

Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group



2016

PRESS COVERAGE

Community under threat in the south

❑ CAMDEN Council seems intent on destroying the community in South Camden.

In April Cllr Phil Jones decided that money obtained from developers in the south of the borough could be used to develop housing in the north.

The council describes South Camden as a "business and commercial area" in contrast to "residential areas" in the north. The many thousands of residents south of Euston Road are ignored.

Recent traffic changes are at the expense of residents, visitors and businesses.

As residents we know that we live in an area that has been a terrorist target (7/7) and is likely to continue to be high risk, given the proximity of three train stations

including Eurostar. It is an important hub for long-distance rail passengers, tourists and commuters. There are also two major hospitals in the area, UCH and Great Ormond Street.

Until November of last year traffic moved freely in the streets south of St Pancras and Euston stations. Then Tavistock Place was closed to westbound traffic; it was the only westbound alternative to Euston Road from this neighbourhood, and the only westbound route between Euston Road and the Strand.

The closure resulted in severe traffic jams on Judd Street, Southampton Row and Woburn Place, the key approaches to St Pancras and Euston. The gridlock extends as far south as Holborn.

There are further traffic plans put forward by TfL and Camden (including stopping vehicle access from Euston Road to Judd Street and vice versa) which will significantly exacerbate the situation. Disrupting traffic flow in this vulnerable area makes it inaccessible to emergency services. Emergency vehicles are already significantly impeded in journey time and are having to drive on the wrong side of heavily-congested residential streets.

If anything happens to disrupt traffic round King's Cross or Euston there is no other westbound route between Camden Town and the Strand.

PETA SWEET

**Bloomsbury Residents Action Group
Sandwich Street, WC1**

Bloomsbury is our village and we're still living here

❑ I FULLY endorse Peta Sweet's comments in last week's letter's page – as a community we are indeed under a creeping and insidious threat.

When I moved to Judd Street in 1981, my elderly neighbours shook my hand and said "welcome to the village." Despite its run-down appearance, that was the character of this historic quarter of London. It still is.

This was before the opening of the British Library on Euston Road, before the renovation of St Pancras and King's Cross stations, and before the emergence of King's Cross Central as a brand new mixed-use neighbourhood.

Residents south of the Euston Road have witnessed a lot of change in the past 30 years, but we are still here. And we

matter.

I was shocked to know that Camden Council sees where I live as a "business and commercial area". I chat to many friends and neighbours on the pavement, in the local pub, the corner store, the chemist.

We meet and greet on the street. We are part of a large living, breathing residential community – despite the latest dangers to our health from idling diesel engines stuck in traffic.

We are dismayed at the recent introduction of new traffic plans (with more to come) that are destroying our quality of life.

With no westbound through route between Euston Road and the Strand, our local streets are all too frequently gridlocked.

As ratepayers and voters it seems our concerns and aspirations are less important than those of more powerful lobbyists such as UCL, the University of London and businesses who operate from premises in WC1, but do not live here.

It may benefit their

students and employees to have easy access via the "trial" Tavistock/Torrington segregated cycleway. But where do they actually live?

Why should residents of WC1 have to tolerate the increase in deadly and toxic fumes from stationary vehicles?

Why should the frail and elderly, who have lived here for half a century, have to pay a fortune for a short taxi ride to the hospital?

Why should we have to worry about how emergency vehicles will get to us if there is a fire, an accident, or terrorist attack? We well remember the horrors of 7/7.

The streets south of the Euston Road were built in the late 18th and the early 19th centuries with terraces and formally landscaped squares to create an attractive residential environment.

The residents are still here. We do not want to be ignored.

DEBBIE RADCLIFFE
Bloomsbury Residents Action
Group
Judd Street, WC1

Chaos was avoidable

□ LEIGH Street, Thanet Street, Sandwich Street and Hastings Street are now an exclusive superhighway for taxis and vans heading towards King's Cross (KX).

These streets provide almost the only route to KX, or they are the satnav-guided rat-run for vehicles escaping the gridlock of Bloomsbury and Judd Street in particular.

