



Car Free Leeds

Possible.
Inspiring climate action

A map of Leeds and its surrounding areas, including Horsforth, Adel, Roundhay, Chapel Allerton, Headingley, Farsley, Pudsey, Wortley, Holbeck, Hunslet, Beeston, Morley, Middleton, Rothwell, and Swillington. The city of Leeds is highlighted in the center. The map is overlaid with a dark blue box containing text on the left and a light blue box containing statistics on the right.

Leeds is a fantastic city where you will not only find **strong local communities** but also lots of **technical innovation** and **city development**, along with **care for the climate**.

However, there is still a way to go if Leeds is to move away from being the “motorway city of the 70s”. Our **over-dependence on cars** has contributed significantly to poor public health, but **public transport in Leeds is expensive, unreliable, and carbon intensive**. The city centre may be pedestrianised, but **walking and cycling infrastructure needs attention** across the whole city.

Area
550km²

Population
793,139

Average weekly earnings
£513

People who cycle to work
1.76%

Car ownership
77% own at least 1 motor vehicle

Air quality
23 days of poor air quality in 2019

People living in social housing
22%

People from ethnic minority backgrounds
19%

Current political landscape
Labour-led council and majority MPs

At Possible, we want to see a zero carbon society, built by and for everyone, and we want to see this fast.

Our **Car Free Leeds** campaign brings to life a positive case for fewer cars on Leeds' streets.

We are working with communities currently blighted by traffic and air pollution to co-design changes to local streets, taking space away from cars and giving it back to people and nature.

We recognise that there are many people, including disabled people, who cannot get around without a car. Our aim of fewer cars on the road means more space for those who need to drive – and a better Leeds for everyone.

At the same time, we will encourage and inspire local decision makers to raise ambitions and accelerate change at the city level.



credit: [Andrew Roberts](#) / CC BY-SA 3.0

Our **Car Free Leeds** campaign

There's so much we'd love to do in Leeds to help shift us away from car dominance.

Here's what we've got planned so far.

Parklets

If streets are lined with parked cars, well, that's just free car storage. What about some space for people to walk, cross the road, sit, rest, socialise?

Parklets are a great way of repurposing car parking spaces. They often host benches and greenery for people to enjoy, and they can lower air temperatures and increase biodiversity too – there's already one on The Calls in the city centre.

We want parklets to become a widely recognised means of creating pleasant spaces for all. Teaming up with others who share our passion for giving public space back to people, we will campaign for a simple process for residents to apply for temporary and permanent parklets – especially in neighbourhoods where people have the least access to green spaces.

We'll be developing resources to help residents through the process: from a photographic history of parklets, to developing a 'how-to' toolkit for individuals, to showcasing case studies.



credit: Hannah Kettle

Who wants the traffic back?

Active Travel Neighbourhoods use planters, bollards, and cameras ('modal filters') to remove through traffic from neighbourhoods.

Residents can still drive onto their road, or receive deliveries, but shortcutting from one main road to the next is harder or impossible. This stops people unnecessarily driving through residential roads, making them quieter, safer, and easier to walk and cycle and play.

The recent implementation of several Active Travel Neighbourhoods under emergency Covid-19 measures has given rise to a debate about the right to public space and how we use it.

The benefits of these schemes are not immediately obvious to some residents. Change can be a challenge for many people, including those who currently own cars, but over time, people tend to adapt to any perceived inconvenience, and in the end don't want their local modal filters removed.

We plan to test this assumption by surveying local residents who have lived by modal filters that have been in place for a while, and ask, 'Who wants the traffic back?'. We will recruit volunteers to carry out the door knocking survey when it is safe to do so and we will share our findings.



Traffic counting

Although Leeds City Council carries out its own traffic monitoring, we want to gather data on neighbourhoods 'under the radar'.

Our focus will be areas which are not benefiting from existing monitoring, and where people are suffering high volumes of through-traffic.

We currently have one traffic counter running in Chapeltown and we will engage new people in climate action by supporting local residents and businesses to install more in their windows.

