

We, the undersigned, are opposed to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) allowing further motor vehicle access through the bollard-protected East Oxford LTNs.

We call on Oxfordshire County Council and Cabinet Member for Highway Management Andrew Gant to:

1. leave the timber bollards in place to protect all age groups (including children) who cycle, scoot, use mobility scooters and walk through our neighbourhoods
2. reject any proposal to open up the LTNs to further motor vehicles, such as taxis

Current situation

On 22nd June 2023, Oxfordshire County Council agreed to replace three of the Cowley LTN bollard-protected filters with ANPR which will allow emergency service vehicles and taxis access through the LTNs. The consultation survey sent out by Oxfordshire County Council proposed taxi access for only one of these filters.

This sets a worrying precedent. Our fear is that Oxfordshire County Council (through its current consultation - [see here](#)) is now planning to give taxi exemptions to other roads and streets in East Oxford that have been identified as potential sites for ANPR to replace wooden bollards.

Background

Since the installation of the wooden bollards in March 2023, our communities have had their first proper taste of what LTNs are meant to achieve, in line with LTNs across the UK. Our streets have become safe for people of all ages to cycle, scoot, use mobility scooters and walk through, in particular for children going to school. OCC has successfully created a safe, active travel highway from Meadow Lane to Cheney, Brookes and the hospitals.

This is now under threat.

Taxis

East Oxford residents have started to expect LTN roads to be safe spaces, where they can amble in the road, children can take their first wobbly bike rides, parents feel they can let their children cross roads by themselves. The smaller the perceived traffic hostility within an LTN, the faster and broader the active travel uptake will be. Allowing taxi exemptions will immediately put off a large proportion of local residents who are considering making more of their journeys on foot or by cycle.

This retrograde step goes against the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee, and it undermines the active travel and liveability gains of the LTNs. *It will create taxi 'superhighways' on narrow residential streets, Magdalen Road, Littlehay Road, James Sreet, and Divinity Road, all of which have been transformed through the introduction of their bollard-protected LTNs.*

The Council forecast for the number of taxis (based on counts along a road with ANPR at only one end) is nonsensical and unrealistically low, given that *opening up a traffic-free route between two arterial roads (as is the case here) will create a shortcut; it will inevitably become the de facto 24/7 route for taxis travelling between Headington and Donnington, avoiding St Clements / Iffley Road congestion.*

*"An LTN is an area where motorised traffic is prevented from taking **shortcuts** through a residential area. This creates quieter and safer streets where residents may feel more comfortable when making local journeys by cycling, wheeling or on foot."* OCC definition of an LTN.

The majority of these streets are too narrow for cyclists and mobility scooters to pass cars safely, and in addition Divinity Road is on a hill, making it more dangerous for cyclists, including children cycling to Cheney School and beyond, if there is a return to an increase in traffic. Anecdotally, parents of children locally are already voicing concerns that if OCC is prepared to allow the 684 private hire drivers and 248 hackney carriage drivers licensed in Oxford access to streets, it means their children will be put back into cars to get to school rather than being allowed to cycle.

While some disabled people are reliant on taxis, many find it easiest to get about using wheelchairs, or adapted bikes or trikes, where quieter streets are an advantage. This will be undermined by allowing further exemptions.

We have consulted numerous authorities in London and not found a single example of an LTN with taxi exemptions - on the contrary, to preserve the integrity and benefits of the LTNs, taxis are not permitted through filters.

ANPR

In theory, ANPR is politically appetising as it may appear to mitigate the delayed ambulance risk, without undermining the LTN. In practice, removal of a physical filter inherently weakens an LTN, by allowing through joyriders, confused drivers, drivers with cloned or conveniently dirty number plates, drivers whose cars are registered to a false address, drivers who just ignore PCNs, and any number of future exemptions.

The pressure on the council to keep adding more exemptions is huge, as different groups request them. For example, just during the course of the recent consultation process, the proposed exemptions have increased from emergency services, to emergency services, taxis, and universal service providers. As this list grows and grows and traffic increases, the LTNs lose their benefits.

And the ANPR barriers do not feel as safe as a physical barrier. It is well documented that where there are physical barriers, children play - where there is ANPR, they do not.

An FOI request made to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Team showed that they have no evidence to support the introduction of ANPR. Studies show that the principal reasons for delays to fire engines are congestion and poor parking. Real data in established LTNs e.g. Waltham Forest showed that response times reduced when the LTNs were introduced.

The details and reasoning for replacing bollards with ANPR are not clearly set out in the consultation document. In the statement of reasons, or Snapshot Report, paragraph 73 relating to emergency services indicates that emergency services response-time modelling was based on diverting routes *around* the filters *rather than unlocking and passing through the bollards*, as was understood to be the procedure.

Summary

We stand by the Climate Change Committee 2023 report, which clearly states that *"LTNs reduce traffic flows on residential streets, providing a more appealing setting in which for locals to walk and cycle and improving air quality."*

We refuse to allow Oxford to become the only city in the UK to take this regressive step of giving taxis cut-through access to supposedly "low traffic" neighbourhoods.

The council is looking for political compromise for no reason. You don't need to change the LTNs, they are working fine, and they will work even better once city-wide bus gates are introduced. Now the wooden bollards are in place, the East Oxford LTNs are working well - please leave them alone.