

# The Case Against a Barnsbury LTN

## Preamble

This document is a companion piece to the earlier “Case Against Islington LTNs”<sup>\*</sup> (a critique of traffic management programmes already implemented by the Council in several Islington wards). It presents the case against Islington Council implementing a similar programme in Barnsbury.

## The Council’s LTN Programme For Barnsbury

*We don’t really know what is planned, and that’s a big cause for concern*

Unfortunately, despite many requests for information, as of November 2022 little is known for sure about the Council’s LTN plans for Barnsbury. This presents a significant difficulty for those who, having witnessed the many flaws and negative outcomes of the Council’s LTN programme so far, for Islington as a whole, are understandably nervous about the implications for Barnsbury. Three factors add to this difficulty:

- Perhaps because of negative publicity now associated with the term “Low Traffic Neighbourhood” the Council has now rebranded its programme under the term “Liveable Neighbourhoods”, itself part of “People Friendly Streets”. As far as we can gather, the “Liveable Barnsbury” programme retains the core objective of reducing car traffic, but with additional environmental objectives.
- Oddly, Barnsbury has been conflated with the new, neighbouring Council ward of “Laycock”. It is not clear why the Council is advancing its LTN programme in these terms but it presents another source of confusion, and will complicate the Council’s consultation process.
- Most of what we do know, or suspect, about the Barnsbury programme is gleaned from the publicity of a small, but very active and assertive cycling lobby, which appears to have a disproportionate influence over the Council and access to its decision making. This presents a problem, firstly because the views expressed may not be an accurate representation of the Council’s real plans, and secondly because they are likely to be biased, understandably so given this is a special interest group. See box below for an illustration of this problem (it goes without saying that we disagree strongly with the proposal to close the specific roads given as examples in the box).

### ***Extract from Low Traffic Barnsbury & St Mary’s Website, March 2022***

#### **Barnsbury LTN discussed at Full Council Meeting**

At last week’s Full Council Meeting John Hartley asked a question for our group:

“Barnsbury suffers from some horrendous traffic. Many vehicles cut through totally inappropriate roads such as: Offord Road, Barnsbury Street, Theberton Street and Cloudesley Place. The junction at Roman Way and MacKenzie Road is far too busy for people on bikes to be safe. The whole Barnsbury area is desperately in need of a Low Traffic Neighbourhood ....”

And Cllr. Rowena Champion responded:

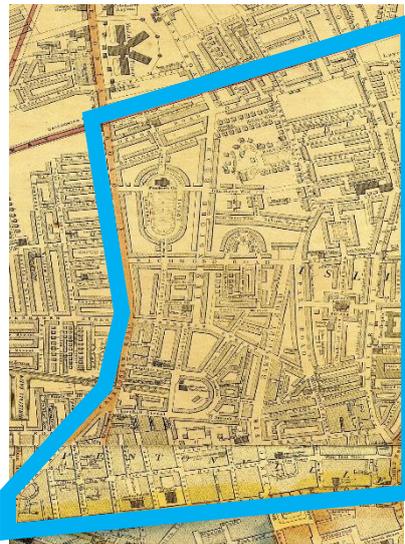
“Thank you very much John, thank you for your question and support for People Friendly Streets.”

The Council has been rightly criticised for a lack of consultation prior to introducing LTNs so far and a reluctance to review or reverse bad decisions. In view of this, and the current obscurity of the Council’s plans, there is a need for intense vigilance on the part of the Barnsbury community to make sure we do not have imposed upon us something we don’t need or want. For the purposes of this document, we focus specifically on traffic systems – the threat to the mobility of those who live and work in Barnsbury – but we should not lose sight of the threat that the Council has other objectives which may also impair our way of life under the umbrella of “Liveable Barnsbury”.

