



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 40 (June 2006)

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Editorial

A somewhat smaller edition than normal this month – there seems to be a dearth of news of late. Readers are reminded that we are always keen to cover transport related news items in London so if you notice any issues that we have not covered that you think we should, then please call me. Or send us a letter for publication. But the story of the Tesco superstore proposed for Orpington came back into focus with yet another proposal from Tesco.

Other news in this edition concerns changes as a result of the recent council elections, an obituary for Eric Forth MP, and some of the aspects of the regime of Transport for London.

Members are reminded that the BBRAG Annual General Meeting takes place on the morning of the 10th June. Please try and attend if you can.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Tesco Creates Uproar in Orpington



Tesco have submitted a revised planning application for the Station Road, Orpington site that increases the retail space by 90%.

In 2005, Tesco obtained planning approval for a redevelopment of the multi-storey car park in Station Road, Orpington. An artist's impression of the proposed building is given above. This was despite opposition from many people on the grounds of inadequate car parking provision, the likely increase in traffic congestion, and the impact on local residents. Businesses who occupy the adjacent offices were particularly concerned about the car parking provision, and other retailers in the High Street were worried about the impact on their customers due to the proposed size of the store.

More information on the history of this development and how Tesco finessed the planning system and persuaded councillors to support it can be seen on our web site at www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Orpington_car_park_HTML.htm

The objections submitted by the group that represented the combined interests of the above objectors can also be seen at: www.bromleytransport.org.uk/OCPAG.htm

Retail Space Almost Doubles

The new application states that "Tesco wishes to provide a substantially wider range of retail goods..." by introducing "a full cover mezzanine floor and reorganising the use of other space". The new "net sales area" will be 7,423 square metres in comparison with 3,917 square metres in the former plans, so the space will almost double.

In fact Tesco estimates that the store turnover will increase from £39.9 million under the old plans by 2008, to £73.3 million.

Car Parking Provision Reduced

Other changes in the new plans are the following revisions to car parking provision:

Public car parking down from 210 to 199
Offices car parking down from 255 to 219
Residential parking up from 32 to 43
Store/staff parking up from 450 to 478

That makes an overall reduction from 947 to 939 when BBRAG had previously shown that the figure for parking provision was grossly inadequate to cope with existing usage already. And now there will be even more parking required to cope with more shoppers at the store, and to provide parking for additional shop staff (after all turnover is forecast to be up 83%)

However, Tesco is still saying that "there will be sufficient public car parking available within Orpington Town Centre to cater for the existing levels of demand".

Tesco Admits More Traffic Will Appear

Tesco concedes that the larger retail space will cause an increase in traffic. They estimate 19% on Fridays and 29% on Saturdays. Is this realistic bearing in mind the extra turnover that is forecast, and the increased attractiveness of the store as a "destination" shopping centre? It seems very doubtful. And we previously pointed out that there is already major traffic congestion on Station Road during rush hours which the new store, even in its former incarnation, could only make worse.

Almost certainly more traffic will divert down the back streets, increasing the impact of noise and pollution on local residents, and having a negative impact on road safety.

Defective Traffic Assessment

Tesco have submitted a "Traffic Assessment" as part of the new application which appears to demonstrate that there would be no significant congestion produced. But this assessment is based on models that may well be inaccurate. There appears to have been no "validation" done on these models that prove they replicate the existing traffic flows and traffic queues accurately. As with any mathematical simulation, it is extremely important to validate the model if you want to get accurate results from any prospective changes.

Tesco Goes Back on Its Previous Comments

Some readers may remember the public meeting that was held to discuss the original development. At that meeting Tesco said they had no plans to include a mezzanine floor, in response to a specific question from a member of the public.

Politicians Get it Wrong Again

Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats circulated flyers to Orpington residents about the latest Tesco proposals as part of their election campaigns. The Conservative one says: "The Car Park is coming to the end of its structural life". This is a statement that has been made by other people, including a former Liberal Democrat councillor, but it is simply untrue.

