# Bristol City Council faces backlash over controversial traffic barriers in Barton Hill



Bristol City Council, led by the Green Party, is facing significant backlash from residents of Barton Hill over the installation of new traffic barriers purportedly aimed at reducing pollution. The council claims these measures are part of broader anti-traffic initiatives, yet local community members, including the area’s ethnically diverse Somali and white working-class populations, have expressed fears that the barriers will serve to segregate them from wealthier neighbours and restrict their movement.

The controversial blockades, referred to by some locals as a 'race wall', were erected under the cover of darkness on March 13, guarded by a substantial police presence. Eyewitness accounts describe council workers installing barricades while police officers, some armed with Tasers, ensured the operation's security. Shopkeeper Naveen Challagundla, who has worked in Barton Hill for two years, articulated concerns that the barriers might jeopardise his business, stating, “It’s like a prison. There’s no difference between pollution here and [in richer areas], but here it’s closed. We will lose all that business.”

Barton Hill is notably one of the UK's more disadvantaged areas, with high levels of poverty among its youth. Research by The Quartet Community Foundation indicates that over a third of the local population is under 16, and a striking 55 per cent of these children live below the poverty line. The neighbourhood is also marked by its ethnic diversity, with 55 per cent of residents identifying as non-white and a significant proportion of households lacking anyone who speaks English as a first language.

Local resident Melissa Topping, who has lived in the area for over a decade, expressed deep concern about potential civil unrest caused by the barricades, predicting, “It’s going to get to the stage of guerilla warfare.” Community sentiment suggests that many believe the barriers will not only exacerbate existing struggles but may even lead to violent protests.

The council has defended the East Bristol Liveable Neighbourhood (EBLN) initiative, asserting that it aims to reduce personal car usage by 44 per cent over the next five years. A council spokesperson emphasised that the scheme is a temporary six-month trial, after which community feedback will be requested to assess its effectiveness and potential for permanence. The measures are designed to promote cycling and walking, yet residents assert that the barriers simply displace traffic rather than mitigate it, leading to further congestion in surrounding areas.

Councillor Ed Plowden, chair of the Transport and Connectivity Committee, acknowledged the community's mixed feelings about the scheme, stating, “We fully support the right to protest, and the right for people to campaign for change in the area.” However, many locals, such as father-of-one Mark Gottshalk, have objected to the manner in which the barricades were installed, asserting that their voices were ignored in the process.

Criticism has also emerged regarding police involvement during the installation of the barriers, with Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Clare Moody stating that she is investigating the police presence at the time. Reports suggest that residents felt unsafe and were confronted by officers from outside the local area, augmenting fears of increased tension.

In a similar vein, Bath and North East Somerset Council recently decided to make the closure of Sydney Road to through traffic a permanent fixture after a contentious trial period. Residents there voiced concerns that while the intention of creating safer, more pleasant neighbourhoods was commendable, it had instead led to increased traffic congestion on alternative routes, potentially compromising safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

Opposition councillors, who challenged the decision, argued that the council had failed to consider the widening impact of such measures, raising issues of transparency and community engagement. They highlighted that the liveable neighbourhood scheme effectively shifted traffic problems rather than resolving them, with constituents expressing fears of increased danger for schoolchildren and cyclists.

Despite the controversy surrounding both schemes, supporters remain adamant that the long-term benefits—such as improved air quality and safer environments for non-drivers—will outweigh initial disruptions and opposition. They emphasise the environmental urgency behind these restructuring decisions as cities across the UK grapple with the dual challenges of air pollution and climate change.

As Bristol and Bath navigate these turbulent changes, a broader conversation about community involvement, urban planning, and public safety continues, illustrating the complex realities that transformative policies can evoke in diverse urban landscapes. The divided sentiments within these communities underscore the necessity for continued dialogue and engagement as local authorities push ahead with ambitious environmental agendas.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/police-join-contractors-bus-gate-installed-before-sunrise/> - This article corroborates the installation of traffic barriers under police presence in Bristol, specifically mentioning the early morning installation and protests in Barton Hill.
* <https://thebristolcable.org/2024/11/traffic-jams-on-roads-around-east-bristol-liveable-neighbourhood-spark-opposition-as-council-calls-for-patience/> - This piece highlights the opposition to the East Bristol Liveable Neighbourhood scheme, including concerns over traffic congestion and community dissatisfaction with the council's approach.
* <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/streets-and-parking/east-bristol-liveable-neighbourhood> - This Bristol City Council webpage would likely detail the official rationale and goals behind the East Bristol Liveable Neighbourhood initiative, including its aims to reduce pollution and enhance public transport.
* <https://www.oecd.org/development/pgd/ENN_Air_Pollution.pdf> - While not directly about Bristol, this OECD report on air pollution underscores the broader environmental context driving initiatives like the Liveable Neighbourhood schemes.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/traffic-closures-uk-climate-crisis-air-pollution-b1024161.html> - This article discusses traffic closures across the UK aimed at addressing air pollution and climate change, mirroring the environmental urgency cited in Bristol.
* <https://www.cyclinguk.org/> - Cycling UK's website typically advocates for cycling-friendly infrastructure, which is in line with the goals of liveable neighbourhood schemes like those in Bristol and Bath.