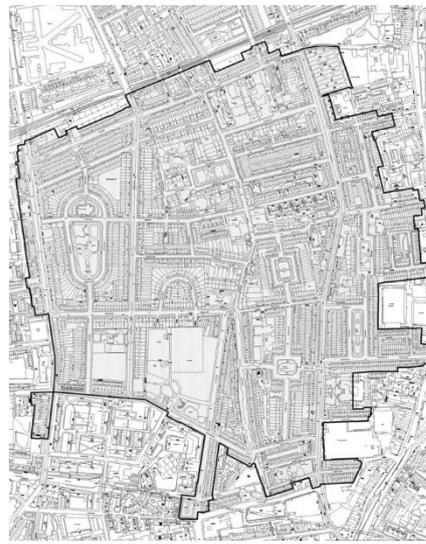
## Barnsbury Past and Present

*How it got to be the way it is, and why we like it that way*

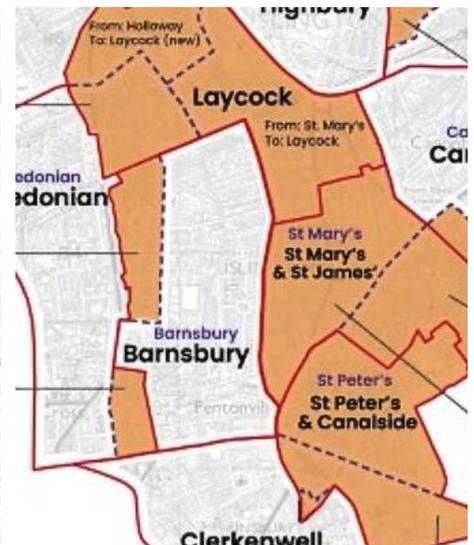
Residential Barnsbury was developed rapidly in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mainly as a series of attractive terraced houses and squares built along a network of roads and lanes, still largely recognisable today, used for horse drawn transport and for herding cattle both into Islington from the North and West and also within Islington as a thriving agricultural and entertainment centre. Barnsbury has remained as a distinct residential and commercial area to the present day. Although its precise boundaries depend on context, and have recently been redefined in terms of a Council ward, we take it for our purposes to be the roughly rectangular area shown below: a core enclave surrounded by a periphery defined by the four “boundary roads” of Liverpool Road (sometimes extending out to Upper Street), Pentonville Road, Caledonian Road and Offord Road (adjacent to the North London Line Railway).



Barnsbury 1868



Barnsbury Conservation Area 2002



Barnsbury Ward 2022

Although Barnsbury was built for a predominantly middle class of professionals and artisans, most of these moved out to new smarter suburbs in the mid-1850s and the area became relatively deprived and run down for about a century, populated mainly by a close-knit community of working class tradespeople and labourers who both lived and worked in the area. This all changed rapidly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century through a process known as “gentrification”. Many of the indigenous working class population were displaced by more affluent residents who improved the housing stock and, crucially, introduced a very early example of a “Traffic Management Scheme”, arguably creating London’s prototype “Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN)”, with streets closed off or made one-way,

and all manner of traffic calming measures. After a short period of bitter conflict and social division, characterised as “The Barnsbury Wars”, the “gentrifiers” had effectively won the battle by the 1990s. In the process several local business communities were more or less eliminated (Cloudesley Road, for example, used to have at least 40 shops; now it has one) and traffic was diverted to the boundary roads.

But over a period of several decades, the traffic system slowly evolved and present residents of the Barnsbury have much to thank for gentrification. The area is now extremely attractive, blessed with many delightful squares and parks, excellent transport links, and a good mix of a quiet core together with many buzzy commercial clusters comprising shops, bars, restaurants and small businesses around its borders, particularly on the boundary roads. Indeed, most of Barnsbury has been designated a Conservation Area (excluding the southernmost part roughly below Copenhagen Street, but including the squares to the East of Liverpool Road – see map above). Significantly, the core area is relatively free from traffic.

### **Islington’s LTN Programme so far has been a costly mistake**

*We don’t want the same thing to happen in Barnsbury*

Our previous article\* presented a number of generic disadvantages, or costs, associated with LTNs in general.

There are now several groups representing the affected Islington wards where LTNs have already been implemented, who have continued to monitor the effects of LTNs and challenge the Council’s approach. A good example is the “Keep Highbury Moving” group, with an excellent website at: <https://www.keephighburymoving.com/> (highly recommended!). This presents many examples, with carefully researched statistics, of how the Highbury LTN has on balance been bad for residents and local businesses.

