



HAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Safe and Healthy Streets Team
Camden

17 March 2024

Dear Safe and Healthy Streets Team,

This letter provides comments from the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum for your consultation on proposals for the Christchurch Hill and Flask Walk/Well Walk areas. Thank you for holding the meeting on 7 March regarding these proposals.

The Forum has serious concerns about the plans. They will reduce rather than enhance safety, especially by creating new opportunities for rat-running through the area. The proposals undo schemes that drastically reduced traffic and rat-running – schemes that involved years of work by Camden officials, including painstaking and positive consultation with the community.

We take exception to your citing of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan as justification for proposals that run against tenets and policies of the Plan. This has caused confusion among residents.

As you know, the Forum previously expressed support only for one measure – that is, widening the pavement at the top of Willow Road so as to increase safety around a theatre from which groups of people, especially children, will soon be exiting. But the changes you propose will in fact make the junction more rather than less dangerous.

Taking the elements of the proposals separately:

1) **Junction of Willow Road/New End Square/Flask Walk/Well Walk/Gayton Road.**

This junction is set to become an even more important cultural hub for Hampstead, as it includes Burgh House, the new Well Walk Theatre, and Livingstone Studio. However, these plans will funnel traffic downhill, encouraging fast-rat running straight through the junction. Already, many drivers ignore the No Entry signs and go straight through the junction from New End Square onto Willow Road and Gayton Road. These plans will actually legitimise and encourage such behaviour by making New End Square one way downwards and removing the requirement to turn left along Well Walk. The junction will thus be busier and more dangerous.

The proposed changes will also make Willow Road more dangerous: cars already speed both up and down the road, and are likely to do so even more. Residents of Willow Road previously submitted to you evidence of traffic flows and speeds. This showed that 15% vehicles using Willow Road exceed the 20mph limit, with top speeds well in excess of 40mph. These proposals will worsen this problem.

Our understanding is that the plans would seriously damage the business of Burgh House, probably the most important historic, cultural and event venue in Hampstead. Vehicles attending weddings and other events, as well as bin lorries, would be unable to reach the house.

Burgh House is also the only polling station in Hampstead village.

We continue to support widening the pavement of Willow Road on the southwestern side, between Gayton Road and Flask Walk. In this one aspect, the proposals do not go far enough, as the pavement could be wider. This would reduce the risks considerably as it would narrow the wide space between the No Entry signs on either side of the road, making it more obvious that entry is forbidden from New End Square/Flask Walk. No parking spaces would need to be removed. Traffic would be slowed. This would make it safer for pedestrians, including those visiting the Well Walk Theatre.

While we understand the intent of paving over the north side of the 'triangle', we do not see how the junction could be made safe if this were done. Forcing traffic to turn left along Well Walk has been a very effective measure to slow and reduce traffic. The measure that would most enhance safety on the junction would be an ANPR camera monitoring the existing No Entry at the top of Willow Road.

Overall, therefore, we oppose making New End Square one-way. We favour retaining the existing triangle, reinforced by a camera on the existing No Entry. We support widening the pavement at the top of Willow Road, which would narrow the gap between the two No Entry signs and make the junction safer.

2) **Cannon Lane/Holford Road/Cannon Place/Christchurch Hill**

The changes proposed to this group of streets are unnecessary and, in some aspects, dangerous.

a) **Holford Road**

Northern End: The proposal to site the northernmost entrance to the Healthy School Street scheme at the top of Holford Road would result in a drop-off loop being created for school parents whereby cars could stop/park near to the entrance of Queen Mary House and then exit through the small slip road back on to East Heath Road (or vice versa). Creating traffic congestion here would be ill-advised, especially given the site allocation for the large-scale redevelopment of the adjacent Queen Mary's House site in the draft Camden Local Plan.

It would be more in line with both the intention of the scheme and Camden policy to pedestrianise the small slip road and place the ANPR camera at the junction where Queen Mary's House and Holford Road meet East Heath Road.

Closing the slip road would also allow, in its place, for the creation of a pedestrian crossing long called-for by residents to link the Vale of Health pedestrian access path to Holford Road.

Southern End: No Entry signs were placed in the early 2000's at the junction of Holford Road with Cannon Place. The street was narrowed to bring an end to the previous practice of larger vehicles driving down Holford Road into Cannon Place or Christchurch Hill. The changes introduced throughout the area at that time made it virtually impossible for large vehicles to be able to safely navigate and exit the area via Well Road so this measure was needed as a permanent deterrent.

This has been a successful measure and should be retained. The current proposals seek, however, to widen this access to include for a cycle lane to run north up Holford Road. In order to retain the benefits introduced by the previous scheme with the narrower vehicle access, it would surely be safer to use a kerb segregated cycle lane at this junction. There is enough space at this location to provide for that. It would also be safer for cyclists not to have to ride head on into oncoming traffic through what is essentially a junction on a blind corner.

b) Hampstead Square/Cannon Place Pedestrian Area

The proposals for this area represent a dangerous step backwards.

The pedestrian area that lies between Cannon Place and Hampstead Square was the most integral and successful element introduced by the original East Hampstead Traffic Calming Scheme.

