

Lessons from Waltham Forest, Oct 2017

Members of London Living Streets took a walk around Waltham Forest in October 2017 with local campaigner Paul Gasson to experience its Mini-Holland scheme.

The Mini Holland project sets out to:

- make residential neighbourhoods quieter, greener, safer, cleaner and more pleasant locations;
- make walking and cycling the default for local trips; and
- reduce motor vehicle rat-running from local neighbourhoods.

To achieve this is focus on a series of key measures:

1. 'Villagisation' of residential areas by preventing rat-running with modal filters
2. Lea Bridge Road Cycle Superhighway
3. A network of segregated and semi-segregated cycle routes
4. New blended 'Copenhagen' crossings at junctions and side roads
5. Redesigns of major junctions
6. Redesign of secondary town centres
7. Complimentary measures including 'cycle superhubs', on-street cycle storage 'hangars' and cycle training.

The project was initiated when the borough secured £30 million funding from Transport for London's [Mini-Holland Programme](#) (along with Enfield and Kingston). Overall the cost of the project is around £45 million over three to four years, with the extra £18 million coming from Section 106 funds (paid by developers); Network Rail (it paid for two modal filters on bridges over its railway because it saved money by not having to engage in very costly bridge strengthening engineering), and other pots of money (such as CIL Funds).

The focus of our walk was Walthamstow Village that was trialled in 2014 and installed in 2015. The overriding impression here was of truly 'living streets'. We were all amazed at how peaceful the area was. We could hear bird song, we ambled in the road. Paul Gasson, member of the Waltham Forest Cycling Campaign that was involved in the implementation of the scheme, says more children are playing on the streets on skateboards, scooters, and kicking balls. Families walk together in the road on the school run instead of hurriedly and anxiously chasing children.

We could see that the scheme was achieving benefits for all residents, not just cyclists. We discussed with Paul Gasson how campaigners, councillors and officers must focus on these wider benefits in order to win over those reticent about similar schemes. This is not just about creating favourable conditions for cyclists, but creating public space that benefits the majority. Wider benefits include:

- encouraging active travel and improving the health of residents;
- improving road safety and vehicle driver behaviour; (this is already marked in Waltham Forest as a result of reductions in traffic counts overall and more specifically in the number of non-local rat-runners who are less concerned with local

environment. The new blended Copenhagen crossings (see below) also encourage drivers to slow and be more aware of pedestrians)

- improving air quality through reductions in auto traffic;
- transforming local town centres to improve footfall and prospects of local businesses;
- adjusting to rising population;(Waltham Forest expects a 25 per cent increase in residents as a result of new housing developments in next decade or two.They want walking and cycling to be default for newcomers and to be built into fabric of new developments.)
- improving social justice/social inclusion; (on many streets in Waltham Forest around half of householders do not own a car. These measures want to transform the public realm to serve their needs and interests rather than just car drivers.)
- improving community cohesion. (One unanticipated benefit in Walthamstow 'Village' was that it encouraged residents to take responsibility for their street, for example by maintaining planters. This has brought people into contact with one another.)

Main measures

Waltham Forest is divided by the North Circular with Chingford to the north and Walthamstow to the south. The Mini-Holland predominantly focuses on the south of the borough. Though there are plans to consider other town centres. As of October 2017 the project is more than half way complete in terms of budget and two thirds in terms of area.

Villagisation

The scheme removes rat-running, or through-traffic, on residential areas using modal filters. These are designed so householders can still access homes (albeit on longer routes), but rat-running drivers cannot cut through quiet residential neighbourhoods in order to short-circuit main road arteries. Work so far has focussed on Walthamstow Village and Blackhorse Village. Plans for Markhouse Village have been stalled as a result of opposition from a passionate car-driving minority.

Modal filters take different forms – big solid wooden posts; wooden seating; elegant steel upright posts (which emergency services can lower via a key); cycle hoops (which double as short-duration cycle parking facilities). There are also planters/flower beds. Modal filters have often been accompanied by removal or adaptation of much-disliked speed humps. Some have been replaced by humps with a sinusoidal cross section. These have a profile which is more comfortable to cycle over.

The Village scheme also includes a number of greening measures that enhance the residential areas. We saw various examples: a pocket park on one street corner with a couple of trees, seating, lots of planters; some ground-level flower beds; a 'rain garden' along one side of a primary school; and NOx-absorbing paving stones.

