



**A Report on Street Name Signs
used by London Borough of Barnet in
Hampstead Garden Suburb**

**Prepared by the
Conservation and Amenities Committee (Consam)
of the
Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association**

Adopted by the Council of the Residents Association 2 September 2003

The original signs

A survey of Street Name Signs in Hampstead Garden Suburb shows a lack of uniformity in typeface, design, size of sign and skill of execution.

Right from the beginning, there were different styles of street sign and there are about five different designs among the surviving cast iron signs.

Hampstead Garden Suburb used to be divided between two boroughs, Finchley and Hendon but the differences in the original signs do not reflect the borders of the old boroughs.

The sign pictured below is an original cast iron sign which Barnet has recently repainted.



Fig 1: 167 cm x 21 cm

However there appears to be inadequate supervision of Barnet's refurbishment work as the sign below in Meadway, an identical design to the one above in Thornton Way, has been repainted without a black surround.

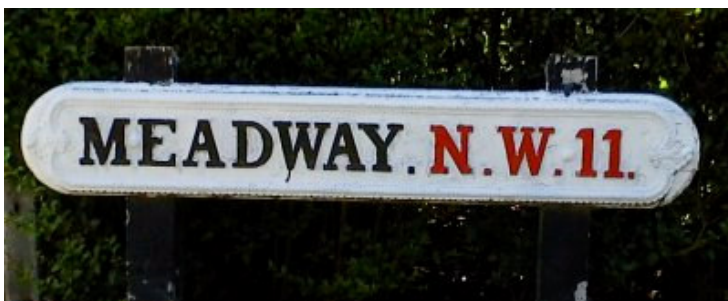


Fig 2: 136 cm x 21 cm

Many of the original cast iron signs were later replaced by steel signs such as the following:



Fig 3: 93 cm x 16 cm

Barnet policy toward street names signs in Hampstead Garden Suburb

Barnet has a special policy for street name signs in the Suburb:

- It is not supposed to use high level signs, example below left. Despite this policy, every now and then a high level sign is put up in the Suburb and then removed as a result of a complaint by a member of Consam.:

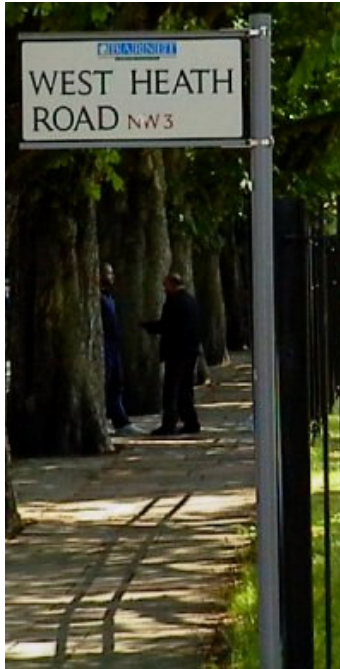


Fig 4

This example by Golders Hill Park replaced the one below, even though they are in a Conservation Area.



Fig 5

- It has been Barnet policy for some time not to remove any more original cast iron signs and instead to repaint them but no signs have been repainted until Spring 2003.

Other designs

Later Barnet, in common with other local authorities, adopted a new typeface for its street name signs called Octavian which originally was specially designed for use on road signs by David Kindersley and Will Carter.

This typeface has narrower letters than classical fonts and a heavier weight without appearing overbearing. This design is a preferred option where replicas of original signs are not possible.



Fig 6

Other variations have the name in two lines which departs from the shape of the original cast iron signs. An example is given below where Fig 7a replaced Fig 7b. Note the unnecessary duplication of the “no through road” logo.



Fig 7a

replacing this one:



Fig 7b

Use of the Barnet logo

In 1997, Barnet started to place its letter heading logo on street name signs and the rate of replacement accelerated. Signs were replaced, even though only the posts holding them up were broken.

This poorly executed example was erected:



Fig 8a: 102 cm x 38 cm

replacing this one:



Fig 8b: 108 x 16 cm

The addition of the old Barnet logo raises the surface area of the sign by 35% compared with the smaller signs. The larger the sign, the more likely it is to attract graffiti.

Street names in one or two lines

The original signs all had the street name in one single line. To maintain historical consistency this is the preferred shape. However for many years Barnet in common with other councils has installed signs with the words in two lines.

The sign writers obviously do not have clear instructions on what they should be doing as shown below. These two signs in Kingsley Way have recently been placed facing each other across the street.



