

**The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents**



**Report for**

Hampstead Garden Suburb  
Residents Association

**Highway Safety Review -  
A598, Finchley Road,  
Temple Fortune,  
London, NW11.**

December 2003

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This report refers to a Highway Safety Review commissioned by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association regarding a traffic scheme being proposed for the A598, Finchley Road, Temple Fortune. The Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust has also co-sponsored the RoSPA commission regarding this project. The review site is located in the London Borough of Barnet. The review was carried out during December 2003.

## **2.0 Methodology**

The Highway Safety Review has been carried out by Malcolm Bulpitt, MIHT, Hon FIHIE, an Associate Consultant with RoSPA.

Malcolm Bulpitt has been involved in the area of ensuring the safe movement of people and traffic, establishing and implementing policies to this end, and lecturing on safety issues for some 40 years. Until entering the consultancy field he had been the Traffic Management Policy Manager of Kent County Council and prior to this was that Council's Safety Engineering Manager. This work involved the investigation and study of accidents and the development of remedial measures. He has been credited by the Federal Highway Administration in the USA as having developed the world's first Road Safety Audit procedure and has undertaken many in-service traffic and safety reviews in both the public and private sectors.

Malcolm Bulpitt visited the site during the afternoon of Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2003 in the company of Ken Murrell who explained the background to the issues that concern the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association (HGSR). Earlier that day he had a useful meeting Theo Panayi, Principal Engineer, Traffic Management, of Barnet Council at their Offices in Whetstone. Mike Freestone, Head of Planning, Highway and Design at Barnet subsequently talked to Malcolm Bulpitt about the scheme. Additional background information was also supplied by staff at Transport for London (TfL). Whilst on site he was introduced to Michael Cohen, the representative of the local business community, Georgina Malcolm, the Chairman of the Residents Association Council, and to staff of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust (HGST).

## **3.0 Background**

The London Borough of Barnet (LBB) has developed a traffic scheme for the length of the A598, Finchley Road between its junction with the A406, North Circular Road (NCR) and Portsdown Avenue, a distance of some 1200m. This section of road contains a busy local shopping centre as well as residential properties (mainly apartments) and commercial premises. Several of the

buildings on the east side of the road have been listed as a part of the internationally recognised Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation Area resulting in English Heritage being required to be an active participant in any consultation exercise.

The present proposals seek to change much of an Accident Remedial Measure (ARM) that was implemented by the LBB in 1997. This scheme was designed to tackle a very poor record of some 80 personal injury accidents recorded over the stretch of road during the previous three years. The major accident problem that had been identified involved pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. This ARM introduced 13 central refuge islands intended to assist pedestrians crossing the road, plus one new and one altered Pelican crossings. An existing Zebra crossing was also included in the scheme. Additionally, kerb build-outs to assist pedestrian crossing movements at junctions were also provided along with entry treatments at several side roads junctions and a series of dropped kerbs along the wide eastern footway. Sections of "Tegula" block paving had also been implemented to highlight pedestrian crossing areas but unfortunately these had performed badly in service and needed replacement.

The ARM appears to have been very successful, with the latest 3-year accident record showing some 47 personal injury accidents (4 resulting in serious injuries and 43 in slight injuries) along this section of road. Just six of these incidents involved pedestrians. In a busy shopping area the ability to be able to cross the road at a location of choice, which the refuges enabled people to do, is an advantage both to pedestrian safety as well as to the viability of the retail activity in the area.

The present scheme is being promoted by the LBB as a part of a new strategy that primarily seeks to reduce congestion on the main road network in the Borough. The LBB are also apparently working to a policy of improving the overall condition of carriageways, footways, etc. across their area and improving parking provision.

The LBB believes that the major problem on this section of Finchley Road is the congestion that occurs to southbound traffic and the potential for this to "back-up" and cause problems at the junction with the North Circular Road. It is considered that this results in a number of vehicle/vehicle accidents along the road.

The current proposal is to remove the majority of the pedestrian refuges, plus all of the kerb build-outs and to move much of the existing on-carriageway parking to parking areas created on some of the wide footways. It was also proposed that some parking should be provided at right-angles to the direction of traffic, this idea was then modified to be echelon parking, however, this suggestion has now been dropped.

The scheme will create two lanes for through traffic from the NCR down to the area around Marks & Spencer and Waitrose where the road will remain at the same width as at present. South of this pinch-point it is planned to create two southbound running lanes to the southern end the scheme.

The proposed scheme was submitted to the Finchley and Golders Green Environment Committee of the London Borough of Barnet on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2003 where it gained approval.

