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Editorial

You have probably been wondering why you have not seen one of our newsletters recently. No you have not missed any, there has simply been a gap due to pressure of other business. But I could not postpone producing one any longer, particularly as there is some good news to cover – see the first article below on parking charges in Barnet.

This is of course only a minor, if somewhat important, skirmish between motorists and local councils in London. The staff of the latter are notoriously anti-car in mentality to begin with, particularly in those boroughs led by those with certain political views. Now that council budgets are under such pressure, with central Government funding being cut back (they simply don't have the cash of course and already borrowing more than is good for you and me), councils are looking to screw as much money out of motorists as possible. This means sticking up parking charges on council owned car parks (perfectly legal unfortunately) and profiteering from permit parking schemes (in fact illegal).

Only political pressure can bring a halt to this so the next time you elect your local councillors (and make sure you vote of course), just have a look at what they have been doing in your local borough on parking recently. Or look at the policies of the party they represent.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Barnet Parking Charges Defeated



On the 22nd July the challenge from a group of local residents to the massive rises in permit parking charges imposed by Barnet Council was upheld in the High Court. The Alliance of British Drivers (ABD) welcomes this decision.

Photo above is of David Attfield and his supporters outside the High Court earlier this year.

The increases in parking charges were declared unlawful by Justice Beverley Lang who upheld past precedents which said that the relevant Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 does not enable councils to raise money from permit parking charges to subsidise other programmes. Namely that the Act is not a fiscal measure and cannot be used to raise general taxation. It can only be used to finance traffic regulation and the operation of permit parking schemes.

ABD spokesperson Roger Lawson had this to say in a press release: *“It is clear that London boroughs have been in the vanguard of using parking charges to fill gaps in council budgets. There is no reason why residents who are forced to pay for parking permits should have to cross-subsidise other council expenditure, and in this case they were acting outside the law. I hope this will lead to challenges in other London boroughs who have been pursuing the same tactics. Our congratulations to David Attfield and his supporters for taking a stand on this issue”.*

More information is available from the Barnet CPZ Action web site at:
<http://barnetcpz.blogspot.co.uk/>

Note there may well be an appeal by Barnet Council, so they would no doubt be grateful of any financial support you care to contribute.

Chaos at Rotherhithe Tunnel



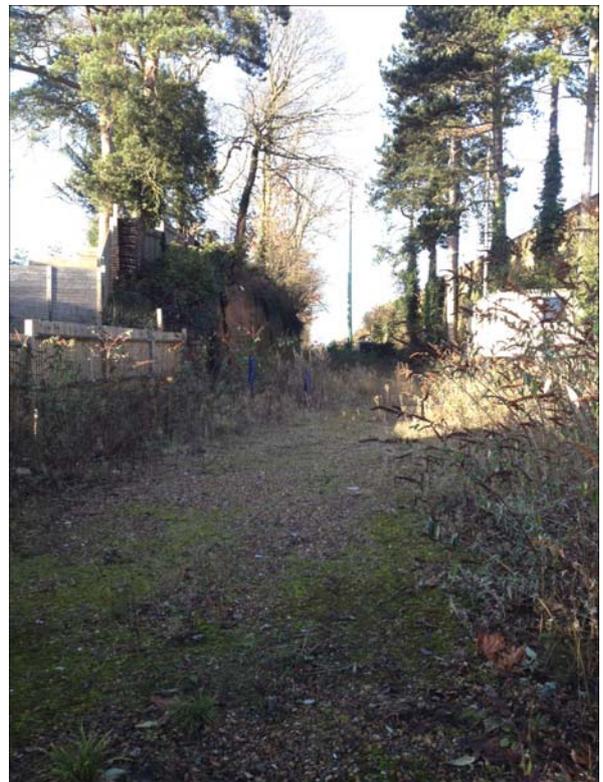
We reported on the chaos at the Rotherhithe Tunnel (photo above) after TfL imposed a very narrow width restriction, in our last edition. The posts imposing this were taken out very quickly and TfL are to be applauded for making a quick decision on this, although of course the ABD warned them about the problems they were likely to cause well in advance. The ABD had a subsequent meeting with the relevant TfL staff responsible for this tunnel who emphasised the dangers that tunnel users faced.

Being a very old tunnel which was only designed originally for horse-drawn traffic, there are no escape routes and few other fire safety measures.

Although a 20-mph speed limit was recently imposed there is still a big risk from large vehicles (e.g. LGVs) that might have very large petrol/diesel tanks. If they were involved in an accident, a large fire could soon arise.

