

Chamber Position regarding the Town Centre Covid-19 Management Scheme

The Bodmin Chamber of Commerce's principal consideration in this matter is the need to ensure that people coming into the town centre, for whatever reason, are able to do so without compromising their personal safety. Our absolute priority, both from a civic duty perspective and from a business standpoint, must be the prevention of onward transmission of Covid-19. An outbreak in Bodmin and its environs would not only be a personal tragedy for anyone affected but would also necessitate Bodmin being locked down — all shops and businesses would be required to close, and to wait for a second wave to pass. We must all do everything in our power to avoid this.

It is widely acknowledged that, as people are no longer staying at home, social distancing and improved personal hygiene are the two key measures that will help us to contain the virus and avoid further outbreaks. These two key measures need to be at the heart of any town centre management scheme if it is to succeed in its aim. It is unfortunate that, owing to time and funding constraints, it was not possible to properly evaluate the situation and carry out a widespread consultation exercise regarding the possible road management options before emergency measures were put in place. As has been the case with so many situations concerning this Covid-19 outbreak, many decisions of Central Government, cascading down to local authority level, have had to be made quickly without time for the normal processes of thorough planning, evidence-gathering and consultation.

We understand that the road closure, as ordered by Cornwall Council, rendered it illegal for any vehicle (other than emergency vehicles) to make use of the closed road. This meant that traders could not receive deliveries, nor could customers collect heavy items, etc., during the period 10 am to 4 pm. There were also complaints regarding the failure to provide access for the disabled, for their carers, and for residents (i.e., for people living in Fore Street). One solution put forward by Chamber was to change the closure order to allow access for delivery vehicles, for blue badge holders, and for residents who need to be able to drive to and/or from their homes during restricted times. However a group of traders expressed strong views that they did not want a road closure of any kind, feeling that it would stop people from coming to shop. They suggested that a one-way pavement scheme would be preferable.

During discussions with retailers, we have established that there is no overall consensus in terms of a preferred road management scheme, and we are therefore forced to accept that not everyone will be happy regardless of which solution is proposed. We have also been talking to members of the public and monitoring local social media; early signs would suggest that the public were in general supportive of the road closure, as it made them feel safe. It is worth noting that throughout the discussions we have been having with retailers, there seems to have been some confusion regarding whether the proposal is for a temporary road closure to deal with the Covid-19 crisis or for permanent pedestrianisation, and this unfortunate confusion has served only to muddy the waters. In the interest of clarity, we wish to place on record the fact that, to the very best of our belief, permanent pedestrianisation does not form any part of these or other pandemic-related measures, and our policy as a Chamber is to remain strictly neutral concerning pedestrianisation and analogous schemes.

In summary, we acknowledge that the existing road closure arrangement, allowing no access whatsoever, cannot continue. Given that Bodmin Chamber of Commerce exists to support the endeavour of business in the town, we are committed to doing whatever we can, given our limited resources, to ensure that the currently-preferred one-way pavement scheme is implemented as quickly, smoothly and successfully as possible. However, we would also like to stress that we fully appreciate that this is a very contentious issue, and it is unfortunate that decisions have had to be made very quickly; we are well aware that no matter what is proposed or implemented, it is unlikely to prove universally popular. Because of this, the Chamber is establishing a review and feedback framework to monitor levels of satisfaction and confidence in the trial scheme. A scheme that does not make people feel safe and comfortable when visiting the town centre is bound to be counter-productive. To begin this review process, we would like to invite anyone who has strong feelings on these and related matters to contact us. If you have any views at all about how we can best make Bodmin town centre a place where people can shop in safety with the confidence that they will be able to keep a safe distance from others, please e-mail us at Stay.Safe@Bodmin-Chamber.Co.Uk or send us a PM via our Facebook page [@BodminChamber](https://www.facebook.com/BodminChamber). We will be listening very carefully to what everyone has to say, and we will keep all stakeholders informed, so please have your say.

The Chamber's overriding goal is to work together with the business community and other stakeholders to ensure that visitors, residents and traders alike can stay safe within an environment that will provide the public with the necessary confidence to come back to our town centre and thereby help the local economy get back on its feet.