

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL EVANS

The last attempt to impose charges for parking in South Road Car park was ten years ago, and fortunately the then administration listened to the chorus of protests including a large petition which I organised, and the proposal was dropped.

Listening to the reaction to the last two speakers, I am hoping that this time, in speaking against this move and asking for it to be withdrawn, I am pushing at an already open door.

Round the country, councils have made the mistake of chasing cars out of town centres and encouraging commutes to outlying shopping centres, at a cost to the environment and adding to global warming. Midsomer Norton is one such retail town centre and a key community asset, and so far to its credit B&NES has achieved significant funding to improve the public realm there, and thereby bolster its chances of surviving and prospering. However it remains at present vulnerable, with long-standing empty properties such as Lloyds, and more recent outstanding additions to the list of empty shops, such as McColls, and it would be ironic if B&NES were to undermine its own good work with these discouraging charges.

Even a small charge for parking in the South Road car park would discourage footfall, and if the charge was small it would add very little to the council's coffers. Better to keep it free.

One could point by contrast and somewhat cynically to other features of the council's spending and investment, such as the costly refurbishment of the Civic Centre in Keynsham after only six or seven years, or the capacious car park behind Sainsbury's in Midsomer Norton which is kept for the exclusive use of B&NES employees. I do hope that the council-tax-paying residents will not find that they and their High Street's customers are made to pay, justifying such cynical reflections.