



Green around the gills

By David Melsome

With all our pubs shut for long periods over the last year, it's no wonder there are signs that some of them are gathering moss. So much so at the Old White Lion in the High Road that it might have to consider a change of name. The two statues proudly guarding its front door are normally a dazzling white but they have taken on a distinctly green hue in all the wet weather we've had through the autumn and winter. Fair play to them, they haven't deserted their post. Let's hope our pubs' doors can open again soon... and someone can find a power washer.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.

Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



Cycle lane lessons from Amsterdam

By Abigail Brambilla

With a little tweaking the new cycle routes on the High Road could work really well for everybody. After several years of cycling up and down the High Road from East Finchley to North Finchley, along with being a car driver, bus passenger, runner and pedestrian on this route, I have considered the lanes from all angles.

The key thing is each one needs to flow and not stop or start or switch into different lanes. This would also prevent cars needing to sharply change lanes in order to miss the white bollards.

Near the Finchley Leisure Centre a cycle lane is taken around a curved section and forced into the passing traffic. However, with a small ramp the cyclist could continue straight onto the footpath and then back into the cycle lane.

I lived in Amsterdam for a short time and cycled my children several miles each day to school. Cyclists and cars moved around the city in quite a streamlined way. The key thing was very low kerbs that meant, when a cyclist needed to change from the cycle lane to the footpath and back, there were no high kerbs to deter their movement.

The traffic in London does move around a lot faster, but this idea could be incorporated at minimal expense. Every several metres there could be small tarmac humps/ramps along the kerb that could lead a cyclist onto the pavement or back onto the road as an escape route when having to pass a bus or parked car.

This would mean a shared footpath in parts for pedestrians and cyclists (with pedestrians of course having priority) by putting a narrow blue mark on a third of the footpath to encourage cyclists to stay on their designated part of the pavement. This way, an experienced cyclist could stay on the road and a less experienced cyclist could opt to use parts of the footpath.

Through East Finchley this would work really well because cyclists, if needing to shop on the High Road, could use the footpath easily and cars could still park along the road too. The bollard-marked cycle lanes could be narrowed to half their current width and buses could be kept in the car lane, which would naturally slow down traffic to the 20 mph speed limit. When a bus pulls in, there would still be room for cars to overtake.

Ultimately, we need to meet the needs of all to feel safe in whatever form of transport we choose to use in the future.

Letters

Cycle lanes: help us now

Dear Editor,

Now that the cycle lanes in the High Road have been in place for about three months, we have had two businesses close down, and a third one due to close in April. This is as a direct result of the effects of the cycle lane south of Fortis Green.

After initial letters to the Highways Department at Barnet Council and our local councillors, expectation was given that extra parking spaces would be made available to allow for spaces lost to the lane.

However there has been no movement on that front. After another three letters to both the department and the councillors, there have been no replies from either.

We feel that the council does not want to hear our concerns. We have lost all parking spaces on this side of the High Road. There is no parking on the side roads as it is an all-day controlled parking zone on this side of the High Road.

There will be more empty premises if nothing changes. Is this what we want for East Finchley?

These ill-thought-out changes are affecting livelihoods. Please stop playing politics and re-visit this issue urgently. We do not think East Finchley can wait 18 months for a review and see more empty properties.

Kokos, Josephines, The Exchange, N2 Food Centre, New Local Café, Prime Locations, Everything Electrical, CW Andrew Pharmacy, Cedars Home Care, Cree Godfrey & Wood, Express Mart, Fetch 22, Dan & DeCarlo, High Road, N2.

I'm on my bike

Dear Editor,

Last summer I went into Bike and Run on the High Road, intending just to look around. I came out a soon-to-be happy owner of an e-bike. I am now a happy cyclist, for the first time in many years.

I was not alone. Transport for London reported a 49% increase in cycle journeys over the summer. I am sure we all remember seeing whole families safely cycling down empty streets.

People cycle more if they feel safe. Separate cycle lanes, as installed along the High Road, greatly improve that safety. They cannot always be continuous; but don't let the best be the enemy of the good. Moving in and out of cycle lanes is no more difficult than changing road layouts for a driver, and much safer than not having lanes at all.

The lanes are designed to encourage more cycling and active travel, and I am sure that as the weather improves we will see exactly that. I know many people who quietly welcome them, and am encouraged that so few people signed the misleading and inaccurate petition calling for their removal.

