

ANPR cameras

It has been suggested by Newcastle City Council that ANPR cameras could be used to control access to the LTN area, although it hasn't been made clear as to whether this would be instead of the bollards, or as a replacement for some or all of them.

As with the LTN itself this proposal seems to have been put forward with no consultation or discussion with residents or businesses, no planning as to its installation or operation, no detail as to who would be allowed to access the area or when access would be allowed, and no detail as to the installation cost or annual operating cost. In fact, no detail whatever has been made available to residents or businesses either in the immediate area, or in areas that it might affect. The proposal to install these cameras appears to be simply another knee-jerk reaction to a problem that Newcastle City Council itself created.

The overriding reason for not using ANPR cameras is that of privacy. A great many people do not want yet more surveillance of their daily lives. Moreover, these cameras do nothing to address the question of whether the LTN should ever have been implemented in the first place, nor that of its negative impact on the wider environment, owing to the increased carbon emissions it is causing. In addition to this, the use of ANPR cameras does not address the socio-economic damage caused by the LTN. Indeed, without very serious consideration and adequate consultation there is every chance that these devices could easily make the situation very much worse. They could very easily adversely affect many residents and even exclude more people from the area, as the issues discussed below highlight.

There are significant issues with the proposal that should be examined in more detail.

Firstly, the siting of the cameras:

From Osborne Road there are at least six routes to enter or leave the 'East Jesmond' area:

Osborne Ave

Osborne Ave/Holly Ave back lane

Fern Avenue

Lily Avenue (back lane)

Grosvenor Road via Queens Road & Grosvenor Place back lane

Grosvenor Road from Osborne Road

From Jesmond Road there are four routes:

Osborne Avenue via Deuchar Street

Osborne Avenue via Cradlewell traffic lights

Shortridge Terrace via Cradlewell traffic lights

Jesmond Dene Road

This seems to provide just two options. Either there are to be ten cameras monitoring all these entry/exit points, or some access points are to be permanently closed, with all traffic being re-routed to the remaining open routes. If the latter option were chosen then which routes should remain open? The routes without cameras would all need to be closed permanently but closing back lanes would not be an option as this would make access for refuse trucks, tradesmen, and service and maintenance vehicles almost impossible.

If cameras were to be installed their siting must be at points where there can be adequate warning such that drivers without the right of access do not inadvertently stray into the 'restricted' area. So, this again limits the available sites.

Osborne Avenue and Grosvenor Road would seem to be the most likely choices for access routes as they are the roads with the greatest capacity. Indeed, until recently, Osborne Avenue was classed as a 'distributor road', exactly the classification of road NCC was trying to force more traffic to use. However, given the strong feelings of some residents about the volume of traffic using these roads in the past, forcing all traffic entering or leaving the area to use either is extremely unlikely to meet with their approval now. Moreover, it would concentrate the very emissions the Council claims to be concerned about on to any route used as an access point.

Next there is the question of exactly which vehicles will be allowed to enter the area. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the types of vehicles that could normally be expected to enter and leave the area on a daily basis:

Residents & property owners

Vehicles owned by, hired by, or on loan to (eg courtesy cars) to permanent residents
Those owned by, hired by, or on loan to (eg courtesy cars) to temporary residents such as students

Vehicles used by businesses providing personal services (hairdressing etc) to elderly residents or those with mobility issues

Landlords' vehicles

Estate agents' vehicles

Repair & recovery vehicles (AA, RAC etc)

Vehicles used by garages to collect residents' vehicles for repair or service.

On-site vehicle maintenance vehicles.

Removal vans

Hearses and vehicles used by funeral directors

Residents' guests & visitors

Vehicles used by guests, or relatives of residents

Businesses & clubs

Vehicles used by owners and staff of businesses in the area.

Those hired by or on loan to the businesses

Those used by customers of the businesses

Vehicles used by customers of the hotels and Air BnB properties

Vehicles used by teams visiting the cricket club

Those used by people attending social events at the cricket club

Those used by visitors to and members of the Masonic Lodge

Tourists

Vehicles used by people visiting tourist sites such as the Banqueting Hall and St Mary's Well

Tradesmen

Vehicles used by tradesmen: joiners, builders, plumbers, electricians, roofers etc

Those used by property cleaning companies

Service & maintenance vehicles

Service vehicles - refuse and recycling trucks

Scrap collection vehicles

Highway maintenance vehicles

Utility & telecoms company vehicles

Other

Taxis, limousine hire vehicles, PSVs
Courier and parcel delivery vehicles
Supermarket delivery vehicles
Vehicles used by medical personnel and carers
Emergency service vehicles

If any or all of these vehicles are to be allowed access, how will this be done? Will the management of access permissions be the responsibility of the driver, the vehicle owner, the registered keeper, the owner of the property being accessed? Who?

Will the number of vehicles will be restricted on a per household basis? What about properties that already have off-street parking available for multiple vehicles. Will the residents in these properties be restricted to access for one or two vehicles only? If this should be the case, again such a policy is very unlikely to be well received by the owners of larger houses in the area.

Why should access restrictions be limited to just the area now known as East Jesmond. This would risk turning the area into some second-class neighbourhood whose occupants face restrictions on what they are permitted to do and how they are able to travel. Following the Council's logic any ANPR system should cover the whole of Jesmond, or even the entire city but that would undoubtedly be politically unacceptable to whichever party happens to be in power.

Will the right to access the area be chargeable? If so, what will those charges be? Will charges be on a daily basis and if so, what would happen about overnight visitors? How will visiting vehicles be registered or exempted and on what basis?

What about residents who live in other parts of Jesmond? For example, those who live to the west of Osborne Road, or in Jesmond Vale, or in South Jesmond Farm, or the area around Clayton Road? Will they be able to travel into or through the area without penalty. Exactly who will be excluded and on what basis?

Will the cameras operate 24 hours a day or just during peak hours. If 24 hours then why, when the only traffic of any concern at all is that at peak periods? If the aim is to make Jesmond cleaner and greener will electric vehicles be exempt?

One final point is that many councils already using ANPRs in this way have become all too well aware of the amount of revenue they can generate. When funds are short it seems that any method of extracting money from the electorate will be deemed acceptable. In 2021 when ANPR cameras were used in Southwark to replace an earlier LTN scheme they generated £2.5 million in penalty revenue in just three months. This alone could well explain why NCC is so enthusiastic about their introduction.

There are so many questions that needed answering before any scheme to install these cameras even reached the planning stage, yet NCC has already submitted applications for their use. It is just yet another ill-considered and ill-judged action by this council.

David Paterson – Version 2.2 – 22 August 2023