

Statement on proposed parking charges in Midsomer Norton – Katherine Howells

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am grateful to the PDS panel who agreed my request for the proposed parking charges for South Road, Midsomer Norton to be referred back to the Cabinet.

1 week ago, I launched an online petition in my ward and as of this evening it has in the region of 300 signatures. I am sure other speakers here this evening will tell you the same - there is huge opposition to this proposal. We need our High Street to be supported to thrive, not to be hindered and damaged by these plans.

Midsomer Norton has a strong community spirit, and our High Street plays a vital role in this: our shops and cafes, our pharmacies, the post office, the bank, the library, our baby and toddler groups. They provide a lifeline to our residents and our neighbours; they bring income to the council through rates and taxes, and they provide jobs to our friends and family.

I believe that introducing these parking charges will be counter-productive to maintaining the council budget for the following reasons:

1. **The inevitable 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. 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, causing problems for local residents.
4. Taking the above into account, I believe that the proposals would be unlikely to generate the revenue anticipated, and further could cause additional loss of revenue to the council.

I was pleased to hear from local reports that you are considering withdrawing these proposals.

I think it would be bad for the budget overall, bad for Midsomer Norton and the surrounding villages and hamlets, our local businesses and our residents.

I would like to ask now that Cllr Samuel and the Cabinet confirms that this plan will be scrapped.