

Report of the Roads & Traffic Committee

on

Controlled Parking Zones in Hampstead Garden Suburb and Temple Fortune

The Proposal

Barnet Council has announced plans to create a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) to encompass the southwest side of Hampstead Garden Suburb and virtually all of Temple Fortune. At its southern end, the new Zone would abut the Golders Green CPZ resulting in more or less contiguous controlled parking in every street between Childs Hill and the North Circular Road.

Parking Problems

It is not clear what problem exists in the majority of the affected roads that requires the introduction of a CPZ as a solution. Certainly, the roads in the immediate vicinity of Temple Fortune are moderately heavily parked during the day as they are used by shoppers when the Pay & Display bays in Finchley Road are fully occupied. This trend falls away sharply however within a couple of hundred yards of the shopping street where there is usually ample parking for both residents and non-residents.

Costs of the CPZs

It will cost £40 pa for a single permit to park within a given CPZ with higher costs for second and third permits. Permit prices have risen 100% since the inception of the East Finchley CPZ in 2000. Despite this, there is a belief that whilst permit charges will continue to rise annually, they are currently capped in order to encourage residents to support the CPZ extension policy. Once this is completed there is likely to be an explosive increase in the cost and the single permit costing £100 or more is unlikely to be many years away. Visitors to residents' homes may park their cars during controlled times by displaying a voucher, bought in advance by the resident permit holder. These are sold in books of ten at a current cost of £10 per book - up by 100% since last year.

The Council's CPZ rules, some of which are reproduced below, demonstrate typical local authority inflexibility on parking matters and we should consider whether we wish to live like this in Hampstead Garden Suburb;

Permits are not transferable between Zones.

Permits are valid only where the designated letter appears on the CPZ street signs.

Visitor Vouchers may only be purchased by existing resident permit holders.

Failure to display a voucher will result in a fine even if the voucher has been purchased.

A resident permit holder parking outside the marked bays during the controlled hours will be subject to a fine which will not be revoked.

Thus permit displaying vehicles which are not parked wholly within marked bays during the hours of operation will be ticketed even though the permit holding owners would be doing no more than infringing yellow lines whose sole purpose is to prevent non-resident parking for their benefit during the relevant times. Under this type of scheme, even residents will lose the right to park in their own roads without petty, intrusive restriction.

Resident permit holders will need to consult with the Council in advance whenever they are carrying out any building work which might require contractors to return for several days as some arrangement will need to be made for them to pay to park as the Council will only sell one voucher book at a time. If a resident application and the Council's response has not been completed within a ten day deadline (irrespective of postal delays) - there will be a fine if subject vehicles are found to have parked without a permit. Prior Council approval will also be needed for a great many day to day occupations which up until now have been none of the Council's business. For example, residents of controlled streets will have to arrange children's birthday parties around how many parking vouchers they can obtain at any one time from the London Borough of Barnet. Spontaneous or short notice gatherings will have to become a thing of the past. It will not, to take just one insensitive example, be possible for people to congregate at a resident's home after a funeral.

In streets like Brim Hill, many residents with off-street parking voted in favour of the CPZ knowing they need never buy a resident permit and (given the availability of off-street parking) never a visitor permit either. These people are permanently insulated from the increasing costs of the permits whilst those living in more modest properties without off-street facilities have the prospect of an ever increasing tax being imposed upon them merely for doing what they have always done - parking their cars outside their homes.

Effects of CPZs

Wherever CPZs have been created, the first effect is to export any parking problem to the area immediately outside the Zone. Indeed, such problems as previously existed are often exacerbated as parking which might previously have been absorbed across a wide area, is now concentrated in a smaller number of streets.

A very recent example of where the knock-on effects of a CPZ had not been taken into account is at Bittacy Hill inside the new (April 2004) Mill Hill East CPZ. Prior to its introduction, commuters parked free of charge in a non-residential area towards the foot of Bittacy Hill. There were no problems. The Council decided to try to exploit this situation by turning the area into a CPZ. The immediate result was that the Council's bays were left completely empty whilst the parking migrated further up the hill to where it was still free. The effects were as follows;

1. The original parking caused neither problems of congestion nor did it affect residents' ability to park - the only problem therefore was that commuters were not paying Barnet for parking.
2. Resistance to paying to park in the CPZ meant that a Zone had been created at Council Tax payers' expense but that the Council was collecting barely a penny in revenue.
3. The displaced parking created a nuisance to residents living further up Bittacy Hill who previously did not have the problem of commuter parking.
4. Commuters were having to walk further to the station to the benefit of neither themselves nor the Council nor the residents of the street in which they were parked.
5. Buses were unable to negotiate the narrower part of Bittacy Hill to which the parking had migrated and which was now constricting the carriageways.
6. In order to maintain access for the buses, the Council has had to suspend the Pay & Display bays so that motorists would be encouraged to return to their original parking places where they will once again be able to leave their cars without charge.

