion structure, a lack of informal discussion, and a high level of anonymity. This applies to the experiences of our residents, who could not meet in community centres to discuss the proposals and relied on contacting the people they already had contact details for rather than being able to have informal conversations in the street. The Covid-19 context also influenced the timescales, meaning that planning processes were conducted in a shorter timescale due to the Government drive for rollout, as Dudley et al. note (Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022). This was coupled with what residents saw as a lack of leadership from elected officials: there being no clear champions for the scheme and also it not being clear with whom concerns should be raised.

We have also seen that context matters, and our data suggests that people see LTNs more positively when they understand them as part of a broader transport strategy that includes the "stick" of road closures alongside the "carrot" of improved public transport and active travel infrastructure. This is not solely about communication, however: the integrated approach needs to be both evidenced and convincing. This is a reminder that the impact of place-based approaches is not limited to that specific place, and that mobility is not only about movement within a place but also the flows into, out of, and around that place.

Another issue that reflects a combination of both presentation and on-the-ground reality, is the need to address walking issues in the area. Whilst restrictions on motor vehicle access can help to reduce traffic and therefore help improve walkability in the area to some extent, LTNs do not necessarily address other prominent barriers to walking. Dropped kerbs and crossing points need to be improved, potholes fixed, and pavement parking issues addressed.

The potential of LTNs in providing space for older adults to walk is valuable considering the high-levels of inactivity in this age group and the positive impact physical activity (including walking) has on health and wellbeing (Cunningham et al., 2020). The example of pavement parking is particularly relevant to Greater Manchester and other areas outside of London. Pavement parking has been prohibited in the Greater London area since 1974 by the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1974 (UK Government, 1974). This is not the case in Greater Manchester, where pavement parking is an issue about which campaigners have raised concerns (Walk Ride GM, 2024).

Relatedly, we observed a tendency for people to perceive the LTNs as interventions for cycling, rather than active travel in a broader sense. This related to the extent to which cycling groups were organised and vocal, and therefore able to express their general levels of support for the development. It also related to the lack of attention on the basics of walking infrastructure, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Presented with a development that is promoted as an "active" neighbourhood, but that has low walkability, residents might well decide that "active" actually means cycling. This speaks to current academic debates around what active travel is and how it is perceived (Cook et al., 2022; Dudley, Banister and Schwanen, 2022).

Monitoring is also an important consideration. Interviewees reported confusion and disappointment in relation to what they perceived to be a lack of data collection. If an LTN is presented as a trial, then residents would expect a good level of monitoring to inform decision-making about this and future schemes. Some interviewees were waiting to see more evidence before making up their minds. It is important to residents to see that decisions are being made on the basis of good data and thorough analysis. An interviewee, for instance, questioned why traffic calming was being placed on quiet residential roads when it was the busier boundary roads that had high air pollution.

Place-based approaches to modal shift should therefore engage with the expectations and experiences of neighbourhoods. Decarbonisation strategies are not necessarily incompatible with what people want for their neighbourhoods. They are often complementary: a walkable neighbourhood in which children can play in the street would seem positive to many. We would be remiss, however, to discount the nuances of experiences and perceptions that can, in time, be amplified into opposition to these schemes.

The economics and politics of the relationship of a neighbourhood to the rest of the city are also a consideration. We have seen that some residents were concerned that active travel improvements might cause rents to rise in their neighbourhood relative to others. Those on the boundary felt that they were being left out of the benefits and potentially impacted by rerouted traffic. Others in a more deprived neighbourhood felt that the LTN had been imposed on them due to their relative deprivation. These examples reflect complex relationships with place that link in part to intangible senses of belonging whilst also connecting to more concrete concerns about financial inclusion, air quality and quality of life impacts. It is well established that there is a social gradient when it comes to the impacts of our transport system and that low-income communities commonly suffer greater negative externalities from car-centric development (Lucas, 2012; Lucas and Mattioli, 2016).

Mobility consists of flows *and* places, and interventions at the neighbourhood scale should therefore be understood within the context of wider transport provision, which includes active travel infrastructure and public transport. We have also seen that there are aspects of place that are less tangible but equally important to residents. These include a socio-economic dimension that relates to concerns around gentrification, exclusion and ghettoization. They relate to how people feel about where they live and can also be reflected in quantifiable metrics such as house prices, traffic levels and air quality. This research therefore contributes to, and builds upon, discourses around place-based approaches, highlighting the importance of communities, transport options and networks (Marsden, 2021). It also points to the value of effective and appropriate engagement with communities that reflects an understanding of their position, both spatially and socially. Such an approach can help to avoid the "placelessness" (Gartner, 2016) of infrastructure design.

Competing Interests

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