



The Editor, Oxford Mail and Times.

Monday 13th July 2020.

Dear Sir/Madam

THOUGHTS ON THE BUSGATE AND ST GILES PROPOSALS

Oxford City Council really has to make up their mind about whether it wants our city centre to have a thriving, interesting and diverse balance of different businesses or whether it would prefer a soulless Disney style theme park of wonderful historic architecture and souvenir shops. I feel that the likes of Cllr Tom Hayes, Cllr Michael Gotch and others are seemingly hell bent on the latter. My sincere belief is that it is easily possible to have both (preferably **without** the plethora of shops and stalls selling tourist 'tat'). It can only be achieved by retaining sensible traffic connections within the city. This is eminently possible, take a look at some very good examples in London, notably Howard De Walden Estate's management of Marylebone, Cadogan's recent Pavilion Road development, near Sloane Square and Grosvenor Estates reworking of the Mount Street area in Mayfair.

Last week in this paper, Tom Hayes proposal for the severing of the last remaining city traffic 'veins' with unnecessary 'bus gates' is complete madness. One of them is on South Parks Road in the Science area, which I have regularly used for many years to get around the city between my businesses and home. Perversely, South Parks Road does not actually have any buses, apart from the occasional city open top bus tour! At no time could you describe this road as congested apart from some backing up with student term time arrival and departures and a modest 5.00pm 'rush hour' caused by the traffic light system where the road meets the High.

I have to ask if Mr Hayes and his colleagues have any business experience credentials because if they had, then they would instinctively know that there has to be a sensible form of traffic flow within a city in order to connect supplies and certain customers etc. Bus gates are an unintelligent and crude tool, a sledgehammer, which completely disregards the commercial well-being of Oxford. They will absolutely **not** aid a Covid recovery, they will do the opposite. Mr Hayes flippantly says they will 'reboot' business, I and many others, say that these bus gate measures will 'put the boot in' on business which, as we speak, will be desperately trying to rebuild after this devastating pandemic. It's going to be hard enough without having to contend with yet more City Council induced hindrances.

On another related subject, in this week's Oxford Mail, Michael Gotch's statement of 'We need to keep out as much private transport as possible' is extremely irresponsible. He is reiterating the damaging message that has been long been purported by successive local politicians that you, the public, are not welcome and Oxford is not open for business.....go elsewhere. His resurrection of the 'St Giles dream', though, is laudable, but please, not like his version of Barcelona's Las Ramblas. If you look closely at his artist's impression, St Giles resembles the Bavarian Christmas Market (which we all know, doesn't specialise in British and local products, just bratwurst and more souvenirs) and has, for some bizarre reason, annually blighted our wonderful Broad Street. Planners please note, vehicular access and some parking will always be required for another of our other gems, the Covered Market.

I would definitely say yes to achieving something inspirational and elegant with St Giles, potentially one of the world's great boulevards, but, only if the health of city centre businesses is maintained by keeping internally connecting traffic. This can easily be accommodated, albeit more discreetly, with a single narrow access road either side with a maximum 10mph speed limit. The challenge of a design should be thrown open via a competition between the very best urban planners and architects in the world. The design must not be left to the dull, anti-business whims of councillors steeped in vote catching dogma and their own agendas.

I am the first to see the merit of the City Council's aim of 'electric only' but only in a realistic **medium term** time frame, because that's the way the world is going. I love the idea of more walking, bicycles and electric scooters but there still has to be a place for the car (hopefully electric eventually) along with its parking, plus the all-important delivery transport, necessary to make business tick.

I appeal, on behalf of OHSA, ROX and business, to Oxford City Council and the County Council to think again about the collateral damage which will be caused by shutting down essential access roads within the city. Also, please end this trickle of scattergun announcements, a mish mash of poorly thought out knee jerk ideas and experiments, which if enacted, will inevitably damage the last remaining businesses. In the context of the aftermath of this pandemic, I and fellow businesses, Colleges and Offices do not want to be witness to an approaching coffin inscribed: 'This City Used To Have A Great Selection Of Interesting, Independent Shops And Businesses but No More'. It's going to be hard enough to rebuild without it being made ten times harder by some of these proposals. Please let us have sensible recognition that there has to be a traffic flow between streets and shops without sending people out onto the ring road each time they want to access a different part of the city.

One last point, hindsight is a wonderful thing but I do wonder if a more sustainable approach to the Westgate development would have been a series of narrow streets linking with the Covered Market, lots of independently owner run shops and businesses combined with a great deal of mixed residential for the affordable, young aspiring and older retirees markets, bringing much needed life into the city. If this had happened, we wouldn't be worried about John Lewis's mooted departure and all the empty shops in Cornmarket and surrounding streets. Oh well, it doesn't cost anything to reflect on how things might have been.....

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