

newsletter

Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association



Barnet Council's cycle lane scheme needs examination

There is growing public criticism of Barnet Council's flagship cycle lane scheme in the High Road between North Finchley and East Finchley, and the congestion and pollution it creates, whilst the results of FBWRA's own enquiries reveal further causes for concern.

Late last year the Council established supposedly temporary cycle and bus lanes in the High Road south of North Finchley, running across the bridge over the North Circular down toward East Finchley. The scheme was put in place under the Covid emergency legislation without the usual scrutiny by a Committee of elected Councillors, and whilst supposedly temporary, the stage is set to make it permanent. There have been complaints that the scheme has resulted in congestion and pollution.

Early in January we emailed members about this and invited them to support an online petition (not posted by FBWRA), on the Council website, calling for the cycle lanes to be removed. We then followed this up with a similar posting on NextDoor (a local social networking service).

From sending our email until the petition closed a week later the number of signatories to the petition soared from about 150 to a total of 536. The matter has been considered by the Councillors on Finchley and Golders Green Residents' Forum, who may decide further action is appropriate (at the time of writing we await word of their decision).

Meanwhile, the Council's responses to FBWRA's Freedom of Information Act request about the scheme revealed

- the scheme was approved and implemented without any assessment of pre-scheme



congestion or cycle traffic – so how can the effects of the scheme be properly assessed?

- the Council was anxious to secure funding for the scheme from the Government's "Emergency Active Travel Fund", launched by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps and given the timescales imposed by the Government as part of the funding application it was not possible to carry out assessments which might have fed into the design process – so the proposal was rushed through without proper preparation. We understand that a cycle route along the A1000 has long been an aspiration of many, but surely, in the pandemic, the Council should have focussed on measures to increase social distancing in town centres? The whole thing smacks of a potentially controversial proposal pushed through under cover of the pandemic – "a good day to bury bad news".
- the Council has no set criteria to define whether the scheme is a success or a failure – so will this be a decision where Council officers make up the rules as they go along?

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- “the Council is aware of the impact that the introduction of the cycle route has had on private modes of transport. While the cycling scheme provides a safe alternative to public and motorised private transport, the council will ensure that this will not be at the cost of inconveniencing private car users”- *so that’s a guarantee, then?*
- the Council has already raised the matter of congestion with TfL, which has undertaken a review of the main traffic signals along the route, subsequently updating the settings to make the system work more effectively- *surely the settings should have been looked at during the design phase? Will they be adequate when traffic levels return to normal?*



- assessing the public response to the scheme and the impact of the traffic signal adjustments and congestion are expected to be completed in March 2021 “at which point the overall data set will contribute to the overall assessment of the scheme.”- *this suggests that the assessment will be by reference to traffic levels, etc during lockdown, surely this cannot be a valid assessment? Wouldn’t it be better to continue studying the effect of the scheme until after life is “back to normal”?*

At the time of writing we are still waiting for the Council to provide



There is a safety issue to be considered. The layout of the “bus and cycle lane”, as the above two pictures clearly illustrate, there is not room for a bus or a bicycle to pass each other safely.

- copies of documents relating to the consultation (required under the Covid emergency legislation) by Council officers with the Chairman of the Council’s Environment Committee as part of the process for exercising emergency powers - *to what extent were Council officers’ proposals critically reviewed?*

interest groups (whether, for example, cyclists or residents’ associations !!).

