

BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 12 (November 2001)

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This edition includes truly surprising news on a possible change of council policy on road humps. See the first article!

Another major story is news on the Aquila and Thornet Wood Road developments which, if left unopposed, will contribute further to traffic congestion in Bromley.

An update on the Old Hill, Chislehurst traffic calming scheme is included and a note about future charging proposals for the Dartford crossing.

With Christmas coming up we have a topical article on the dangers of drink, and there is an interesting idea on how to cut traffic by 15%.

There is also an article on the Hawthorne Experiments and their implications for common claims on traffic accident reduction, and an update on Ken Livingstone's strategy for reducing air pollution in London.

With such a mix of articles, hopefully we have something to interest all of our readers, but any suggestions for future topics or contributed articles would be welcome.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Surprising Change of Council Policy on Speed Bumps

Michael Tickner, new Conservative leader of Bromley Council, has recently stated that plans to spend money on speed bumps will be dropped. He apparently said "From now on, the Conservatives will be sticking up for the motorist. We feel traffic calming has gone on long enough. I don't want to see any more road humps as they cause drivers to become angry and frustrated. We need to look at new ways to calm traffic."

Unfortunately it seems his sentiments are not supported by councillors on the Environmental Services (Ops) Committee who soon after voted to continue with the proposed traffic calming measures in St Mary Cray High Street and Chelsfield Lane. Now that Conservatives are in control of the council, any unnecessary expenditure is likely to be cut but apparently a budget of £316,000 has been

obtained from Transport for London (part of the new Greater London Authority) for those developments and one in Blakeney Road, Beckenham.

Editors Comments: Well you end up paying one way or another as ultimately these funds come from taxation. However, if it is to become Conservative policy to oppose more speed bumps in Bromley, and to be more supportive of the needs of road users, then they are to be congratulated and we would suggest that B.B.R.A.G. members bear that in mind when the next council elections take place.

Council Leadership System

Mention was made in a previous Newsletter concerning consultation on a possible change of council leadership. Options were to move to a directly elected Mayor (with supporting cabinet or council manager), or a Leader with a cabinet (rather similar to the existing arrangement but with less emphasis on committees). The latter was apparently the chosen option by the majority of people consulted and this new system will be introduced in spring 2002. The council Leader will be supported by eight Cabinet members who will make most of the policy and budget decisions. They will effectively act as the executive decision making body on most matters and hence will be called the "Executive".

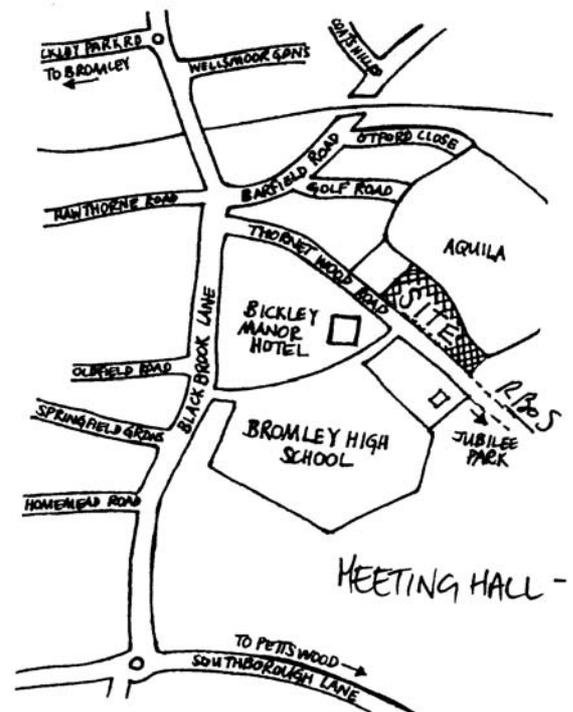
Editors Comments: Well it remains to be seen how this system will work out, but it may be an improvement on the existing committee system which lacked clear accountability to anyone. It may helpfully avoid the above mentioned example of where the council Leader clearly has different policies to those of the committee members who currently decide many transport management issues.

New Council Appointment

We are advised that Gareth Davies has recently taken over the position formerly held by the late Roger Perry as Assistant Director Engineering in Environmental Services (this department handles traffic management issues).

Aquila and Thornet Wood Road, Bickley Developments

Mention has been made previously in this newsletter of a proposed Plymouth Brethren Meeting Hall in Thornet Wood Road. More details of that are contained in this article, and also of the proposed redevelopment of the Aquila site. A map showing the location of these sites follows.



A planning application has been made for the Meeting Hall (effectively a church) on a site in Thornet Wood Road, opposite the Bickley Manor Hotel entrance. The site is currently a rough, grassy field with scrub around the edges. It has been designated as green belt land for a long time and still is in the recent Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for Bromley.

