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No effects without side effects!

Dear Editor,

It was interesting to read 'news' of the role of green space in towns and the impact on mental health in the March issue. Local environs are important facilitators and barriers to health enhancing behaviours. Jarvis' paper illustrates this when reporting the impact of StreetGames which provides opportunities for young people to take part in physical activities within local neighbourhoods.<sup>1</sup>

Both reports provoked my thoughts about the relationship between environmental change interventions and local neighbourhoods. For instance, in the first author's own local neighbourhood, efforts to promote cycling in 2009 led to the installation of 1.5 miles of cycle lanes, signage and crossings. The scheme also led to the removal of a small section of the existing dual lane highway (a left hand filter lane) from vehicle use and the installation of a 'designated' cycle lane.<sup>2,3</sup> This intervention, which reportedly came at a cost of over £500,000, formed a small part of a city-wide orbital route and was part of a strategic approach to cycling in the City. While the evaluation data indicate an increase in cycling trips on the route (pre- vs post-intervention), the evaluation could not support that individuals who were new to cycling, (i.e. not cycling previously) had subsequently taken up cycling as a result of the intervention.<sup>2</sup>

One of the detrimental impacts of the scheme was an increase in queuing traffic,<sup>3</sup> owing to the loss of part of the carriage way, with drivers

using local streets as an alternative route to navigate the congestion.<sup>2,4</sup> Indeed, monitoring data indicate a doubling of traffic volumes in these local streets from 900 to 1,774 movements (average weekday flows).<sup>2</sup> While the scheme was declared a success against original objectives,<sup>3</sup> residents argued that there had been a detrimental impact to local residents, owing to the increase in traffic volumes using local streets to navigate the congestion.<sup>5</sup>

Campaigning by local people and elected officials resulted in the local authority consulting stakeholders on changes to the scheme. Importantly for many local residents, consultations included proposed alterations to the intervention, with part of the cycle lane reverting back to highway use for vehicles and reinstatement of the left hand traffic filter lane. This aimed to reduce congestion and improve traffic volumes in affected neighbourhoods.<sup>5</sup> These changes, which finally took place in 2012, were not welcomed by all stakeholders, notably the cycling lobby. While planners may have 'good' (public health) intentions, it is important to thoroughly understand the broader and deeper impacts of environmental interventions on local neighbourhoods. As this example illustrates, there are no effects without side effects!

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