

**Letter from the Chairman of the Hampstead Heath Management Committee
Bob Hall to interested parties about proposed changes at Parliament Hill.**

Dear

Vehicle access to Parliament Hill from Gordon House Road

Thank you for your e-mailed letter concerning the proposed access route for vehicles from Gordon House Road.

I do assure you that we are well aware of the issues which concern residents at Lissenden Gardens and adjoining roads and others who have commented. However, some misrepresentations have arisen in the media and elsewhere with respect to what is actually proposed, so that some suggestions are being made which are wide of the mark.

I attach a plan which shows existing and proposed routes and number of vehicle movements. As you can see, the only “new” section runs along the eastern and southern edges of the existing cricket field. The track will be approximately 3 metres wide and 200 metres long. Essential Corporation Heath support vehicles, together with some contractors’ vehicles (such as deliveries to the relocated café and postal vans) will use the whole route from Gordon House Road. The maximum permitted speed for vehicles on the entire access route will be 5 mph. Most Heath staff working at the Depot will be required to park at the Lido car park area and walk to the offices since the number of parking spaces at the Parliament Hill staff office will be cut to two.

The proposal arose following the preparation in 2007 of the first ever comprehensive Strategic Management Plan for the Heath. This involved a large consultation process with local, regional and special interest groups. The intention behind the Strategic Plan was that, having taken the broad look across the whole of the Heath, we would then expect to have to look in detail at particular areas where issues, needs or problems had been identified in the Plan.

The consultation highlighted the fact that the Parliament Hill Triangle is an extremely important gateway to the Heath as a whole, being used by 3 – 4 million people a year. It showed, in particular, that it is an area of conflict between pedestrians and motorised vehicles. Given that it is an area with such intense use, is a focal point for sporting activities and is close to communities which reflect social deprivation, it was considered to be the first area of the Heath as a whole which required close area based review.

The possibility of obtaining Heritage Lottery funding towards part of the cost of proposals (under the Parks for People funding programme) arose at short notice, requiring a submission by 30 September 2008. This presented an opportunity to address some of the issues relating to Parliament Hill made clear by the Strategic Plan. The HLF bid was produced after intensive consultation last summer.

As you will know, the present main vehicular access point to Parliament Hill is from Highgate Road, which is also the busiest pedestrian access point on to the Heath. In

view of the tragic fatality in 2003 at Golders Hill Park (involving a collision between a contractor's vehicle and an elderly man on a shared access route) a primary concern is to avoid any such accident happening again or any other form of avoidable accident. Hence a core aim of the plan leading to the HLF bid is to separate pedestrian from vehicular use of access routes as far as is reasonably achievable.

There is an implication in the comments that we have received that, given the removal of various service vehicle movements to the Kenwood Staff Depot, the thus reduced usage of the link from Highgate Road will be manageable and that the City should develop means of managing that rather than increase the use of the access route from Gordon House Road. If the existing Highgate Road access was retained, the consequence of the removal of the vehicular movements to Kenwood Staff Yard would mean that 24 to 30 service vehicle movements would still remain on that access way. The relevant factor to be taken into account is that these 24 to 30 vehicle movements will, per day, be shared with 3,500 pedestrian movements, whereas the Gordon House Road proposal will involve 22 vehicle movements per day which, because of the new pedestrian only path to be created (see attached plan), will not be competing with any pedestrian movements along the route. It was this comparison that persuaded the Consultative Committee and the Hampstead Heath Management Committee that the balance of interest of the Heath users in general supported the new proposals with respect to Gordon House Road.

We were, and are, very well aware of the issue with respect to the interface between the Gordon House Road access way and the pedestrian access to the Heath from Lissenden Gardens. We have always made it abundantly clear that it is fully accepted that a satisfactory way has to be found of minimising as much as possible the potential for conflict between pedestrians and vehicles at this point. This is something which has to be done in any event - that is, whether or not the proposed new Gordon House Road access route is implemented.

If the construction of the proposed Heritage Centre and relocation of the café proceed, I anticipate that construction vehicles will use a section of the access way from Highgate road which will be fenced off. Such vehicles will not use the Gordon House access route.

Meetings have been held with the residents of Lissenden Gardens and adjoining roads on 22 September and 12 December 2008. To help clarify matters further, we will be holding a site meeting on Saturday 14 February at 10 am, starting at the Lido car park to walk the route and explain the proposals. You are most welcome to attend.

Yours sincerely

Bob Hall
Chairman, Hampstead Heath Management Committee