Where necessary, planters are protected by horizontal wooden planks/bollards to prevent cars parking on them. In one example, residents used crowd-funding to pay for their own planting scheme – an avenue of trees along the end of the lawn of a social housing apartment block.

The pedestrianisation of Orford Road is the focus of the Walthamstow Village scheme. The street is closed to all traffic between 10am and 10pm except for a local bus that periodically chugs up the single lane carriageway. The pavements have been widened on both sides and now shops and coffee houses spill out onto the street. There was an extraordinary ambience when we were there. We saw three mothers with buggies strolling down it side by side.

A camera monitors and detects invading motor-vehicles. This is a very important enforcement measure that needs to be part of any such scheme. The pedestrianisation defined by time of day (10am-10pm) was also an interesting concession with few downsides since there will be fewer wanting to be on foot on that street after 10pm.

Lea Bridge Road

This is major new cycling infrastructure with a fully segregated cycle 'superhighway' running in both directions, east-west, from the borough boundary with Hackney to Whipps Cross roundabout. This includes a redesign of Whipps Cross Roundabout; redesign of major junctions including at Wood Street, Leyton Green Road, Markhouse Road/Church Road, Orient Way/ Argyll Avenue and Bakers Arms; and the redesign of a railway bridge. On October 2017 much of the scheme is yet to be, or in process of being constructed. Something like half of the TfL grant being spent on this part of the scheme.

Cycle routes

In addition to the Lea Bridge Road superhighway, Waltham Forest is also building a number of cycle tracks on roads including Hoe Street and Forest Road. These are protected and semi-protected segregated cycle tracks. For example, some are via stepped cycle tracks (i.e. at higher level than motor vehicle carriageway, and same level, yet clearly differentiated, from pedestrian pavement). Some are lightly segregated via armadillos. But we didn't see any instances of those.

We saw various bus stop treatments on roads where segregated cycle tracks were installed. These included bus stop boarders (bus users step across the cycle track with pedestrians gaining right of way); bus stop islands; and bus stop bypasses (or floating bus stops where the cycleway runs behind the passenger boarding area at a bus stop, between an island and the footway). There were clearly some issues with some treatments, especially bus stop boarders, which don't give much space/time for bus passengers to look out for passing cyclists. Gasson agreed that bypasses were the preferred option. Experiences from Waltham Forest and Enfield show that work is underway to create more standardised, safe designs.

Contra-flow cycling on otherwise one-way roads is becoming Council policy and now almost ubiquitous in Walthamstow. We inspected only one example. There was some debate about whether these are more or less safe for cyclists on narrow streets than being diverted into busy junctions, or to cycle 'with flow' on a one-way street (both of which are definitely less safe for cyclists).

Redesign of junctions

Waltham Forest has also installed around 100 new blended ('Copenhagen' style) crossings at junctions between side roads and bigger roads including Blackhorse Road, Hoe Street, Lea Bridge Road. These work by blending or extending the pavement into the road, signalling to drivers they are entering a pedestrian area where they must allow pedestrians to move. Gasson said some risk-averse families have been wary of these as it is difficult to see difference between the road and pavement. But he added they are already seeing 'startling behaviour change', with drivers now identifying risks, slowing down and giving priority to pedestrians.

He added that it is important to have tight or 'bracketed' carriageway treatments, i.e. almost right-angled, rather than rounded. These prevent drivers from cutting corners when entering or leaving side roads. Would it be better to have elevated or ramp pavement treatments at each intersection?

They are also planning redesign of major junctions for example at Blackhorse junction, Palmerston Road, Bell Junction at Hoe Street/Chingford Road, Shernhall Street and Wood Street/ Fulbourne Road. The aim is to make navigating junctions safer and easier for all road users, especially for people walking and cycling, whilst improving the flow of traffic and bus facilities. Plans being considered are for a 'Green Scramble', so pedestrians and cycles can cross at once and diagonally or straight across roads, such as in operation on Oxford Circus.

We also saw several new 'Tiger' Crossings –unsignalised, raised crossing, like a Zebra crossing but for both pedestrians and cyclists. About 10 already installed in Waltham Forest. These have proved uncontroversial. They are costly compared to Zebra crossing but cheaper than signalised crossings. These are important from an inequality perspective, since many disabled cyclists find it much easier to cycle than to walk e.g. see recent Wheels for Wellbeing survey.