The HGSRA and the HGST are concerned that these proposals will reduce pedestrian safety along the length of road, result in a general deterioration of facilities for the ease of pedestrian movement and compromise the viability of the shopping centre. It is also understood that English Heritage are in disagreement with the provision of on-footway parking as, in their opinion, this will detract from the listed buildings and the overall environmental amenity value of the area.

Implementation of the scheme had started in November but work on site has been temporarily halted. Although this is understood to be partly due to the need to avoid disruption to traffic over the Christmas period, it also followed a decision that was taken by the Finchley and Golders Green Environment Committee on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003. This Committee voted to suspend the scheme in order to allow a full risk assessment plus a full consultation procedure to be carried-out. Subsequently this decision by the local Committee has apparently been put on-hold until the full Cabinet of Barnet Council meets to reconsider the scheme. This means that some work could resume after the Christmas holiday period.

## 4.0 Observations

- 4.1 **Overall scheme** Conversations with the Borough Officers revealed that they believed that the main issues that currently needed to be tackled in the Finchley Road area were concerns regarding easing traffic congestion, promoting the free flow of traffic (including buses) and improving the provision of parking. They considered that that this scheme met these criteria. They claimed that they had carried-out a critical review of the current “very generous” provision of pedestrian facilities and that the proposed reduction in these would not disadvantage too many local residents.

The Borough believes that removal of the refuges and the introduction of freer flowing conditions will also improve the safety performance of the road. However, it is unclear how this would be achieved. If traffic flow were to be freed-up the potential for more injury accidents would probably rise as speed and safety are

generally regarded as mutually incompatible objectives. In practice the removal of the central islands could well result in an increased number of nose-to-tail collisions involving right-turning vehicles as these currently shelter in the shadow of the string of islands. The islands also prevent inappropriate overtaking movements in light traffic conditions hence reducing the potential for head-on collisions.

Removal of the kerb build-outs will not only disadvantage both pedestrians attempting to cross the Finchley Road but will also make exiting the side roads more difficult for drivers. Currently they can pull forward in the shadow of the build-outs to see approaching traffic. Although the kerbside parking is proposed to be removed the planned presence of parked vehicles on adjacent footways will still restrict the visibility from many side roads.

The removal of the widened kerbs at the Temple Fortune Lane/Bridge Lane junction could result in increased entry speeds for vehicles turning into these roads and disadvantage pedestrians crossing these busy side turnings. Along with relocating some bus stops this was the only change proposed for this junction although in their report to members the officers indicated that this location was a major source of queues and congestion.

It is understood that the carriageway is to be resurfaced with Stone Mastic Asphalt as a part of the proposals. Although offering a quieter running surface this material is known to have short term skid resistance problems. These should be addressed by the scheme designers who may decide to choose an alternative material that has a better anti-skid performance in such a critical section of road where many braking and turning movements take place.

The LBB considered that the local business community was in favour of their proposals. A conversation with a representative of this community indicated that they were actually ambivalent about them, for whilst wishing to see better parking provision they did not wish to see either the pedestrians (their customers) disadvantaged or the local environment compromised.

It is understood that, following discussions with TfL, this organisation does not have serious concerns that the traffic congestion on the southbound Finchley Road creates problems at the junction with the NCR as the LBB have stated. Staff at TfL also noted that although improvements to bus operating times along this section of road would obviously be useful they would not wish to see this achieved at the expense of pedestrian safety.

As the single lane pinch-point at Marks & Spencer is not being addressed it is unclear how the proposals will actually benefit the buses on Finchley Road unless a Bus Lane was to be provided on the additional southbound running lane that the scheme is creating.

Officers of the London Road Safety Unit at TfL were also concerned that the proposed scheme may serve to negate the safety gains of the previous Accident Remedial scheme without gaining any other positive safety benefits for road users in general. They were also concerned that the scheme was apparently being partially justified on accident saving grounds. A bid for funding had been made to them without, apparently, an in-depth examination having been made of the potential for these savings. Although funding appeared to have been allocated to LBB on a “good faith” basis it is understood that the London Road Safety Unit may now consider re-visiting the details of the scheme in the light of the current local concerns over both safety and the environment.

- 4.2 **Parking issues** The LBB officers considered that the use of footways to accommodate parked vehicles was legitimate when attempting to resolve the serious congestion problems that they believed to exist in this area. They claimed that they had chosen to use “4-wheel-on-the-footway” parking rather than “2-wheel-on-the-footway” parking as they considered that drivers would cope with this in a more controlled manner. Their experience of “2-wheel-on” parking was that drivers would be undisciplined and overrun the width of the parking area and finish-up using all the available footway space anyway. However, they are proposing some lengths of “2-wheel-on” parking where the footways are narrow.