Fig 9: 102 cm x 23 cm



Fig 10: 71 cm x 38 cm

Both signs were erected within a year of each other. The sign with the words in two lines has the disadvantage that it has a surface area approximately 15% to 20% larger than the sign which has the street name in one line.

The second Kingsley Way sign above is some 55% larger than the sign, without a logo, which it replaced. In the case of Erskine Hill (Fig 8a above), the new sign is twice the surface area of the old one.

Matters are made even worse with the latest turquoise design on page 7 which is normally double the surface area of the old style sign in one line.

Yet another variation in early 2003

Shortly before the turquoise sign was introduced, Barnet changed its sign style once again. It is not clear why two new completely different designs were introduced with a few months of each other. The most likely explanation is that two different departments in the Council were working on the different designs and each did not know what the other was doing.

The sign below may have been a response to the RA's earlier objections to the use of colour on the sign. However the RA was never consulted over this design. The words "London Borough" are unnecessary and the Barnet logo makes the sign too deep.

This particular sign was originally erected as a high level sign, contrary to Barnet policy for the Suburb, and brought down to its correct level after a complaint by Consam. It also replaced a cast iron sign contrary to Barnet's policy that they should be refurbished.



Fig 10a

Note the poor workmanship on the Northway version above. The posts are not the same height and the lettering is not horizontally centred on the sign, with extra space on the left and too little on the right.



Fig 10b

The turquoise design

In March 2003, just a month or two after its previous change in design, Barnet has launched another new street name sign design.

The council says in its magazine *Barnet First* "These new signs incorporate the Barnet crest along with the blue surround adopted as part of the council's corporate identity last year. This new style will improve the image of Barnet's roads and give the borough a unique identity that will differentiate itself from surrounding areas. You will see it popping up across Barnet whenever an existing sign needs replacing, or a new development is taking place."



Fig 11: 97cm x 38 cm

which replaced this sign:



Fig 12: 108cm x 16 cm

It has a surface area over twice as high as the sign it replaced.

There could be worse to come as this huge example from Golders Green illustrates:



Fig 13: 200 cm x 43 cm

Why the new design is unsuitable for Conservation Areas like Hampstead Garden Suburb

The authoritative guide to London's street furniture is contained in *Street For All* compiled by English Heritage and jointly published by English Heritage, the Government Office for London (which has since been taken over by the Mayor London), London Planning Advisory Committee, The London Forum and The Pedestrians Association. It was endorsed by the then Minister for London who wrote a foreword to the guide.

In the section on street signs it states:

“Street name signs make a significant contribution to local charm and character. Local variations in design, materials and lettering add richness and variety to the street scene. Where older signs survive, they should usually be retained rather than replaced to maintain a sense of historical continuity.”

The new design adopted by Barnet does not match this criteria. In particular:

- The size of each new sign will be approximately double that of an original style sign. This will make it a magnet for graffiti. It also makes the sign too obtrusive.
- The colour of the sign has no historic basis. It is also aesthetically unpleasant and seems to have been chosen to make it stand out when its function does not require this.
- The traditional sign has the street name in one rather than two lines. If this is used with the new design it creates an unduly large sign which is even uglier, see Fig 13 above.
- Traditional signs in Barnet do not have the name or crest of the local authority on the sign. Including the name of the authority on the sign detracts from the local charm and destroys the integrity of a community such as Hampstead Garden Suburb. When the suburb was built, Barnet did not exist, so use of the name has no historic authenticity.
- Using a corporate identity on street name signs is a misconceived concept as the street name signs should be forever whereas it is well known that corporate identities are changed at regular and frequent intervals. The result is the current situation with a hotchpotch of different designs; 12 different variations are shown in this report and in fact there are several others.
- Street name signs in Barnet are currently made from a synthetic composite material not unlike fibreboard with a glossy laminated surface. The original signs were made of cast iron or cast aluminium and replicas could be made with cast aluminium. Older signs are made of steel with raised letters also in metal. The new materials are easily vandalised, do not wear as well and are designed to be replaced rather than maintained.

What happens elsewhere

In Hampstead, the London Borough of Camden has been less destructive of historic street name signs. In old Hampstead many more original signs remain than do in Hampstead Garden Suburb. For example



Fig 14

Although some signs have been replaced by modern ones:



Fig 15

The current policy is to replace the modern signs with replicas of the original design. An example is given below. Although the replica is made of different material (metal instead of ceramic tiles) the replica is almost indistinguishable from the original.



Fig 16

The HGS Resident Association's involvement

It is known that about 20 years or longer ago, Barnet agreed with the RA that the typeface on Street signs in the Suburb should be a serif type, Octavian.

