

BBRAG NEWS

BROMLEY BOROUGH ROADS ACTION GROUP – No. 1 (JUNE 99)

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This is the first edition of the BBRAG newsletter, which is designed to keep our members informed on what BBRAG is doing, and of any news that is likely to be of interest to our members. We will try to circulate such a newsletter regularly but if you want an update on any particular issue, or have any news of general interest which you would like us to publish then please contact me or any of the other committee members of BBRAG (some telephone numbers and addresses are given at the end of this newsletter). We will also introduce a readers letters section in a future issue so if you have any subjects you want to let off steam about then please get writing (send by e-mail or fax if you prefer).

Roger Lawson, Editor

Watts Lane/Manor Park Rd Postscript

The Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (formerly called the Chislehurst Roads Action Group) was originally formed by a few local residents to fight the proposals for the traffic calming scheme in Watts Lane and Manor Park Road, Chislehurst. We felt that the proposals were excessive in a road that was comparatively quiet for most of the day, and which did not have a bad accident record – no pedestrian injuries in recent years and most of the accidents that had taken place were at the dangerous junctions at each end of the road which were not likely to be affected by the proposed measures. Despite the council receiving over 90 written objections to the plans, the relevant council sub-committee voted to go ahead with the proposals with only minor modifications. It seemed to be a triumph of emotion over logic as there appears to be little rational justification for spending £40,000 on these measures.

Well the scheme has now been implemented. As expected, it has resulted in a lot of traffic diverting down St Pauls Cray Road and via the war memorial traffic lights. The standing queues of traffic in St Pauls Cray Road (which are of course much worse as regards atmospheric pollution) are now more extensive and last longer, and congestion at the already notorious war memorial junction has been aggravated. In practice, a few residents of Watts Lane and Manor Park Road have got their wishes to the great inconvenience of other residents in St Pauls Cray Road and to the general annoyance of road users. The details of the scheme are also badly designed, with vehicles being forced over the cushions by parked cars, the cushions being so wide that it is difficult to straddle them properly and many other poor design aspects.

However, it is not too late to voice your complaints – send them to your local ward councillors (contact BBRAG for a list if you don't know who they are), or to Roger Perry, Assistant Director, Environmental Services, Bromley Council, Bromley BRI 3UH.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaint

After many months, the personal complaint made by Roger Lawson (it is not possible for corporate bodies such as BBRAG to submit such complaints) about the actions of Bromley Council staff in relation to the Watts Lane/ Manor Park Rd scheme has finally been rejected. The basis of the complaint was the clear bias by council staff in the consultation process (such as the design, content and distribution of the initial consultation leaflet), the lack of consultation of road users when there is a legal obligation to do so, and the misrepresentation of complaints received and other relevant background information to council members. In summary, the Local Government Ombudsman did not feel that council staff had acted unreasonably or with bias, but how he could draw those conclusions from the facts presented to him is somewhat difficult to understand. The only further action that could be taken on this matter would be to apply for a judicial review in the High Court, but with a cost of several thousands of pounds attached to such actions and no certainty of success, it is unlikely that BBRAG will pursue this matter in the short term.

At the end of the day, the Local Government Ombudsman cannot interfere in political decisions, and if your local councillors are silly enough to vote for such traffic calming schemes (whilst ignoring the views of many of their electors), then it can be difficult to stop them happening.

Chislehurst Rd, Bickley/Chislehurst

One of the roads likely to suffer from “traffic calming” in the near future is Chislehurst Road, which runs between Chislehurst Station Approach and Widmore Road, and is a continuation of Old Hil. This road has been scheduled for traffic calming for some time, presumably because of the speed of traffic in the road and the presence of Bullers Wood School part of the way along it. There have been 12 accidents resulting in injury in the road in the last 3 years (none to pedestrians, and only one serious one with the rest minor). Recently a new housing development by Crest near the railway bridge at the eastern end has caused additional concern (a speed ramp at the development exit was commenced construction and then abandoned, but a dangerous and abrupt narrowing of the road to ensure a sight line for exiting traffic has been implemented). The council have commissioned outside consultants to prepare a suitable scheme and they came up with two options – both of which consist of speed cushions and tables down the whole length of the road, with mini-roundabouts at junctions with some of the side roads, etc. Although BBRAG accepts that there is some justification for traffic calming in this road so as to enforce the existing speed limit, and improve the safety at some of the road junctions, we again feel that the proposed measures are excessive and a further waste of money. We also feel that it would seriously inconvenience residents from such areas as Old Hill who use that road as their normal route into Bromley. We have therefore produced some alternative proposals which we feel are a better compromise between the needs for improved road safety and the convenience of road users, and which are more cost effective. If you want more information on our proposals, please contact BBRAG for details.