In 2011 a ban was imposed on eastbound traffic turning left from Tavistock Place into Marchmont Street, preventing traffic from taking a direct route to Euston Road and KX. London Taxi Drivers' Association raised objections but to no avail. That traffic is now diverted onto Judd Street.

Then in 2015 the "experimental" closure of Tavistock Place to westbound traffic was sprung on most residents, and traffic approaching the Judd Street/Tavistock Place junction from the east or south was also diverted onto Judd Street towards Euston Road.

But this localised blight is only a snapshot of a much wider problem, the essence of which is the piecemeal fiddling with and removal of key traffic routes from the broader network by policy-driven dedication to cycles. The result is overloading of the remaining network, causing problematic congestion, junction conflicts, reduced static and dynamic capacity, increased noise and increased atmospheric pollution throughout the wider area.

With the availability of

sophisticated traffic modelling software, the impacts of any potential turn restriction can be analysed in a broader context, and are predictable, measurable, and avoidable.

That they were not prior to the current chaos is down to professional incompetence or wilful disregard for residents, and for the environmental consequences of policy imposition.

TONY HARRISON
Thanet Street, WC1

Just taste the fumes

❑ MY fight for survival started a few years ago when Camden decided to implement a plan which involved the banning of northbound traffic in the

section of Marchmont Street, north of Tavistock Place.

This resulted in traffic (including diesel cabs) taking rat-run routes via the densely populated side streets and Judd Street. Reports following this referred vaguely to "some pollution readings having

fallen", but did not specify precisely where such readings had been obtained. Perhaps Upper Marchmont Street?

I am in the care of University College Hospital for treatment of a chronic chest condition. The standard of care and attention I receive is beyond reproach. But the heroic efforts of the staff have to fight against the pollutants from the displaced traffic. The situation has been exacerbated by changes related to the imposed one-way traffic along Tavistock Place. In Judd Street we now have frequent long queues of stationary traffic, including many taxi cabs, waiting for the lights to change at Euston Road. The pollution is now horrendous. One can also taste the fumes. But the most toxic component consists of particles which

are invisible and odourless. They are so small that they are absorbed into the body via the lungs. Very cunning.

I wonder who will win in determining my existence (or lack of it). UCH or Camden Council?

The proposed plans involving the banning of traffic from leaving the north end of Judd Street will only result in further chaos. Delivery vehicles will be handicapped from performing their normal function and visitor vehicles will roam the side streets. Residents will be able to look out on a day-long "Tour de France" following the introduction of super cycle lanes.

Please reverse the changes, drop the plans, and leave us alone. Then we will be able to again breathe a little more freely.

DAVID A HILL
Judd Street, WC1

Jams now!

❑ THANET, Sandwich, Hastings, Leigh, Coram, Handel, Wakefield and Tonbridge streets, small residential roads that used to be quiet and traffic-free, are now so severely polluted residents have to keep their windows closed even during a heat wave.

Wider streets where traffic used to move freely now have traffic jams for up to 10 hours a day, and residents are suffering even more debilitating pollution.

Further proposals from

Camden and Transport for London would close routes into the Judd Street area from north and south.

This will push more of the traffic into the small side streets south of Euston Road and create gridlock.

Thousands of residents and many small businesses in WC1 are suffering needlessly because of poor traffic planning.

This is a soluble problem. Let's all get together to find a solution that works for everyone.

MG VERSTEEG
Thanet Street, WC1

Pollution is increasing

□ I APPRECIATE the good intentions behind Meric Apak's letter, (Action plan aims to help clear the air, July 28).

I am afraid the good intentions ring rather hollow, however, when Camden Council is increasing pollution.

The closure of Tavistock Place to west-bound traffic has resulted in hugely increased pollution on Judd Street and Hunter Street. These streets are also now far more dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians, and the changes impede emergency vehicles. Prior to the closure there was occasional stationary traffic, but it flowed reasonably well. Now west-bound traffic has all been shunted from Tavistock Place to the surrounding streets, there is idling traffic for many hours a day, predominantly diesel engines. Idling traffic is a greater threat to health than moving traffic.

