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## Council apologises after wrongly boasting that low traffic neighbourhoods reduced pollution

Islington Council claimed that NO2 levels had decreased at all LTN sites, but it later admitted that pollution had in fact increased

By Steve Bird

12 March 2022 • 1:33pm

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A council which boasted that [low traffic neighbourhoods \(LTNs\)](#) saw a reduction in poisonous car fumes has apologised after it was forced to admit pollution had in fact increased.

Islington Council has been accused of "misleading" residents after a report analysing Highbury West and Highbury Fields LTNs included a "key finding" section, which states that nitrogen dioxide levels (NO2) had "decreased at all [LTN] sites".

But residents in the north London borough lodged a formal complaint and insisted the authority's own report showed pollution had risen 26 per cent across Highbury.

The document even recorded how NO2 levels had soared 44 per cent outside Highbury Grove School, which is on a main road where traffic is



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said to have increased after nearby residential roads were closed to through traffic.

The council introduced the Highbury West and Highbury Fields LTNs in January 2021 after the Government pledged millions of pounds for the so-called "[green transport revolution](#)" launched by Grant Shapps, the Transport Secretary.

## 'Gridlock nightmare'

In October last year, council bosses published its interim monitoring report with the "key findings" after commissioning Project Centre, a company owned by the transportation and enforcement company Marston Holdings, to [analyse data gathered over six months at those LTNs](#).

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But residents who feel LTNs have created a "gridlock nightmare" with traffic forced onto boundary roads, said they were "astounded" by some of the six-month interim report's summary of findings. Those findings were included in tweets and a council leaflet sent to 14,500 households.

A team of residents submitted a formal complaint highlighting how data in the 123-page report refuted the "key findings" that car fumes had decreased and traffic volumes had dropped on some boundary roads.

The council has now admitted some claims were not supported by the report's data because it was sometimes of an "unacceptably poor quality", gathered from equipment which suffered a "technical error" or simply did "not reflect the full picture".

## 'Frankly laughable'



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Joanna Sargent, a resident who set up the Keep Highbury Moving group which exposed the mistakes, said: "The council was quick to tweet and produce a pamphlet featuring the interim report's key findings, some of which struck us as dubious.

"We felt some of the summary findings gave a twisted impression to Highbury residents of what the collected data actually showed.

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"The council has now admitted some of the errors - including the frankly laughable claim of a 42 per cent reduction in traffic on Holloway Road, the main road into London from the north."

The council conducted an independent audit of the report before partially upholding the complaint, removing their tweets containing the findings before issuing an apology. It also published a new 12-month report which does not repeat the errors, but found NO2 levels had risen across the entire borough where there are now eight trial LTNs.

A Freedom of Information request reveals Project Centre was given a year-long contract in August 2021 to produce monitoring reports.

### **'Concerns about general quality of work'**

A council spokesman said it "ended" the contract in October "due to concerns about the general quality of work and capacity allocated to the project", and has now commissioned another company to provide monitoring reports. He insisted the LTNs were "achieving most of their intended aims".

"We would like to thank those who provided feedback on the six-month interim report for the Highbury schemes, and apologise for any

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In a statement, Project Centre said: "While the body of the report correctly reported on the air quality monitoring, including all text and figures, Project Centre apologises for the human errors made in parts of its analysis. We are reviewing our procedures."

The company refused to say how many other reports it had done for other councils about LTNs. Islington Council said the company was commissioned and completed six reports on its LTNs.

A new council pamphlet about the two LTNs has been produced from a 12-month study and been sent to 25,000 households. The public consultation on the Highbury LTNs ends on Monday.

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