They are still considering what to do, but may well consider imposing a weight limit (by the use of cameras to check the registration details of vehicles). This would enable them to stop the large LGVs that currently can squeeze through the entrance gates, but still permit cars to use the tunnel.

A New Car Park at Chislehurst Station



People who use Chislehurst Station in the London Borough of Bromley may be aware that there is a piece of waste land to the west of the station (i.e. the other side of the railway line to the existing station car park). This has been a railway goods yard, and temporary van sale site, in the past but has been derelict for some time as you can see from the photograph above. It is owned by Network Rail and hence could revert to operational railway use if they chose.

Previous applications to turn it into a car park have been rejected but Network Rail recently submitted another application so as to provide 47 car parking spaces (the site is quite narrow but does go back quite a long way).

Both the Alliance of British Drivers and the Chislehurst Society (a very large “local amenity society”) made representations on this matter, supporting the application.

The Chislehurst Society reviewed the planning application, as they do for all those of significance in Chislehurst, and submitted a note saying they supported the application in principle so long as the amenity of local residents was protected and existing trees were preserved if possible.

Despite that, council officers recommended rejection to the council Planning Committee who considered the matter. Chislehurst Society Committee Member Roger Lawson (your editor also of course) attended the subsequent Planning Committee meeting and spoke in favour of the application, on behalf of the Society. He argued the site was an eyesore, and he therefore did not see how a properly landscaped car park could be detrimental to the Conservation Area in any way. Indeed it might provide a valuable public amenity bearing in mind the existing car park is usually full leading to obstructive car parking in surrounding roads. It also would encourage the use of public transport by providing car parking at a key transport interchange (which is likely soon to become Bromley Council policy).

Fortunately the Planning Committee agreed with his stance, after some debate, so there will be a new car park in due course.

(Editor’s Note: this probably emphasises the importance of getting involved in local affairs if you wish to have some influence on council decisions. Lest readers get the impression that I would like more car parking everywhere, I strongly support removing most of the car parking from Chislehurst High Street which is probably a more contentious local issue and probably more difficult to persuade the council to implement).

London Thames River Crossings

We have mentioned the public consultation on new Thames River crossing previously (see the Jan 2013 and Nov 2012 editions, which like all our past newsletters are available from our web site). This was focussed on new crossings near to the Blackwall Tunnel. A report by TfL on the results of the consultation have been published – <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/rivercrossings/consultation>

In summary, 57% of respondents strongly supported a new road tunnel between Silvertown and Greenwich, versus only 10% strongly opposed. Or to put it another way, 76% supported it, versus 15% opposed, which is a clear-cut a picture as you ever get with public opinion polls.

Likewise there was strong support for a new ferry to replace the existing one at Woolwich, and also good support for a new bridge or tunnel at Gallions Reach.

But tolling of any new crossings, or the existing Blackwall Tunnel was opposed by the majority.

The ABD’s response to the consultation is present on our web site.

(Editor’s Note: we will have to wait and see when we might get some new crossings, and how they might be paid for – a thorny issue no doubt, but I get the impression that as far as most residents of London are concerned, it cannot happen soon enough).

Dartford (Lower Thames Crossings)

In addition to the above consultation, a consultation on possible new bridges/tunnels further down river has been launched by the Department for Transport – to cope with the increasing congestion at the Dartford Crossing. The implementation of “free-flow charging” is now planned to be implemented from October 2014, but is only expected to have a temporary impact to relieve the congestion on this key link within the M25 orbital route.

A number of options were put forward, including a new crossing alongside the existing one at Dartford, and two further down river – a lot of the traffic congestion is caused by vehicles heading to/from the Channel ports.

The ABD supported Option 2C, with variants to improve the M20/A2 links.

Dartford River Crossings Radio Debate

On the 8th July, your editor attended a debate hosted by both BBC Radio Essex and Radio Kent at the Hilton Hotel near the Dartford crossing (south side). Unfortunately most of the attendees from Essex did not arrive because of an accident on the north side which created very long queues (several hours in duration), and when I left there were also long queues on the south side heading toward the tunnel. These kinds of events are of course common occurrences which several attendees mentioned.

There were about 70 people present. Here's some brief notes on what was said (I did not speak because I thought there were enough opinionated people giving their views already).

Paul Carter, of Kent County Council argued for the need for a new crossing and preferred Option C (furthest down river), but he also wanted some changes to the link roads and a tunnel not a bridge.