It is true that this is a particularly absurd example of the maxim that no problem is so bad that government interference cannot make it worse but similar unwanted effects are created every single time the Council creates or extends a CPZ.

Originally, CPZs in Barnet were mostly established around railway stations to prevent commuter parking. The effects were threefold; some commuters did choose alternative ways of travelling to their local stations, some continued to drive and then parked outside the Zone boundary whilst the remainder simply drove further afield either to stations where parking was still available or to their place of work. Insofar as the case for the CPZ is to discourage the use of the car, it is questionable at the very least that it has been successful when the effect is to cause many commuters to drive greater distances than before.

Over the past year, Barnet Council has extended CPZ operations to local shopping streets. The introduction of these Zones is too recent to say with certainty how it will effect behaviour in the Suburb but the operation of the CPZ in North Finchley may provide a lesson.

North Finchley CPZ - Lessons for Temple Fortune

In the summer of 2003, the local authority introduced CPZs in streets around Northern Line stations on the High Barnet branch. The CPZ at Woodside Park station was initially very small, extending to little more than 200 yards on the east side of the line. Streets on the west side of the line were not incorporated into the Zone, presumably because residents did not consider themselves to be unduly inconvenienced by commuter parking.

Once the CPZ became active, the relatively modest amount of station parking, which had previously been entirely confined to the station approaches, was displaced into Gainsborough Road and Woodside Avenue creating a nuisance for residents of these streets. The Council exploited these grievances to create a massive CPZ which also introduced Pay & Display parking into the High Road. The expanded Controlled Zone now encompasses the whole of North Finchley and adjoins the Finchley Central CPZ to the south creating a total Zoned area of approximately two square miles.

The shortage of usable parking space around the station and in the shopping street caused traffic to displace into the previously lightly parked residential streets. Although the original Woodside Park CPZ had a one hour restriction typical of station CPZs, in order to sell the idea of the CPZ to residents who were newly affected by shopper parking, the Council instigated an all day restriction in almost every residential street in the area. The result has been that Pay & Display capacity is now wholly insufficient to handle the demand and is almost always completely taken from early in the day. Visitors arriving in the area later on are frequently unable to park at all.

It is too soon to say with certainty how this will affect the shops because if trade is falling, many shopkeepers will have little choice but to see out their existing leases (some of which may still have years to run) at which time they will not renew. What is certain is that many local authority initiatives elsewhere - even those implemented with the best of intentions - have severely damaged local shopping streets. In this respect, those who remember Hendon Central well enough may be able to compare the contemporary state of Watford Way with its plumbers merchants, stationery wholesalers, fast food shops, mini cab offices and unoccupied or shuttered premises with the thriving shopping street it used to be. It was made unviable in the 1970s simply by the addition of a central fence which turned the thoroughfare into a dual carriageway making it more difficult for people to cross the road and shop on both sides. Few imagined that this apparently innocuous measure would damage the health of the street but that is all it took to upset a delicate balance that could not be maintained when it became just a little more difficult for people to shop.

Golders Green has also seen a reduction in the quality of its shops in recent times due to parking shortages caused by its CPZ. A very high proportion of the shops on Golders Green Road are charity shops, second hand outlets, discounted booksellers and the like and commercial landlords know that it is a notoriously difficult location to which to attract good retail tenants in spite of it being a public transport hub and having a large semi-permanent foreign community which tends not to be car owning and is therefore more likely to shop locally. These factors are not enough without adequate parking facilities for larger numbers of more affluent shoppers.

The proposals in Temple Fortune represent an enormous threat to our local shops because people have an easy option; if they cannot park conveniently at their nearest shopping location they will go elsewhere. In this part of London, anyone with a car can drive to Brent Cross within minutes, certain in the knowledge of being able to park conveniently and free of charge. At the time of writing, Barnet's consultation documents have not been circulated but Temple Fortune traders who are aware of the proposal have already indicated strong opposition.

Whether one approves or disapproves of car usage, *this is the reality* and if local shops rely upon customers coming by car, convenient parking must be maintained or the customers will simply go elsewhere. If they do, then it is to the detriment of all local people - ironically, particularly to those in the anti-car lobby who complain loudest about the loss of such facilities when they are gone. After all, it is the non car users who have the most to lose when the shops within walking distance close down. The tendency in recent times is for anti-car attitudes to have become a mantra. In determining a position on the proposed Temple Fortune scheme it is essential that parties consider the prospects based upon the likely *effect* of the Scheme rather than respond to reflexive feelings towards the private car.

