

Appendix A - Briefing Note on Woodmere Avenue Width Restriction

Early History

Back in the 1980s, after consultation with residents, public and local county councillors, it was agreed that a width restriction be placed in Woodmere Avenue, and this would be **7 feet** wide. This came into force with a Traffic Regulation Order on the 24th March 1980.

At the same location there is also a bus lane supported by a “No Entry except buses” Traffic Regulation Order, and enforcement of this is a matter for the police.

Over the years, the width restrictions have been abused and sustained damage, particularly to lit bollards, posts and lit signs. This led to regular complaints from residents living next to the restrictions and regular maintenance and clean up costs for the Highway Authority.

Recent scheme

Hence the recent strengthen works was carried out to address these ongoing complaints from residents, the county councillor and local members. The refurbishment scheme opened to traffic on 25th February 2011 and uses stiffened posts which are designed to resist vehicle strikes and reduce maintenance costs. Indeed they are designed to control/restrict **any vehicle** which is over 7 ft in width.

The width restriction is 7 feet to support the traffic regulation order. **The restriction width and traffic order have always been for a width of 7 feet, since its introduction in 1980. The original Traffic Road Order has never been changed.**

The posts for the refurbishment scheme have been set at a width of 7 feet in line with the kerbs, whereas previously the posts had been set at the back of the kerb, making the posts 7 foot 6 inches apart.

The posts that were initially installed were at a height on 1.3 metres. This was to ensure that the posts and width was visible to drivers and to assist them in guiding them through the restriction. However, a decision was made to cut these bollards to a height of 730mm. which took place at 8.30pm on Friday 25th February after several vehicles sustained damage to their wing mirrors.

The District Manager has observed vehicles going though the restrictions between 12-1pm and 5-6pm on Mon 28th Feb, and all cars negotiated the restrictions without damage, and only 1 in 10 vans struck the kerbs.

Correspondence received to date

There have been a total of 71 complaints since the refurbishment scheme was opened – 46 in March, 10 in April, 6 in May and 8 in June so far.

Insurance claims have been received from 10 persons. All have been rejected, though 3 have exercised their right to appeal against the decision.

The Watford Observer continue to cover the issue with regular articles, highlighting vehicles which have either struck the restrictions or become stuck within the restrictions. The comments on the newspapers web site which follow each article strike a fair balance between those concerned about damage to their vehicles and those who question whether the drivers of vehicle sustaining damage should be on the road.

A press statement has now been prepared with input from highway officers, the press office, the insurance section, and the executive member for highways, Cllr Stuart Pile. The press statement reads as follows:

"The seven foot width restriction on Woodmere Avenue was introduced in 1980 to prevent rat-running through the residential estate. In order to enforce the width restriction, there have been posts, seven feet apart, at this site for many years. The width restriction is clearly signposted both on Woodmere Avenue and on adjoining roads. Provided your vehicle isn't wider than seven feet, you can access the road. To put this in perspective, seven foot is wider than the entrance to a normal garage. Several thousand cars use this road on a daily basis without any problems so we have no plans to make changes to the posts on Woodmere Avenue unless local councillors ask, through the Joint Member Panel, for alterations to be made."

The Way forward

Vehicles will not be damaged if they are less than 7 feet in width and being driven correctly by a competent driver. There are signs meeting national traffic regulations in place in advance of the restriction on all approaches notifying road users of the width restriction. It is up to each driver, with the knowledge of their vehicle width and the advanced signage, to make a conscious decision on whether or not they have the confidence to go through. There are alternative routes to avoid the restriction.

Herts. Highways are continuing to monitor the situation, and may take further remedial action as necessary.