

Think Global, Act Local

Park The Car: Barnet FoE Active Travel briefing



This briefing provides an overview of the current situation relating to active travel in Barnet. It has been prepared by Barnet FoE to help inform and inspire accelerated and effective action by all. The analysis is based upon public domain material.

Summary

Using body power instead of engines or batteries to help us get around is good for our health and our environment. Barnet's residents have the potential to do a lot more "active travel" but there are some key barriers to overcome, myths to bust and actions to take. Car owners could choose to leave their car parked at home and walk or cycle to the shops or work. The council could develop and implement an ambitious strategy to enable more active travel and less traffic.

Barnet needs to decide whether it joins the shift to active travel or gets left behind.

Background

If you have ever been out and about in a wheelchair or been for a walk, run or bike ride you have been doing something called "active travel", and it's good for health, well-being and the environment (29% of Barnet emissions are produced by transport).

But it appears that in Barnet we could benefit from doing more.

According to the [Barnet Council Transport Strategy](#), just under half of Barnet's residents are failing to achieve the recommended level of physical activity participation. This is particularly acute for people who commute: residents aged 35-44 years report the second lowest levels of physical activity participation compared to other age groups, and levels are significantly lower than the national average. Inactivity costs the NHS money, a 2015 report by Sport England and Public Health England said that one in two women and a third of men are not active enough and this inactivity is costing the NHS around £7.4 billion a year.

When asked to select what would help them maintain a healthy lifestyle, "more opportunities to walk and cycle as part of my daily routine" was the second most common response after "cheaper healthy food and drink".

As highlighted in our [Net Zero Barnet Briefing](#), TfL estimates there are almost half a million journeys per day in Barnet that could be converted from motorised transport to walking and cycling, after excluding journeys that are too long, part of a chain (such as from home to the shops to school) or involving carrying heavy shopping or equipment.

According to [Climate Action](#), 2% of people in Barnet commute to work by cycling (compared to 4% of people in the best performing similar local authority area) and there is the potential for 21% of commuter journeys in Barnet to be by bike, as long as there's uptake of e-bikes and good cycling infrastructure available, such as segregated cycleways.

People seem willing to make changes in how they travel: 72% of 1551 people surveyed in Barnet believe we should all drive less to save the planet according to 2021 YouGov national opinion polling.



Almost a third of Barnet households do not have access to a car but presumably are able to manage by walking, cycling and use of public transport.

However, Barnet has the second highest car ownership levels per household in London, almost double the level of neighbouring Haringey. Two thirds of car journeys in the borough are under 5km and a quarter of car trips begin and end in the borough.

So what needs to be done to get car owners to park their cars and increase their active travel? Healthy Streets might offer the answer.

The [London Boroughs Healthy Streets Scorecard](#) provides data to show:

- The health of each borough's streets so borough officials and residents can assess success in getting people out of cars and onto public transport, walking and cycling.
- The extent to which councils are putting in place key measures which can make a real difference.

The scorecard enables comparison between London Boroughs of the score for each indicator and provides some insights.

For London, as a whole, the Healthy Streets view is "While traffic reduction schemes can be controversial, the last year has shown that where councils are determined, they can make a big difference for their residents and London. And this can be done relatively fast and cheaply as last year's rapid rollout of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Streets has shown.

But while many London boroughs are forging ahead, some are still failing to take action, leaving their residents exposed to the dangers of rising congestion. London risks becoming a tale of two cities as a huge divergence in action emerges."

Barnet Healthy Streets 2021 summary

"Barnet remains a low scoring borough and action is desperately needed to improve the health of Barnet's streets. A relatively high proportion of trips are still made by car, rather than by sustainable modes of transport and the proportion of adults who regularly walk, or cycle is low. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, as the borough remains one of the least safe places for pedestrians and cyclists.

In response to these issues and the pandemic, Barnet council has introduced a number of School Streets over the last year, restricting traffic around schools at arrival and departure times, and the borough's schools remain high performers in achieving STARS accreditations. But, unlike many other boroughs, it has introduced no new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods at all; parking remains uncontrolled on the vast majority of its streets; along with Bromley it has the lowest score of all London boroughs on the proportion of roads covered by a 20mph speed limit; and there is virtually no protected cycle track in the borough at all (although there is a sign of hope in its A1000 scheme).

Barnet is now one of only four councils in London not to declare a climate emergency – having voted it down in June. If Barnet wants better outcomes for its residents, it urgently needs to start playing catch-up – the School Streets and A1000 cycle track has to be just the start of concerted action, and these should be followed by more of the same, as well as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, but the biggest priorities and easiest wins for the borough will be introduction of 20mph borough-wide speed limits and roll-out of controlled parking".