The RA has no records of communications with Barnet on this issue before 1997. Street name signs seemed to be replaced very occasionally and new signs conformed to the existing design so they were not considered an issue.

In 1997 Consam wrote to the Barnet Neighbourhood Management Service complaining about the use of the blue Barnet logo on a sign in South Square between St Judes Church (a Grade I listed building) and a terrace of Grade II listed houses. The sign which was replaced was not damaged, it only required new posts.

In 1997 Consam, English Heritage and the HGS Trust submitted a joint report on Street Clutter in Hampstead Garden Suburb to the London Borough of Barnet.

In 2000 the RA submitted a range of issues to Barnet Highways chief Mike Freestone and a three hour meeting was held between representatives of the RA and Mr Freestone and Cllr McGurk. Our objection to the use of the Barnet logo and the poor design of the signs was robustly put to the officials. Mr Freestone, who still has overall responsibility for this issue, promised to look into the matters raised.

The Ham & High reported RA objections to the Barnet logo on street name signs on 28 February 2003, page 3. The article said:

“A council spokeswoman said the issue over street signs were still being “negotiated” with residents. But she added that a newly designed street sign, launched this week, would be replacing old ones throughout the borough on a wear-and-tear basis.” In fact the Council had not communicated with the RA on this issue since the meeting in 2000.

In the past Barnet has either rejected or ignored most of the RA's comments on this issue. The only issue which they have agreed on is to continue the policy of not erecting high level signs (Fig 4) in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

At a meeting on 20 July 2003 between Cllr Mike Freer, Cllr John Marshall and members of Consam and the RA Executive Committee, Cllr Freer agreed to review the provision of new signs and to submit an alternative design for use in the Suburb to the RA.

It was disclosed at this meeting that Barnet replaces signs whenever a road is resurfaced. Previously the RA had been told that signs are only replaced when they are damaged. This would account for a large number of new signs where apparently there was no damage. This policy seem wasteful of resources and contrary to good practice and should be reviewed.

The Council's obligations

In theory Barnet Council is supposed to make special provision for all matters regarding the street scene in the Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation Area.

The source of this is found in the following documents:

- *The London Borough of Barnet Unitary Development Plan*, November 1991
- *The Revised Deposit Draft London Borough of Barnet Unitary Development Plan*, March 2001
- *Greening the Garden Suburb*, 1996
- *The London Borough of Barnet Heritage Strategy* (undated)
- *PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment*, advice from the Department of Environment, September 1994 (Updated 2002).
- *Streets For All, A Guide to the Management of London's Streets*, compiled by English Heritage and published by English Heritage, Government Office for London, The London Forum, London Planning Advisory Group and The Pedestrians Association.

In the opinion of Consam, these documents all contain specific clauses which any independent outsider might think would reasonably rule out the new street name design in all 17 Barnet conservation areas.

The Council also has an obligation to consult:

- interested parties and residents before it makes decisions affecting residents. In a judicial review in March 2003, Barnet had a traffic order in Mill Hill struck down by the High Court because it had not carried out a proper consultation. In this case too, no consultation has been offered to either individuals or the RA.
- When Barnet adopted the document *Greening of the Suburb*, it agreed in future to consult HGS Trust and English Heritage on issues relevant to the conservation of Hampstead Garden Suburb. No consultation has been carried out with those bodies on this issue.
- The borough employs a Conservation Officer who is specifically involved in trying to protect the historic environment. He does not appear to have been consulted on the issue of the impact of the new design of street name signs in conservation areas. This would be contrary to the authority's obligations under paragraph 1.6 of *PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment*.
- *PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment*, in paragraph 1.7 with regard to street furniture states "it is a key element of Government policy for conservation that there should be adequate processes of consultation and education".

Objections

Since the first sign appeared at Meadway Gate, RA officers have had many complaints from residents and residents raised the issue at the Annual General Meeting. The matter has been raised informally with one of the local councillors.

The HGS Trust has written a letter of complaint and English Heritage is likely to do the same.

Under Barnet's new constitution decisions of this type are delegated to an Executive Member and the Executive member responsible is Cllr Brian Coleman. Cllr Mike Freer has told us he too has responsibility for this policy. It would also appear to be the responsibility of Barnet's Planning and Environment Committee chaired by Cllr Melvin Cohen.