A common theme is that the Council has repeatedly used questionable data to support its decisions, in some cases demonstrably false data, then published misleading reports which downplay the predominantly negative effects of LTNs. This revealing scrutiny has now reached the attention of the mainstream press with the Times, for example, reporting that traffic levels had been flat or even falling before most inner London boroughs introduced LTNs (we do not have a “traffic crisis”) and that the bounce back in traffic levels following Covid was higher in those boroughs which introduced LTNs than those which did not.

Taking into account this recent research, the likely negative effects of LTNs are summarised below, highlighting those which are particularly relevant to Barnsbury. We then identify those groups likely to be most disadvantaged.

#### **Negative Effects of LTNs**

- **Congestion on boundary roads**, caused by traffic newly diverted from closed off streets, and exacerbated by other “car-unfriendly” features (such as cycle lanes). A good example from Highbury is the now almost permanent congestion on Balls Pond Road, extending through the notorious Highbury Corner along Holloway Road. This congestion is also a problem for Barnsbury and could get worse. Liverpool Road is particularly

threatened (see below). Note that public transport by bus is also made more difficult by this congestion.

- **Longer journey times**, both within and also into and out of Barnsbury, and Islington as a whole, which is particularly costly for those relying on driving for a living (taxis, tradespeople, delivery drivers etc).
- **Increased pollution**, as a result. Again, a good example is Highbury, where pollution levels actually increased (by 42%!), with the Council later apologising for misleading reporting (see previous article\*).
- **More cyclists**. Increasingly, cyclists in Islington, typically young men, tend to flout traffic rules by, for example, riding on pavements, jumping red lights, breaking speed limits and sometimes engaging in criminal activity; and the Council appears to turn a blind eye. This behaviour is particularly unpleasant for pedestrians, as well as motorists and other cyclists. There has also been an alarming rise in cycle-like vehicles such as scooters, electric bikes, and cargo bikes, which are even more dangerous. The proliferation of bikes carrying small children, sometimes several at once, is a particularly disturbing development.
- **Ugliness**. The extensive and largely unnecessary signage, “planters” and other “street furniture” associated with LTNs and cycle lanes is turning Islington into an increasingly unattractive borough. This is a particular threat to Barnsbury as the borough’s largest conservation area. To quote the Council itself: *“Overall, the area has a rare quality of consistency and completeness which requires careful and sensitive policies to protect and enhance it”*.
- **Camera Surveillance**. A particular cause of ugliness are the CCTV cameras used to enforce “filtered” streets. Such cameras will no doubt become even more common as the criteria for filtering become more and more complex. They are an unpleasant intrusion in a quiet conservation area such as Barnsbury and there are many Barnsbury residents who are increasingly uncomfortable and resentful of this evidence that we appear to be heading towards some sort of totalitarian police state!
- **Divided community**. LTNs are now a deeply divisive issue in Islington which causes real anger and distress on both sides of the argument, and can only get worse in Barnsbury. This is all unnecessary.
- **Cultural decline**. Islington as a whole risks being transformed from a lively, exciting, mixed-economy inner city neighbourhood into a dull dormitory suburb. This applies especially to the peripheral areas of Barnsbury around Caledonian Road to the West and as far as Upper Street in the West.
- **Monetary costs**. These are huge and include:
  - Costs of implementation by the Council
  - Costs incurred by small businesses through a decline in trade or increased travelling time
  - Costs incurred by motorists in fines and higher fuel consumption

### **Main Constituencies Disadvantaged by LTNs**

- **Motorists**, obviously. We make no apologies for including this group. Over the past century the motor vehicle and the freedom of mobility which it enables has enormously enhanced the quality of life for millions, especially the older generation. No sensible person would choose not to walk from A to B within Barnsbury, but in some

circumstances and for other journeys a car or van is sometimes essential. The “war on cars” has gone too far!