Redesign of secondary town centres

Plans are to redesign four centres: North Chingford, Highams Park, Leyton and Leytonstone. Gasson said redesigning these will be critical in ensuring a network of direct and joined-up cycle routes across the Borough (along with measures to lessen the severance caused by the North Circular).

Cycle storage

There has been widespread installation of secure, rain-proof cycle storage facilities for rent in both residential streets and at railway stations and Walthamstow bus station.

The cycle hangars on residential streets are located on the carriageway but accessible from the pavement. Part of the rationale is to make bike parking as convenient as car parking on-street. So far 150 have been installed; another 100 still to come. This is a significant intervention to facilitate local residents switching to cycling mode for local (e.g. shopping, or getting to school) trips. The rental cost is £20 to £25 a year (much cheaper than a resident's car parking permit); but high enough to make installation and maintenance of the hangers a zero-cost expenditure for the Council. Waltham Forest has committed to keeping rental costs low so bike parking isn't more expensive than car parking.

The Borough currently has six secure [cycle hubs](#) (and a further two by 2018) for people who what want to include cycling as part of their daily commute or regular shopping trips. We saw one at Walthamstow Station that holds 80 bikes. These are well lit, have CCTV and glass walls to increase safety of users. Hubs are filling immediately. Cost is £25 a year. We also saw several Brompton docks, for example next to Walthamstow station cycle hub. This is another low-cost way to access bikes via transport interchanges.

Additional soft measures include [free cycle training](#) for adults and children through a training partner Cycle Confident; a free summer cycling school; a community bike scheme so residents and students can [hire bikes](#) and cargo bikes; free [bike check-ups](#) and [cycle maintenance classes](#); a new on-line [mapping system](#) and improved [wayfinding](#) across the borough with new signage.

The council has also made it easier and cheaper for residents to close their streets for play once a month or so. Gasson said that [play streets](#) were especially useful on streets that haven't been filtered so communities can experience an alternative and come together to discuss alternatives.

Key ingredients

Paul spoke about key ingredients that such an ambitious area-wide public realm transformation project needs:

- Money. But this is a one-off expenditure with little ongoing recurrent expenditure.
- Political will and commitment. Councillors need to understand what can be achieved and be willing to engage residents about the wider benefits. This also needs to come from more than one cabinet member in a council to ensure strong, committed political backing.
- Officers with a 'can do' attitude and understanding of the wider benefits an area-wide public realm transformation can deliver. You also need the nitty-gritty infrastructure devices that help deliver it.
- Network of active local residents who help in the engagement process and in developing specific ideas for particular locations.

Lessons learned

Engagement with the community

Community engagement is critical to explain the wider benefits to residents, businesses, travellers (regardless of mode). This sort of transformation is new to many people so time must be spent spelling out what they will gain. Waltham Forest has taken this very seriously with endless leafleting, hiring skilled outside staff to talk to residents and shopkeepers along roads being changed. Around 10 per cent of their budget was spent on engagement.

Collaboration

This scheme involved councillors, council staff, and the community all working together. Although the majority party introduced the project, it was also voted for by the minority party, despite some more affluent residents and constituents having serious reservations.

Visionary local campaigners

Local campaigners were important in identifying innovative, visionary ideas to realise the project's full potential. This ambition is required long before the consultation phase. Paul Gasson said his campaign group, Waltham Forest Cycling Campaign, was lucky to have been shown early drafts of the council's bid for the Mini-Holland funding. This meant they could improve it and ensure it was 'gold-plated in terms of aspiration'.

Local residents and campaigners also have huge local knowledge of streets. They must also build a reputation for being technically well-informed, competent, practical and constructive. To get council support they pointed to existing, similar schemes to demonstrate existing successes and local appetite for this type of scheme. He also advised choosing easy targets first. "Don't pick fights first, go for soft areas, get them embedded and let people see how they work.'

He also made the point that ambition doesn't always need to be expensive or complicated. Campaigners persuaded the council to rethink a Dutch-style roundabout -- initially planned to replace the gyratory near Whipps Cross hospital – and put in a signalled roundabout instead. This was simpler and more cost-effective.

Local campaigners were also essential in finding actively committed residents on streets. This was essential both during the consultation phase to ensure there was on-the-ground support and when the scheme was implemented to encourage residents to maintain the planters measures themselves. (Council cannot afford to be responsible for planting and maintaining planters).