A November 2015 Lambeth Council newsletter notes: "An idling engine can produce up to twice as many exhaust emissions as an engine in motion. Exhaust emissions contain a range of air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter. These can affect the air quality of the surrounding environment and the air we breathe and are particularly bad for people with asthma, children, the elderly and you".

In Judd and Hunter streets there has been up to 10 hours per day solid traffic jams, where well over 1,000 people live. When there is congestion, it can take a vehicle nine

minutes to drive around 150 metres from Cromer Street to Euston Road – a journey that normally takes about 20 seconds.

So journeys can now take 27 times as long, emitting 27 times as much pollution. The July 28 letter from Judd Street resident David Hill, who is suffering the health effects of the council's change, said that you can "taste the fumes". I emphasise this is a newly-created problem following the Tavistock Place closure to west-bound traffic.

When it happened the increased pollution was obvious and I wrote repeatedly to councillors and others to ask about health impact monitoring and whether pollution was being measured; but received no reply. I hear air quality monitoring has been done in Tavistock Place (where no doubt there is less pollution) but I know of none on Judd Street.

Yes, there are plans to block off most access at both ends of Judd Street which some people say will help. However, this might result in more traffic just being stuck on Judd Street (since we know from the March 10 public meeting that traffic modelling is flawed and

had not predicted the degree of congestion on Judd Street); it will certainly result in people having to drive much further to achieve their destinations. It will also make life very difficult for older people and people with disabilities, who need to be able to access their own homes.

This area is not just a thoroughfare for people from outside. It is a living, breathing, community. It is all very well for people who do not live here to write in and say the Tavistock one-way system should be kept.

It is time the health and views of the people who actually live here – who also cycle and walk here – are recognised.

NICKY COATES
Bloomsbury Residents'
Action Group

Delays close to home

□ I AM a resident of Judd Street and I have recently been obliged to drive, by necessity, to and from New Cross on a regular basis.

Given that this is a long journey, it is dispiriting to record that the greatest delays I face are inevitably in the Bloomsbury area, very close my home.

These delays are a direct result of the closure of Tavistock Place.

Aside from the dangers that this causes to anyone who uses the roads (particularly cyclists and pedestrians using or trying to cross Judd Street and Hunter Street), it represents a qualitative change in the experience of living in an area that

was once distinguished, perhaps remarkably, for its quiet residential feel.

The fact that this new road system is as dangerous to cyclists as it is distressing to residents begs the question as to whom it is of benefit.

DR MARIAM MOTAMEDI-FRASER
WC1

BLOOMSBURY area is vital

□ THE closure of Tavistock place is supposedly a "trial".

Richenda Walford of Camden Cyclists does not see it as such. She said: "...any suggestion we should go back to the pre-trial days is backward-looking" and "We should not hand over our streets to through-traffic and all the nastiness that brings", (No rat-runs *Letters*, August 4).

She quotes the Safer Bloomsbury website in support of the trial.

The partners in the website are all businesses and colleges who want easy cycle access for their

coming into the area.

Fair enough, but the area could support safe cycling without creating rat-runs and pollution in residential areas and chaos on the streets that are so important for security, particularly at the mainline stations.

Access for emergency services is ignored in both the Transport for London and the Camden proposals for the area.

Indeed none of the proposals mention that in Camden's transport plan Tavistock Place, Judd Street, Guilford Street, Woburn Place, and Tavistock Square are all designated as emergency routes.

Ambulance and fire services have both already

changes and the further proposals will slow them down even more.

Ms Walford also applauds Camden's next set of traffic proposals on the grounds that they would remove the "rat-runs" created by the closure of Tavistock Place. These proposals would remove access to Judd Street from both north and south, pushing ever more traffic on to Russell Square and Woburn Place.

"Rat-runs" is an emotive phrase, of course, and nobody wants them; but there are wider issues at stake here.

"Rat-run" ignores that this area, with thousands of residents and businesses, needs services and that it contains the route that connects train stations serving the south of England to those serving the north.

Residents have had no

have been imposed on our area. Consultation has been derisory.