We will analyse and publish the results to help make the case to the relevant authorities for street re-designs and changes in how we travel.

Cleaner air

Leeds' Clean Air Zone would have meant that the most polluting lorries, taxis and buses would have had to pay to drive inside Leeds' Outer Ring Road. This was unfortunately scrapped in October 2020 before it came into effect.

This is a great opportunity to start a conversation around the costs and benefits of different transport choices, and analysing the cost of car ownership.

We want to demonstrate that a car-free life is possible, and we want to support people through this journey. We plan to launch a car-free trial pledge, and we'll be supporting people with advice on how to do a car-free school run, daily commute and weekly shop.

We will also raise awareness of other transport options such as car share clubs, examine the factors that prevent people from giving up their cars, and facilitate discussions on how these can be addressed.



credit: [Tim Green](#) / CC BY 2.0



credit: Juan Carballo Diaz

Future filling stations

With the UK phasing out petrol and diesel cars, there's a great opportunity to do something amazing with the land currently occupied by petrol stations. Did you know that [Hyde Park Book Club](#) used to be a petrol station?

We will first audit Leeds' petrol stations and find out how much land they currently occupy.

We will support local groups to register petrol stations as Assets of Community Value (ACV), which is land or property, nominated as important by a local community group, that then has added protection from development. If an owner of an ACV wishes to sell, they must first inform the local authority. If a qualifying community group wants to buy the ACV, they can have more time (up to six months) to raise the money to purchase it.

We also want to run workshops with local communities to develop ideas for what these petrol stations can be – perhaps a community garden or a space for young people.

Getting people talking

Not talking about the problem with mass private car ownership makes it easier for us all to ignore.

This is why we want to get people talking; sharing their stories and experiences of getting around our city – the good and the bad!

We’d love to showcase these stories in a creative way with local art groups and encourage people to change how they talk, and think, about travel.

Young people have a huge role to play in tackling the climate crisis, and whilst they are unlikely to own or drive a car themselves, they are amongst the most vulnerable road users. We want to hear their voices.

We are planning to organise a youth panel discussion where young people can discuss and learn about the issues around car-use, toxic air, and health and wellbeing.

Key dates

Key dates in the calendar will provide a focus for our activities, often working in partnership with other stakeholder organisations across Leeds.

Clean Air Day	17 June 2021
Climate Coalition Festival	18–26 September 2021
Car Free Day	22 September 2021
UN climate talks	1–12 November 2021

We’d love to hear your ideas about how we can work together on these events and maximise collaboration.

The **problem with** **cars** in Leeds

We all want to live in a neighbourhood where we can breathe clean air, walk around safely and feel connected to our community.

But Leeds is congested with traffic, choked by fumes and is often dangerous for people who walk and cycle. This affects all Leeds residents, but older people, disabled people, children and communities where people of colour, and poor people live are hit the hardest.

1. The climate emergency

Transport emissions are the largest source of CO₂ emissions in the UK and private cars are the biggest single source of transport emissions.

In March 2019, two months before the UK government, Leeds declared a climate emergency and committed to working towards net zero emissions by 2030.

The [Big Leeds Climate Conversation](#) found that nine in ten Leeds residents believe that the climate is changing and that the earth is warming due to human activity, reducing their own impact on the environment is a 'personal priority', and becoming a carbon neutral city should be a city priority.

To become carbon neutral by 2030, we are going to have to drastically reduce our car use, and in December 2020, Leeds City Council released their ambitious [draft transport strategy](#) with its vision of being "a city where you don't need a car".

93.4% of Leeds residents believe that the climate is changing and that the earth is warming due to human activity.



89.4% of people said that reducing their own impact on the environment is a 'personal priority'.

