

Proposal to Replace Barrier on Firs Park Avenue Between Width Restrictions
with a Camera Controlled Gap for Emergency Access

Frequently Asked Questions

BACKGROUND

1) Who is making this proposal?

Enfield Council is making this proposal. The Council is the highway and traffic authority for the road in question. It is responsible for the maintenance of the current infrastructure and for the purchase and maintenance of any infrastructure that might be introduced to replace it.

2) How has this come about?

In Autumn 2019 officers from the traffic and transportation department met with representatives of London Ambulance Service (LAS) by way of early stage engagement on its programme of Quieter Neighbourhood projects. In response to the idea of future closure points across the network, LAS highlighted issues their crews face with negotiating locked barriers. LAS report that typically keys are not carried and that crews detour around such features. Their estimated delay factor is 60 seconds, relative to a target deadline of 7 minutes (less 90 seconds for operator/dispatch time) to reach the most critically ill or injured patients. Providing a gap with a permanent camera to deter misuse by other drivers was discussed as a suitable alternative. Subsequently, the proposal to upgrade three pre-existing sites was agreed, with our contact at LAS selecting the sites felt to offer greatest benefit to ambulance crews and patient outcomes. Firs Park Avenue was one of the three sites nominated.

CONSULTATION

3) Who has been consulted? Why was the whole street/area not consulted?

The department is clear on the best arrangement that removes the impediment of the lockable barrier for ambulance crews but retains a deterrent on misuse by drivers of non-emergency vehicles. It is also very confident that the proposal will result in a negligible change to traffic levels and speeds in Firs Park Avenue. Accordingly, the department did not seek input from the community in advance of making a proposal but moved directly to the statutory consultation exercise. Nor did it see necessity in notifying via letter-drop all the households within the estate. The regulations prescribe the placement of notices in the street, adverts in local papers and the London Gazette, and proposals being passed to the emergency services etc; all of which was done. Letters were sent to the 44 households nearest the barrier, who might otherwise have seen changes taking place at a later date and not known if they were planned work or something else. Notification was also sent to ward councillors to coincide with the letter drop. These measures to ensure a degree of local awareness were considered a good match to the minor scope of the change that is likely to result in terms of traffic movements.

FEARS ABOUT SPEED / VOLUME of TRAFFIC

4) Won't the proposal exacerbate the speeding problems?

Presently the existing width restrictions impose a pronounced slowing effect on domestic traffic and – along with a ring of similar control features on nearby streets - prevent drivers of large goods vehicles from departing the main roads in search of less appropriate back-routes through the estate. The department anticipates that the prospect of a penalty charge notice (PCN) will prove a strong deterrent on misuse of the gap by drivers of vehicles large or small, and hence that the proposal will

see no material increase in volume or speed of traffic, present no problems in terms of road safety, and make and no tangible change to the character of the street.

5) Shouldn't the focus, when funding is limited, be on traffic calming measures?

It was as part of the Quieter Neighbourhoods initiative (referenced above) that a perception survey was carried out across the area in late 2019. From this, the department has a good understanding of the community's views on how their streets function and how they could be made better. However, like most of the department's scheme work, the funding is largely derived from sustainable travel contributions from Transport for London. Were it not for the interruption in funding associated with the pandemic, it is likely that the perception study would by now have been followed by some firm plans for the Firs Lane Quieter Neighbourhood; and that these would have been focussed around reducing both the speed and volume of traffic.

The reason the present proposal is able to be taken forward during the period when other scheme work is on hold relates to how it is funded. Revenue from parking and traffic operations can legally only be spent on limited areas, including measures such as this. The further benefit of a camera over a barrier is that the barrier tends to be an ongoing maintenance burden given the need to make repairs etc. By contrast the camera has a small maintenance cost and over time the costs are likely to be offset by the monies claimed from the occasional bad driver breaching the restriction point. Hence unlike a traffic calming scheme – or Quieter Neighbourhood scheme – this proposal benefits from a specific source of applicable funding and will tend to recoup its costs over time. Hence, the department seeks to use this opportunity to provide benefits to ambulance response times whilst other work has necessarily been put on hold.

6) What studies have been undertaken?

The department has previous, recent traffic studies from across the area that will hopefully go on to inform its Quieter Neighbourhoods work, when this is able to resume. It has not undertaken studies on traffic, road safety, noise, pollution and so forth specifically relating to this proposal because it does not anticipate this proposal causing any material change to traffic patterns.

SIGNS, FINES, CAMERAS and LAWLESS DRIVERS

7) Which vehicles will be allowed through the restriction point? Will there be camera signs?

Any driver breaching the proposed No Motor Vehicles signs at the gap will be liable to receive a PCN. The only exemption is for emergency service vehicles during a blue-light event. Camera warning signs will be placed at the installation to reinforce to drivers the need to comply with the restriction.

8) Would the camera capture every offence? What is the penalty? What if fines go unpaid?

The camera would capture every offence in each direction, day or night. The system requires 'manual' review of the footage of interest before issuing a PCN but this work is already undertaken for various other sites and it is not anticipated that additional staff resources would be required arising from this proposal. Rather it is anticipated that the system will be largely self-enforcing with very few contraventions each day. The penalty is £130 for each offence, discounted to £65 if paid within 14 days. Unpaid fines would be pursued as a debt, possibly resulting in seizure of property.

