

RE Parking at Northumberland Heath.txt

Thank you for your various emails, please accept my apologies for not replying, however we have been investigating your comments and have found the following:

Parking Services (which is part of Bexley Council and is the client of the parking enforcement contract with VinciPark Services [the contractor]), received complaints from various members of the public in relation to increased congestion caused in Bexley Road, Northumberland Heath area as a result of the closure of part of Brook Street.

The Parking Manager and a Senior Parking Officer visited the location on the morning of Tuesday 19th September 2006 and concluded that in the interest of public safety and to ease both traffic flow and congestion caused by increased traffic movement, it was indeed necessary to introduce peak time (Monday to Saturday 07:30 to 10:00 and 16:00 to 19:00), parking place suspensions for the 3 x parking places in Bexley Road, from approximately 351 Bexley Road to 265 Bexley Road as this was the section of the road considered to be most affected by the increased traffic.

Unfortunately, there was no prior consultation possible with either the residents or businesses in relation to the implementation of the parking place suspensions as the suspensions were not programmed into the Brook Street works and the decision to suspend the parking places was made by the Parking Manager in response to public concerns. It is of course unfortunate that consultation could not be entered into, however, if the suspensions had been programmed into the work then of course the normal procedure would have been to consult those residents and businesses who may be affected.

The notices of suspension were placed Tuesday evening by the Parking Attendants on instruction by the Council, as the suspensions were peak time only, it was considered that the notices should be placed in support of the time plates not over them, as the parking places could still be used by the motorists between 10:00 and 16:00. The Parking Manager considered that this approach would minimise the impact on the businesses whilst at the same time it would also prevent severe congestion during peak traffic flow periods. A further peak time suspension of the parking place opposite 209 to 219 approximately was introduced, as a further review showed that there was a bottle neck of traffic being caused by vehicles parked in this parking place, due to the increased traffic flow as a result of the Brook Street works.

As the suspensions were placed in the interest of public safety to resolve an immediate traffic related problem, temporary suspension notices were placed as it was not possible within the timescale to erect more robust ones. I have been assured that sufficiently more robust signs have now been erected, although the digital images taken of the original suspension notices show quite clearly that they met the requirement for a suspension notice and accordingly, I have found no evidence to suggest that the Council is "targetting unsuspecting motorists" as the intention of the notices is quite clear.

There is a robust statutory process in place, (as set down in Section 66 and Schedule 6 of the Road Traffic Act 1991), which any motorist who considers that they have cause to contest the issue of a PCN issued to them, may follow. Correspondence received by the Council within the statutory time limits will be considered in full with each case assessed on its own merits. All evidence, such as correspondence received and sent, the hand written pocket book notes made by the Parking Attendant and any digital evidence provided by either party, etc, will also be reviewed by qualified back office Council Parking Officers, before a decision is made on a case by case basis.

Due to the nature of the suspensions and the circumstances surrounding their implementation, it is of course essential that the suspended areas, (and of course those sections of the road covered by parking restrictions already), are enforced effectively. To achieve compliance it has been necessary to establish a high profile presence of VinciPark Parking Attendants who also serve as a deterrent to motorists considering parking in contravention of any parking regulations or restrictions.

I trust that the above has answered your questions, should you have any further

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queries please feel free to email them direct by return or to contact Parking
Services: 020 8294 6172.

Regards

Greg Tippett
Assistant Parking Manager
Bexley Parking Services
Bexley Council

Mr Tippett

I am disappointed to see that a response which took so long to write resulted in explanations that are absolute rubbish!

I have talked with several traders on Northumberland Heath and not one of them is aware of any person who complained of increased congestion resulting from the works in Brook Street. This stretch of road is congested at the best of times and removing the parking bays would have no effect whatsoever as there are natural bottlenecks at both ends – the first caused by the mini-roundabout at the intersection with Colyers Lane and Brook Street and the other by the fact that unrestricted parking is allowed on both sides of Bexley Road from the point below the intersection with Avenue Road and Horsa Road.