I have obtained all the past reports to the council on the existing car park using the Freedom of Information Act and although there were doubts raised some years ago about the structural integrity of the building following the collapse of a multi-storey car park elsewhere in the country, in fact it later was accepted to be in a basically sound condition. It would need some refurbishment in the future to retain it in use and to generally modernise it, which could easily have been paid for out of recent profits from the car park revenue (it has been exceedingly profitable of late as little has been spent on maintenance).

But the car park certainly does not need rebuilding, and potentially has many years of useful life still left.

Make Sure You Object

If you want to stop this new proposal, it is important that you put your comments in writing to Bromley Council. Please write to: The Chief Planner, London Borough of Bromley, Stockwell Close, Bromley, BR1 3UH quoting reference DC/06/01277/FULL1. Your objections should arrive as soon as practical.

It is of course just possible that if Tesco cannot obtain approval for the additional retail space, then they might cancel the whole project, so do make sure you object again even if you submitted objections to the previous application (you will need to repeat many of the same arguments of course as this is a separate application).

Tesco now have so many sites they can develop in their "land bank" that they are being accused of monopolising future retail development opportunities. And what's the longest time that Tesco have retained a site without developing it? Seventeen years is apparently the answer.

An Interest Declared

The author of this note has to declare an interest. After seeing the way that Tesco ran rings around local councillors, and finessed the planning regulations to maximise their own interests during the consideration of the previous planning application, he purchased some shares in the company for his wife a few months ago.

A Member's Letter

The following letter was sent to the local press by BBAG member Derek Dobson and is a good summary of the views of many Bromley residents.

"Give them an inch and they will take a yard. Whoever coined this phrase perhaps had the supermarket giant Tesco in mind. Not satisfied with pushing their existing and greedy plans through a weak and timid Council Planning Committee, they have now come back for a second helping.

The application to nearly double the size of their proposed new store in Orpington High Street just beggars belief.

It seems that Tesco, which corners the retail market with a 30% share of all sales, has now reached the point where they are blind to their own arrogance. We are very fortunate indeed to have people such as Roger Lawson (Chairman of the Action Group) to fight the public's corner in an effort to stop Tesco steam rolling their audacious demands through the Council again.

However, perhaps this situation creates an ideal opportunity to give them a bloody nose? If Tesco would like the original planning permission revised, then why not? But not in a way that Tesco had envisaged! Let the Council show some "backbone" when reviewing the planning permission that they so weakly gave in to by now refusing it altogether! Let the Councillors actually represent the views of the people who voted them into power."

More on Parking Issues

Very extensive consultation is still taking place on the provision of more "on-street" parking while the Tesco site is redeveloped. The council has in fact increased the number of such places from 246 to 372, which has not pleased everyone, but would seem to be a useful addition.

Concern has also been expressed that because some of the proposed on-street parking spaces north of the High Street will permit parking all day, some people might use them instead of the Station car park. This seems unlikely to your editor because of the distance and possible extra cost, but is to be reviewed by council staff. And of course there were some people who parked in the existing multi-storey car park and walked up to the Station, mainly because the latter soon fills up. So it is unreasonable not to cater for them anyway.

Unfortunately the application to develop more parking near in the Library in Priory Gardens (45 places) has been rejected by a Planning Committee. But the council is expected to submit a revised application which they hope will overcome the objections – there were other "planning gains" from these proposals so it would be a pity if the idea was dropped.

Removal of Humps in Barnet

The London Evening Standard recently ran a story claiming that "Road accidents have plummeted in a London borough which have ripped out its road humps".

The borough is Barnet who began removing them in 2002, despite public attacks from Ken Livingstone and staff at Transport for London. Casualties in the first six months of last year fell by 14.9% compared with the previous year, whereas the London average was only 8.8%. Only six other London boroughs (out of over 30) did better.

Motorcycle accidents fell by 19.1% which is particularly impressive bearing in mind that they have increased in some boroughs.