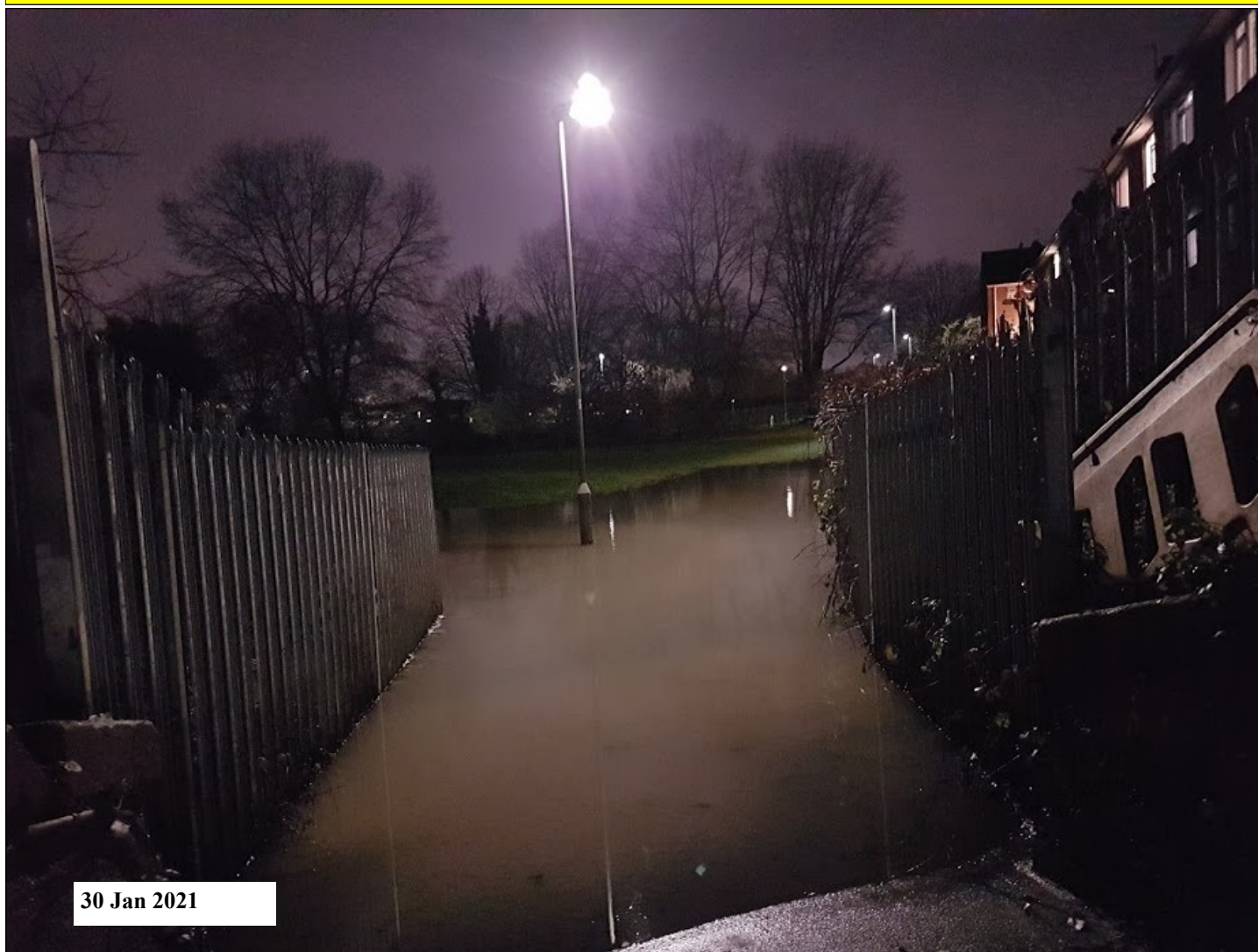
- an explanation as to how the Council will ensure that the results of the public consultation on the scheme (which seems to be based on self-selecting individuals sending emails to the Council’s traffic consultations email address - Traffic.Consultations@Barnet.gov.uk) are (A) truly representative of the opinions of the wider local population of road users in the parts of the Borough whose residents are affected by the scheme (i.e. who use or used to use the roads concerned, not merely those who live nearby) and are balanced and objective; and (B) not unfairly skewed by a higher rate of response from particular

Meanwhile, in the High Court, a judge has ordered the Mayor of London and TfL to “reconsider” and “substantially amend” another traffic scheme introduced under cover of the pandemic, on the basis that “ it was both unfair and irrational to introduce such extreme measures ...” and ““If the Mayor and TfL had proceeded more cautiously, monitoring the situation and acting upon evidence rather than conjecture, their proposals would have been proportionate to the difficulties which needed to be addressed”.

The circumstances are somewhat different from those in the High Road, but we hope that the Council will carefully consider the implications of the ruling!

DT

Chaville Court - still in a disgusting condition



30 Jan 2021

This picture was taken on Saturday evening 30 January 2021. It shows that the sewage drain has flooded to a depth of 10 inches. Thames Water was working on the sewage pipes a week earlier.

The disgusting conditions outside Chaville Court in Beaconsfield Road, in Beaconsfield Road were highlighted in our last (October 2020) edition.

Your Residents' Association brought the plight of Chaville Court to the attention of our local councillors and local MP, Theresa Villiers. Pressure was brought to bear on Thames Water and eventually they sent out a team to try and rectify the problem.

The Thames Water team worked valiantly to resolve the problem, as the photographs overleaf show. But, try as they may, when the rains came again, in late January, outside of Chaville Court sewage overflowed again, this time to considerable depth.