The LBB has not planned to create positive parking bays with the proposals but simply to indicate those sections of the footway where parking would be permitted. The footway would be strengthened under the existing paving slabs in an effort to protect any services present from potential damage. It was not clear if the Utility Companies had been consulted on this change. Without a positive kerb face (or bollards) at the back edge of these parking areas it is still probable that some drivers will over-run onto the limited area remaining for pedestrians to use.

English Heritage had noted in their correspondence with the Borough that if footway parking were to be used they would prefer that this be of the “2-wheel-on” variety rather than the method proposed by the LBB. It was understood that the LBB had, for some reason, told the HGSRA/HGST that English Heritage preferred the “4-wheel-on” proposal.

English Heritage is also opposed to the overall scheme on environmental and amenity grounds.

It is understood that LBB may not have consulted with representatives of the mobility and visually impaired over these proposals that could severely disadvantage these vulnerable road users. It is believed that the RNIB had previously worked with the LBB to implement a locator scheme using the kerbside lamp columns on this road. This scheme may now be in jeopardy and it is believed that the RNIB was unaware of the current scheme.

Allowing vehicles to drive and park on the footway is a major potential problem for the blind and partially sighted as they could inadvertently walk into them and become injured. To accommodate the parking lamp columns and other street furniture is being moved to new locations away from the kerb edge and in the middle of the existing footway. When parked vehicles are not present these items then become potential obstructions in the middle of an otherwise clear walking area.

The “4-wheel-on” parking proposals will result in a considerable reduction in the footway available to pedestrians in some locations. For example outside Nos.1097 to 1105 the footway will be cut-back to some 3m outside shops and cafes who display goods and site tables outside their premises. Outside Nos. 746 to 764, where some “2-wheel-on” parking is to be introduced much of the available footway is actually in private ownership and this will result in the public footway being only some 1.2m wide.

On-footway parking is being considered at Childs Way where two schools are situated. This area is very busy with adults and children at school in-turn and out-turn periods and any loss of footway space would severely disbenefit this group of road users.

The scheme does provide spaces for “Disabled” drivers but the location of these does not appear to have been thoroughly thought through. Some spaces will remain, either fully or partially, on the through carriageway effectively blocking the expensively achieved second running lane. The opportunity to place two “Disabled” spaces outside Marks & Spencer in the middle of the busiest and most attractive commercial section of the road has been missed.

- 4.3 Consultation** The apparent lack of a serious attempt to consult with local organisations was seen to be one of the major contentious issues between the local representative groups and the LBB. When the previous Accident Remedial scheme was being

proposed a useful formal consultation period had taken place. This had enabled local residents and other organisations to express their views on the scheme and have an input into the eventual outcome. This situation did not appear to be the case with this scheme. A small exhibition was apparently staged in the shopping area for a short period of time but apparently no positive contacts were made with concerned groups such as HGSRA and the HGST.

The HGSRA was particularly concerned that the plan showing details of the scheme exhibited at the time was different in many respects from the one that was eventually sent to them by the LBB. It also appeared that both of these plans were different from the plans the LBB were apparently using internally for implementing the scheme, although the exhibition plan and the construction plan appeared to have produced in the same office on the same day. It also appeared that the plan submitted to the local Committee for approval could also have been different to those seen by the residents. The plans handed over by the Borough for this study were also different from all the other plans as, apparently, were those that had been submitted earlier to branches of TfL.

It is accepted that changes will be made to engineering drawings during the life of a scheme as modifications are made, but the confusion with these drawings appeared to be quite fundamental with, for example, totally different plans bearing the same drawing numbers and/or revision letters. The objectors to the scheme appear to believe that the numbering confusion, and the distribution of different plans, may not have been entirely accidental. Although this allegation cannot be proven it does indicate the distrust that has been engendered by the Borough through their apparent failure to fully consult all interested parties in the area when planning the scheme.

- 4.4 Pedestrian facilities** The proposals to remove the majority of the pedestrian refuges along this section of road can only be regarded as a potential disbenefit to pedestrians in this busy shopping area. Road Safety professionals commonly accept that one of the safest ways of ensuring safe crossing movements across busy roads is by the use of a series of closely spaced refuges. These form individual places where pedestrians can safely cross on their desire lines in two easy stages, whilst also creating a shadow central refuge along the whole length of the road.

Removal of the refuges will have the result that many people will have to walk considerable distances to access safe places to cross the road. This will be a disadvantage especially for the elderly (and

the Borough admit that a large number of this group do live in the area) and for adults accompanied by young children. Children attempting to cross the road whilst out on their own will also be at risk.