Councillor Mathew Offord, who heads Barnet's Environment and Transport department said the figures "vindicate our sensible and managed approach, including removing road humps where they are not needed". The policy was first introduced by Brian Coleman (see left).

(Editor's Comments: There may be an element of the selective use of statistics in these claims, but even so it is obvious that boroughs such as Barnet who have removed humps, or Bromley where new installations were stopped some years ago, are seeing comparable levels of accident reduction, if not better ones than those boroughs who persist in installing more and more speed humps. Clearly humps are unnecessary to cut road accidents, and they have lots of other disadvantages which we have explained repeatedly in the pages of this newsletter).

Humps to Go in Gloucestershire

After a long campaign by local residents, led by Steve Seward, 26 speed humps are to be removed from Shireway in South Gloucestershire.

There was a failure to properly consult residents initially on the scheme, and even though they objected after they were installed, the council refused to act. Councillors were also initially unmoved by the complaints. Only after persistent campaigning and multiple public consultations did it become clear that the residents absolutely wanted the humps removed, so that is what they got. Only 15% of consultees actually wanted the humps to remain.

For more information see their web site at: www.humps.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

One particular useful feature of the web site is a set of "car stickers", many of which you could use on any speed hump campaign. You can download them from:

www.humps.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/facts.htm

(Editor's Comments: Yet another example of a council that saw no legal or other difficulties with removing humps, unlike the staff of Bromley Council).

TfL Wants to Change Your Behaviour

Transport for London (TfL) is to spend £24 million on "behavioural change" in 2006/2007, and £30 million in the following year.

Up to 24 staff are to be employed to promote borough initiatives for green travel plans and other initiatives. One of the latter is the travel awareness campaign under the "Good Going" banner which even has its own web site at: www.goodgoing.co.uk. There are a number of special offers if you sign a pledge to "walk, cycle, use public transport or low emission vehicles", and there is even a "loyalty card" so you can see they are using all the latest marketing gimmicks to get you to change your lifestyle patterns.

(Editor's Comments: These programmes have been running for some years, but TfL have yet to produce any evidence that they have any impact whatsoever on people's long term travel preferences or decisions).

TfL Budgets and More Office Space Required

The above expenditure is of course only a small part of the overall budget for TfL of £5.5 billion. This organisation has been expanding rapidly in size and helps to explain why the GLA precept is rising so fast, and hence your council taxes.

The Financial Times has reported that Transport for London (TfL) have been negotiating to take 300,000 sq. ft. of office space in the proposed "Shard of Glass" tower near London Bridge. That's about half the available space and would enable the development to proceed. Perhaps needless to point out that Ken Livingstone is a keen advocate of this terrorist prone development, as well as having ultimate control of TfL. With likely office rents of as much as £45 per square foot being proposed in this building, that's £13.5 million pounds a year, so you can see where your taxpayers money is going and just shows how big an empire is being built at TfL.

Speed Limit Enforcement

TfL is working on plans to map all speed limits in London and introduce compulsory adherence, at least for buses and taxis, by the use of automatic speed adaptation technology as soon as possible. Road safety head Chris Lines recently suggested that motorists could be encouraged to install such devices by reduced parking fees, discounts on Oyster cards and reduced congestion charges plus insurance companies could promote their installation.

Traffic Lights Proliferating

TfL have reported that the number of traffic signals have risen by 750 in London over the last five years. That's a rise of 17.5% so there are now almost 5,000. *(Editor's Comments: I can't say I have noticed a lot more in Bromley, so one wonders where they have been put in, but it is certainly possible that the increased numbers have contributed to increased congestion in some parts of London. They are of course very expensive to install and maintain).*

Separating Public & Private Transport

The Association of British Drivers (ABD – see www.abd.org.uk) have suggested that it would be a very good idea to separate responsibility for public transport from private transport. In the case of Transport for London (TfL) it is in their financial interest to boost public transport revenue by deterring private car use. But as they "regulate" the latter and have rights to impose such charges as the Congestion Tax, it gives them the motive to impose high taxes and as much inconvenience as possible on private transport users.