Of course, there is some drainage and eventually the overflow water drains away, leaving a thick disgusting sludge on the pathway, as well as on the parkland grass.

In trying to get to the bottom of who is responsible for this

hazardous health state of affairs, a Freedom of Information (FOI) request was submitted by your Residents' Association chairman, David Thompson.

The FOI revealed the inability of those in authority to deal with the mess. They knew about the conditions outside Chaville Court for years, but nothing happened. No one within Barnet Council offices was willing to take responsibility. Your Association tried to find out who in Barnet Council is responsible for ensuring water safety.

Barnet Homes run Chaville Court. Barnet Homes is a Barnet Council organisation which is an "Arms Length Management Organisation" or ALMO (with very long arms). Barnet Homes now operates under the umbrella of "The Barnet Group".

The responsibility of the sewage system belongs to Thames Water and one of the sewage manholes is on Network Rail land (a demarcation issue which was easily resolved when there was a will).

Freedom of Information revealed a sorry state of Affairs:

17 Dec 2018 - from Thames Water to Barnet Council - "there are other solution but these are expensive ... we do not propose to carry out further work".

26 February 2020 - Barnet Council to Thames Water - "... Could Thames Water issue us with a small note ... why any scheme is not possible".

17 June 2020 - Cllr Zinkin to Barnet Council official web site
"Cllr Sanz says Thames Water says it is too expensive to fix"

18 June 2020 - Barnet Council to Thames Water - "... we have received 2 enquires regarding foul water ... can an update be provided on priority".

1 July 2020 - Thames Water to Barnet Council - "... It is actually in my colleagues area".

5 July 2020 -someone to Cllr Zinkin
"... This might put additional pressure on Thames Water"

4 July 2020 - Cllr Zinkin to Barnet Council official web site
"I have not had a response to this query ... what is the problem in replying"

5 July 2020 Cllr Sanz to Cllr Zinkin - "... "flooded again"

22 July 2020 - Barnet Council to Thames Water -
"... one more enquiry from one resident. . .which details the issue"

26 August 2020 - Barnet council to Cllrs Sanz & Zinkin
"Thames Water is undertaking surveys ... A representative will visit the area ... a timescale of 1 -2 months"

3 October 2020 Cllr Sanz to someone in Barnet Council
A Tweet containing video of overflowing sewage drain

8 October 2020 someone in Barnet to Cllrs Sanz & Zinkin
"Thames Water ... will provide an update within 6 weeks.

What the above messages show is the inability of the Barnet agencies to deal with Thames Water. It is as though the profitability of Thames Water trumps the health of Barnet residents.

Compensation: As residents of Chaville House pay their rent to Barnet Homes, then obviously Barnet Homes should recompense the residents for the inadequate waste water service they have received over the years, which is an element of their rent. Barnet Homes/Barnet Group are responsible they should compensate residents of Chaville Court. They can get the money back from Thames Water.

The Future 1: Barnet Council must immediately fence off the field of Bethune Park (on the East side of Beaconsfield Road) as a health hazard. They should remove the polluted grass and soil to a distance of at least 50 metres from the pathway.

The Future 2: Barnet Council at the highest level must ensure that Thames Water replace the pipes that have been invaded by tree roots and that they say are the cause of the problem.

The Future 3: Your Residents' Association will continue to monitor the situation.



The picture above shows that the flooding outside Chaville Court spreads into the grass and play area of Bethune Park.



21 Jan 2021

The picture to the left shows the sewage water bubbling up from two manhole covers. One manhole is on the Barnet Council path, the other is behind the fence on Network Rail land.

The Tweet sent by Cllr Sanz on 3 October 2020 contains a video showing these same two drains overflowing.

With the structure Barnet Council - Barnet Homes - The Barnet Group - who owns the problem, who takes responsibility for dealing with Thames Water?

There are official bodies who may help in dealing with Thames Water - CC Water and OFWAT. It is not known if anybody in the chain of Barnet's organisations has approached either of these bodies.



23 Jan 2021

The picture above, as well as the one to the right show Thames Water sent out in force a team to try and deal with problem. The Thames Water operatives did what they could to clear the sewage pipes.

The blockage problem comes about by tree roots invading the joints in the ancient sewage pipes. The image on the page opposite shows that there are bushes and a tree about 10 metres from the manhole. These are easily removed by Barnet Council but the tree roots causing the blockage would still exist.

The only answer is to install new, robust sewage pipes. Maybe the problem should be escalated to the Chief Executive of the Council and he can deal with Thames Water.



