

THORNBURY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

www.thornburychamber.org.uk

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Dear Sirs

The closure of Thornbury High Street has been in place now for only 4 days but the following issues have become clear already:

1. Traffic

The rerouting of traffic around the High Street has issues with pinch points that have always been known by local residents but are now more noticeable. The mini roundabout between Midland Way and Rock Street. The vision when turning out of Rock Street is difficult and there have been several incidents and near misses there over the years. The buses used to only turn left from the Midland Way / Rock Street mini – they cannot get round without using both sides of Rock Street or mounting the pavement. With the current changes 2 buses will meet there or a bus and HGV as more and more traffic goes that way.

The car park at Aldi, there is a blind bend when you want to exit, which will become much more difficult with more traffic on this road.

Deliveries into the High Street are already becoming a problem, a large lorry had to do a 3 point turn in the very limited space at the top end of the High Street and The Close as they were not allowed through the barrier.

2. Disabled Access

3 disabled parking bays have been installed at the bottom of the High Street in the Bus bay, however it has been pointed out by residents that there are no such facilities at the top of the High Street. Making the access to Boots to pick up prescriptions virtually impossible, as the walk from the disabled bays is too far. It is uphill, so difficult to push a wheelchair that distance. People trying to use the 3 bays at the bottom are also causing traffic issues with people coming around the corner to access the Castle Street car park finding people trying to turn out of the bays, or queuing to park in the bays. Many elderly and disabled people have to be dropped off close to the shops they need to use – the new disabled bays are too far away and the car parks a marathon. Nor can they carry shopping much distance so need picking up / bus without carting it all the way over to Aldi for the bus. This closure is very much disadvantaging the more vulnerable people in the town, exactly the people we should be trying to help.

By closing the High Street many more people will now have to walk through the St Mary Centre which has narrow restricted walkways at both ends and in fact means more people being pushed into an area where there are queues, outside Aldi and the other Chemist in Thornbury, thereby creating more of a risk to people rather than lessening the risk. There is barely 2m allowance for people to queue safely, and if you then put people walking through into the situation it will become very congested.

The disabled bays in Castle Court and Rock Street car parks are still too far for many of our elderly residents to walk, one of the criteria for applying for a disabled badge is the distance you are able to walk without having to stop.

The lack of vehicles access has been the one we have received the most comments about this week and people are very worried they will not be able to access these businesses again!

3. High Street Usage

It may only be the first few days of the closure but already it has seen an increase in youngsters using the area as a play park. Several youngsters were taking advantage of the space to use it as a cycle circuit, using the pavements as ramps and racing up and around the area, making it dangerous for pedestrians both on and off the pavement, luckily due the road being close, there were very few people around for this to be an issue. If the High Street remains pedestrianized, who will police this area to ensure it stays as a safe environment for pedestrians. As pointed out by Alan Coles the manager of St Mary Centre pedestrians and cyclists do not mix easily. It was mentioned at this meeting that you would look into putting up signs asking cyclists to dismount, but no such signs are in place.

The shops and businesses at the top of Castle street and The Plain have similar pavement space, so why have they not been considered to be at risk when re opening? If the reason for the closure is to allow people to safely distance, why should these businesses not also be considered under the same risk profile? Can we please see the risk assessment that was done when the decision was made to close the High Street, and to exclude Castle Street and The Plain.

Businesses are very aware of the need to provide space for people to queue whilst socially distancing, they have spent many weeks getting prepared for re-opening, some of our High Street businesses have been open the whole time and have not found this to be an issue. Even with the relaxation of the rules allowing more businesses to open, we feel there is enough space along our pavements in the majority of the High Street to allow the correct social distancing, several businesses will be by appointment only and have said they are happy for the other shops to use their frontage for queues if needed. If you look at the spread of businesses you can see that there are no areas where queues will cause an issue by not leaving enough space for people to pass. I note also my point above! Will the council be marking the High Street with 2-meter markings along all pavements to direct people to socially distance as St Mary Centre have done?

4. Access

How have you risk assessed emergency access to and through the High street for emergency vehicles? Previously for emergency vehicles to get from Thornbury Hill to the south of the High Street, would only have to navigate 2 roundabouts and 2 zebra crossings on a fairly straight forward route. Now they will be on a much busier road and will have to navigate 3 roundabouts, 2 zebra crossings, a blind bend, and 3 road junctions, this will surely slow down response time, as well as putting lives at risk on the actual route.

Deliveries have also been an issue for the businesses this week. We were advised that deliveries would be allowed at the moment 24/7 but this does not seem to be the case. Some of our businesses have had discussions with delivery drivers such as DPD who say they will not deliver if they do not have direct access to the property as they do not have time in their schedule to park and walk up the high street, they are paid by the number of deliveries they make so any that are in a pedestrianized area will be left on the van. This will also impact those people who live within the pedestrianized area as there is no back access to their properties.

We have received concerns from local farmers who during harvest time use the High Street as access for their tractors to get to their fields north and south of the Town, the diverted route is not suitable for large tractor and trailers to use.

5. Business Concerns

Our Local businesses who have remained open in and near to the High Street have already seen a drastic drop in the trade this week (30-50% compared to the rest of lockdown). This amount of reduction is not sustainable for any length of time, particularly after the last few months. Businesses do not have the ability to weather a 'bedding in period' for pedestrianization due to the significant impact lockdown has had on their income (whilst many have still had to pay full rent, bills etc.). Many will be reopening already at a loss and recognize that footfall even without pedestrianization is going to be significantly down. The pedestrianization is also causing some businesses to consider whether or not it is worthwhile trying to reopen.

One of our business owners has made the following calculations regarding the loss of the parking spaces in the High Street which will give you a small idea of the impact this will have on them from Monday!

- If we work on 20 parking spaces on the High Street that are only full for half of the time between 9-5.
- And assume each car only has one person that only spends £5 in the High Street on that visit and that their visit uses up the entire hour allowed
- That spend is still £400 a day which pays for **5.4 people a day** to be employed in those businesses.
- We believe the number to be significantly higher as we know the spaces are full for the majority of the day and this doesn't factor in those people that drop off elderly customer and those with low mobility who are unable to walk from the car parks (and therefore whose trade will now be lost) or those who visit restaurants in the evening or are collecting takeaways.

6. Residents' Concerns

We have had a significant number of residents who have expressed their concerns, both at how the closure has been done and the cost of this closure. They want to know who is paying the bill for this closure and what costs have been allocated to this project?

For all of the reasons above we believe that the total closure of Thornbury High Street should be reversed immediately, with a full consultation to follow in the coming days/weeks to determine what if any changes are needed to the High Street. Thornbury is a Market Town and with that comes certain expectations from both residents and visitors. We have signs on the Motorway and A38 stating we are a Historic Market Town, to close our best asset so that it is hidden from view of people driving through our town would be suicide for our local businesses and from the feedback we are getting both on social media and people contacting us this is not what the majority of local residents want or need. We need vehicular access to our High Street and a bus route to the High Street. No changes should have been nor should be made without a full consultation to all those impacted by such changes.

We also request sight of any data and consultation process you have undertaken to show that the closure of the High Street is necessary and what criteria you are using to assess the success of the closure.

Yours Sincerely

Thornbury Chamber of Commerce and Local Business owners of Thornbury