



## **Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members**

### **Full Council – 7 July 2025**

**1. Question from Councillor Lesley Smith to Councillor Benea (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property)**

Will the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Property provide a response to Members on: the importance of the recent Brent Council investment into making the West-London Orbital Line a reality and the level of support amongst Brent residents, businesses and other London Boroughs, for the Bakerloo Line Upgrade and Extension project?

**Response:**

**West London Orbital**

In April 2025, Cabinet agreed to make a funding contribution of £465,516 (plus contingency) payable in 2026-27, towards the next stage of development of the West London Orbital rail scheme (WLO).

The importance of the WLO cannot be underestimated. There is currently a lack of effective orbital public transport connections in West London, with many people who live in the area required to travel into central London and out again by rail or forced onto the often congested and unreliable highway network, to make what should be relatively short journeys to access work, education or leisure opportunities.

The WLO will also bring about significant economic, social and environmental benefits to Brent and its communities, including new homes and jobs; improved access to a range of employment and learning opportunities; enhanced social inclusion – particularly for some of the more deprived parts of the borough; and a significant reduction in car trips and harmful emissions. The case for investment in the scheme is therefore compelling.

A report recently published by Hammersmith & Fulham Council makes a compelling case for the economic potential of the West London Orbital (WLO) railway. It estimates that the project could help unlock nearly 16,000 additional homes along the route, generating up to £2.2 billion in added value, primarily through residential development concentrated near station hubs.

In addition to this uplift in land and housing value, the report anticipates wider economic benefits of approximately £16 million per year, reflecting the enhanced connectivity, increased access to jobs, and improved transport reliability that the new line would bring to the sub-region.

Transport for London (TfL) has reviewed the scheme's viability and confirmed that the economic case is relatively strong, with a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) ranging from 1.6 to 2.3. This places the WLO firmly in the "medium to high" value-for-money category used in transport appraisal, strengthening the argument for public investment in the scheme.

### **Bakerloo Line Upgrade and Extension project**

The Bakerloo Line is in urgent need of investment. It currently runs the oldest trains in the country — rolling stock that dates back to 1972 — meaning Londoners are travelling every day on trains that are over half a century old. These trains are long past their intended lifespan, and the risks associated with continuing to rely on them are growing. Breakdowns, delays, and costly emergency repairs are becoming increasingly frequent, and there is a very real danger of a major system failure if action isn't taken soon.

This isn't just about outdated trains, it's about a lifeline for tens of thousands of Londoners who depend on the Bakerloo Line to get to work, school, and vital services. Communities from Kilburn Park to Kenton rely on it every day, yet the line remains one of the least reliable and least comfortable in the capital. With obsolete signalling, poor ventilation and outdated infrastructure, it is falling behind every other line on the network, and that gap is only widening.

In April 2025 Central London Forward commissioned population polling and business surveys to understand the level of support there is for the Bakerloo Line Upgrade and Extension project within the communities along the line and businesses across London.

The results indicated that 76% of residents and 89% businesses were in favor of the proposals and only 1% of residents and 2% businesses were in opposition. The results also indicated that Brent businesses and residents were more actively supportive of the campaign, and aware of it, and indicated that it would benefit them – than in other areas along the route.

Key findings included:

- 81% of Brent residents supported the proposals to upgrade and extend the Bakerloo Line (76% overall)
- 67% of Brent residents said their ability to travel to work or other frequently visited locations would be improved (57% overall)
- 48% of Brent residents said the upgrade and extension would reduce the number of journeys they made by car (45% overall)
- 57% of Brent residents said the upgrade and extension would improve their ability to access employment (45% overall)
- 81% of Brent businesses said that the upgrade and extension would have a positive impact on their business (74% overall)
- 58% of Brent businesses said that the upgrade and extension would result in more custom (52% overall), whilst 70% said it would result in increased growth (63% overall)

Further information about the surveys and the results can be found at [Back the Bakerloo Line - New independent research shows overwhelming London-wide support for Bakerloo Line Upgrade and Extension](#)

**2. Question from Councillor Long to Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement) and Councillor Rubin (Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power)**

Will the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power and the Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement, provide a response to members on the following: The progress towards the installation of a network of mandatory parking bays for dockless e-bike across the borough; the importance of the ongoing efforts to hold e-bike operators to the high standards of safety that Brent's residents expect; the ongoing programmes available to both residents and businesses, to promote cycling and encourage active transport; the total number of individual parking slots available through Brent's network of Bike Hangars and an update on the work underway alongside Transport for London to improve walking and cycling routes between Wembley Central and Harlesden Station.