23 Jan 2021

Barnet Council wants to charge for parking in our local parks

Barnet Council is looking to charge for parking in Council owned parks and playing fields. The principle was approved in January 2019. The plan is to introduce charges in stages, starting with Mill Hill Park, Old Courthouse Recreation Ground, Scratchwood Open Space and West Hendon Playing Fields but on the list for later consideration are the car parks at Bethune Park in Friern Barnet and at Brook Farm/ Wyatts Farm in Whetstone. The Council recently carried out a consultation about the phase 1 proposals.

FBWRA made submissions to the consultation including the following-

1. The primary purpose of parks is to provide places where residents can exercise and take recreation. They are not "profit-centres." [The Council hopes to raise £150,000 a year after costs]
2. Charges should not be set at a level which will discourage use of the park and should recognise that even moderate charges will mount up for frequent users. It should also be recognised that pensioners and others with limited incomes are significant users of parks. Thus generous "free of charge" periods suitable for participation in the activities usually carried on in the park concerned are always appropriate. [The suggested charges usually allow free parking for 30 minutes or 2 hours]
3. The principle of charging is acceptable where a car park is heavily used by commuters and others who are parking for reasons other than using the park, but only where the level of charges and design of the tariff are structured to discourage use by such persons, whilst not discouraging use by those who are using the park. In some locations it may be sufficient to set one or more one hour time periods where charges apply and unnecessary to impose charges on "park users" at other times.
4. The principle of charging is also acceptable where a car park is very heavily used by those using the relevant park (so that parking availability might reasonably be considered inadequate), but the level of charges and design of the tariff should be structured to encourage "turnover" of users and not to maximise revenue.
5. There is no point in imposing charges where free



Oak Hill Park has a car park for visitors. The park has a number of football pitches which are used by amateur teams over the weekend. A football match lasts 1 hour and 45 minutes but the time changing before the match and cleaning and changing after the match, is taken into account, players would need at least 2½ hours free parking (otherwise they may be tempted to park in the surrounding streets).

parking is available at other locations in the immediate vicinity to the car park in question as that will merely lead to increased congestion on the roads concerned. [This applies to both Bethune Park and at Brook Farm/ Wyatts Farm.]

6. Some at least of the car parks concerned are poorly maintained and poorly marked out. Whilst we see no objection to parking charges to raise income to adequately maintain the car parks on the basis that it is reasonable for those who use the car parks to contribute to their costs of maintenance, to set charges at a level greater than that required to achieve this objective would have the result that car drivers would be being treated unfairly. Consequently, except in those cases where the circumstances described in paragraphs 3 or 4 above apply, we would not support parking charges set at a level where there would be an element of contribution to the general running costs of the parks.

For future consultations better publicity is desirable to ensure the consultation is as wide as practicable. Such consultations should not be limited to a specific question asking for comments on the charging tariffs and a general "other comments" question, but should also ask specific questions on other relevant points, such as whether restrictions would be welcomed and if so why, and whether restrictions are required to ensure reasonable availability of parking spaces for all.

A TRIP TO THE TIP

Many of our readers will be familiar with the Summers Lane Tip- or the "Summers Lane recycling and reuse centre" as it is now officially known. The tip is operated by LondonEnergy Ltd (no space between the first two words), a company wholly owned by the North London Waste Authority (NLWA).

The tip closed during the "first lockdown" in 2020 but then reopened. It has remained open during the second and also the current lockdowns, although now has an advance booking system to minimise queuing time. For those unfamiliar with the detail, bookings are done online and require vehicle registration and the driver's name. There is a limit of 100 vehicles an hour.



At the very end of the second lockdown I made a trip to Summers Lane tip. There was quite a queue of vehicles. As I got closer the reason became apparent- every other vehicle space was coned off. Presumably this is to assist social distancing. So, capacity was reduced by 50%, but no-one running the site had thought to reduce the number of booking slots on the website- hence the queue. In practice the delay was only a few minutes as we edged forwards a few yards at a time, but during those few minutes many waiting vehicles would have their engines running continuously, spewing fumes into the air- not entirely consistent with the wider philosophy behind "recycling and reuse"

Now for some more serious stuff. Cocooned in my car, windows shut, I was fine, isolated from the outside world. No need for a mask. Then one of the staff at the tip was next to my car, shouting at me. Let's call him "Napoleon." Napoleon was shouting because he wanted to speak to me. I reluctantly wound down my car window. He wanted to know if I had a booking. He wanted to know my name. He wanted to check me off on his list of bookings. Fair enough, but he didn't need my name – the vehicle registration would be enough. Napoleon, who did not give the impression of a man who welcomed questions, explained he needed my name as looking for names was easier than looking for a registration. I queried this but gave in and told him. After all, I didn't want a "banning order".