Alongside the no-entry sign at the foot of Holford Road, it was put in place to defeat the long-established rat run used by motor vehicles looking to bypass both East Heath Road and Heath Street by instead driving up Christchurch Hill (and then on to Holford Road - or Hampstead Square and Elm Row).

In its initial incarnation, single removable bollards were placed at each end of the fire path on the pedestrian area to allow for bicycles and emergency vehicles to continue to have access. Unfortunately, however, the use of bollards provided that the rat-run essentially remained open for motorbikes. Camden's aim to make this area a peaceful haven for pedestrians was therefore defeated and there were a number of accidents and near-misses that led to the rapid replacement of the bollards with the current fire gates.

The plan to re-open the fire path on Hampstead Square is therefore a dangerous step backwards for pedestrians and children who play on "the square" (as it is called locally). Additionally, this area is also the emergency assembly area for both Christ

Church School and Christ Church for whom all of the area is needed in such an event (or during any practice).

Those cyclists that do very occasionally cross the area, almost all of whom are local users, have never complained at having to dismount and walk across and doing so is a small price to pay for both the continued closure of the previous rat run and for pedestrian safety. We therefore strongly urge the council not to undo previous good work at this junction.

c) Cannon Lane

The combined effects of making Cannon Lane one way eastbound and the closure of its link through to Well Road will be to force any traffic entering Cannon Lane to exit only via an already dangerous junction with East Heath Road. Further narrowing that junction will only serve to exacerbate that danger and residents are rightfully very concerned by these proposals.

There are no existing problems with two-way traffic between Cannon Lane and Well Road and there is no reason therefore for its closure to motor vehicles. It should remain open.

The relocation of parking spaces to the opposite side of Cannon Lane from their existing location is very dangerous for the occupants of both No. 4 and No. 5. There is no pavement lying behind those spaces to protect those residents from oncoming traffic when they exit their properties. Whilst the existing spaces may not be ideal, they are better than no protection at all and should be retained in their current location. They also act as a buffer to slow motor vehicles down as they turn down through Cannon Lane.

d) Cannon Place

By siting the north-eastern entrance to the Healthy School Street scheme in Cannon Place, motor vehicles will be able to drive into Squire's Mount and out through Cannon Lane, creating a drop-off loop for school parents which is essentially shifting the school traffic issues 'down the road'. It would be both safer and more sensible to relocate any ANPR camera at the junction of Squire's Mount and East Heath Road. Doing so would also serve to remove the unacceptable visual clutter that would be sited adjacent to the historic cannons and designated heritage assets of Cannon Place

e) Christ Church

The proposals will prevent Christ Church from accessing its car park during the scheme hours. We understand that the Church wrote to the council prior to the public consultation with their concerns but that they did not receive a response.

There is therefore clearly a need for direct discussions with the church to both understand and seek to mitigate (or even avoid) any potential loss of income so that

the church's economic viability is not put into question. It is also unfortunate the staff of Christ Church School would not be exempt from the proposed scheme.

f) Cannon Place/Holford Road Blue Badge Space

The siting of the proposed Blue Badge space alongside the pedestrian area between Hampstead Square and Cannon Place is questionable in terms of location. If the fire path is re-opened to any kind of traffic then users of this new space are put at risk of collision. It would make more sense therefore to put this bay at the top of Cannon Place alongside the gated car park belonging to Christ Church. This would allow for safe and unimpeded access for users of the space to both the church and school.

3) Flask Wask/Gardnor Road

The changes proposed here have two elements: building out the pavement at the junction of the two streets, and widening the pavement on the south side of Flask Walk. Gardnor Road is a cul-de-sac along which cars and vans routinely reverse so as to exit. The current layout, with a wide entrance to Gardnor Road, allows drivers to reverse out safely. But narrowing the entrance would mean that drivers would always need to reverse out of Gardnor Road straight into traffic. This would be difficult and dangerous. Secondly, we fear that narrowing Flask Walk could cause problems as vehicles would only be able to go along it in one direction at once. Drivers coming the other way would have to wait either on the Willow Road junction or alongside Flask Walk Green. There could be queues, jams, frustration – and more noise and vehicle emissions.

The intended route for pedestrians along Flask Walk is on the north side, where there is a wide pavement all the way from the High Street to the Heath. There seems no reason to disrupt this.

4) Signage/buildouts

The proposals would require a sharp increase in the amount of street signs. We oppose this as contrary to policy TT2(4) of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, policy TT2(6) opposes unnecessary barriers and buildouts that detract from the area's historic character 'or are likely to worsen rather than reduce street congestion.'

The Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan seeks an area that is 'safe and walkable, with good public transport and alternatives to use of cars.' The key word is 'safe'. It is not acceptable for Camden to introduce measures in order to comply with blanket transport policies without paying attention to safety or to the particular character and dynamics of the streets affected.

We urge Camden to withdraw these plans and reconsider the area's particular needs.

We are copying this response to Councillor Adam Harrison, with whom we were originally in contact with regard to Willow Road, and to our Hampstead Town Ward Councillors, Stephen Stark and Linda Chung, both of whom are *ex officio* members of our committee.

With thanks for your consideration of these comments,

Alexander Nicoll

Chair

Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum

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