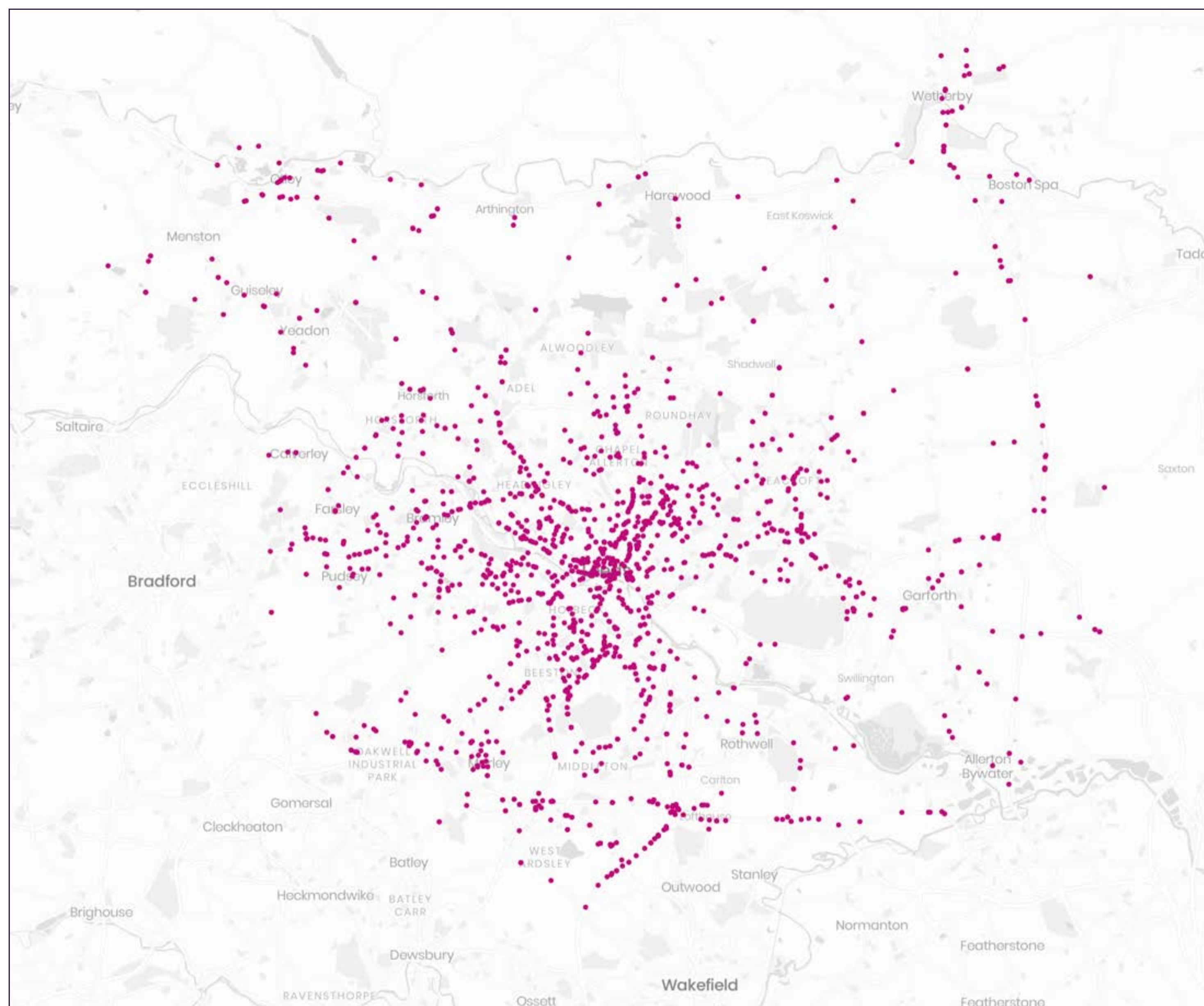


91.6% of people agreed that becoming a carbon neutral city should be a city priority.



Data: [Big Leeds Climate Conversation](#)

Road traffic accidents in Leeds, 2019



Data: Leeds City Council © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

2. Collisions

With 1.3 million people killed each year globally, cars have been termed the world's "deadliest animal".

Over the last few years, the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads of Leeds has risen, and in 2019, 22 people were killed and 313 seriously injured.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) has been calling for a reduction of the speed limit to 20mph on all urban roads, on the basis that this would reduce the number and severity of road collisions and take pressure off the NHS.

