

Submission Re Sidewalk Exemption for Friars Way and Doncaster streets

Dear CWC Members and Councillors of the City of London;

Thank you for your service to our community. We appreciate it, particularly in this period of heightened pandemic stress when we have all come to appreciate how very important our community, and neighbourhood, is to us.

I am writing today to ask your consideration regarding the Sherwood Forest sidewalk matter (specifically Doncaster Place, Doncaster Avenue and Friars Way).

I have only recently become aware of the sidewalk proposal. The residents of Doncaster Avenue did not receive any City notice of the proposal so I am hoping to provide this input to you directly as a long time resident who walks on these streets daily.

Our family has lived on Doncaster Ave for over 30 years. Most of our neighbours are likewise long term residents. It is not uncommon in our neighbourhood to see houses passed down through generations as we are extremely attached to our surroundings in Sherwood.

I know other areas prize their historic buildings (such as Woodfield) and celebrate other aspects of their neighbourhoods, but for the residents of Sherwood Forest, it has always been our mature trees, surrounding nature, and the Medway Valley ESA. We cherish our rare boulevard trees and the design of our meandering streets and hilly terrain. I would encourage anyone who has not yet had a chance to visit Sherwood Forest to come for a stroll on our streets, and a hike in the Valley.

Sherwood Forest was developed intentionally to work with the contour and elevation of the Valley, to slow traffic with curvy streets, and to make sidewalks unnecessary. In their place we have a unique canopy of trees and gardens that are a showcase of the "Forest City". Just last year the City completed a replanting initiative to add some trees to augment our mature boulevard growth. We were very pleased with this City tree planting policy and feel that the neighbourhood is a true testament to London's claim of being a City that cherishes nature and forestation.

This leads me to the topic of sidewalks on Doncaster (Place and Avenue) and Friars Way. First, I want to assure you that for all the years our family has lived in Sherwood we have never encountered any issue of safety, any barrier to accessibility, or any need for a sidewalk. These are not streets that people take unless they live in the neighbourhood, and drivers have always been respectful of pedestrians, bikes, and mobility devices. It is not the chosen traffic route of anyone trying to get anywhere directly, and occupants have always respectfully shared these low speed roads without issue. There is, simply put, no current barrier to accessibility, and residents of all ages and conditions now safely travel the streets as a daily activity (often to and from our connected Medway Valley ESA).

Infact, a number of you may recall that we had a primary school for many years in the vicinity of the proposed sidewalks. That school (Sherwood Forest PS) was closed and demolished recently, a fact we still lament but one which leads to the reality that there is even less call for sidewalks now as we no longer have the neighbourhood school traffic. We had no need for

sidewalks for all the years the school was in Sherwood Forest, and certainly have no greater need now.

Another concern with adding these sidewalks where they are not wanted, is the considerable destruction of so many mature and rare trees. We have Linden trees which can grow for 100s of years and are a true gem, and rare within London. Many of the trees are located near the road because there have never been any sidewalks. Numbers were not included in the Committee Report regarding the anticipated tree losses on Doncaster (I assume as the report itself noted that it is NOT the type of street on which sidewalks are typically installed), but such losses would be substantial as Doncaster Place is a tree lined circle and Doncaster Ave has many very old, large, beautiful, trees near the current roadway. The Committee Report itself says: "being dead end court-style streets they have no connecting links to other destinations. These types of locations are normally Not considered for a new sidewalk..." and no tree loss study has been provided for Doncaster Place or Doncaster Ave. Further, the Doncaster Ave build would only be needed to attach it to Doncaster Place sidewalks if those were to proceed.

Third, and of significant concern, is the steep grade along both Doncaster Ave and Doncaster Place which would make any sidewalk trip with an assisted device difficult to impossible in the winter months. Doncaster Place is a hilly, NO EXIT, circle, that only serves the 10 or so houses on it.

More concerning is the significant grade on Doncaster Avenue. Heading downward toward Wychwood it is so steep that even cars struggle to manage it all winter. We literally cannot travel on it before the plow/sander arrives. Maintaining a sidewalk in the winter would be like maintaining a bobsled run. It will be dangerous. It just does not make a reasonable pedestrian sidewalk route given the severe incline. We have not had an accident yet as we walk on the widely plowed side of the road, but I have no doubt that trying to maintain a passable sidewalk on such a steep grade in the winter will be next to impossible, and it will expose the City to unnecessary liability because an accident is not only foreseeable, but probable. Pedestrians will be forced into the road further as no sidewalk will remain safe at that pitch all winter.

Fourth, in many places Doncaster yards are also very pitched, and are likely to require retaining walls if you continue the sidewalk along in the future. That would mean not only a significant loss of mature trees but also further destruction of lawns and root damage to the initially spared historically significant trees. We don't want our legacy to be the 'felling of Sherwood Forest'.

Fifth, the recent City policy of re-planting the neighbourhood would be in direct conflict with the policy of now destroying it in the name of introducing new, unnecessary, unwanted, sidewalks.

As Councillors you have the choice to use discretion and common sense in noting that not all neighbourhoods were constructed with the intention of adding sidewalks. That is certainly the case in Sherwood Forest. The overall wellbeing of the neighbourhood is not served by such destruction of the trees - Friar's Way will be unrecognizable. You cannot reasonably replace 100 year old trees with saplings. It will absolutely gut the home owners who are so devoted to their natural surroundings.

You have the authority to exempt streets from a blanket sidewalk policy. There is no penalty for doing so. Infact, most legislation post-dating the original build would typically be grandfathered to permit the community to be engaged in the decision making process that would alter their homes and streets so detrimentally. The traffic patterns don't warrant the need for sidewalks, and the negatives are enormous.

I want to applaud those of you who have thoroughly considered the input of the owners in other areas who have made a plea for exemption to date. I not only think it is the right approach to take legally (having practised law in London for over 30 years) but I would argue it is the morally appropriate thing to do as well. This is not "one size fits all". There is no legislation obligating you to mandate sidewalks on every street. In some cases (as on Doncaster Ave) it is arguably downright dangerous, and in reference to Friars Way and both Doncaster streets there is no current barrier to accessibility that is being resolved.

I can assure you as a resident of this block for over 30 years, with 4 children who attended Sherwood Forest school, and neighbours of all ages who safely travel by every mode of transport on a daily basis on the subject streets, that sidewalks are not needed for accessibility. We are all far safer walking on the side of these roads, and choosing our side based on facing any vehicles. Our community has been successfully sharing these roads since it was developed as "the Sherwood Forest".

I would ask you to imagine for one minute that you lived on one of our streets. And had done so for thirty years. And maybe even grew up on the street, and then bought the house from your parents (as so many have). Please, Please, don't kill our legacy trees. It is not necessary or warranted in the name of accessibility. Given the sheer grade of both Doncaster streets, I fear it is also courting a very dangerous potential outcome as someone is going to get hurt trying to navigate such a perilous sidewalk path.

I sincerely thank those of you who work to consider the community, on a case by case basis, in these matters. It is more work for you, but your community appreciates your dedication. These are not 'one size fits all' decisions and some neighbourhoods were just not developed with sidewalks in mind. They are not always warranted and can come with considerable downside.

Finally, by way of context, I would also note that Runnymede is our immediate neighbour in the Sherwood Forest, and we were very grateful when Council members exempted that street. It was certainly a cause for celebration and saved a lot of our precious area trees.

Thankyou for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions about this submission by reply email or direct line.

Respectfully,
Michele Mannering, Andrew Hynes and the extended Hynes Family