



The auditorium grew hushed as a senior Watford borough councillor took to his feet. The police liaison team looked nervous. They had made their presentation and laid out their plans for this "unique event": the anti-terrorism zones, the identity checks, the restriction on vehicles stopping in the vicinity of this "important international conference". But now it was the turn of the people of Watford to speak.

What would they make of this international three-day policy summit, with its heavyweight delegate list bulging with billionaire financiers, party leaders and media moguls, protected by the biggest security operation Watford has ever seen?

"What this whole thing boils down to," boomed the councillor, "is this: are you, or are you not, setting a precedent for vehicles parking on the verge of the Old Hempstead Road?"

Thus began an hour-long (hour-and-a-half-long?) discussion about whether or not cars and press vehicles should be allowed to park on a strip of grass running parallel to the A41, just opposite the Grove hotel. It was like a weird, dystopian episode of Keeping Up Appearances. Never mind that our ministers are meeting in secret with the heads of Shell, BP, Google and Amazon – what about the verge!

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