

Driving to a standstill



By Poppy

Guess the issue that comes up on the doorstep most often. (Rogue councillors? (close! and always entertaining in a perverse kind of way.) Privatisation? (passionate, but not the most common). The top issue is traffic: parking, speeding, congestion, parking roads, on and on. It doesn't take a genius to work out that we have a car crisis in Barnet. But I see no official acknowledgement of this. Yes, the council plans an additional 60,000 new homes in the borough and envisages Barnet's population growing by about 50% between 2001-2040. But where is the recognition of the corollaries to this: that there will be ever more cars but no prospect of appreciably increasing road space?

Instead I see a council driving blind – where to? It builds sleeping policemen then takes them away; introduces high parking charges then reduces them;



paints cycle lanes then unpaints them; brings in CPZs, speed limits, road widening and road narrowing schemes. These measures always fail to solve the problem, and often create other problems. The CPZs were a terrible own-goal for the Tory administration and a terrible waste of all of our council tax. They also shove the problem sideways to adjacent roads, whose residents complain strangers use them leaving the residents nowhere to park. High parking charges are blamed for killing the high street. *Ad hoc* speed limits create absurdities such as turning off Mays Lane (max 20mph) into a tiny side road and being able to speed up (to 30mph). There's also the paradoxical situation of speeding and congestion plaguing residents all at once (Don't take my word for it; ask Victoria Road-ers). Confusing? They are!

What to do? I usually say that I'm fine with the critical analysis, but if you want solutions, pay me! But as a start, here are my suggestions of what **not** to do:

- Don't deny the crisis. (Cooee, Barnet Council, anyone home?)
- Don't put your faith in the "market" - its supposed self-regulatory powers, and assume that once we reach gridlock, the problem will have solved itself.
- Don't trust experts who reckon they know the answer. (Remember Dr Beeching...)
- Don't let an autocratic power to impose the solution. (Sound familiar?)
- Don't accept a single-bullet solution to this complex problem.

Most important, don't believe it that I'm calling for all cars to be banned (however tempting that may seem).

What am I calling for? A public discussion to agree what to do together. Start by listening and this is some of what you told me on the doorstep: One Falkland Road resident suggested allowing each household to park only one vehicle on the road. Cyclists are sure that better (well, any) cycling provision will make a big difference, as would making walking easier and safer. Someone else talked about expanding a streetcar-hire system so people don't have to own a car: We could try requiring leases on new builds to preclude car ownership and at the same time make public transport cheaper and easier: If they can do it in Copenhagen?

Lets stop driving blind to a complete standstill. Here's my prediction (for free). Eventually something more drastic than 20mph zones near schools will become imperative. Whatever measures are then taken, they will need our support to succeed.

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