We know that there are solutions that would accommodate the needs of cyclists, residents, and services.

It is encouraging that the council has agreed to start a dialogue with residents but we are concerned that both Camden and TfL have self-imposed deadlines for different parts of their proposals that would limit options and prevent looking at the area as a whole.

This area is a vital part of London's infrastructure. Camden and TfL need to treat it as such and, instead of introducing changes piecemeal, develop a traffic scheme that works for emergency services, residents and cyclists.

ELIZABETH PAUL
Sandwich Street, WC1

We're part of a campus

□ PETA Sweet

(Community under threat in the south, *Letters*, July 14) cites the council describing south Camden as a "business and commercial area" in contrast to "residential areas" in the north.

It may come as a surprise to some that our area has a new name and a new function. We are in the "Knowledge Quarter" a body whose "vision is for the area to be considered a loosely integrated campus".

The KQ is a consortium governed by nine organisations, with Camden Council a board

member. There are over 50 "partners" in this organisation, many of them academic institutions paying up to £20,000 to join.

One reason for joining is that "Partners will be supported by the KQ in their external consultations, in developing responses and representing your view on areas that will impact the local environment and sustainability through public realm and larger infrastructure initiatives."

KQ supports the Transport for London proposal that the north-south superhighway goes down Judd Street, because it will allow "employees, visitors and students to travel more securely".

They show some

concern about deliveries to their institutions and the need for taxis to attract visitors and tourists, but no mention of residents.

UCL is a large and most voracious developer. The council gets a considerable revenue from this.

The council is now on the board of an institution that regards us as part of their campus.

No surprise, then, that consultations on the current traffic proposals were token.

Our councillors need to start representing the concerns and interests of residents instead of selling us off to the highest bidder.

ALAN YOUNG
Sandwich Street, WC1

Security is top priority

❑ THE police response to the killing in Russell Square in August was swift and effective.

They arrived on the scene within six minutes, which enabled them to catch and disarm a man before he could do more harm. It is fortunate that during the August holidays traffic in this area is minimal. Would the police have been able to respond as quickly if traffic were as

heavy as it is out of the holiday season?

In September traffic will go back to its normal level, which is now often stationary the length of Woburn Place, Russell Square and Southampton Row. This jam only started when Camden closed Tavistock Place to westbound traffic. Jams severely impede the access for emergency service.

Camden plans further closures that will remove vehicular access to Judd Street from Euston Road. Guilford Street, Southampton Row and

Woburn Place will then become even more gridlocked.

In Camden's Traffic Plan, Tavistock Place, Judd Street, Guilford Street and Woburn Place were all designated as emergency routes. How can our councillors justify blocking these necessary emergency routes to St Pancras and Euston stations which are at high risk of attack? Why is Transport for London ignoring Sadiq Khan's concerns? Security must come first.

AMANDA ANDREWS, WC1

People don't want these cycle lanes

❑ I WENT to the "discussion" meeting at the Town Hall regarding the proposal for the Tavistock Place/ Torrington Place double cycle lanes to be made permanent.

It's apparent Transport for London and Camden Council aren't really interested how this has hit people who live, work, and need to drive here.

They conveniently didn't have a map that extended to cover where I could have shown them the gridlock these cycle lanes have brought on this part of King's Cross Road/ Swinton Street/ Gray's Inn Road which is resulting in far heavier traffic and consequently more pollution.

I live in Wicklow Street. I was told the air pollution is now better in Torrington Place and Tavistock Place. Really?

This isn't solving air pollution

it's simply diverting heavier loads of traffic to an already very congested area, the outside route of drivers who don't pay the Congestion Charge? I imagine they're not testing the air quality in these areas that are being directly affected by the displaced traffic that can no longer travel east to west on Tavistock/ Torrington Place.

I need my car for my job. As a costume designer I have to buy (from the West End) and hire large quantities of clothes and transport them to fittings to various production companies that are based in and around Soho and the West End. I cannot do this using public transport or on a bicycle. Because of these cycle lanes a 15-minute drive now can take me up to an hour.