Richard Johnson, of CPRE, wanted to remove junctions 1A and 3I which he thinks will solve the traffic congestion. As usual, they are opposed to new road building. John Kent, of Essex County Council opposed any new crossing, and suggests remodelling the junctions.

A Dartford councillor said "We do need a new crossing, but anywhere but Dartford". He suggested we needed "resilience" and option A would not give that.

A Gravesham councillor said Option B would cause problems with the Paramount development.

Several people from local villages both south and north of the river opposed the crossings, some on health grounds (air pollution creating it they allege). But it might be classified as the usual "nimby" opposition, as was also apparent from the residents of Dartford.

Option C causes potentially more environmental damage although that can possibly be mitigated by using a tunnel, moving the link roads, moving the birds, etc.

There was some discussion of Options (called D and E) which were not in the Government consultation, and are possible locations further down river, but it was said these would be much more costly.

A number of business people expressed concerns about the delay in building anything, and the delay in implementation of free-flow tolling (Highways Agency have announced an October 2014 start date – the BBC reported that up to £21m a year will be lost in unpaid tolls by foreign vehicles).

A show of hands poll taken at the end showed 3 supporters of Option A, 2 supporters of Option B, and about 20 supporters of Option C – but there were as many wanted "none of the above".

It was a reasonably well behaved debate and moderately informative. There was generally a strong desire that something should be done to try and relieve the congestion as soon as possible.

Sign the petition!

Note: don't forget to sign the petition against free flow charging proposals at the Dartford Crossing if you have not already done so. See here for details:

www.freedomfordrivers.org/River_Crossings.htm

London's Roads Task Force

A group of worthies was commissioned by the Mayor of London under the name "Roads Task Force" to devise a future plan for London's roads. They have now reported – see here: www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/28187.aspx

One of their suggestions is to move the south and north circulars into tunnels plus an urgent review of the inner ring road (at the edge of the Congestion Tax zone). How would this massive expenditure be paid for – why by road pricing of course.

But they are keen to tackle local congestion points and greater use of technology to manage the road network. However they talk also about “demand management” and “designing the city and activities to reduce the need to travel”.

+ Residents of Ealing voted against a proposed CPZ in the Pitshanger area, so they won't be getting one in the foreseeable future (over 60% opposed it).

News Snapshots

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

+ Your editor happened to talk to someone recently who manages a bailiff company about the difficulty of enforcing parking fines. It seems in Southwark they only manage to enforce 7% of the fines that the local council refers to them (20% in Tower Hamlets also, but it might typically be over 60% in Surrey towns). It seems the main reason is that the DVLA allow you to register a car in any name without checking. So they get names like Donald Duck, Ronald Reagan, etc, with false addresses. Being able to tow the cars away of persistent offenders does not get you far if they are worthless.

+ TfL have published the results of a consultation on their Road Safety Action Plan. It contains this sentence: *“Pedal cycle and pedestrian killed and seriously injured casualties increased by 22 per cent and 7 per cent respectively between 2010 and 2011.”* Editor's Comments: of course the former increase is undoubtedly due to the increased volumes of cyclists on the roads of London, encouraged by the Mayor's promotion and encouragement of cycling. Pedestrian numbers have also risen substantially. We will no doubt see even more aggressive and expensive measures to protect cyclists and pedestrians from their own folly, to the prejudice of other road users.

+ It has been reported in the media that both Isabel Dedring (Deputy Mayor of Transport for London), and Philip Everett of the City of London support more use of 20-mph wide area zones - for example in the latter case across the whole of the City of London to counter the increase in casualties caused by more cyclists and pedestrians. The ABD has written to both of these people pointing out that simply putting up 20-mph signs would be unlikely to help.

About the Alliance of British Drivers (ABD)

The Alliance of British Drivers was formed from a merger of the Association of British Drivers and the Drivers Alliance. The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Alliance is a “not for profit” voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our web site at www.abd.org.uk

Note that the ABD maintains a list of members who are familiar with individual London boroughs and may be able to help with information on local issues in those boroughs. The current list is below. If any other members would like to keep an eye on local news and advise on local transport issues then please let me know. Roger Lawson

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This Newsletter is published by the London Region of the Alliance of British (A.B.D.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB and is distributed free of charge to ABD Members in the London area and to those Members of BBKAG who formerly received the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group newsletter. All material contained herein is Copyright of the A.B.D. or of the authors 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 the A.B.D.

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