The serious point here is that Napoleon was requiring every driver to speak to him, close up and in many cases when they were not masked up- as they were not expecting to need the mask until they got out of the car. Clearly not good practice in the middle of a deadly pandemic. LondonEnergy (no space) and NLWA need to

review operating procedures. If Napoleon and others like him find a list of vehicle registrations hard to work through, how about substituting "make of vehicle" for "name of driver" on the booking form? No need then to open windows.

Further serious stuff. "Visitors should wear a face covering and keep 2m from other people when on site" states the website booking information- but when I visited very many visitors were not wearing face coverings and distancing was spasmodic. There were plenty of staff on site but I saw none drawing the requirement to the attention of "visitors". More signage perhaps? Polite reminders?

Less serious stuff. I made a decision- this was worthy of an article in the Newsletter. I decided to take some general pictures (but not of staff) to illustrate it. Immediately a member of staff bore down on me. "You mustn't take photos. It's against site regulations". "Really? Is there a secret military installation here? A Polaris base?" (showing my age!) Napoleon's boss joined us and said he would get a copy of the regulations from the office to show me. I waited. A few minutes later he returned empty handed- I should contact LondonEnergy (no space), or NLWA (he didn't seem entirely sure which).

Not wanting them to think I was taking pictures to get at them in some way I drew myself up to my full height ("not tall") and explained that I was from a local residents' association and that the pictures were for our Newsletter as the arrangements at the tip would interest our members. Then I thanked them and went on my way.

DT

NEWS FROM FRIARY PARK - Nearly a year of lockdown

The lockdown has had a considerable effect on the Park. When the tight restrictions were imposed in March, the play area was closed and the skate park, table tennis and adult exercise area were all sealed off with barriers. We were allowed to exercise once a day but what better place to walk or run a circuit than the Park. Since then it has proven to be the lungs of Friern Barnet and visitor numbers have never been so high. Now that restrictions on recreation areas in public places have been eased the Park has become even more popular.

It's good that so many people are enjoying its facilities. The narrow paths have made it difficult to maintain social distancing so the verges have been well used as 'passing places'. This was easy in the summer but now that the ground has become soft and muddy it poses more difficulties.



The Friends Group has been unable to run its full range of activities such as litter picks but the Council has been generally efficient in emptying bins and tidying up once a week. The proprietors of the cafe rather unhelpfully decided to open at weekends only for takeaways which was a blow to many visitors. The bins become overfull as many visitors fail to take their used cups home with them.

The Friends have been keeping a close eye on the maintenance of the Park, but a troublesome spot has been where the stream exits the Park beneath Torrington Park. This has been partly caused by a build-up of leaves at the exit grille at the streams' exit, plus the flow of surface water down the grassy slope. A reminder to the Council normally results in prompt action to clear the obstruction.

In the autumn the Friends planted more daffodils by the

main gate and drive which are already showing their heads above the wet soil. There should be a good show this year and these will add to the colourful display which was produced last spring.

Essential maintenance work by Council workmen still needs to go on, but the soft nature of the ground can result in ruts caused by heavy vehicles. According to the Council, contractors should make the ground good before leaving the site.

The lockdown has prevented our friends Goodgym from paying their regular visits to help tidy the Park but we hope to see them back again when it gets easier. Our Union Jack is looking rather sad as it waves limply from the mast. The Friends intend to buy a new one to herald the arrival of spring and hopefully to signify greater Covid optimism!

RT

Membership of FBWRA costs only £5 per household per calendar year, payable on 1st January. It provides quarterly newsletters, e-mail updates, social events, meetings on local issues, and a chance to influence what happens in your neighbourhood. Application forms from FBWRA.org or from FBWRA Treasurer, 12 Macdonald Road N11 3JB

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Friern Barnet and Whetstone Residents' Association

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are non-political • We work for all residents in the area • We discuss issues with Local Councillors and Council Officials • Associated with the following bodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Federation of Residents' Associations of Barnet • The Finchley Society • Friends of Friary Park • Open Spaces Society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Friern Barnet & District Local History Society • Coppetts Wood Conservationists • The London Green Belt Council • Love Whetstone |
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Forthcoming Events

Incognito Theatre, Holly Park Road Performances are Sunday at 6pm, Monday - Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 3pm and 8pm.

All shows cancelled until further notice

FRIERN BARNET & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
start 7:45 p.m.

Meetings postponed until further notice