- **People driving into or out of Islington.** There are many circumstances where a motorised vehicle is the only practical option for people to leave Islington or get back in. See below for an analysis of this problem for Barnsbury.
- **Old people.** Old people rely on cars to a great extent for their freedom of mobility, either through cars which they own, or through taxis, ambulances, and other people’s cars. There are a lot of old people in Barnsbury!
- **Disabled or at-risk people.** The Council recognises this as a problem with LTNs and has proposed a “Blue Badge” solution involving complex filtering, but results so far have not been encouraging, and will require even more ugly, intrusive and expensive CCTV cameras.
- **People living on main roads to which traffic is diverted.** Liverpool Road, Caledonian Road and Offord Road could all be adversely affected if traffic was diverted by closing off streets within the core Barnsbury area. And there would be knock-on effects on Upper Street and Holloway Road, for example.
- **People who need to drive for a living.** Taxi drivers, deliverymen, all household tradespeople such as builders, plumbers, window cleaners etc (and their customers) are all adversely affected by LTNs.
- **Local businesses.** Shops, pubs, restaurants etc (and their customers) are particularly disadvantaged. “Keep Highbury Moving” has highlighted particularly damning evidence relating to this group and the group above. It seems there have been no fewer than 287 formal objections from local businesses to the Highbury LTNs, with the number in favour apparently zero. To be fair to the Council, it did appear to carry out an extensive consultation with the Highbury business community, and has published the results in a detailed report, but the only reaction to the overwhelming negative feedback is a number of “mitigating actions” which are, frankly, risible.
- **Emergency services.** The Council originally claimed that services such as the Police, Fire Brigade and Ambulances are not affected by LTNs but common sense suggests otherwise, and recent evidence is emerging that response times for all three services have indeed increased as a result of LTNs, all over London.
- **Schoolchildren and their parents.** The Council has already implemented a “School Street” outside Thornhill Primary School and plans more. For a full discussion of why we believe this to be a poor solution to an over-exaggerated problem, see the earlier article\*.

## **If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it**

### *Why the Council should leave Barnsbury alone*

Our overwhelming view is that there is no major problem with traffic in Barnsbury’s core area, and that any action by the Council, however good their intentions, will almost certainly lead to more costs than benefits. Barnsbury’s traffic system has evolved over centuries through incremental adaptations, as well as one major prototype LTN initiative, into one which is as close to optimal as possible. Certainly, any attempt to redesign it through a top-down planning process based on essentially ideological doctrines (“four wheels bad; two wheels good” to paraphrase Orwell) will almost certainly have negative outcomes, both intended and unintended. Note in particular that so

many “traffic calming” measures have been implemented over the years in Barnsbury that the system as a whole is now rather unstable; any changes to one part are likely to have catastrophic impacts on others.

The community in the core Barnsbury area already enjoys extremely attractive, leafy and relatively traffic-free streets, with little congestion or pollution. It is very difficult to envisage how Barnsbury can be made more “Liveable” in any meaningful sense.

We are completely unconvinced by the claims of the cycling lobby that Barnsbury’s streets should be made more “friendly” for them. Cycling in Barnsbury is simply not particularly dangerous. The entire borough is now subject to a 20mph speed limit and cycling lanes are everywhere (and rarely used!). Pollution is not a problem except on boundary roads as an effect of LTNs. And the argument that we all need to cycle more is patronising at best and verges on totalitarianism. Furthermore, “Keep Highbury Moving” analysis reveals that the Council’s claim that cycling increased by 66% on Highbury’s internal roads is false: after normalisation and seasonal adjustment (applied by the Council to car traffic), the correct figure is just 2%!

Arguably the only major problem experienced by the Barnsbury community is the increasing difficulty of leaving it or getting back in again by car, for car owners, residents who rely on car transport, and tradespeople and other businesses who rely on cars or vans to serve Barnsbury residents and businesses. One of the most damning criticisms of recent Islington LTN initiatives is that they have severely restricted this freedom of movement into and out of a borough which for centuries has been attractive precisely because of its excellent transport links. Thanks to the nightmare of Highbury corner, coupled with the almost permanently congested Balls Pond Road, it is now very difficult to drive East out of Islington via Hackney. Similarly, Holloway Road (the A1!) is now frequently at a standstill for people attempting to travel North or North West. And driving to the West Country via Euston Road was until very recently a misery due to its cycle lane (the results here were so catastrophic that the lanes have now been removed). These problems will hopefully be addressed eventually by reversing the LTN policies which caused them, but in the meantime, it is vital for Barnsbury that there is free movement of traffic on the boundary roads which link to these key routes out of and into London.