**Response:**

**Dockless e-bikes:**

To address the issue of inconsiderate and unsafe parking of bikes, particularly on footways, the Council is working closely with Lime and other operators to implement a network of 200 dedicated parking bays which is being delivered on a phased basis across Brent. Bays are being rolled out in a range of locations, including those areas with high pedestrian activity - such as outside stations, main high streets, and other important trip generators; and where we have received a high level of complaints. As of the end of June 2025, around 100 bays have been installed, with more planned for installation in July and August, following consultation.

The Council recognises the importance of holding e-bike operators to high standards of safety. As a result of extensive negotiations with Lime, they have committed to a new operating plan which came into effect on 1 November 2024. Among the various commitments includes:

- A reduction in fleet size from 750 bikes to 500, until the new parking bays are in place and levels of complaints have been significantly reduced.
- Introduction of a ban on parking of bikes in areas where misuse is severe and parking poor and introduction of automatic speed controls in busy hotspots.
- Increasing operational staff on the ground from 14 to 24 to ensure greater coverage of the borough and to improve responsiveness.
- Agreed KPIs including the removal of inappropriately parked/abandoned bikes within 2 hours when reported.

We continue to work with Lime to drive forward improvements in their operating practises, but where Members or residents identify issues, please report these to:

- Email: [brent@li.me](mailto:brent@li.me)
- Email: [support@li.me](mailto:support@li.me)
- Online: [fixmystreet.com](https://fixmystreet.com)

Ahead of the expected introduction of e-bike and e-scooter regulations by the Government, TfL, London Councils and London boroughs are continuing work to introduce a pan-London micromobility contract which will see the introduction of a centrally managed, standardised approach to e-bike and e-scooter operations across the Capital. In the meantime, the Council will continue working closely with scheme operators to bring about continuous improvements in their operations.

### **Promoting Active Travel:**

Our programme of cycling related activities to encourage active travel include the following:

- Cycle training, this is free to anyone who lives, works or studies in Brent [Cycle training, security and safety | Brent Council](#). Group sessions, school courses or individual 1:1 training are available
- Try before you bike managed by Peddle my Wheels [Try a bike for a month | Brent Council](#) provides the opportunity for residents to pay monthly for a bike until the value of the bike is paid off and/or this can be returned at any time if they change their mind.
- Also managed by Peddle my Wheels we have cycling influencers that are members of the local community that are provided with a free bike and safety equipment, and we follow them on their cycling journey (via social media posts) from beginner to hopefully becoming a regular cyclist and encouraging others to do similar. We are currently recruiting for a cycling influencer in St Raphaels and South Kilburn Green Neighbourhoods and 2 Brent Council staff to encourage colleagues to consider cycling to work or for work related journeys.
- Our schools programme which includes encouraging schools to develop a travel plans (TfL's Travel for Life) helps to promote active travel at an early age [TfL Travel for Life - Travel for Life](#). 42 schools in Brent currently have active school travel plans and 28 of those have achieved Gold accreditation.
- School streets help support active travel by improving the environment and safety around schools, we have 30+ in the borough. [School Streets programme | Brent Council](#) [Breathe Clean Brent](#)

- Brent's Breathe Clean project: [Breathe Clean Brent](#) includes a map to encourage active travel and includes details of healthier walking and cycling routes across the borough. This was promoted to schools and also includes community walking routes and Brent art trail which combines visiting places of interest with using sustainable travel.
- Revive and Ride: Launched in April 2025 as part of Brent Council's "Revive and Ride" initiative, the scheme refurbishes bikes discarded at Abbey Road's Waste & Recycling Centre and donates them - up to 10 free bikes per local faith or community group along with training and guided rides to encourage cycling and greener living.

### **Bike Hangars:**

To date, the Council has installed 153 Bike Hangars across the borough, providing over 900 parking spaces for bikes. This comprises:

- 148 on street Bike Hangers, providing 888 individual parking slots.
- 5 hangars in Brent Housing Estates, providing 30 individual parking slots.

An additional 17 cycle hangars are planned for installation during 2025/26 utilising funding secured from Transport for London.

### **Wembley – Willesden Junction Healthy Streets Corridor Scheme:**

Brent Council have been working closely with Transport for London (TfL) since April 2019 to develop a project that would make it safer and easier for local people to walk and cycle between Wembley and Willesden Junction. The project is being developed in phases, and the first phase is on the area between Wembley Central and Harlesden stations, where a new high-quality Cycleway and improvements for pedestrians are being proposed.

