



'Temporary' cycle lane plan for the High Road

By John Lawrence

Barnet Council is proposing to install new cycle lanes running almost the entire length of the High Road in East Finchley to make travelling safer for the growing number of people who have taken to cycling in recent months.

The council has released plans showing details of almost continuous cycle lanes in both directions between the North Circular and the Great North Road, south of the tube station as far as the border with Haringey.

The cycle lanes scheme is being labelled as 'temporary' but, at the time of going to press, there were no details on how long they might be in place, nor when they might be installed.

Pros and cons

There will be a clear benefit for cyclists in having a designated and clearly marked space to travel up and down the busy High Road. However, it will come at the cost of the suspension of around 20 paid parking bays outside shops along the route, in order to create room for the new lanes. East Finchley councillor Arjun Mittra posted the plans on Facebook and asked for reaction from local people. He told *The Archer* he is still seeking details from the council on when they might be installed.

One respondent said: "The more pedestrian and cycle friendly an area is, the more room there is for people to shop and the more pleasant the experience. The more we can move away from cars and get them off the streets the better for people and the local shops." Another said: "Being cycle and pedestrian friendly transforms town centres for the better and is supportive of local businesses. Losing 20 parking bays on the High Road won't make it harder to park. The problem for most people is the cost of parking, not finding a bay." But others argued that the new lanes will create congestion and damage the viability of the retail shops as well as shift parking onto residential streets. They called for more creative solutions to slow the traffic through the High Road and improve safety for all cyclists and pedestrians.



Get on board: Sonia at the wheel of her big red bus



Sonia's driving passion for a double-decker

By John Lawrence

When Sonia Beldom drives up in her big red double-decker she always gets double takes from the other, mostly male, drivers on the bus-for-hire circuit. And when she's on the road some tourists even leap out in front of her vehicle to snap a quick photo.

Sonia loves the attention when she's behind the wheel. Most of her work is private hire for weddings, corporate outings and tourist trips around London's iconic landmarks. "My favourite," says Sonia, "because I get to drive where I like and the thrill of driving over Tower Bridge gets me every time."

Sonia lives locally so if you've ever seen an old Routemaster bus she's probably been at the wheel. Once, driving along the High Road in East Finchley on her way to the A1, she got diverted before she could turn into East End Road. Manoeuvring her double-decker down Kitchener Road and Market Place to get back on track was "a challenge".

On board with Ken Bruce

Sonia's day job is as a TV

producer and presentation coach. She has helped bring many travel series to the screen, including *An Idiot Abroad* with Karl Pilkington, *The Hairy Bikers' Great Mississippi Adventure* and *Victoria's Empire* with the late Victoria Wood.

She started her broadcasting career as a BBC Radio 2 producer where she discovered that Ken Bruce owned a heritage Routemaster bus hire company. Ken agreed she could drive it and, with a proper licence,



Front seat driver: Sonia gets ready to welcome passengers

could do occasional paid work for the company as they had no female drivers.

"I think I'm one of the youngest female drivers of these old buses and I always get surprised looks when I rock up with my blonde hair, red nails

and full-make-up," says Sonia. "As you can imagine, most of the drivers are retired London Transport bus drivers. It's very funny to see the reactions sometimes, which is another reason I love it."

Buses4Homeless

While the private hire buses have been off the road during the Covid-19 crisis, Sonia has spent her time writing a children's picture e-book called *Granny Franny's Big Red Bus*, a fun adventure partly based on her mum.

Sonia is donating 10% of sales to Buses4Homeless who recondition old buses into sleeping, eating, learning and wellbeing hubs for homeless people who enter a three-month programme to get them back into work and onto their feet.

And now the lockdown has loosened a little, she is back driving a modern open-top tourist bus for the same charity to distribute personal protective equipment and information to vulnerable and homeless people. Find out more about the book and download it at www.grannyfrannysbigredbus.com; it's also available on Amazon.

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