To combat road danger, we need motor traffic reduction measures, as well as support for walking, cycling and scooting.

Fewer cars means fewer collisions, and more space for pedestrians to move, play and socialise safely.

3. Toxic air

Motor traffic is a major contributor to air pollution, producing harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and non-exhaust emissions (particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as particulate matter, PM2.5 or PM10). These pollutants have both direct and indirect effects on the environment and our own physical and mental health.

According to the World Health Organisation, air pollution-related deaths are most closely linked to PM2.5 emissions.

In Leeds, the majority of our transport emissions comes from cars: 58%, and approximately 300 deaths per year are linked to high levels of air pollution. One in every 22 adult deaths in Leeds is linked to high levels of non-exhaust emissions that consist of tiny particles small enough to be breathed in (PM2.5).

Pre-Covid-19 lockdowns, Leeds was one of the UK cities breaching legal limits of PM2.5 – one street with illegal levels of particulate matter was just outside Leeds General Infirmary – and Neville Street was the most polluted street outside of London.



credit: Dave Noonan

In a landmark verdict in January 2021, a coroner ruled that a nine year old child, Ella Kissi-Debrah, died from illegal levels of air pollution – the main source being traffic emissions. Ella, who had severe asthma, lived within 30 metres of London's infamous South Circular Road. The judge is expected to make recommendations for legislation to prevent future deaths.

In March 2021, the UK was found guilty by the European Court of Justice of “systematically and persistently” breaching air pollution limits.

4. Noise pollution

Traffic is a big contributor to noise pollution in Leeds – especially for those who live on or near major roads, for whom the exposure to traffic noise is constant.

The World Health Organisation recognises environmental noise as the second largest environmental health risk in Western Europe, behind air quality.

Noise pollution contributes to an increase in heart and circulatory problems, sleep disturbance, chronic annoyance, physiological effects, mental health effects, hearing impairment, reduced performance and communication and learning effects.

5. Inactivity crisis

Leeds is facing an inactivity crisis. Over decades, machines, cars and technology have gradually taken over many of the tasks that used to require physical effort. Almost without realising it, we have engineered physical activity out of our daily lives.

The consequences of this shift to more sedentary lifestyles are severe. Lack of physical activity is now one of the biggest threats to our health, increasing the risk of developing a range of chronic diseases including diabetes, dementia, depression, heart disease and cancer.

We urgently need to design physical activity back into our everyday lives. Walking more, cycling more, using public transport more, are the easiest and most affordable ways for many of us to get more active and live healthier lives.



credit: Richard Kay / CC BY-SA 2.0

6. Public space

While Leeds city centre is leading the way in pedestrianising public space, only about a fifth of Leeds is made up of green space, and we have a high number of green-space-deprived neighbourhoods.

The Covid-19 lockdowns, and the closure of parks and urban green spaces, highlighted how access to outdoor space is a luxury denied to many people, particularly those from low income households living in tower blocks.

We currently give over swathes of public land to the storage of private cars, which sit unused for 95% of the time.

We could use more of this land to increase our green spaces through measures such as parklets and increasing cycle storage space.