If there are problems of congestion, which I have not witnessed, then they can be dealt with by other measures, but not by ripping out a safety scheme which over time will benefit all of us.

Nick Starling, Durham Road, N2.

Make space

Dear Editor,

In your last issue I was very pleased to see the both the letter on the subject of pavement courtesy and your article on dropping dirty face masks. These are such important subjects during the pandemic.

On my walks I often move into people's drives to avoid oncomers filling the pavement. Also, like your previous correspondent I have for some time stuck an arm out to the side, but smiled at those approaching rather than shouting at them. Some smile back and move aside, some even say sorry, but many continue regardless.

Just recently, after a younger couple had passed me without moving, the man turned round and shouted, "You could wear a mask!" He seemed unaware both of courtesy and the fact that masks protect others rather than the user, and anyway really should not be necessary on wide residential pavements. The worst place is East Finchley High Road, where people do keep a 2m distance when queueing for shops, but pass far too near when walking down the road. Throughout the pandemic, joggers on the High Road have passed literally by others' shoulders. Surely there is a case for banning joggers from the High Road itself, which is obviously quite busy, while there are plenty of side roads and parks where there is so much more space for joggers?

V. Teague Leopold Road, N2.

Memories of Valona House

Dear Editor,

I was very sad to see the demolition of Valona House on the front page of *The Archer* (February 2021). I have many fond memories of this building, as at the age of 14 in 1944, I started my working life there as a trainee dental nurse, working with dental surgeon Mr Sidney Puckey.

He lived above the surgery with his wife and daughter, who I believe had her bedroom over the stables at the back of the house. From the dentist's chair one could see the goldfish pond and well-kept colourful garden. Opposite the surgery was the waiting room, and further along the corridor was the workshop, making and repairing dentures.

When the dentist died, I went into school clinic dentistry, and stayed there until I retired after a while. I am now 90 years young (I hope), and I have many happy memories of Valona House. I shall miss it when I go on one of my walks, but life and changes must go on.

Evelyn J Bagley, Church Lane, N2

Not everyone is online

Dear Editor,

The government's assumption that everyone has access to online facilities incites me to fury ('Call to take part in once-a-decade population survey', *The Archer*, February 2021), none the more so than the availability of Covid information and now the Census.

Surely it is essential that the huge number of elderly people (over 75?) should be included in this important

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survey or else a greatly incorrect account of the demographic information of our country will be used for the next decade, thus affecting services for the elderly.

I would urge us all to remember this section of the public and encourage them to request a written census form. Let another decade pass before such assumptions are made.

Jenny Lumley, Fortis Green Avenue, N2

Cleaner air benefits

Dear Editor,

It was good to see coverage in *The Archer* of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) although the article failed to mention that vehicle scrappage grants are available for small businesses, charities and low income and disabled Londoners.

It also didn't mention the benefits that the clean air zone will bring to the poorest families. The British Lung Foundation has found that pregnant women, children, older people and those on the lowest incomes are disproportionately affected by air pollution.

In 2019, 4,000 Londoners died due to the impacts of toxic air. Research by Imperial College has found that the highest number of deaths attributed to poor air quality were recorded in outer London boroughs. This is due to the higher proportion of elderly people in these areas, who are more susceptible to the impacts of air pollution.

Public Health England estimates that the cost of air pollution to the NHS and social care could reach as much as £18.6 billion by 2035 unless significant action is taken.

So, yes, there is a charge for the worst polluting vehicles, but the result will be cleaner air for all with consequent health benefits and cost savings. The expansion of the ULEZ will also start to protect some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities.

Frances Buckingham, Address supplied.

Choose your tree carefully

Dear Editor,

I have to take issue with a sentence in February's *Archer* ('Plant a tree in remembrance'), namely "to plant a tree of any size, shape or variety".

PLEASE DO NOT. All trees have specific requirements, which involve researching the species carefully. Does it prefer moist or dry conditions, shade and cool or more light and heat, acid or alkaline soil? How big will it grow, what plants will grow in association with it, is it a native species, and so on?

The call to plant willy-nilly is a ridiculous recipe for disaster. Unsuitable trees will linger and die, or grow too big for the space, or shed limbs dangerously, slippery fruits that smell disgusting, or leaves that don't compost properly etc. If you are thinking of planting a tree, please make sure that you check your facts first.

Linda Dolata (Official Guide at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew since 2006), Leopold Road, N2.