Dealing with opposition

Gasson had lots of useful points in relation to this about how campaigners built local support on the ground; seeding local activist groups rather than running them; building interest via social media; and being persistent.

It took six months to get the filter in on Northcote Road as a result of opposition from a resident councillor and a motivated opposition group. As he said, 'there will always be a small number who will hate this. And once they have dug their heals in, it's hard for them to retract. But these people shouldn't be the focus – instead the focus should be on making it work for everyone else. There are many people that this changes everything for.'

Emergency services

The three emergency services have not encountered difficulties with the project. In practice, they have not found it necessary to use their keys, or (in the case of fire engines) felt the need to bulldoze their way through modal filters. But the police, for example, do not have up-to-date Satnav facilities and only know about where modal filters are located as a result of accumulated local knowledge. On the other hand, the fire brigade actually reports improved response times.

With regard to winning support from the health service, it's worth making the long-term argument that as the number of collisions and road casualties drop and people get healthier as a result of more active travel the burden on the NHS should gradually fall.

Consultations and trials

Commonplace was a useful consolation tool as it provided a more 'holistic' picture – not just about traffic but about also about community impact. Gasson says this was radical for the highways team to see how something could have wider benefits than on how people get around.

The current Walking and Cycling Commissioner, Will Norman, is opposed to trials of schemes such as modal filters. Waltham Forest did trial the closure of Orford Road in 2014. Gasson acknowledged that trials are risky and can stir up very strong negative feelings which could threaten getting anything in permanently. But in this case -- on something so new and ground-breaking -- it was worth it.

Monitoring success

In 2016, one year following the installation of the Walthamstow Village scheme, Waltham Forest carried out a [review](#) to assess the project's impact against its core aims. This included analysis of traffic count and collision data as well as a survey of the local community and emergency services.

Gasson says this sort of review needs to be repeated, maybe five years on, once the scheme has settled in. He also wishes he had taken more baseline data so they had something to compare to – particularly in relation to footfall on shopping streets. He also advised gathering lots of 'before' photos for communications. People soon forget what things were once like so photos are a useful reminder about how far a scheme has come.

Key findings from technical data: from the 2016 Review:

- The average road within Walthamstow Village saw a 44 per cent reduction in daily traffic counts. Some roads saw a 90 per cent reduction.
- Three of the 14 roads in the Village saw an increase in traffic. In Church Lane vehicle counts rose by 18.9% (equivalent to 410 additional vehicles per day); and 40.1% (equivalent to 833 additional vehicles per day) on East Avenue between its junctions with Church Lane and Orford Road.
- Average vehicle speeds have decreased throughout the area, both in the mean speeds and 85%ile speed. The average 85%ile speed reduced from 21.6mph to 19.5mph.
- The surrounding roads of Hoe Street, Lea Bridge Road and Shernhall Street have seen a rise in traffic levels between 2014 to 2016. Hoe Street saw an increase of 401 vehicles, and the biggest increase was in Shernhall Street of 2,045 vehicles a day.
- Despite these increases on boundary roads, the area is seeing an overall reduction in traffic showing that 'evaporation' does happen, i.e. the village saw a reduction of 14,516 vehicles a day, compared to an increase of 4,113 cars a day on boundary roads.

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- There have been two slight collisions involving pedestrians or cyclists on the boundary roads on the new blended Copenhagen crossings, compared to 18 pre-scheme over three years.
- Walthamstow Village has become a more attractive place for cycling with the number of cyclists on Copeland Road and Pembroke Road have increased by around 20%, and 124% on Orford Road.

Results from survey neither show overwhelming support or opposition to the scheme. The overriding impression is of indifference and slow acceptance. Also some signs of slow behaviour change.

- 19 per cent of residents said they were walking more following changes in Walthamstow Village
- 8 per cent were cycling more
- 28 per cent said their street had got better; 28 per cent said it had got worse; and 45 per cent said it had stayed the same
- Only 1.7 per cent of residents would scrap the scheme and revert back to the former layout
- All of the visitors surveyed had a positive opinion of the overall scheme with 84 per cent stating it was very good

Paul says he is seeing new types of cyclists, beyond the typical white young man. There is an oversubscribed community-ran bike club for Muslim women that brings together up to 20 women at a time; more women in general are cycling now; and they are seeing new types of bikes - more Dutch style bikes for example. Paul says: "I saw a two year-old cycling on the street the other day – you just wouldn't have seen this before."