(Editor's Comments: This is certainly a very valid point and I would be all in favour of such a change. As it is there is very little attempt to integrate public and private transport provision, so you get restrictive parking at or around stations which actually discourages appropriate "interchanges" and wider use of public transport facilities).

Recent Council Election Results

The Conservatives increased their control of Bromley Council by winning 49 of the 60 council seats. The Tories ejected the Liberal Democrats from Orpington and Biggin Hill wards and also defeated long standing Labour councillor John Holbrook in Cray Valley West.

It was interesting to note the vote for independent candidate John Hemming-Clark in Chislehurst ward who gained 903 votes from what he called a "standing start", this being his first attempt. That beat all candidates other than the Conservative ones who all polled more than 2,500 – trying to unseat them in such a solidly Tory area was never going to be easy. He seemed to be opposed to most speed humps, speed cameras and bus lane cameras but is a fan of "walking, cycles, buses and cars" according to his comments to your editor. Certainly a candidate worth watching if he stands again in the council elections, and it seems that he may well stand as a candidate in the forthcoming by-election in Bromley & Chislehurst (see below).

A BNP candidate stood in Mottingham and gained 416 votes which was more than two LibDem candidates. UKIP and Green Party candidates stood in other wards, but generally had little impact.



With the new slate of councillors, responsibilities have been reassigned and Councillor Colin Smith (picture left) has taken over responsibility from George Taylor for the newly renamed

"Environment & Leisure" Portfolio which looks after transport matters. So you will get less coverage on the forceful approach of Mr Taylor in future, just when he seemed to be building up public attendance at his meetings to an unprecedented level.

In neighbouring Croydon, the Conservatives took control from Labour, their success again being allegedly based on a policy of "no more speed humps" according to a local resident.

Eric Forth Dies



As most readers will no doubt be aware, Bromley and Chislehurst MP Eric Forth died recently after a short illness. This is a sad loss for all those who value independence of mind, and tributes came

from many quarters, although he did not always endear himself to some voters. But he was certainly an energetic MP so far as the local constituency was concerned, and always dealt with letters from his constituents promptly and efficiently.

The Daily Telegraph reported that the local constituency party was under some pressure to have an "A-list" candidate imposed on them, whereas they might prefer a local candidate – GLA member Bob Neill and Councillor Colin Bloom were both mentioned.

They also quoted retired businessman Peter Avis as saying "...people in Bromley who supported Eric Forth want somebody of a similar ilk who won't pussyfoot around". It seems that "trendy" or "gay" candidates perhaps should not bother to apply.

Hit & Run Collisions in London

While accidents in general are falling, the number of "hit and run" collisions in London has been rising (up 41% since 1994-98). In 2004 there were 4,379 such accidents in London, which is 15% of all road traffic accidents, and in boroughs such as Hackney as many as a quarter of all drivers flee the scene (Bromley is one of the most law abiding boroughs of course at only 11%, and some of those may simply be cases where the driver was not aware that an accident had taken place).

The blame for the increase is being put on the reduction in traffic police officers in the last few years (halved in the last 12 years according to the Green Party). The result is that there are many more uninsured and unlicensed drivers who have a strong incentive to disappear. Over reliance on automated devices such as speed cameras to catch breaches of traffic regulations is also alleged to be a contributory factor, which actually encourages drivers to drive unregistered vehicles.

News Snapshots

Sundry news in the last few weeks that is worth a mention is as follows:

- + The Metropolitan Police are running another public consultation on policing priorities in London. To contribute, go to: www.met.police.uk/about/performance/consultation
- + According to a report in the Evening Standard, senior Tories including David Cameron want to do an "about-turn" on congestion charging, and drop their opposition to it. They may also support road pricing. However London Conservatives remain very much opposed.

(Editor's Comments: After picking up many votes in the recent local elections, this would seem to be a certain way to reduce their vote in the next general election. It will be interesting to see what stance they adopt in the forthcoming Bromley and Chislehurst by-election).

