

Beech Street ZEZ Saga

Pre December 2019

In **May 2019** the City announced its [City of London Transport Strategy](#) which proposed a very significant ZEZ extending from London Wall to the northern boundary of the Golden Lane Estate and from Aldersgate Street east as far as Moorgate; the whole area to be within the City boundary. The BA welcomed this proposal and was keen to help in its design and implementation.

Post December 2019

On **3 December 2019**, Streets and Walkways sub (S&W) agreed to implement the Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) for the Beech Street ZEZ. This was followed by a press release by the City. No consultation had occurred with either the BA or through a public consultation. Subsequently, City officers were forced into an apology for their failure to consult with residents.

The ZEZ was implemented on **18 March 2020** with no specific traffic monitoring in place, and minimal air quality monitoring. This was after the Prime Minister's advice on 16 March to stop non-essential contact and travel. On **23 March 2020** the country went into full lockdown. On **25 March** following a request from the BA, City officers refused to suspend the scheme, despite the Mayor of London suspending both the Low Emission and Congestion Charging Zones. The BA's request was based on the impossibility of conducting an experiment with no data collection and for the inevitable distress caused to all residents.

On **10 May 2020** the Prime Minister announced a conditional plan for lifting lockdown, encouraging people who could not work from home to return to the workplace but avoid public transport. Buoyed by this announcement, City officers took the decision not to suspend or revoke the experimental traffic order without reference to S&W.

At the end of **July 2020**, the City started to enforce the traffic restrictions, issuing penalty charge notices to non-compliant vehicles traversing Beech Street. The trigger times were never published, but penalised residents complained that the threshold was set too high. These times were not revised until **December 2020**, when a determined Barbican resident took their PCN notice to the London Tribunal who found in favour of the appellant. It is not yet known if earlier cases have been reviewed. Because of the poor design of the scheme, inadequate signage and a minimal public awareness campaign, residents found it increasingly difficult to get deliveries or use taxis. Residents who raised these issues with senior elected members were ignored or received perfunctory replies. In the meantime residents helped monitor the design and deployment of signage, as these tasks were impossible for officers working from home.

In **October 2020** S&W reviewed the scheme and approved an increase in the budget to £2.345m to provide for an escalation in costs. The committee authorised the creation of gaps in the Beech Street central reservation in an attempt to improve penalty-free access to residential blocks, but another six months passed before the gaps were eventually created. (They opened on 19 April 2021, more than a year after the scheme's introduction.)

Throughout this time City officers and members of S&W were working on the assumption that the scheme would pass seamlessly from an ETO to a permanent scheme. The BA supported this move, but only on the condition that a firm undertaking was made to investigate the larger scheme mentioned above. Such an undertaking was never made.

On **8 December 2020**, following an action by a resident, the High Court determined that the City had acted unlawfully in its execution of the scheme and that the City would not be permitted at the end

of the experiment, to use the truncated procedure normally available for turning an ETO into a permanent traffic order. At this point, the scheme was doomed, not because of the judgement, but because of officers' failure to initiate the steps necessary to implement a permanent scheme. Officers decided to wait until the next S&W meeting, two months later, for a decision to proceed with preparations for a permanent scheme. This meeting took place on **18 February 2021** by which time it was impossible to implement a permanent scheme to follow on from the end of the ETO.

In March 2021 the City set out to plan consultation for the permanent scheme and finally installed traffic monitors in affected streets. The country was still in lockdown, and it is difficult to understand why on this evidence, the monitors were not installed earlier. On **15 April 2021** in a further judgement, the court made an order prohibiting the City from taking further steps towards the implementation of a permanent scheme. Erroneously, the City additionally interpreted this as an instruction to stop consulting on or evaluating the experimental scheme which resulted in the removal of the traffic monitors only a month after they were installed. It was only in **June 2021** that officers realised their misinterpretation. Throughout these developments members of S&W were publically unaware that there was no possibility of the scheme moving to permanence ay the end of the ETO.

Only at the Planning and Transportation Committee meeting on **20 July 2021** was there a public acknowledgement that Beech Street would return to normal traffic after **18 September 2021**. The chair of that committee blamed this sorry state of affairs on "third parties", which presumably means the Courts and Barbican residents.