

There has been considerable discussion over the past weeks about the proposal to provide a new access route for vehicles to the existing Maintenance Depot and Staff Yard at Parliament Hill on the Heath. The issue has been clouded by inaccurate comments leading, it would seem, to a growing misunderstanding both with respect to what new “road” is proposed and what it is intended to achieve.

As part of an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to help fund general improvement to the Parliament Hill area (including finishing restoration of the listed 1930’s Lido where the City is providing £1.8 Million as match funding), we included a solution to a potentially dangerous situation which exists on a stretch of the busiest access way on the Heath (from Highgate Road along the Broadwalk to the junction just south-west of the bandstand) as a result of shared use between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. The proposal is that a different route for access by vehicles to the depot and staff yard should be established. This involves creating a length of new access way some 200 meters long and some 3 metres wide which will run along a very short section of the edge of the Heath, namely the southern and eastern boundaries of the cricket field immediately to the south west of the depot/yard.

Despite some of the assertions made, there was considerable consultation with the public last summer before submission of the bid to HLF on 30 September 2008. Some 90 written comments, showing varying degrees of opposition to the new access way proposal, were received, together with other non-supportive comments at road-shows held during the consultation period. There was however, as a result of the consultation, extensive support for the proposals, including the new access way proposal.

Before reaching decisions, the City is required to consult the statutorily established Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee, the advice from which is both much valued and carefully considered.

All submissions were carefully evaluated, but the comparison between the existing level of pedestrian use of the present access way compared to the alternative proposed (which will not involve any pedestrian movements along the alternative route suggested), persuaded the Consultative Committee and subsequently the City’s Hampstead Heath Management Committee that the balance of interest of the Heath users in general supported the new proposals.

The City of London has held the Heath since 1989 and thereafter managed it at no cost to the taxpayer. It has a duty to seek to ensure that the Heath (which has over 7 million visitors each year) is as safe as possible for its users. It is wonderful that people love the Heath so dearly and of course it is appreciated that decisions can raise strong feelings; but, in the end, after proper consultation, we have to take responsibility for a decision.

Whilst our view is that this proposal is a good solution to the problem at the Broadwalk, we have made it abundantly clear is that if there is another approach to

the pedestrian/vehicle conflict, then this can be considered provided it is viable, it can be resourced and it solves the pedestrian/vehicle conflict problem.

It has been suggested that the reduction by about a third in vehicular traffic presently accessing the Parliament Hill depot, following removal of some of the activities to the Kenwood Staff Yard, means that the continuing use of the Broadwalk by pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles can managed safely. We do not agree. However, this point can be looked at again very carefully, by reference to accepted norms and standards, to assess its validity and application with respect to the Broadwalk.

It is anticipated that the result of the HLF bid will be known in the next 4 to 6 weeks. That being so, it seems sensible therefore to wait until then before launching into further detailed consideration of the matter.

The City has a long record over the last century or so of preserving open spaces from development or dereliction: Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches, Highgate Wood. It was privileged to have the opportunity to continue this custodianship on behalf of the public with respect to Hampstead Heath in 1987. It has since then spent some £85 Million on the Heath out of its own resources. It is willing to continue this investment. It deals with proposals with respect to the management of the Heath rationally and transparently. We have been open and accurate about what has been proposed.

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Chairman, Hampstead Heath Management Committee

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