These changes will help us to reduce air pollution and carbon emissions, which could improve local people's health. It would also address congestion and help support new developments across the wider area by providing better walking and cycling links to local businesses and stations.

A public consultation on the proposals was held between 10th November and 21st December 2023 during which 313 responses were received, including ten from stakeholders. Some key findings from the responses received were:

- 83 per cent think the scheme will encourage more people to walk.
- 87 per cent think the scheme will encourage more people to cycle.
- 9 per cent think the scheme will encourage more people to use public transport.

- 60 per cent think the scheme will mean fewer people will choose to travel by motor vehicle for personal journeys and 46% (125 respondents) think it will have no impact on business journeys.

A link to the consultation report is here: -  
<https://haveyoursay.tfl.gov.uk/28345/widgets/80430/documents/60985>

The Council will continue to work closely with TfL to develop these proposals for walking and cycling improvements between Wembley and Harlesden over the coming months with the aim to obtain agreement to commence detailed design shortly and progress towards construction in early 2027.

**3. Question from Councillor Moeen to Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools)**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools provide an update to Members on the recent announcements by both government and the Mayor of London, to fund both free school meals and pilot breakfast clubs, and the importance of this new commitment to addressing food poverty in the borough?

**Response:**

All children nationally currently receive free school meals in Key Stage 1 (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2). Eligibility for free school meals for other year groups is based on a range of benefits received by families (such as income support and child tax credit where income is no more than £16,190). The children of families in receipt of Universal Credit are eligible for free school meals if household income is less than £7,400 a year. The UK government has recently announced an expansion of Free School Meals (FSM) in England, to remove the £7,400 cap so that all children whose families receive Universal Credit will be eligible for free school meals from September 2026. According to the Government this will affect over half a million more pupils, as part of a broader strategy to tackle child poverty and ensure all children have access to nutritious meals.

While this will contribute to addressing food poverty in Brent for many local families, families across the borough are already benefitting from schemes to ensure as many children as possible access free school meals. All primary aged children in Brent have free school meals through the London Mayor's Free School Meal policy, which commenced in 2023 and has now been made permanent. To ensure that as many children as possible in secondary schools also benefit from free school meals, the council has established an auto-enrolment scheme. This ensures that primary aged children whose families receive eligible benefits are also formally registered for free school meals so that their schools can access linked pupil premium funding to provide additional support to these pupils. The Brent auto-enrolment scheme to date has identified over 389 additional eligible children, generating over £500K additional funding for schools.

Research undertaken by the Mayor's office has identified the benefits of the scheme to provide universal free school meals for primary children across London, which include children not going hungry at school, reducing stigma and inequalities and supporting educational outcomes.

The government has also announced a national scheme of free breakfasts clubs in every primary school to ensure all primary aged children have access to a healthy breakfast to support their engagement in learning. An early adopter scheme is currently underway to pilot and test delivery of the programme in 750 schools across the county, which includes 5 Brent schools.



**4. Question from Councillor Mistry to Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council):**

Given the findings of the Council's own Equalities Impact Assessment that the twinning of Brent with Nablus 'may cause emotional harm to some groups in Brent', 'may risk compounding antisemitism', and 'may be viewed as demonstrating greater support for one group over another', could the Leader of the Council:

- (1) Specify steps the Council is taking to mitigate these risks and ensure that community cohesion, equalities obligations and political impartiality are upheld?
- (2) Furthermore, given that travel to Nablus is dependent on approval from Israeli authorities, deemed unsafe for LGBTQ+ people by some, and subject to official Foreign Office guidance advising against travel to all parts of the West Bank, justify spending time and resources on a partnership that many Brent residents cannot safely or legally participate in; and
- (3) Finally, given the absence of meaningful engagement or consultation with many of Brent's communities, including its large Hindu, Jewish and Christian populations, respond to concerns that this has been on a one-sided political process, rather than a genuinely representative or inclusive one and considering support of the twinning arrangement advise what steps were taken to verify the authenticity and residency of those signatures in their petition?

**Response:**

We fully recognise the importance of ensuring that all communities in Brent feel heard, respected, and included in the decisions that affect civic life. Brent has a long and proud humanitarian tradition of standing up for dialogue, justice, and equality. We are equally proud of our diversity, both of people and plurality of views but, most importantly, we are committed to promoting our borough as a place where every resident can call their home.

We understand that the decision to twin with Nablus has caused some concern, particularly in light of current affairs and the links between many Brent households and families in the Middle East.

The twinning initiative is intended as a gesture aimed at fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, building bridges between communities, sharing experiences, and supporting grassroots collaboration.