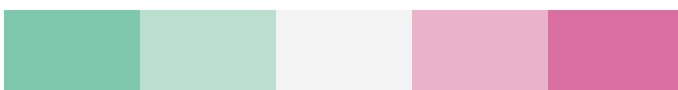
7. Inequality and social justice

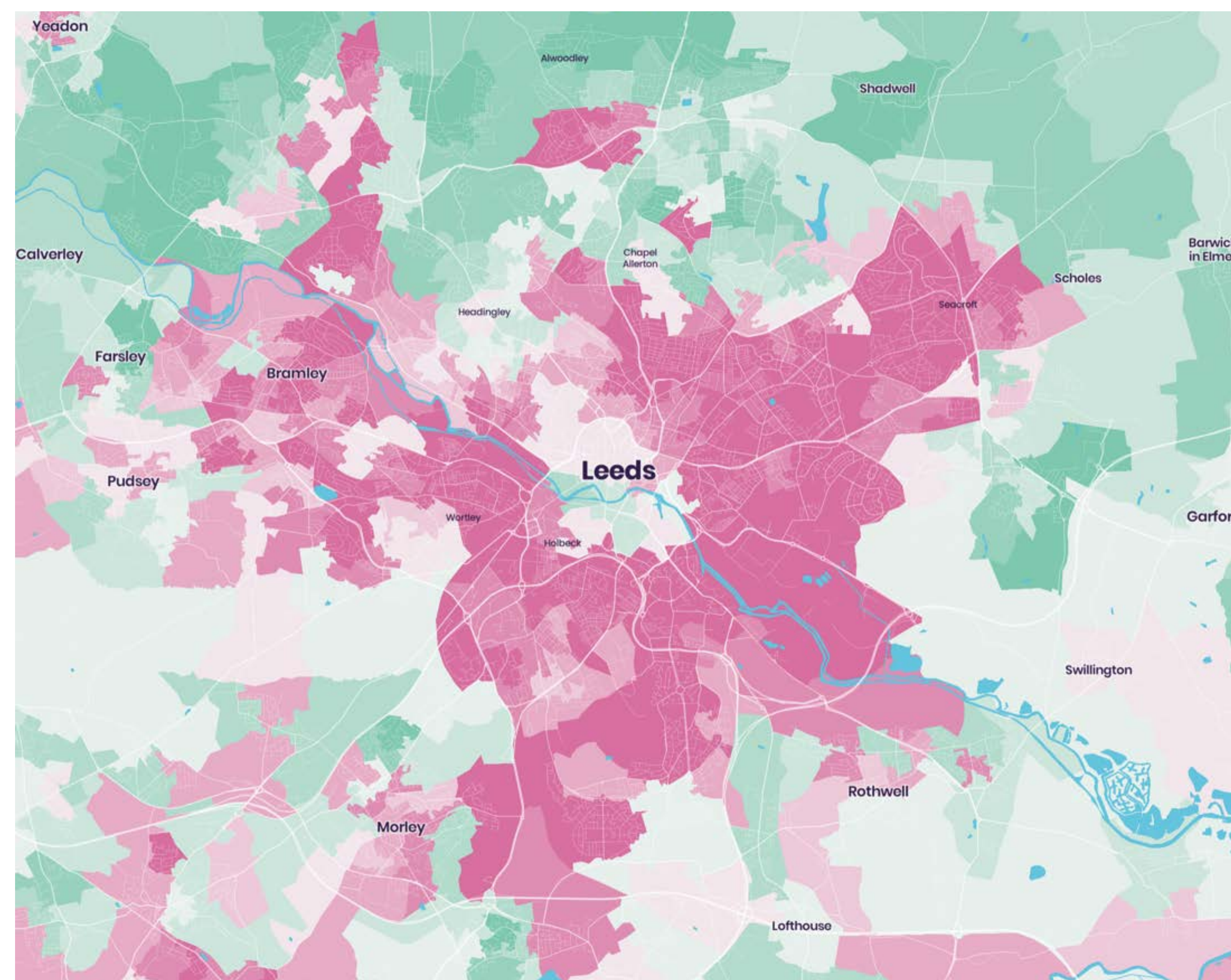
Car dominance is also a matter of social justice. One in four areas in Leeds rank amongst the most deprived 10% of areas nationally. On this map you can see these areas of deprivation.

The most deprived areas of our cities have the lowest car ownership rates, yet it is these people who suffer the most from the toxic air, noise, stress, congestion and traffic danger from other people driving through their streets.

Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by air pollution from motor traffic. A large proportion of the workforce of taxi drivers and bus drivers are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and are thus consistently exposed to vehicle fumes for long hours.

UK index of multiple deprivation, 2019

Least Deprived  Most Deprived



Data: Consumer Data Research Centre © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

8. Congestion

In recent years, almost 80% of vehicle miles travelled on Leeds city roads were cars and taxis, and we are in the top ten most congested urban areas in the UK. We also have two of the top ten most congested roads in the UK.