The application is for a building to accommodate 950 people, including 138 car parking spaces. The applicants state that 90% of attendees are expected to arrive by car, and from a large geographic area - this building is not intended to simply serve local needs. One point to note is that even with the proposed car parking spaces there are unlikely to be sufficient to cope with anywhere near the maximum capacity hence it is likely that on-street parking would occur.

Proposed hours of usage of this building are extensive and spread over 7 days per week, including from 06.00 on Sunday, although it seems that they may not overlap directly with the busiest rush hour times. However it will clearly generate considerable additional traffic volumes.

The other pending application is for redevelopment of the Aquila site for housing. This was formerly used by the MoD but is now no longer required. The likely proposal is for 275 houses, or more as the GLA have recently set guidelines for more denser housing with a mix of "affordable" housing in new developments, plus a possible Children's Hospice. The likely access route would be via Blackbrook Lane and Barfield Road. Although it is quite likely that London commuters will favour these houses as the site is within walking distance of Chislehurst station, it is also clearly going to generate much additional road traffic.

The Aquila site was given Green Belt status many years ago, and in fact the MoD

promised to return it to open space after they had finished with the site. However the recent UDP does rezone it for housing.

Both of the above developments will clearly add considerably to traffic in this area which is already severely congested. Blackbrook Lane, and the junctions with Barfield Road and Thornet Wood Road (which are very close together) get very busy during school opening and closing times. The A222 Bickley Park Road/ Summer Hill route (which is the main Bromley to Sidcup road and links to the A20) is now congested for most of the day, particularly at the Chislehurst War Memorial junction. Traffic also backs up on Blackbrook Lane where it joins with Bickley Park Road as a result of this congestion. Some pictures of these conditions are shown at the end of this newsletter (the photographs were taken on a week day at 08.15 am, but during school half term so congestion is likely to be worse at other times).

Such congestion and standing traffic already causes considerable delays, high economic costs, noise and atmospheric pollution, that negatively affect local residents. For those reasons, B.B.R.A.G. is opposing these proposals. We also object to the development of green belt land, as the amenities of the latter are one reason why people choose to live in Bromley.

We suggest you personally object to the Meeting Hall development by writing to Bromley Council (address: James Amos, Planning Department, Bromley Council, Stockwell Close, Bromley, BR1 3UH) quoting reference DC/01/00428/FULL1 - note that it should not be too late to do so as consideration of this matter has been deferred pending a review of the transport issues.

Local residents have also vigorously objected to these proposals and a group called the Bickley Residents Action Group (B.R.A.G. - not to be confused with B.B.R.A.G) has been formed. Contact names are: Kim Amato (Tel:020-8467-1448), Habib Huque (Tel: 020-8295-1440), Keith Duffy-Penny (Tel: 020-8467-3637) or Ron Shirley (Tel: 020-8295-3020). They would no doubt welcome your support.

Old Hill, Chislehurst

Readers may recall that the proposed traffic calming scheme for Old Hill depended on the housing development in Brenchley Close being approved - the developer had promised to pay for the scheme which had otherwise already been agreed by the council. The planning application for the housing development was initially rejected due to numerous local objections, but the Inspector who heard the appeal allowed it with certain conditions attached. These include that an investigation for contaminated land be first made and any required remedial work done (there is some risk that the existing houses were built on a rubbish tip), and that investigation be made as to how close the new foundations will be to Chislehurst Caves (never wise to build above a void of course). These investigations may take some time so it is not certain when or if the traffic calming scheme will be implemented. In the meantime the council has decided to go ahead with extensive resurfacing work on Old Hill which had previously been postponed, so they clearly think that nothing will happen quickly.

Let us hope that the new council Leader's policy on speed bumps will cause this proposed scheme to be dropped, as it was never a good technical solution to the traffic accident problems on Old Hill.

Dartford Crossing

No doubt many of our readers use the Dartford tunnel/bridge crossing of the Thames on the M25. You may be interested to hear that the existing legal right to charge tolls on the crossing expires at the end of 2001, when the bridge will be fully paid for, although another year of charging thereafter to build up a "maintenance fund" is permitted. In other words, unless new legislation is implemented, there is the prospect of tolls being dropped.

But the Government is now proposing that tolls should remain, and at the same level of £1 per car, so as to "raise revenue for future transport projects". That's about £50 million pound of additional taxation in reality, although legally they will have to spend it on transport projects.

Future transport projects include additional Thames crossings east of London (eg. a road/rail bridge at Thamesmead which was being actively discussed when your editor lived there 30 years ago, another tunnel at Blackwall, etc) and "major new transport infrastructure in the Thames Gateway area over the next ten years".

Fortunately for them, but unfortunately for the public, the Government can now introduce charges without specific new legislation under the Transport Act 2000 which enables them to introduce charges on any bridges or tunnels.