+ The recent Government reshuffle has meant that Douglas Alexander has taken over from Alistair Darling as the new Secretary of State for Transport. However the policies have not changed and he is to push ahead with the introduction of a national road pricing scheme. He recently announced £10 million in funding to research the necessary technologies.



He is yet another Scot in the senior ranks of Government and is a solicitor by profession. Your editor was unable to find any past involvement or interest by Mr Alexander in transport matters, so it seems we may have yet another Transport Minister with little knowledge of the subject.

+ The Department for Transport recently published National Statistics of vehicle speeds in Great Britain in 2005. These statistics relate to the speeds at which drivers choose to drive in free-flow conditions generally across the road network. To quote their press release "The latest figures show that the proportion of motorists exceeding the speed limit in 2005 changed very little from 2004 although driving in excess of the speed limit remains at a high level on all types of road." *(Editor's Comments: It seems drivers will persist in driving according to the prevailing road conditions and their personal views on a safe driving speed, instead of adhering religiously to posted speed limits which are now unrealistic and inappropriate in many locations – how surprising!)*

+ The Scottish Parliament are hosting a petition against high parking charges at hospitals. This is a problem that affects both staff and patients, particularly those of the latter who have to regularly attend hospital but who have disabilities that make it difficult to travel on public transport. Readers may think that such people would qualify for ambulance transport and/or for financial support to use taxis but that is not

usually the case. To support this petition, go to: http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/view_petition.asp?PetitionID=93

+ Councillor Julian Grainger has had the complaint against him of "bullying of council staff" referred back by the Standards Board to a local "standards committee". This allegation related to the installation of rumble strips in Pratts Bottom.

+ Brian Coleman has been re-elected as Chairman of the Greater London Assembly by Assembly members.

+ Bromley Council is proposing some "raised junctions" (ie. speed humps by some other name) on Elmers End Road. Let us hope that new Environment portfolio holder Colin Smith puts a prompt halt to this latest attempt to reintroduce more speed humps in the borough. The reference is ADE (TP)MDH/H12/16 if you wish to send objections to Bromley Council.

+ Traffic congestion in the Borough of Bromley seems to have been particularly bad in the last few weeks. Whether this is because of increased numbers of cars (as a result of the trend to increase population and housing in the borough), or simply caused by road works is not clear. The latter includes numerous road closures and one-way working due to gas main replacement, and some water main works. Roads closed or otherwise affected include Old Hill and Watts Lane in Chislehurst, and Blackbrook Lane in Bickley. Your editor received several complaints about the length of time these works are taking to complete.

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB. All material contained herein is Copyright of B.B.R.A.G. and may only be reproduced with permission. Any opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author of the article or that of the Editor which do not necessarily represent the official policies of B.B.R.A.G.

B.B.R.A.G. Chairman and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com). Contact the above for information on the aims and objectives of B.B.R.A.G. or for membership information (membership costs £9.50 per annum for individuals, or £7.50 if you opt to receive our Newsletter via email, or £50 for corporate membership). B.B.R.A.G. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in the borough.

Our internet web address is: <http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk> . This contains much useful information including articles extracted from our newsletters. It also contains a "News" page which is updated regularly with items of topical interest.

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BBRAG Background Information

The Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.) stands for a more democratic and more rational approach to the traffic management problems of the London Borough of Bromley. Our initial formation some years ago was based on opposition to the kind of traffic calming scheme that was being introduced in the borough that simply caused more traffic congestion, and general inconvenience to road users, without any significant benefit in terms of road accident reductions. In fact, the money wasted on such schemes could have been much better spent on actual improvements to road safety in other areas. We now take a more general interest in all transport and associated environmental issues in the borough of Bromley and the greater London area. This includes traffic management schemes, public transport, road safety, parking policies, air pollution, other transport environmental issues such as noise, and associated local and central government policies. Our prime objective is to promote improvements in the transport infrastructure while stopping wasted expenditure on unpopular, ineffective or inappropriate policies.