9) Could a lawless driver routinely avoid PCNs by obscuring their registration plates?

Should the camera record such activity the footage would be passed to the police. Someone using this tactic routinely is likely to be locally based as well as a frequent user of the street and hence should not expect to go undetected for long.

BENEFITS TO AMBULANCE CREWS

10) Who is this supposed to help?

Switching the barrier for a camera could help fire crews in occasional circumstances in reaching a fire in the estate more quickly. It also avoids the problems of gates being left open, which persists at various sites across the network and has been confirmed in the responses received to this proposal.

Following discussions with the LAS, they advised that, if a number of these gates were removed it could save critical minutes when responding to emergency calls which, they say, could save lives. It is, therefore, anticipated that the main beneficiary would be ambulance crews and their patients; i.e. the residents of Enfield.

11) Can't ambulances already use the width restriction part of the road when gaining access?

Lone-responder vehicles (i.e. paramedic cars) would certainly have been able to do so, and some older style ambulances may also have fitted through the narrowed section of the road. However, the department understands that the latest fleet of ambulances includes a larger box section at the rear of the vehicle meaning its footprint now extends beyond that of the base vehicle (a transit-style van) of the like that residents may see passing through the width restriction. Depending on the exact tolerance applied to the original construction of the gaps, the larger ambulance is liable to be too wide to pass such features, or certainly too wide to pass without difficulty.

12) Why does the ambulance service need this kind of help? And why now? What has changed? Why can ambulance drivers not simply use keys to open barriers?

At a meeting last Autumn LAS officers were able to set out some of the problems their service faces, particularly with regard to lockable barriers. Further London-wide guidance from LAS has been issued to boroughs since, reinforcing their strong preference for councils to avoid placing locking barriers at key access points.

Normal practice by local authorities, historically, has been to provide a lockable barrier where there is need to delete through-traffic but retain emergency access, with the assumption that this serves all emergency services well enough. However, LAS points out that their vehicles do not carry the same surplus crew-members as fire crews and may be less able to improvise with physical measures such as cutting off a jammed padlock or lifting away a gate, if finding the infrastructure damaged. Their crews also make far more trips around the network than fire crews. LAS receives 5700 calls per day, which is 300 or 400 times more calls than London Fire Brigade.

The local and regional population level continues to rise while levels of physical activity are lower than in previous generations to the detriment of public health, meaning demand on the ambulance service is higher now than in the past. The increased population tends to bring increased road congestion, but not more available lanes of road to allow ambulances to pass traffic. Under modern levels of scrutiny, LAS is set challenging response targets to respond to emergency calls. Their target deadline to reach a patient who is critically ill or injured is 7 minutes less 90 seconds for operator/dispatch time. They typically find that encountering a barrier adds 60 seconds of delay, which is a significant amount of time relative to that deadline and when every passing second may increase the likelihood of death or of a permanent brain injury etc. to the patient. Replacing a barrier with a camera at key access points avoids an ambulance driver remaining on less direct routes for fear of not finding a barrier accessible or of facing delays while fumbling for keys.

The department's conclusion is that ambulance crews do face a different set of issues to fire crews; and that there is a clear benefit to the health outcomes of Enfield residents in trying to remove barriers at key sites to shorten response times.

Improvements in camera technology mean that they can now be mounted on existing lamp-posts, rather than on large bespoke masts, reducing costs. So there exists today an opportunity to allow easier access for ambulances whilst providing low-cost camera enforcement against misuse that did not exist in previous years.

13) Why change the Firs Park Avenue feature and not other nearby features, or all of them?

Residents will appreciate that the ring of features intended to deter misuse of the estate by large vehicles means similar control points to that on Firs Park Avenue are sited at Ridge Road, Rowantree Road and Halstead Road near their junctions with B154 Church Street. The view of LAS, as the department understands it, is that allowing unhindered access at just one of these four locations will resolve most concerns about gaining swift access to patients within the estate. The Firs Park Avenue junction is the first one encountered by ambulances departing the A10 or crossing the A10 on Church Street when despatched from Windmill Road ambulance station, and accordingly, this is their most strategic point of entry to the estate.

COSTS AND REVENUES

14) How much will the changes cost?

The cost of purchasing the camera is roughly £25k. Its installation on a lamp-post costs roughly £200. The remaining work in removing the gate and adding signs brings the full total to roughly £30k.

15) How can the installation be afforded?

Revenue from parking and traffic operations can legally only be spent on limited areas, including measures such as this. The further benefit of a camera over a barrier is that the barrier tends to be an ongoing maintenance burden given the need to make repairs etc. as set out above. By contrast the camera has a small maintenance cost attached and over time the costs are likely to be offset by the monies claimed from the occasional bad driver breaching the restriction point.

16) How much does the Council predict it will make in PCN revenue?

The Council did not make any such calculation in advance of making the proposal. It is merely seeking the opportunity to use the affordable technology now available to ease the passage of ambulances around the network.

NEXT STEPS

17) What happens next?

The Council will review the comments submitted and is likely to have made a decision by the end of September as to whether the proposal will go forward or otherwise.

18) How can I challenge the process?

Should it be decided to proceed with the scheme, anyone feeling that the Council has not followed the correct legal procedure could apply to seek a judicial review within six-weeks of the traffic order being made.