The Barnet Council Transport Strategy identifies the key barriers to walking and cycling as “environments dominated by fast flowing traffic, lack of cycling infrastructure and fears over safety”, and the healthy streets scores suggest that Barnet has a lot to do to remove these barriers as it is bottom of all 33 London boroughs for the amount of 20 mph speed limits, third bottom for protected cycle track and below average (19th out of 33) for low traffic neighbourhoods.

Fears over safety appear well-founded, as Barnet is 15th out of the 19 outer London boroughs for serious injuries to cyclists and 12th/19 for pedestrians. This all results in Barnet having low active levels (31st/33 for adults walking 5 times a week and 23rd/33 for cycling 5 times a week).

For trips to school, Barnet is 24th/33 for school streets (where there are temporary restrictions on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times). This may improve as, according to a 2021 press report, “plans have been drawn up by Barnet Council to introduce school streets at ten locations across the borough”.

The [Barnet Council Sustainability Strategy Framework](#) approved in December 2021 promises “further school streets wherever appropriate” and to “implement active travel improvements”. Further detail will hopefully be included in the Sustainability Strategy which is promised for later in 2022.

One area where Barnet has done well (being 2nd/33) is in respect to STARS – Sustainable Travel: Active, Responsible, Safe. This is TfL's accreditation scheme for London schools and nurseries that aims to inspire young Londoners to travel to school sustainably, actively, responsibly and safely by championing walking, scooting and cycling. It appears that achieving STARS accreditation is mainly due to action taken by schools and nurseries rather than being council led.

So what could be done?

The development of the council's Sustainability Strategy provides the opportunity to drive ambitious, collaborative action plans that encourage car owners to leave their cars parked at home and enable all residents to participate in higher levels of safe, active travel.

Overcome misconceptions

There are strong voices who provide reasons why change cannot or should not be pursued, sometimes based on false assumptions or misconceptions. Active Travel Myth Busters says that “Public or political opposition can act as a barrier to changing the misconceptions about the consequences of reallocating road space or how to get the most economic benefit from transport spending.” And provide “myth busters” - evidence to help overcome these misconceptions that could be useful in making the case for change.

Deliver an ambitious strategy with clear targets

Healthy Streets, the London Transport Strategy and an increasingly popular concept of 20 minute neighbourhoods, provide some suggestions of what the ambition for Barnet could be:

Healthy Streets Scorecard want all London Boroughs to implement five key measures that it says will dramatically improve air quality, reduce road danger, boost active lifestyles and reduce carbon emissions – often literally overnight:

1. Borough-wide Low Traffic Neighbourhoods



2. A default 20mph speed limit on all borough and Transport for London controlled roads
3. Small-area Controlled Parking Zones borough-wide
4. Protected cycle lanes on main roads
5. Traffic-free streets around all schools and safe walking and cycling routes to school

And the London Mayor's 2018 [Transport Strategy](#) has three key targets:

1. To increase the trips made by 'sustainable mode of transport' (walking, cycling, public transport) from 63% to 80% by 2041
2. For everyone to undertake the daily 20 minutes of active travel they need to stay healthy by 2041
3. Vision Zero for road danger: the elimination of all deaths and serious injuries on London's transport system by 2041

Barnet may also have the potential to become a [20 Minute Neighbourhoods](#) – “a complete, compact and connected neighbourhood, where people can meet their everyday needs within a short walk or cycle, the idea of the 20-minute neighbourhood presents multiple benefits including boosting local economies, improving people's health and wellbeing, increasing social connections in communities, and tackling climate change.”

The direction of travel is for more Active Travel

There is increasing support, advice and funding for increasing Active Travel. Barnet should not be left behind.

In 2021 Sport England launched a 10-year active travel strategy [Uniting the Movement](#) “to make being physically active a normal part of life for everyone in England...We're shining a light on the huge impact environmental prompts and cues can have in changing people's behaviour, which is why we're championing Active Design alongside active travel.”

In July 2020 the Government published its report [Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking](#) which “describes the vision to make England a great walking and cycling nation” and “sets out the actions required at all levels of government”.

In July 2021 the [Department for Transport](#) (DoT) increased funding for cycling and walking and in January 2022 made changes to the [Highway Code](#) to improve the safety of people walking, cycling and riding horses

Also in Jan 2022 [Active Travel England](#) (ATE) (funded by the DoT) was launched with cyclist Chris Boardman as its interim commissioner. Its purpose is “to create safer streets for cycling and walking to boost air quality and help improve the health and wellbeing of the nation”.