I also have a disabled sister who often stays with me. She

needs assistance to walk. I have neighbours who are elderly or disabled who use cabs to attend doctors' surgeries, hospitals, shops, go to church and visit friends; their cab fares have now quadrupled. A Camden employee at the meeting told me with glee that she has had great feedback from older cyclists, and those with disabilities, who are now enjoying getting exercise from cycling. My sister and neighbours aren't able-bodied enough to ride a bicycle. I have written and asked TfL and the council what their definition of disabled is, and have had no response.

I am not anti-cyclist. I believe in freedom of movement for everyone. And I am very concerned for cyclists' safety; which is why I wish TfL and Camden had made consultations before rolling out these cycle

lanes. There are better solutions which would be an improvement for cyclists, residents, and the emergency services, if only they would listen.

Another resident asked why we had not been consulted and was told: "Because local residents would never have agreed to them". And that I feel sums this situation up.

I appreciate they want to create a "greener" environment. Yet central London needs deliveries via lorries, vans, cars, and motorbikes to function, and this utopian vision of so much pedestrianisation, cycle lanes, etc simply doesn't make sense with keeping our vibrant city alive.

I don't feel TfL or the council are listening to me nor any local residents. We don't want this proposal to be made permanent.

FIONA DEALEY, WC1

Cycle lane backing is no surprise!

□ SO results are in from the TaviPlace consultation (Backing for cycle lane, November 10).

As the sequence of events shows, it's not surprising there were over 15,000 respondents.

The scheme was developed with input from Transport for London, the University of London, UCL, Living Streets, London Cycling Campaign and Camden Cyclists (which receives funding from Camden). As soon as the one-way system was in place, the Safer Bloomsbury website emerged (with Camden Cyclists involvement) harnessing support for the cycle tracks to remain permanent.

It's no surprise that immediate approval came from the university and other Bloomsbury institutions.

Camden Cyclists and LCC are great advocates of social media. As the consultation process hotted up, they whizzed off emails and tweets to their thousands of followers. No wonder it was the biggest ever result in Camden's planning history.

BRAG (Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group) was set up to be a voice for residents who are perhaps less agile and articulate than others. Some of these are people who have lived in the neighbourhood for 30 years or more, before anyone wanted to live near King's Cross, who now feel trapped in their flats by the rise in pollution, the noise and fumes from displaced traffic, and the fear of some cyclists (not all)

who race along the tracks to work or to college.

Of the consultation figures released by the council it seems 1,387 were Camden residents. But Camden is a large borough. Being able to cycle safely to the West End from Kentish Town or Candelowes is a nice idea.

In their final scrutiny of results, I hope councillors will recognise that over 1,100 people signed the BRAG petition opposing the trial; 800 of these signatures came from people who live in WC1, in close vicinity to the scheme; 300 signatures came from occupants of flats in the Brunswick Centre.

I very much doubt that sheltered housing residents will have clicked on the council's online consultation form. Will Camden

officers bother to double-check?

I think that imposing a controversial scheme without prior consultation with residents who live nearby, with the intention of justifying it later, and providing minimal air quality records (where is the pollution monitor on Hunter Street?) is just plain sneaky.

Will Camden analyse the results from *Question 8* of the consultation form and consider alternative suggestions for getting around Bloomsbury? Your *Comment* (November 10) says that councillors will need to balance public opinion with the concerns of its residents.

I hope they do.

PS: I'm a cyclist too.

DEBBIE RADCLIFFE
Judd Street, WC1

17 November 2016, Camden New Journal

A flawed consultation

□ YOUR headline (Great consultation on cycle lane, now for the tricky part, *Comment*, November 10) appears to have been written without irony.

This "great" consultation is known by local residents to have been a complete travesty.

The process was seriously flawed in innumerable ways,

meaning that its results can have no validity.

We were promised by the council – especially in view of the botched consultations carried out earlier in the year by Transport for London – that the consultation document would be sent to every council tax payer. This did not happen; the distribution was haphazard and partial. Envelopes without names or addresses were posted through letterboxes in apparently random

numbers, not necessarily relating to the number of households; documents intended for residents of some mansion blocks were seen left in a heap on the floor. Many households never received the legally required document.