Barnsbury’s boundary roads are fairly busy, but not unduly so for thoroughfares whose main *raison d’être* must surely be the free movement of traffic of all types, commensurate with a lively commercial and entertainment ambience. The challenge for the Council in this respect should be to avoid making these roads more busy by diverting traffic on to them, either from other Barnsbury streets, or, more importantly, from neighbouring LTNs. Note, in passing, that the Traffic Management Act 2004 requires a local traffic authority, among other matters, to secure “the expeditious movement of traffic” and “the avoidance, elimination or reduction of road congestion or other disruption to the movement of traffic”.

Taking each road in turn:

- Pentonville Road, or the A501, is one of London’s main arteries and is always going to be very busy. Fortunately not many people actually live on it. It is, however, a key route out of Barnsbury both to the East via City Road and especially to the West via Euston Road. The aim here should be to allow traffic to flow as freely as possible. In particular, any temptation to install cycle lanes should be resisted.
- Caledonian Road is a busy shopping street as well as an important North/South thoroughfare. The balance between free movement and trade is probably about right,

especially given that York Way to the West remains a good alternative for North/South traffic in most cases.

- Liverpool Road was in the past a reasonably pleasant, wide thoroughfare without much traffic. However, recent Council initiatives, including cycle lanes with cars parked outside these lanes, have turned it into a more congested, polluted, dangerous and unattractive route to the dismay of most residents living there. Even cyclists dislike the new scheme! These initiatives should be reversed. The Council should certainly not be allowed to make Liverpool Road even worse.
- Offord Road is a more debatable case. We are aware that there is a highly active local community (“Offord Road Green Alliance”, with links to the cycling lobby) which wishes to block it off in some way to avoid “cut through” traffic. We believe this should be resisted for several reasons:
  - From personal experience the levels of traffic on Offord Road are actually quite modest.
  - This road has always been an important thoroughfare for East/West traffic between Caledonian Road and Liverpool Road and there are now very few alternatives. Note that there is actually a bus route down Offord Road.
  - Thanks to the 1990s prototype LTN, Offord Road is one of the few remaining ways via which residents can leave Barnsbury to go North or vice versa.
  - Again, thanks to the 1990s LTN, if Offord Road was closed off or “filtered” then all its traffic would be diverted on to much smaller streets. For example, to enter Barnsbury from Liverpool Road, traffic would be forced to use Lofting Road or Bewdley Street.
  - The argument that children should be able to play in the road is absurd. There are plenty of gardens and parks nearby.
  - Although the activist group is clearly in favour of filtering, it is quite possible that many living in Offord Road are not, recognising the many generic reasons why LTNs might disadvantage Offord Road residents themselves, as well as their neighbours.

## Conclusion

**Islington Council is planning to introduce a Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) programme in Barnsbury, under the misleading branding of “Liveable Barnsbury”. Although its detailed plans remain obscure, the Council should be resisted. As Islington’s largest Conservation Area, Barnsbury is already an eminently “liveable” district. Thanks in part to a prototype LTN implemented over 30 years ago, traffic volumes are low and the current traffic system works well for most residents, despite the claims of a small but dogmatic cycling lobby. Based on the results of LTNs already implemented in other parts of Islington, a new LTN in Barnsbury would almost certainly have an adverse effect on many, if not most, people who live or work in Barnsbury, including some of the most vulnerable. The default position should be that the Council does nothing.**

**Nick Collin, November 2022**

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\* "The Case Against LTNs in Islington":

[https://cloudesleyassociation.org/images/The\\_Case\\_Against\\_LTNs\\_PDF.pdf](https://cloudesleyassociation.org/images/The_Case_Against_LTNs_PDF.pdf)