

Letter to the Editor of the Evening Standard from the Chairman of the Hampstead Heath Management Committee – an abridged version appeared in the newspaper on Friday 6th February 2009

Sir,

Your news story and "Save the Heath" editorial in Friday's paper states that we are proposing a new segregated access track for service vehicles so that they can get to 'new offices' we plan to build and that the route will go across a cricket pitch, cut across a number of paths and that it 'will pass right by the children's playground'. All of these are untrue.

Let's be clear: the plan is to make London's glorious Hampstead Heath a safer place by taking the service vehicles away from the pedestrian paths they must now use and put most of them on a discrete route along a very short part of the edge of the Heath.

Of course it would be better to have no vehicles on the Heath at all - but that is not realistic. We aim to keep this heavily used London "green lung" clean and maintained for the over 7 million visitors who use it every year. Some service vehicle access is necessary: the rubbish has to be carted away, the toilets cleaned, the trees and grass maintained.

So, to cut the risk of accidents, we propose extending an existing boundary track and making it vehicles-only. Anyone who takes a dispassionate look at the map will see that the plan makes sense - indeed it has been supported by many local amenity and conservation groups represented on the statutorily-established Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee including both the Heath and Hampstead and Highgate Societies, following wide consultation.

If the ever more-visited Hampstead Heath is to remain a green oasis, there have to be some changes to help it cope with the pressures of the urban citizenry that surround it. This is a modest and carefully-planned change that will enhance the Heath for users.

Bob Hall