

Councillor Shaun Hughes - PDS SCRUTINY BUDGET STATEMENT – 23 Jan 2024
(Midsomer Norton Car Park Charging)

During recent years we have seen BANES look to sell our car park to a supermarket, proposed building houses, we've had parking charges Version 1 and now parking charges Version 2.

Our high street economy is fragile, and many shops and businesses will not survive if parking charges are introduced and will simply and encourage more out of town shopping at Tesco and beyond.

The claim that our high street is comparable with Keynsham and therefore should have parking charges is frankly ridiculous, in Keynsham during the past 10 years BANES have spent £28 million on a civic Centre, millions converting council buildings to 96 apartments and of course high street road improvements. by comparison nothing spent on Midsomer Norton High Street. Decade of neglect

In Bath spending has included £10 million on security barriers, £7 million on buying an Old Post office and more than £2 million on a feasibility study for the Milsom quarter.

In summary tens of millions have been spent in Keynsham and Bath to improve footfall and encourage shoppers and they've benefited with visitors in their thousands, by comparison Midsomer Norton has been completely neglected.

The proposal is to introduce emission-based charges using the climate emergency to justify additional financial burden to the poorest in our society those who rely on a car but can not afford a newer or electric vehicle.

Cars are a necessity not a luxury in our area and residents need access to our high street for essential services such as banks, pharmacies, libraries, council services, professional services and support local shops.

Quite frankly the latest idea to persuade residents from Cllr Rigby and Cllr Auton for 2 hours free parking does not stand up to scrutiny, if most visits are less than 2 hours as claimed then the income will be almost zero and not the £200k that has been budgeted, if fact once you factor in the installation and enforcement costs you will lose money.

Of course, we know from this that any free parking provision will be short lived and this is just a way to get the machines in place without too much resistance.

There has been no study of car park usage and more importantly no impact assessment of the damage this will do to the town, We need BANES to invest in our town rather than creating barriers for businesses and would urge to Cabinet to reconsider this proposal.