The way the consultation document was written was clearly biased. First, there was the misuse of photos to imply that making the trial permanent would be better – the dull "before the trial" photo set aside the digitally enhanced and sunny "after the trial/proposed layout" photo. The title of the document, *Proposed improvement for walking and cycling* seeks to predispose consultees into believing the change has been an improvement. It could equally well be headed: *Proposal to close some roads and move traffic onto surrounding residential streets*, which would have been accurate.

The statements on safety and air pollution are misleading. The document tells us that: "Collision data for the first half of 2016 is not yet available, but feedback gathered during the trial indicates that the route feels safer... for...cyclists".

This is misleading because, in effect, it is saying there is no evidence the trial layout is safer but the council nevertheless is implying that it is safer. The document tells the consultee that "air quality has shown significant improvements".

This is simply not true, apart from in three sites chosen by the council, including the trial route where all westbound traffic is banned.

These three pockets of improvement are clearly at the expense of giving many surrounding streets, where traffic has increased by between 50 and 100 per cent, much worse air quality – but the council has actively refused to measure air quality in these streets.

The trial has caused newly-created idling traffic, often for many hours a day, in numerous streets. So this claim on improved air quality is at best disingenuous and certainly misleading.

But the framing of the questions in the document has caused most outrage

among residents. The council document only allowed one choice between two options – either keep it as it is now or go back to how it was before last November.

As one residents commented: "A bit like choosing between having a cold or flu." How it is now does not work for local residents. And how it was before last November did not work well either. The council offered no question on alternative solutions and it was totally confusing for anyone who wanted to suggest any.

All this was in addition to other devices used by the council which appear to be purposefully avoiding residents' opinions. The cynical use of an Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) to impose the

trial, which meant residents did not have to be asked; ETOs are normally used for small changes; the use of an ETO in this case appears to be a way of introducing a contentious traffic management scheme through the back door. And the early consultation with some carefully selected parties such as London Cycling Campaign, Living Streets and the University of London, can only lead one to conclude that the council consulted with organisations they thought would support the trial but not those who would be most affected, and those who would be paying for these changes – residents.

NICKY COATES
Chair, Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group

Geography and road consultation

□ DISCONTENT about the controversial Tavistock-Torrington Place experimental traffic scheme rumbles on in the *Letters* page, (or Torrington-Tavistock, depending on which end has priority.)

Councillor Phil Jones has now weighed in with a comprehensive response about how Camden Council consulted the community (Decision in early 2017, November 24).

What he omitted to mention was the salient fact that the trial scheme was introduced because of the West End Project, to sweeten life for residents nearest to Tottenham Court Road and Gower Street.

This is clearly articulated on

the council's website.

These same residents were also included in the area chosen by Camden for its latest consultation; plus other streets where the trial has had less impact.

People who live in the eastern half of the designated area were not asked their views about the West End Project, and "there's the rub" (to quote a troubled Shakespearean protagonist).

It is these WC1 residents who have had to suffer the impact of displaced traffic on their local streets, as a result of the cabinet decision on January 21 2015 to reduce east-west traffic on the Tavistock-Torrington Place corridor.

According to the consultation area map, the eastern boundary ended one street east of Judd Street, therefore excluding swathes of people who live in residential blocks in Cromer Street, Regent Square, Mecklenburgh Square, Gray's Inn Road and further east.

Why are the views of these residents considered less important than those who live on the western boundary (such as Ridgmount Gardens and Gordon Mansions) whose objections initiated the one-way scheme in the first place and are likely to be among the 61 per cent in favour.

Isn't this skewing the results? Cllr Jones is correct in saying

a number of groups and individuals (both for and against) have worked hard to ensure as many people as possible were aware of the Tavistock-Torrington trial consultation.

But why did the West End Project have such a low profile when it was consulted on in 2014?

Camden officers now have to add up the numbers and analyse specific feedback.

Initial figures have been released showing that 61 per cent of residents were in favour. But where did they actually live?

DEBBIE RADCLIFFE
Judd Street, WC1