However, motorbikes would in future be free. More details of these proposals, and the reasons behind them, can be obtained from the following web site:

www.highways.gov.uk/info/consult/liveconsult/dcross/dcross.htm

Any objections to these proposals can be sent to “The Secretary of State, Highways Agency, Operators Directorate, Federated House, London Road, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1SZ” quoting reference HA 48/3/5.



Homefield Rise, Orpington

An innovative new proposal is to put a speed table under the existing Pelican crossing in Homefield Rise, Orpington. As Pelican crossings are traffic light controlled, one would have thought that this provided enough protection for pedestrians, so it is difficult to understand the logic behind this proposal. B.B.R.A.G. has therefore objected to yet another needless speed bump.

Mobile Phones

One modern habit that is clearly a possible safety risk is the use of mobile phones in cars. An interesting recent study by the University of Utah has shown that using a mobile phone is much more distracting than listening to a car radio or doing other simple in-car tasks. Drivers reacted much more slowly to hazards such as red lights, or road obstacles. In fact, there was also little difference between hand held phones and hands- free usage. Author David Strayer said “... it was the active engagement in conversation that distracted drivers more than any other similar activity in the car.”

Editors Comments: From personal experience, it clearly distracts drivers if they are using a mobile phone. The act of talking and driving at the same time always seemed a difficult thing to do and for that reason I always avoid taking calls when on the move (or is it simply that my multi-tasking skills are not what they once were). Clearly legislation should be drawn up, reflecting the above facts, rather than the current anomalous situation where it isn't clearly legal or illegal.

The Dangers of Drink

An interesting recent article in the Daily Telegraph covered the dangers of drinking and walking. Last year, 793 adult pedestrians were killed on the roads. However, the latest available statistics show that almost half had been drinking and a third were over the legal limit for driving. In fact, from other statistics, it is clear that the vast majority of road accidents to pedestrians happen not from vehicles running off the road, but from pedestrians recklessly stepping into the road.

Clearly measures to separate pedestrians from road traffic are very important, and simple measures such as barriers to control where pedestrians can cross, could be effective. But take care over Xmas!.

Cutting Traffic by 15%

Another interesting recent press article was in the Financial Times. It was entitled “How to think people out of their vehicles”. Apparently if you offer people personal advice on the journeys they make, then by making alternative suggestions you can often cut overall car use by up to 15%. Experiments in Perth, Australia have shown its effectiveness.

The alternatives suggested may be public transport, walking or cycling. You need to back up the advice with more supporting information sources, like clearer bus timetables, but the overall cost is relatively low.

Sounds an interesting idea that might actually work. Individualised marketing to the people you are targeting is one of the keys to it's success.

Hawthorne Experiments

Recent copies of this Newsletter have given you some accident statistics that demonstrate that the major emphasis on traffic calming schemes and speed reduction measures (e.g. hundreds of extra speed cameras, lots more speed bumps), seem to have negligible impact on overall accident statistics, which stubbornly refuse to come down. This despite the fact that there are studies that clearly appear to demonstrate the effectiveness of these measures based on before/after studies of accident statistics in particular locations. There are three major reasons why these statistics are misleading:

Firstly because they often ignore the effect of diverting traffic. To be accurate you need to take account of the changed volume and mix of traffic which is rarely done.

Secondly they often fall into the common traps of using selective statistics (ie. the bad comparables are ignored and the good ones published), or they don't allow for extraneous factors such as weather conditions, or they ignore random statistical variation. Rarely are "confidence levels" attached to the numbers as they then make poor political headlines (in fact the statistics are usually based on such poor experimental design that it would be folly to do so anyway).

Thirdly though they totally ignore the major problem when experimenting on human beings, that predictions tend to be self fulfilling. This was clearly demonstrated back in about 1930 in a series of research projects in industrial psychology undertaken by Elton Mayo and known as the Hawthorne Experiments (there are several references on the Internet to this work if you want more details as it is a classical study in this field). One of the things he did was to test the effect of increasing or decreasing lighting conditions in the workplace. With an increase, he expected an improvement in output, and got it. With a decrease, he was expecting a reduction, but got an increase. In other words, any change improved performance. Why was this? Because the subjects expected the change to improve performance because they knew that was what the experiments were about, and hence it did. Behaviour changed to match peoples expectations.

So let's take up the analogy with the introduction of speed cameras. People expect the installation of speed cameras will reduce the number of accidents (after all we are told they are only sited at accident black spots), so in fact they might well react accordingly, ie. they will act to match their expectations. How long will this effect last: well quite a long time according to Mayo, but clearly it could not last for ever because otherwise you could simply keep changing the environment and endlessly improve performance.

One of the clear conclusions is that when experimenting on people you have to be very careful when interpreting the results. This is why medical experiments typically use a double-blind technique where neither the subject nor the collector of the statistics knows who is getting the real medicine or who is getting the dummy.