Below is a copy of a letter of complaint sent by a resident G. Gore which was posted on the HGS E mail discussion list and Cllr Coleman's reply:

To: *cllr.b.coleman@barnet.gov.uk; Mike.Freestone@barnet.gov.uk*

Subject: *Street name signs*

Dear Sirs

I was absolutely appalled to see the new road sign at Meadway Gate. I would like to lodge a complaint about the fact that as residents of Hampstead Garden Suburb we are subjected to strict limitations on what we can do to our own homes BUT when Barnet wants to do something to our area they do not have to conform to the same standards.

I thought it was completely out of keeping to have road signs that were modern in design with reflective coating - when the ones they were replacing were of a different font and completely different design BUT this new blue design is hideous and so obviously nothing to do with any ideas Henrietta Barnett would have had. I thought the whole area was a conservation area.

People from around the world come to the Suburb to study the history of urban development, what are you doing sticking that totally inappropriate signage at the gate of such an historical area?

Could you please return all the road signs to the original Victorian look signs, so at least they all match and they are in keeping with the whole environment.

Yours sincerely

G. Gore

REPLY FROM CLLR COLEMAN:

Sorry , No this is the new corporate image for the Borough and will cover all signs , publications, posters, notepaper and everything else. I like the new signs as they include the Borough crest for the first time . They will be rolled out eventually to all roads in the Borough including Hampstead Garden Suburb.

Golders Green Forum

At the request of the RA Executive Committee, the issue was raised by RA Treasurer and RA Roads and Traffic Committee member George Hatjoulis at the Golders Green Forum on 17 June 2003. This is a copy of his subsequent E mail to Barnet officers confirming the questions he asked in person.

Dear Katy,

Following the Forum meeting at St Michael's Church Hall, 17/06/03, you requested that I repeat my questions and observations in writing. I provide a summary below.

1. The residents of the Hampstead Garden Suburb conservation area are very unhappy with the new street signs that are being rolled out across the area. They are not consistent with the character of the conservation area and ignored a past commitment of the council to retain traditional signs.
2. Why were the HGS Residents Association, the HGS Trust and English Heritage not consulted about the new signs?
3. Is there a report on the suitability of these signs from the Barnet Conservation Officer?
4. Could we please halt any further installation of such signs until there is proper consultation with the above mentioned associations?
5. Attempts by individual residents to raise the matter with Cllr B. Coleman produced unpromising results. One such response was posted on the HGS email group list (and thus placed in the public domain). Cllr Coleman is reported to have replied:

Sorry , No this is the new corporate image for the Borough and will cover all signs , publications, posters, notepaper and everything else. I like the new signs as they include the Borough crest for the first time . They will be rolled out eventually to all roads in the Borough including Hampstead Garden Suburb

In the light of the lack of consultation and due consideration of the requirements of the conservation area, the response seems insensitive.

The Chair (Cllr Gearson) promised to address the matter with Cllr Coleman. I look forward to hearing of the outcome.

Yours Faithfully,

George Hatjoulis

As of 2 September 2003 no reply had been received to the questions raised.

Conclusions

We would very much welcome the statement from Cllr Freer that Barnet is prepared to consider an alternative street name sign design which is appropriate in the historic environment and will be used instead of the turquoise sign in Conservation Areas.

The RA recommends:

1. That all remaining original cast iron signs should be retained and Barnet should prepare a list of the remaining signs in conservation areas and repaint them as a matter of urgency.
2. The possibility of making embossed signs in metal should be investigated as they are closer to the original design, have a much longer life and are aesthetically more attractive.
3. Any new sign should be in the format of the example below which conforms to the following:
 - The words should be in one line as was the case with the original signs.
 - Care should be taken with word spacing and there should be a minimum of white space at the margins, both horizontal and vertical, as shown in the example below. Where there is a short name, the board should be trimmed to be less wide rather than leaving extra space at the margins.
 - The typeface should be Octavian, as below.
 - The colour of the lettering should be black with the post code in smaller type and coloured red.
 - The signs should be on short posts at the back of the pavement against a hedge or fixed without posts to a fence or wall at the same low height.
 - The posts supporting the signs should be painted green, the same shade as the lamp posts.
 - The posts should not protrude above the top of the sign.



Fig 17

4. All recently erected signs containing either version of the Barnet logo should be replaced with signs conforming to the specification above. Money could be found for this by changing the policy of replacing street name signs when a road is resurfaced.
5. It should be the eventual aim to restore all Street name signs in the Conservation Area to ones resembling the historical originals so that there is more uniformity.
6. The relevant departments, Neighbourhood Management, Street Signs etc should be made aware of the special considerations that apply to Conservation Areas.