Failures of the System

One of the most serious faults with the current system of determining whether a street or district should be made a CPZ is that the arbiter has a financial interest in finding in favour. This brings the system into disrepute and often means that opponents of CPZ schemes have no confidence that their opinions will be given a fair hearing. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence that Barnet is oblivious to arguments against CPZs.

The Council's practice for selling CPZ schemes is to tap into or to stimulate discontent over a perceived parking problem. It is able to do this to greatest effect by approaching residents who live just outside a six month old Zone and who have had the CPZs former parking problems exported to their area.

Individual streets are canvassed and resident support is sought for incorporation into the CPZ. A simple majority of one in the number of canvassing returns is sufficient for Barnet to act. In some cases there have been very small returns with very low levels of support among those canvassed (only 2% of Hampstead Garden Suburb residents were found to support the original East Finchley CPZ) but these are still treated by Barnet as a demonstration of majority resident support.

Barnet's attitude to the opinions of residents is worth examining as the Council appears to take a quite different view as to how much weight should be given to resident opinion when it concerns CPZs than is the case with any other issue. The R&T Committee has heard evidence that Barnet pays no attention to overwhelming resident opinion expressed in petitions to retain traffic calming measures in their streets. This is in complete contrast to the Council's expressions of enthusiasm when they obtain the most modest resident support for a CPZ.

A warning

The justification for the East Finchley CPZ was to prevent commuter parking and Councillors assured Suburb residents that their only concern was to prevent all day parking by station users - hence the one hour restriction (2pm - 3pm) on Mondays to Fridays only. With absolutely no general consultation, the restriction in Deansway, Edmunds Walk and certain other streets has recently been altered to apply from 10am to 6.30pm and to include Saturdays so that even short term users of the station are prevented from parking. This increase in the controlled hours from five per week to fifty-one has apparently come about because users of Park House were sometimes able to park for several hours outside the original controlled time. This is of course, precisely what they were permitted to do so why is the Council restricting them? Barnet's response to objections is that people may use the

Pay & Display spaces but apart from the fact that many will not wish to pay or may not be able to, the number of these spaces has not been increased and it may be assumed that the additional demand created by Park House will mean that demand for even short term parking cannot now be met by the Pay & Display solution. We should now almost certainly assume that the new restriction will in due course be extended to take in the rest of the Zone so that even short-term users of the station will be unable to park. This is the absolute opposite of what Barnet promised when the CPZ was set up and serves as a lesson that we should not rely upon Barnet to honour the agreed operation of any CPZ in Temple Fortune if the Council subsequently decides its revenues might be enhanced by creating more stringent parking restrictions. Once a CPZ has been created it serves as a bridgehead for the Council both in terms of size and regulation.

When should we support CPZs - when should we oppose?

The CPZs in the Suburb have been created for nominally different reasons in different places. As already mentioned, Barnet has an interest in promoting the idea which means that the Council cannot be an honest broker and has no real interest in either solving genuine parking problems or in avoiding new ones.

The RA position should be very straightforward based upon a reasonable, common sense principle;

1. Where people are generally prevented from parking within a short distance (perhaps twenty or thirty yards at most) of their homes, we should support the principle of carefully managed and operated CPZs. These should be inexpensive and should not be designed in such a manner as to entirely exclude non-resident traffic. The object should be to ensure that some space is available to residents at virtually all times. The caveat however must be that where the street in question serves a high demand local facility, any parking control must also take into account the needs of the wider Suburb community who must not be denied the practical use of those facilities. This might involve the balanced use of Pay & Display parking or where appropriate, unrestricted parking but the principle must be that different locations may require different approaches. The blunt use of the highly restrictive CPZ with a uniform set of controls will rarely be appropriate and must be resisted in the interests of the community. It must be remembered that public roads are precisely that and that whilst resident interests must be protected, they should not be the sole consideration and are not necessarily paramount.

2. Where residents are not generally prevented from parking within a short distance of their homes, we should resolutely oppose any CPZ scheme. This should apply both in those streets where there is currently adequate on-street parking for residents and non-residents alike and in those where residents have off-street parking. We should not generally support CPZ schemes simply because the residents of a given street would like the public road cleared of vehicles which belong to people other than themselves. We recognise that wherever the boundary of a CPZ is drawn, residents just outside are likely to be disadvantaged and they are entitled to be very angry at having had a parking problem moved to them through no fault of their own. This issue does need to be considered in the context of Suburb-wide solutions to parking matters but it must be recognised that acceding to Barnet's policy of drawing the boundary, exporting the problem and then expanding the CPZ will quickly turn the entire Suburb into a collection of CPZs in which we will all have to pay for the privilege of parking in our own streets but will be virtually unable to park our cars anywhere else.

