

Statement on proposed parking charges in MSN – Katherine Howells

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today ahead of your budget discussions about the proposed parking charges for South Street in Midsomer Norton.

Midsomer Norton is a busy market town, which serves not only its local residents but also the surrounding villages and hamlets. It is a hub for friends and family to meet for lunch and coffee, as well as providing essential services for local people such as the post office, banks, pharmacies, and a variety of shops. It is a focal point for our community.

While many people arrive into the town centre on foot or by bus, for others this isn't possible either because of their circumstances or their location. For these people, the free car park gives them a reason to visit our town, not to take their custom elsewhere, online, or to the big supermarkets.

I appreciate that a local authority has to raise money to spend money to provide vital services, but I believe that introducing these parking charges will be counter-productive to maintaining the council budget for the following reasons:

1. There will inevitably be a reduction in footfall to the High Street, which will result in a loss of revenue for local shops. Many shops are struggling to stay afloat as it stands due to the pandemic, and some have already had to close their shutters for the last time because they couldn't make the finances work. Shop closures not only impact local residents, but also hit the council's coffers. The fewer shops we have, the fewer visitors we will get and the cycle will spiral downwards.
2. A reduction in footfall to our local post offices and banks, may result in us losing these essential services if they become uneconomical to maintain, which would have a huge impact on our elderly community or those who struggle to get to one of the nearby cities.
3. It is suggested that the free parking encourages people to park all day in order to use the bus service into Bath or Bristol. No doubt some will still see a modest charge as preferable to paying for parking in the City or driving further to a park and ride, but others will simply look to park further out in residential streets, which will disadvantage local residents who may then be unable to park close to their homes for days at a time.
4. Taking the above into account, I believe that the proposals would be unlikely to generate the revenue anticipated, which I believe could result in the scheme making a loss once the costs of enforcing parking charges are taken into account.

I urge the panel to examine these proposals carefully, and to encourage the cabinet to reconsider - because it would be bad for the budget overall, bad for Midsomer Norton; our local businesses and our residents.