The HGV traffic coming from the bakery on Belmont Road, traffic that would normally use Brook Street, cannot use Mill Road in lieu as there is no entry. It is doubtful these large lorries would be able to negotiate the one-way system around Northumberland Park so they probably travelled the opposite way down Belmont Road and completely avoided Northumberland Heath, thus not adding to the congestion.

The normal parking situation in Brook Street makes it a bad driving experience in normal circumstances as vehicles travelling in opposite directions can never pass comfortably, let alone when one of them is a van or lorry. But very little traffic at the top turns left into Bexley Road. Most of it either turns right towards Bexley Heath or crosses into Barnehurst Avenue which is used as a shortcut to Crayford and University Way.

The only complaints I have heard concern the usual situation in Northumberland Heath with far too much traffic travelling at speed through an often-crowded secondary shopping centre. If the council was really concerned about public safety, it might be doing something to lower the speed limit, not making the public an excuse for its own illegal actions.

Your email does not make it entirely clear whether the Senior Parking Officer you refer to actually works for the council or Vinci Park Services, who now appear to have a different name from the one quoted on the borough's website. Perhaps you could confirm that the Parking Manager is your superior, and works for the council, and clarify the position with respect to the Senior Parking Officer.

In normal circumstances, I would expect decisions about traffic movement and public road safety to involve both the traffic police and the road safety officer. For those who have a vested interest in parking revenue to make such decisions is frankly a conflict of interests, especially when they do not seem to be capable of sound judgments.

When the decision was made to mount the suspension notices in support of the normal parking limits, rather than in place of, this deliberately contravened the regulations. The Parking Manager obviously made this decision to ensure that wardens' time was spent booking motorists, not covering and uncovering statutory signs at the relevant parts of the day.

There is considerable photographic evidence to prove that your statement about the temporary signs meeting the requirements is a complete fabrication on your part. There is no way they meet the requirement and the photographs we have clearly demonstrate the council's blatant efforts to deceive unsuspecting motorists. This evening I was only able to find two of the new signs you mentioned, all the others were the original ones and most of these were illegible. I took new photographs at each bay and will be happy to offer these as proof to anyone who contests the tickets. Furthermore, if you were unable to find any evidence that motorists were deliberately targeted you obviously didn't visit the scene and monitor their actions, nor did you speak to anyone who could have given you factual information. If the intention was merely to keep traffic flowing smoothly, as you suggest, the wardens could have been deployed to stop people parking. In practice, however, they were observed hiding until the motorists left their vehicles at which time they pounced out and stuck tickets on the windscreens. Indeed, in one case, a warden was heard telling a motorist

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who had been booked that he could stay there all day as the ticket had already been issued.

You know as well as I do that many parking tickets are issued when motorists have not actually broken any regulations. The difference between us is that I don't have to lie to protect my salary. You know also that most motorists often pay their fine, even though they are not guilty, because the fiasco you refer to as a 'robust statutory process' is a completely one-sided procedure where the motorist has virtually no chance of winning the appeal and then faces a bigger fine. The length of time you alone have delayed the process negates the chance of most people registering their appeal within the statutory time limit as most are not yet aware that Bexley Council breached the law.

If there was an element of honesty in your department, or in the Town Hall generally, you would admit you were wrong and rescind all the tickets that were issued during this period. As things stand now, you have demonstrated that we have to fight this battle the hard way. This means we will use every means at our disposal to expose Bexley's malpractices and we will have no hesitation in embarrassing the liars who try to bluff their way out of a sticky situation.

Instead of picking on motorists you have set up as part of an insidious scam, your wardens might be better occupied booking people who flagrantly park on double-yellow lines, as they do frequently in Crayford. Such occurrences cause real traffic congestion, and dangers to the public, but I have yet to see a warden in that area.