

Creating Hammersmith Avenue

Dr. Alex Reid, member



Created in the 1950s, the Hammersmith A4 was driven through historical residential areas west of the Hammersmith Flyover in a way which would be unthinkable today. The road destroyed much of the churchyard of St. Paul's Church, where it eliminated an old wall and many grave markers. It drove through the green space of Homefield Recreation Ground, dividing it into two. It severed several north/south residential streets such as Black Lion Lane. And it inflicted constant traffic noise on the otherwise idyllic Furnivall Gardens (above).

This section of the A4 was designed not as an urban street, but as a quasi-motorway with six lanes of traffic, a central barrier, and no surface pedestrian crossings. Bizarrely, planners of the 1950s envisaged this urban motorway being extended right through central London, along Piccadilly, Shaftesbury Avenue and Holborn. Mercifully that never happened, but the Hammersmith section did get built. It damages the community through which it passes in four ways: visual intrusion, noise, pollution, and severance. Each of these problems could be mitigated at relatively modest cost.

Visual Intrusion

Problem: The sight of continuous heavy traffic travelling at 40mph intrudes seriously on the peace and calm of the residential areas through which the A4 passes. This is particularly noticeable in Furnivall Gardens, the riverside park shown in the aerial photo above.

Proposed action: This could be mitigated with planting, including dense planting along the north side of Furnivall Gardens. There could also be merit in some kind of screening fence, with ivy growing over it, in the places where the traffic is most visible.

Noise

Problem: The houses and green spaces near the road on the north and south sides suffer seriously from noise pollution.

Proposed action: Reduce the speed limit along the stretch of road from Hammersmith Flyover to Hogarth Roundabout from 40mph to 30mph. This will produce a significant reduction in tyre, engine and exhaust noise. It has been estimated that reducing vehicle speeds from 40 to 30 mph is as effective in noise terms as removing one half of the vehicles from the roadway. Investigate feasibility of low-noise road surface.

The reduction of a London speed limit from 40mph to 30mph is not novel. The Mayor of London initiated such reductions elsewhere in London, as part of a safety campaign. For example, the speed limit is to be reduced from 40mph to 30 mph along a stretch of the A10 between North Middlesex University Hospital and White Hart Lane in Tottenham.

Consideration should also be given to reducing the number of lanes from six to four. This would reduce the level of traffic noise, and the released space could be used for cycle ways and trees. It would also facilitate pedestrian crossings. This reduction may have little impact on overall route capacity, which is constrained by junctions such as Hogarth roundabout.

Pollution

Problem: Traffic related air pollution has dropped sharply in recent years, due to emission regulations and electric vehicles. But it remains a serious issue, affecting the properties and the parks alongside the Hammersmith A4.

Proposed action: A major planting scheme along both sides of this stretch of road. Trees will take carbon dioxide from the air, and will remove some particulate pollution by catching tiny particles on their leaf surfaces. They also support wildlife and encourage biodiversity.

Severance

Problem: This section of the A4 has created a serious severance between the communities to its north and south.

Proposed action: A complete re-imagining of this section of the A4 turning it from a pedestrian-hostile quasi-motorway into a pedestrian-friendly avenue. The key elements of this transformation would be:

- New traffic light controlled pedestrian and cycle crossings at some or all of Homefield Recreation Ground, St. Peter's Square, Black Lion Lane, Weltje Road, and Hammersmith Town Hall.
- Reduction of speed limit, as proposed above, from 40 mph to 30 mph.
- Cycling improvements.

If the pedestrian underpasses are to be retained, they should be refurbished. As the photo shows, they are currently shabby, depressing, and intimidating after dark.



Taking a View

A member contribution published by The Hammersmith Society

A Vision

Today on the Hammersmith A4 vehicles dominate pedestrians, cyclists, those living near the road, and those visiting the parks which adjoin it. These proposals aim to shift that balance. The road still needs to function as a road, but the interests of pedestrians, cyclists and visitors need to be given much more weight. If that means extending vehicle journey times by a few minutes it is a small price to pay for the community benefit. And the interests of those who live all their lives in the community should carry at least as much weight as the interests of people passing briefly through it in their cars.

The spirit - not the detail - is conveyed in the two images below. The first is about vehicles and nothing else. The second, with its pedestrian crossing, is about vehicles, but also about people.



Above: Not the A4, but rather like it - six lanes of roaring traffic, with no pedestrian crossings. Completely out of place in a residential neighbourhood.



Above: Not the A4, but the kind of green and pedestrian-friendly avenue it could become.

This article is extracted from the W6 Cityscape website (at www.w6cityscape.com) which is edited by Dr Alex Reid, Hammersmith Society member and former Director General of RIBA. Hammersmith Avenue is one of nine projects to improve the public realm in W6 which the website develops and promotes.

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