John Gallop, newly elected councillor for the Bickley Ward, is taking a particular interest in this development and has been consulting local residents on the subject. BBRAG have discussed the proposals with him and he certainly appears more willing to listen to different points of view than other councillors we have spoken to in the past. We have emphasised to him the importance of achieving a widespread consensus on the most appropriate scheme. If you have any comments or questions you wish to put to him then he can be contacted on 0181-313-9837 or write to Members Room, Bromley Council, Stockwell Close, Bromley BRI 3UH.

Blackbrook Lane and Other Prospective Traffic Calming Schemes

Other roads in the borough that are likely to be the subject of future traffic calming schemes are as follows: Blackbrook Lane, Queensway (Petts Wood), Foxgrove Road and Albemarle Road. These are the ones that are at the top of the priority list and have already been “approved for treatment”, but there are many others where such schemes have been requested and have therefore been added to the “waiting list”. A fuller list can be obtained from BBRAG, or from Bromley Councils web site at www.bromley.gov.uk – look under Bromley Council/Our Services/Environmental Services/Traffic – this also gives you some contact names and email addresses of those staff who handle traffic matters. However Blackbrook Lane was the only scheme that was authorised to progress further at a meeting of the Environmental Services (Operations) Sub-Committee of the council on the 15th May. Blackbrook Lane runs between Bickley Park Road and Southborough Lane, and is used by a lot of traffic to go between Chislehurst/Bickley and the western side of Petts Wood (it would also be used by traffic heading from Chislehurst to the A21 or Biggin Hill direction). More information on the proposals here will be published at a later date.

Aims and Objectives of BBRAG

Contrary to what many of our opponents say, BBRAG is not solely a motorists pressure group. Our objective has always been to obtain a consensus between the various parties that have an interest in traffic calming schemes. Most people are in favour of appropriate traffic calming schemes, particularly where an improvement to the environment is obtained, or where there is the possibility of making some reduction in the horrific road accident statistics. The costs to the community of road traffic accidents are very large, and anyone who has had a relative or loved one killed or seriously injured in a road accident (as one of our committee members has) knows the suffering that results. However, that is even more reason to obtain the maximum possible benefit from any expenditure on road improvements.

However there still has to be a compromise between the needs of the community for fast, efficient transport and the needs of road safety. It would be perfectly feasible to halt all road traffic accidents in the Borough by closing all the roads, or restricting them to public service vehicles only, but that would not be seen as a practical or reasonable compromise by most borough residents. BBRAGs view is that we need to have a rational and objective approach to such matters. So often when these matters are discussed there are many calls on your emotions, but little reference to the facts. A few local residents often get their views accepted over the good of the community as a whole. There is very little democracy involved in the way decisions are made on these schemes, and council staff also seem unwilling to listen to anyone who disagrees with their preferred solution. There is also a great tendency to treat each scheme in isolation - putting in a scheme in one place, often just diverts traffic to another area.

Bearing the above in mind, we have drawn up the following objectives for the society (these are extracted from our constitution – anyone who would like a full copy of that should contact BBRAG).

A) To promote wider, fairer and more democratic consultation on new traffic management schemes in the London Borough of Bromley.

B) To ensure that all road users (motorists, motorcyclists, cyclists, pedestrians) are consulted equally and fairly on proposed traffic management schemes, and to ensure that the views of such road users are taken into account as well as the views of local residents when such schemes are being considered.