Although the scheme designers claim that they have tried to accommodate the majority of pedestrian movements by providing a new Zebra Crossing, retaining two existing Pelican crossings plus two refuges and a Zebra crossing, as well as re-instating one refuge, it is apparent that these are insufficient facilities along 1.2km of main road. If the smooth flow of traffic was planned to be the primary outcome of the scheme it is considered that it would have been preferable to introduce Pelican crossings in place of the Zebra crossings as these could be linked together to platoon the traffic.

The provision of a Pelican crossing facility in place of the remaining refuge sited on the desire line between Marks & Spencer and Waitrose would also have been a useful proposal. This too could have been part of a linked signal system and the presence of the requisite zigzag (no stopping) markings would have assisted in preventing the traffic queues that build-up on the main road as drivers queue for spaces in the adjacent off-street car park.

The removal of the kerb build-outs at the side road junctions could also adversely effect pedestrian safety as could the increase in road space at the Temple Fortune Lane/Bridge Lane junction.

At the southern end of the scheme there is a major pedestrian demand to and from the Synagogue/Jewish Community Centre in Aylth Gardens. There is also a school for children with special needs on the corner of Portsdown Avenue yet neither of the pedestrian movements associated with these facilities will be catered-for with the removal of the two refuges in this area.

## **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 5.1 The scheme proposed by the London Borough of Barnet on this section of Finchley Road appears to have been designed with the sole purpose of increasing the traffic storage capacity of the section of this road between the NCR and the narrow section adjacent to the Marks & Spencer store.

- 5.2 Due to the presence of this pinch-point the through capacity of the road will probably not be noticeably increased. The area around this store is also severely congested at busy times by queuing traffic waiting to access an off-street car park. This problem will also remain.
- 5.3 South of the Marks & Spencer store the junction at Temple Fortune Lane/ Bridge Lane will still remain as a traffic bottleneck and little is being proposed to relieve this. After Portsdown Road the main road reverts to a single running lane in each direction so little overall benefit will have been achieved for through traffic.
- 5.4 The Highway Authority for the NCR does not appear to be concerned with the potential for queuing traffic on the southbound Finchley Road to adversely effect the operation of their critical junction.
- 5.5 If an improvement in traffic capacity was to be a major objective the conversion of all the present and proposed formal crossing facilities to light controlled ones (plus implementing a new one in the central section) may have achieved a more positive solution.
- 5.6 To achieve the additional running lane most elements of a very successful Accident Remedial Measure are being removed with the potential to cause an increase in accidents to vulnerable road users along the entire length of the scheme.
- 5.7 It is unclear how the proposed scheme will improve overall safety on this road. With the removal of the traffic islands the potential exists to make the safety situation for right-turning traffic worse.
- 5.8 It is considered that pedestrians using this busy shopping area could be severely disbenefited by the scheme and this may have a long-term effect on the viability of trading in the area.
- 5.9 The provision of pavement parking could well have an impact on the local environment and will certainly cause problems for the mobility and visually impaired, as well as for able-bodied pedestrians.
- 5.10 In other locations where pavement parking has been used it is recognised that this provision has to be controlled by the use of raised kerbs or street furniture to prevent drivers encroaching on the remaining footway.

- 5.11 Earlier proposals to consider the use of echelon parking have fortunately been dropped. These were wholly inappropriate in the locations proposed on a busy 'A' class road and had the potential for generating accident problems.
- 5.12 This section of Finchley Road is a busy shopping area that is adjacent to an internationally renowned Conservation Area. It should be regarded as a "People Place" where through vehicular traffic has to give precedence to local people and visitors going about their legitimate business. The proposed scheme apparently sets out to reverse this situation to the potential disbenefit of the community and with little apparent overall gain to the traffic using the Finchley Road.
- 5.13 It is unfortunate that the London Borough of Barnet appears to have seriously alienated important elements of the local community with a poorly executed consultation exercise. The veracity of the documentation and information given out also appears to have been called into question by these local organisations and has resulted in an apparent lack of trust being generated between individuals and the Borough.

It is considered that the proposed scheme will result in a major safety disbenefit to the Temple Fortune area. It is therefore recommended that the scheme be totally reconsidered by the London Borough of Barnet in association with Transport for London and the entire local community. If change is needed on this section of Finchley Road it must be achieved with the agreement of the local residents and other interested organisations. The current scheme appears to be out of step with the worthwhile improvements to Road Safety and to community facilities that are being achieved in other locations in London that are dominated by traffic.

## 6.0 Statement

This report has been prepared by RoSPA as an independent document, unbiased by any of the parties involved. It primarily seeks to identify any safety issues that could arise from the scheme proposed by the London Borough of Barnet on the A598, Finchley Road at Temple Fortune and to encourage actions that could assist in overcoming these.

### Reviewer

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