Problems created by Controlled Parking Zones

- ❑ CPZs do not resolve problems, they simply move them elsewhere or create different problems. The only consistent winner is Barnet Council which derives enormous revenue from the Schemes.**

- ❑ Loss of parking in Temple Fortune will pose serious threat to shops leading to possible widespread closures and degrading of Suburb's main shopping street**

- ❑ Residents of large properties with off-street parking can opt out of the permit based Scheme whilst residents of smaller properties without such facilities cannot. To this end, the CPZ schemes tend to benefit wealthier residents whilst discriminating against the less well off**

- ❑ Resolution of problem in one location results in problem being displaced to new location**

- ❑ Cost of permits has risen 75% in four years - future huge increases likely**

- ❑ Expansion of CPZs will have residents paying to park outside their own homes but being unable to park anywhere else in the Suburb**

The view of the Roads & Traffic Committee is that a general expansion of Controlled Parking Zones in Hampstead Garden Suburb and Temple Fortune should be opposed by the Residents Association. There may be a case for some strictly localised use of the CPZ where unique parking problems exist but the introduction of limited CPZs should be accompanied by guarantees from Barnet Council that the boundaries and restrictions will be honoured and not used as a basis for piecemeal extensions of the Zones.

Please see attached letter from Siddiek Meer to Gavin Woolery-Allen of Barnet Council.

Roads and Traffic Committee
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7th October 2004

Dear Mr. Woolery-Allen,

Proposed Temple Fortune CPZ

I refer to your recent telephone conversation with Gary Shaw.

At the last meeting of the Roads and Traffic Committee of the HGSRA, there was concern that your proposal for a CPZ in Temple Fortune as currently envisaged is far too extensive and runs the risk of affecting the viability of the shopping street.

The position at the moment is that for much of the business day, the Pay & Display space on Finchley Road is more or less fully occupied. The same may be said for the relatively few additional bays in Bridge Lane and Temple Fortune Lane. The total number of these bays is wholly insufficient to accommodate all those who wish to use Temple Fortune's facilities, so shoppers who are unable to find space in the Pay & Display areas currently park in the unrestricted streets nearby.

The opportunity to create sufficient additional Pay & Display space in the context of a general CPZ in Temple Fortune would seem to be very limited. Were the proposed Scheme to follow existing patterns, it seems likely that the overall available parking space will be considerably reduced and that most of what remains will be designated for resident use only during the controlled hours. Where such schemes have been implemented elsewhere, Pay & Display parking has been introduced only where there are long stretches of street space which do not abut residents' homes. There are virtually no such areas around Temple Fortune so there would not appear to be much scope for creating the large amount of additional Pay & Display parking for non-residents that would be necessary to replace the substantial uncontrolled space which would be lost under the Scheme.

It is manifestly the case that the shops and businesses in Finchley Road need the custom from those who at present park outside the Pay & Display areas. Were this very considerable element of their business to be lost because customers had difficulty parking, the effect would be significant and would very likely result in the closure of a number of shops.

The inter-relationships within a shopping street are immensely fragile; each type of shop draws in customers who then tend to stay and shop elsewhere on the street for convenience. If individual shops start to close for lack of custom, others nearby are likely to be affected and in time, they too will shut down. At present the shops on Finchley Road include multiples such as Boots, W.H. Smith, Waitrose and Marks and Spencer, several cafes and restaurants, five banks and an array of individual businesses selling everything from fruit to fashion. Few suburban areas are so well catered for - often because local authority schemes have failed to appreciate the necessity of maintaining convenient parking. In this area, a ready made alternative exists at Brent Cross and it might well be the case that interfering with existing arrangements at Temple Fortune will destabilise our most important local shopping street which, once damaged could never recover.

In almost every location where CPZs have been established by Barnet there have been consequences. Some of these have been foreseen, others such as the Bittacy Hill scheme have thrown up problems which were not anticipated and over which the Council has had to backtrack. The Temple Fortune district is Hampstead Garden Suburb's commercial centre. It is a thriving area whose facilities are so varied that in shopping terms, it makes the Suburb almost entirely self-sufficient. Experience elsewhere tells us that there certainly will be knock-on effects if a CPZ is installed and were it to be the case that a Controlled Zone upset the balance and resulted in shop closures, it would probably already be too late to remedy the situation. For local residents, the possible loss to all of us of a thriving and varied shopping street would almost certainly outweigh any advantages which some individuals might derive from exclusive resident parking privileges.

I understand that you are sending out the first set of consultation documents during October. I would ask that you take these comments into consideration and that you kindly include the Roads & Traffic Committee in your forthcoming despatch (as Cllr. Harris agreed to do when I spoke to him recently about this matter) as we intend to formulate a position on the proposal which we believe will best represent the interests of Suburb residents.

Yours sincerely,

Siddiek Meer