C) To protect and enhance the environment (visual, atmospheric, audible) from the effects of ill considered traffic management schemes.

D) To promote road safety and a reduction in accidents in the borough by ensuring that any money spent on traffic management schemes is spent where the accident statistics most justify it, and in a manner that is likely to reduce personal injury statistics.

E) To support well designed traffic calming schemes in appropriate locations and to support the enforcement of appropriate speed limits.

F) To ensure that a proper cost/benefit analysis is performed on all proposed traffic management schemes, and to promote a rational selection of schemes on that basis.

G) To ensure that new traffic management schemes do not unnecessarily impede traffic flows (consistent with the above

objectives) and preferably improve such flows, bearing in mind that congestion is a significant cost to individuals, business and the community as a whole.

H) To generally promote improvements to the transport infrastructure in respect of road and rail networks, and public transport facilities in Bromley and the London area.

I) To try and ensure that any new traffic management schemes are acceptable to all elements of the community, and to try to achieve a consensus among local residents, road users and public bodies, before they are implemented.

J) To pursue any other policy, put forward or sponsor candidates for any elections, or support any other democratic group or party, that may be in the interests of the residents of the Borough of Bromley and the members of the Association.

Expenditure on Road Schemes and Accident Statistics

Did you know that Bromley Council spent £400,000 on traffic management schemes in the last year? Not all of this was on traffic calming schemes of course, presumably some was actually spent on improving traffic flows! However, at £40,000 a time for such schemes as Watts Lane/Manor Park Road, and Chislehurst Road, you can see that expenditure over the last few years on such schemes has been quite high. Unfortunately it appears to have had little effect on the road traffic accident statistics in the borough. We are actually looking into this further to try and identify what if any has been the benefit of such schemes. Our view at present is that a lot of the expenditure has been wasted. To give one

example, Blackbrook Lane which is being considered for traffic calming does not appear in the list of the top 100 locations for personal injury accidents in the three years ending 1997. In other words, there are many more locations that would benefit from expenditure if reduction in accident statistics is the priority.

The Chislehurst Society

As some of you are no doubt aware, your Chairman and Treasurer (John Nicholls and Roger Lawson) recently stood for election to the committee of the Chislehurst Society.

This was for two reasons. Firstly we were unhappy with the approach that the Society took to the Watts Lane/Manor Park Road scheme where they actively campaigned for the scheme but refused to consult their members on the subject. Secondly the Society had published several erroneous statements on the issue. We therefore stood on a platform of wider consultation with the members, and the merit of having other fresher voices on the executive committee. Unfortunately we were not elected. With a poorly attended AGM, some of the older members seemed unwilling to listen to our arguments and had prejudged the issue – however we certainly made our views known and gained some support, so we will no doubt try again next year.

Press Coverage

Attached are copies of articles or letters that have been published in the local press on the activities of BBRAG. We try to get as much coverage as possible, and put our point of view across, but it is not always easy to get rational arguments properly covered.

Future Actions

Our main priority in the short term is to build up our membership base, so that BBRAG can speak more authoritatively to Bromley Council and elected councillors. We are therefore doing a leaflet drop to about 10,000 households as a first step. We will report the results in the next issue, but if it is successful we will probably repeat it in a wider area.

We will of course continue to monitor proposed new traffic schemes as they arise and have made a number of submissions to the council over the last few months. We will also get involved in any matters that are brought to our attention by our members, or the general public, so if you have any concerns that come within our “Aims and Objectives”, or where you think we could usefully take action, then please contact BBRAG.

How You Can Help

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to join BBRAG. The cost is only £7.50 and the more members we have, the stronger our voice when putting our point of view to local politicians and council officers. Also any extra donations would be welcomed as the cost of promoting the society through mailshots and advertising is quite high, apart from the costs of publishing this newsletter and general administration costs.

Ensure that you make your feelings known about poor traffic management schemes in the borough. Contact Bromley Council or your local councillor. So often such schemes are implemented without proper thought or full consultation, simply because most people are unwilling to speak up. Talk to BBRAG if you need our assistance in putting forward an argument, or want any advice on traffic matters or associated regulations.

Contact Information

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