# Oxford’s low traffic neighbourhoods spark fierce backlash from local businesses



Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) introduced in Oxford have sparked significant controversy and opposition since their implementation, with local business owners and residents expressing strong dissatisfaction. The scheme, designed to reduce through traffic and encourage safer, quieter neighbourhoods, was first introduced by a Conservative and Independent alliance administration in 2021 and has since undergone notable developments.

The LTNs were initially installed in the Cowley area of Oxford in May 2022, with the intention to limit traffic flow in residential zones and promote cycling and walking. This approach gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic as councils sought to support safer commuting alternatives. However, the scheme has provoked intense reactions, with reports of bollards being forcibly removed, run over, set ablaze, and wooden planters used to block streets being vandalised, including graffiti and destruction of plants.

Despite the backlash, Oxfordshire County Council decided to make the scheme permanent in 2023 after an 18-month trial. Since the 2021 election, the council has been governed by a Liberal Democrat and Green alliance after no party secured a majority. This political shift has influenced the continuation and expansion of LTNs.

Councillor Eddie Reeves, leader of the local Conservative group, criticised the current administration’s support for the LTNs. Speaking to the Oxford Mail, Reeves stated, "The Lib Dems and Greens came into office to much fanfare in 2021 and put the rocket boosters behind LTNs. The LTN experiment has not worked […] they have left a lot of people feeling as though the council do not listen to them." Reeves also noted that while the Conservative group would not support the scheme, removing the existing LTNs would incur substantial costs, which he found hard to justify given their focus on repairing roads.

In contrast, Liz Leffman, the Liberal Democrat leader of Oxfordshire County Council, defended the scheme, noting, "The LTNs were introduced by the Conservatives long before we became the administration. There are people living in low traffic neighbourhoods who really like the fact that their children can safely walk and cycle to school, and that seems to me to be absolutely a priority."

Among the most vocal critics is Clinton Pugh, a long-standing business owner on the Cowley Road who claims the LTNs have severely impacted his restaurants. Pugh, whose businesses include Cafe Coco, KazBar, and Cafe Tarifa, described Oxfordshire County Council as "bullies" after the council decided to make the scheme permanent. He asserted that the traffic measures had "wrecked" his businesses, leading to significant financial losses estimated in the hundreds of thousands of pounds. In particular, he blamed the council for the sale of Cafe Coco in October 2022, labelling the scheme an "ill thought out traffic calming disaster."

Despite the challenges faced, not all of Pugh’s establishments have closed; KazBar remains operational, although he reported a substantial drop in trade. Cafe Tarifa was repossessed last year amid the downturn. Pugh’s family includes several actors, such as his daughter Florence Pugh, known for her roles in Hollywood films including Marvel’s Thunderbolts, who reportedly stepped in to support staff wages during the difficult period over Christmas 2022.

Pugh has actively protested the LTNs, even erecting banners against the scheme on his premises, which led to confrontations with the council. In late 2020, he displayed a billboard outside Cafe Coco condemning the initiative, provoking demands from the city council to remove it. After replacing the sign with protest slogans referencing censorship and democracy, Pugh was warned he might face substantial fines for breaching advertising regulations.

The LTNs are part of broader environmental and transport policies in Oxford, which include the introduction of a pilot Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) in February 2022. This initiative has brought further changes to the area, such as the removal of hundreds of parking spaces—195 on Cowley Road alone—to make way for cycle lanes. While Pugh supports environmental goals for a cleaner Oxford, he maintains that the implementation has been detrimental to local businesses reliant on passing traffic.

The Daily Mail is reporting that this ongoing dispute illustrates the complex challenges of urban transport planning where efforts to promote sustainable travel intersect with local economic and social concerns. The debate in Oxford remains highly contested, with the council emphasising the benefits of LTNs for safer, healthier communities while business owners highlight the adverse economic impacts.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23308820.oxford-cowley-road-traders-produce-shock-business-survey-ltns/> - This article discusses a survey conducted by Cowley Road traders, revealing that eight shops have closed in areas affected by Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), with loss of parking being a major factor contributing to the closures.
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-57540583> - This BBC News report covers a protest in Cowley against the LTNs, highlighting concerns from residents and business owners about increased travel times and negative impacts on local businesses due to the traffic restrictions.
3. <https://longreads.politicshome.com/road-warriors> - This article features Clinton Pugh, a business owner on Cowley Road, who claims that the LTNs have severely impacted his restaurants, leading to significant financial losses and the sale of one of his establishments.
4. <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=23210> - This council meeting agenda discusses the proposed Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme in Oxford, including concerns from the local licensed Hackney carriage trade about the impact of road closures on their operations.
5. <https://www.change.org/p/oxfordshire-county-council-remove-the-low-traffic-neighborhood-road-closures-in-oxford-cb5d7e8d-478c-4b4d-ad66-25a626e3e25d> - This petition reflects residents' concerns about the LTNs, including negative impacts on businesses, increased travel times, and the blocking of roads affecting residents' own access.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-63716090> - This BBC News article reports on the £72,000 spent by Oxfordshire County Council repairing vandalised bollards used in the LTNs, indicating significant public opposition and acts of vandalism against the traffic-calming measures.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14662631/Low-traffic-neighbourhoods-failed-experiment-Florence-Pugh-father.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data