The process around this twinning, is not a closed story and we know that there is still more to be done. The Council has engaged in ongoing dialogue with both the Nablus Governorate and the Brent-Nablus Twinning Association as the organisations responsible.

I have also personally made clear that the relationship must remain focused on community, cultural, educational, and municipal exchange, and that it must support, not undermine, our responsibilities to community cohesion here in Brent too.

It will not and should not endorse any political group or ideology over another and should follow in the footsteps of Dundee City Council and Sheffield City Council, which also have links with Nablus.

To ensure our community cohesion and equalities obligations are closely adhered to and before signing a Twinning agreement, in line with our continuing EIA obligations, we will be engaging with members of the community who may be particularly marginalised.

As set out in the assessment, which was appended to the initial report, the relationship is not solely based on physical exchanges or travel, something also highlighted in the body of the Council report, but also aspirational and multi-faith activities which can take place online. The assessment also sets out the aspiration of Brent Nablus Twinning Association to build on links with Brent's outstanding network of schools, and host school children from Nablus; to deepen links between our two homes.

If twinning is to be successful, it must be driven forward and resourced by volunteers within Brent's community – and the council has made this principle clear in our International Partnering Protocol. The resource from the council will be limited, and the impact will be under stringent review by the council. If at any stage it becomes clear that a twinning arrangement is failing in promoting constructive dialogue, or community and cultural exchange, the protocol allows for the arrangement to be reviewed and, if necessary, annulled.

The EIA sets out the advantages and disadvantages of building the twinning relationship and processes in place. A consistent approach is applied to all petitions received by the council to verify the authenticity of signatures, but where concerns have been raised, we have investigated accordingly. As set out in the petition guidance, postcodes of Brent and neighbouring boroughs are accepted, *'a random check will be carried out on very large petitions..... to ensure they are valid. If it is felt that a petition contains signatures from people who are remote from the area, are unlikely to be affected by the subject of the petition or are not genuine then the petition will be returned'*.

**5. Question from Councillor Lorber to Councillor Benea (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property):**

Can the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property please confirm:

- (1) how many Shared Ownership units have been approved by the Planning Committee in the last 10 years in Brent to be built by:
  - (a) the Council in total and in each ward;
  - (b) developers and Housing Associations in total and in each ward
- (2) How many Shared Ownership units have been delivered in that period by the Council, Developers and Housing Associations in total and by ward, and:
  - (a) how many of these units are currently occupied and how many are empty in total and by ward;
  - (b) how many completed Shared Ownership units are still to find a buyer in Brent and what are the implications, if these units are unsaleable.

In view of this month's damning BBC report into hidden costs and financial hardship experienced by people who were led to believe that shared ownership was a stepping stone into home ownership, does Brent Council still define 'shared ownership' as an affordable housing model.

**Response:**

Question 1(a) & (b): The details are as shown in the spreadsheet attached as Appendix 1 and derived from planning approvals data broken down by ward and by Council or Housing Association.

Question 2(a): The attached spreadsheet also shows delivery by ward. The council does not hold data on occupancy rates for Housing Associations.

Question 2(b): The council does not hold details of sales rates for developers or housing associations.

In terms of the implications if shared ownership units are unsaleable - Brent's '[Shared Ownership Sales and Marketing Policy](#)' sets out the process in relation to marketing of Council units at an appropriate level in the market and verified by an independent valuer. Housing associations are responsible for managing their own sales.

In recognition of affordability pressures the Government has made changes to allow for smaller initial shares (down to 5%) and smaller staircasing purchases for those wishing to increase their share. At Brent, we have sought to provide the most affordable rates by reducing the amount of initial equity. This must of course

be balanced with scheme viability. This does allow it to be accessible to households at below market price.

In response whether the Council still defines 'shared ownership' as an affordable housing model – Shared ownership falls within the definition of an affordable housing product within the National Planning Policy Framework and London Plan and Brent's Local Plan is consistent with this. Since this is a discounted market product aimed at assisting households into home ownership it is not immune from changes in the market and therefore levels of affordability. Nevertheless, it is sold at a level below full market value so accessible to a sector of households that cannot afford the full market price.

The Council's emphasis is on providing the maximum number of homes at social or London affordable rents which, in reality, requires a significant amount of subsidy. Shared ownership is part of the overall picture. Moreover, keeping pace with housing delivery is an important factor ensuring homes of all types are made available and Brent has built more homes in the last 10 years than any other London borough except Tower Hamlets. This is over 20,000 homes including 4200 affordable (also 2<sup>nd</sup> highest in London).