Most people drive to work, but according to the Big Leeds Climate Conversation, approximately one third of respondents would car share, over a third would work from home more often, and almost half would consider an electric or hybrid car. Residents also believe that more positive action is needed to make car-use a last resort.

Our residents are obviously aware of the issues and solutions around car-dependency, and that's great! We now need to make sure these options are more viable for more people.

9. Social isolation

A major threat to our quality of life in Leeds is the impact of high motor vehicle traffic on neighbourhood social interaction.

Where traffic volumes are high, residents report limited social contact with people on the other side of the road. They have fewer friends and acquaintances than on lower traffic streets. The extent of people's "home territories" also diminishes as motor traffic increases and high traffic limits the mobility of people walking and cycling.

People often perceive more road danger in their neighbourhood as a result of traffic conditions on their street, and this affects the degree of independence granted to children.

This all highlights the need to reclaim urban residential neighbourhoods from motor traffic, and that political will is required to make this happen.



credit: Andrew Roberts

Are electric vehicles the solution?

All vehicles, even electric and hydrogen ones, produce non-exhaust emissions (air pollution particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as particulate matter or PM2.5 or PM10).

These can enter all major organs of the body, not just the lungs, heart, and brain, but also the placenta, affecting life chances of unborn children.

Electric vehicles still cause congestion and road danger, they do nothing to encourage space or transport equity, and they compound the inactivity crisis and social isolation in our communities.

So, no – the answer isn't just newer cars, but fewer cars.

Moving away from car dependency

Car-use can exacerbate inequalities already present in our city and cause damage to people and our environment.

Residents have called for more positive action to help make using private cars a last resort, and highlighted the need for more green space around the city.

Air Quality Management Areas

Local Authorities (LAs) carry out regular reviews and assessments of air quality in their areas to make sure national air quality objectives are met. Air Quality Management Areas are areas where these objectives are not likely to be met.

Leeds has multiple Air Quality Management Areas around the city.

Leeds Clean Air Zone

Given the poor air quality in Leeds, the council had planned to introduce a Clean Air Zone. However, in 2020 the scheme was scrapped as their short-term air quality goals were met before its full implementation.

School Streets

School Streets restrict motor traffic at school opening and closing times. They help improve road safety and air quality, and increase the number of children who walk or cycle to school.

Leeds' has 14 schools with school streets but our report found that about half of Leeds' schools may be suitable for a School Street.



credit: Hannah Kettle

Electric vehicles

Leeds City Council is running EV trials for organisations to see if their fleets could go electric, and they're also running e-bike trials for residents so they can see first-hand the benefits of switching to electric bikes for their commute. There are many charging points around the city, so there is no need to worry about running low!

Car clubs

Enterprise Car Club is available in Leeds, and there are lots of locations where you can start a car rental from.

Parklets

Parklets are created by turning parking spaces into parks, or community spaces, and there's already one on The Calls in the city centre. They're a great way for people to access outside space where they can't otherwise.

Active travel

Amongst other things, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more space so people can get around safely, and the importance of maintaining our health. Emergency measures – like Active Travel Neighbourhoods (ATNs) and improved cycle infrastructure – were put in place to allow for just that. ATNs also provide outdoor space for people to play in who can't easily access green space.



credit: Naassom Azevedo

Collaboration

We want to work with residents, businesses, individuals, campaigners, community groups and other organisations to drive forward the car free vision and re-imagine Leeds as a place designed around people, rather than cars.

We are also keen to work in partnership with other organisations already doing fantastic work in this area, and add value to existing initiatives.

We particularly want to engage with groups and individuals who are most affected by the harms of cars, to amplify their voices and co-design solutions. We want to work with disabled people's organisations, communities of colour, schools, and faith groups as well as local authorities.

If you like the sound of this and want to help us work towards the vision of a Car Free Leeds, we'd love to hear from you!

Find Out More

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