To really produce proper before/after studies to measure the effectiveness of

accident prevention measures, you therefore have to be exceedingly careful. Certainly it must be extended over a long period of time so the Hawthorne effect wears off. Secondly, you should also try removing the change to see what effect that has, or introduce other similar but different measures to see whether any change in the environment stimulates the same change. For example, compare the effect of a real speed camera, with a sign warning of hazards ahead. Also you need to separate the collectors of the statistics from the interpreters (in practice they are the same police at present). Unfortunately it is so difficult to do this kind of study in an unbiased and effective manner that in practice it is unlikely ever to be done properly.

Editors Comments: Take any claims for breakthroughs in traffic accident reduction with a pinch of salt.

Air Pollution

Previous articles in our Newsletters have covered air pollution figures in Bromley and the London area, and the Mayor of London's draft strategy for how to improve matters. Note that there didn't seem to be major problems in Bromley in comparison with other London boroughs. Latest news on this area is as follows.

The Government has announced new targets to cut air pollution in England and Wales. Environment Minister Michael Meacher has set new aims for exhaust gas chemicals. The target is to reduce pollution levels by half by 2010, but as previously pointed out, with more modern cars being vastly improved in terms of pollution emissions, pollution is expected to fall quite rapidly anyway over the next few years so this target is not very difficult at all. A spokesman for Friends of the Earth immediately said it wasn't good enough.

The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone has recently published a Draft Air Quality Strategy document - all 230 pages of it but there is a "Highlights" summary available (which includes a feedback form) of only 22 pages for the slower reader. These can be downloaded from the GLA web site of www.london.gov.uk, or printed copies purchased by phoning 020 7983 4100. Responses are due by the 14th December. Note that this appears to be a revised version of the one we previously discussed and commented on.

The Mayor's Transport Strategy already has a target to reduce congestion and road traffic volumes which may assist with improving pollution in a minor way. So what else is there in the new document? Main proposals are:

1. Measures to stimulate the faster adoption of cleaner vehicle technology and alternative fuels, particularly for PSVs and for buses, taxis, and goods vehicles. Ambulance, fire, police and local authority vehicles are clearly also ones to be targeted here by appropriate retrofitting or new vehicle purchase strategies.
2. The Mayor will encourage the expansion of alternative fuelling infrastructure such as refuelling points for electric, LPG and similar fuels.
3. The Mayor will encourage the adoption of cleaner fuels including promotion of grants under the government "CleanUp" and "Powershift" programmes.
4. Buses and taxis will be forced to adhere to new, tighter emission limits.
5. The Mayor will run campaigns to encourage regular vehicle maintenance and to minimise extended periods of idling (the latter may be enforced by fixed penalty notice fines).

6. The Mayor is considering the introduction of “Low Emission Zones” to bar heavy polluters such as lorries and buses that don’t meet certain low emission standards (this is effective in many foreign cities to control particular “hot spots”).

7. Traffic management measures such as optimising road layout for smoother traffic flows, optimising bus priority, stricter parking enforcement, green wave traffic lights, co-ordinating street works and similar measures will be introduced.

8. Programmes to encourage everyone to drive more smoothly will be run (no this is not a joke).

Editors Comments: Most of these proposals are eminently sensible, without knowing the cost of some of them. There is a clear emphasis on the encouragement to use new technology and to restrict the more heavily polluting vehicles, which are certainly the most effective ways to reduce the emissions.

AGM News

B.B.R.A.G. recently held it’s annual AGM. Personal membership rates were unchanged, but a new Corporate Membership rate of £50 has been introduced. This is targeted at organisations who may be interested in supporting our objectives. If you know of any company or non-profit making body that would be interested then please let us know.

The Executive Committee was re-elected without change except that Peggy Taylor has decided to step down. If any member is interested in becoming more active in assisting the society then please let us know. We would be particularly like someone to take on running some membership recruitment campaigns as expanding our current membership is a

high priority if we are to achieve our stated objectives.

One decision that was made at the AGM was to offer complimentary copies of this newsletter to local “movers and shakers”, ie. local councillors, press, MP’s, GLA Members and council staff. If you have any additional suggestions regarding who should receive such copies then please advise the editor.

Contact Information

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Pictures of Congestion on Blackbrook Lane and Bickley Park Road



Junction of Blackbrook Lane, Barfield Road and Thornet Wood Road, looking south (traffic on left is queuing up for junction with Bickley Park Road 200 yards north)



On Bickley Park Road looking east to Chislehurst Station and Summer Hill (traffic on left is in stationery queue all the way up Summer Hill)



Long queue of traffic on Blackbrook Lane waiting to join Bickley Park Road



Queue formed east bound on Bickley Park Road at junction with Blackbrook Lane