

Into battle on Bridge St.

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THE "Battle of Bridge Street" hotted up this week, with the Christchurch Preservation Trust pledging their support in favour of the closure of Bridge Street, and adjoining Castle Street, to through traffic. And their decision now leaves them daggers drawn against the wishes of local traders who are stepping up the counter-attack against the threatened closure.

However, the traders have taken comfort in growing support from professional folk in the area, many of whom are angered by earlier claims that they backed the local council in wanting the streets sealed off.

The borough engineer's department at Christchurch admit that they were originally of the belief that the majority of professional folk in the area supported the closure, and that they are not sure of the balance of opinion.

"At first, from the reaction we received, it seemed that most of the professional people and residents in the area supported the closure.

"It would now appear that opinion is split. Some are in favour, some are against, and some aren't saying a word — it's not possible to say what the majority view is for certain," explained a council spokesman.

One of the first Bridge Street firms to take the council to task over the alleged "professional" support of council scheme was that of Filer, Knapper and Co., chartered accountants.

Referring to a meeting between traders and the town's works committee, they wrote:

"We were most surprised to receive a report from the members of the delegation who recently discussed the closure of Bridge Street to traffic with you, that you had apparently advised them that although all the traders in Bridge Street wished the street to remain open to traffic, all the professional firms did not agree with this and in effect would be happy if traffic was permanently stopped."

The letter added: "These sentiments are completely untrue, as we wish to support the traders in the street completely and do not wish the street to be closed to traffic.

'In fact we have gone as far as to subscribe to the traders' action fund in this matter."

PROFESSIONALS

Mr. Michael Filer, who is also a councillor in neighbouring Bournemouth, told the 'Times': "As a professional body we are opposed to general traffic being restricted from the area — and we believe the straight through system should be kept.

"Although the traders would be the first to suffer if Bridge Street were shut off to through traffic I am sure that the professional people would feel the pinch very soon afterwards."

Added Mr. Filer: "I personally however, have no objection to buses or heavy goods vehicles being re-routed because they undoubtedly cause heavy vibration to buildings in the area."

Another anti-closure campaigner is Mr. R. Prince, the Bridge Street chiropodist, who commented: "I am aghast at this idea that the closure of the street to through traffic is backed by the professional people in the area.

"Through access is essential for patients — and patients are my lifeblood. Some of the people who come for treatment by car have difficulty walking from the kerb to our door as it is.

"I am opposed to any restriction whatsoever."

However the "professional" views were balanced by one dental surgeon who said that although he did not agree "wholeheartedly" with the council plan he did feel that turning Bridge Street into a cul-de-sac with sufficient "provisos" — such as street parking, a wide turning circle and positive sign-posting — might not present a major problem.

He added: "There are problems that need looking into, but I think it would be possible to bring the closure to through traffic without any major damage being done."

He felt that many people in the area appreciated being without the disturbance caused by heavy traffic. However, he conceded he was concerned about the effect a closure might have to some traders.

Positively in favour of the council scheme are the Christchurch Preservation Trust, who feel that through traffic causes "an avoidable noise and disturbance". (See letters, page 5).

In a letter to the council, Preservation Trust chairman Dr. James Cantlie, wrote: "Every resident of the town wherever he lives would surely prefer to walk in a quieter central area, as would our visitors, and I suggest this is far more significant than the limited interest of some traders who may lose less than they fear, particularly if parking can be eased, once through traffic is cleared from the centre of this town."

Dr. Cantlie told The 'Times' he felt the new system should be tried for at least six months. "If it does not work it can be easily changed, shutting off a road does not involve any great structural effort."

He added: "I don't feel that the traders should be so sure about what will happen—some might be pleasantly surprised."

"In a quieter atmosphere people might be encouraged to stroll farther along the street. Such businesses as restaurants might prosper—also the King's Arms Hotel could benefit from a client who would be attracted to the hotel because of its view of the Priory undisturbed by heavy traffic."

However, Dr Cantlie said he personally was against the plan to pedestrianise the High Street—which traders fear will compound the sealing off of Bridge Street.

KEPT OPEN

"I do not think such pedestrianisation would be a good idea—you cannot funnel heavy traffic, such as buses and lorries, down small streets that surround the High Street."

"I have seen pedestrianisation as operated in major cities in Europe—and in each case the main street has been kept open to traffic and it is the side streets that have been pedestrianised," added Dr Cantlie.

A spokesman for the local chamber of trade—who were meeting privately last night to thrash out further opposition plans—said door to door collections were being mounted in the area in support of a fighting fund.

He added: "From the reaction so far I believe the whacking majority of people are on our side."

According to the Town Plan—which is the "planning policy" document county council officials say they are committed to work to—the High Street of the future would be pedestrianised from the Druiitt Library to Priory Corner—and traffic totally excluded.

However the area of Castle Street, down as far as Millhams Street, and Wick Lane as far as the Post Office, will be open to goods delivery vehicles only, explained a council spokesman.

Anyone wishing to approach the remainder of Castle Street and Bridge Street would, according to the aims of the plan, have to do so via Stony Lane.

The spokesman said he was not yet sure whether buses would be granted the same access as delivery vehicles—meetings were soon to be held with the relevant transport authorities to discover their views.

He stressed that the scheme would not take place until satisfactory off street parking and goods servicing was available.

The facts on Bridge Street

Sir—I was astonished to read last week's report, and letter from the Christchurch preservation trust, that a unanimous resolution had been passed recommending the permanent closure of Bridge Street. I was at that meeting and feel that a few facts should be made public.

Of the eight or nine people present, the two principal speakers were Mr. Gordon Robbins of Bridge Street, and Dr. James Cantlie, also of Bridge Street.

Mr. Robbins spoke at length, and was in favour of the one-way traffic flow into the town from Purewell, but restricting public transport as far as the Bridge Street car park. He also envisaged the long-term phasing out of shops in the area the area (presumably by bankruptcy).

The Robbins plan would also make the High Street one-way towards the Priory, taking the entire traffic flow from Bridge Street and High Street down Wick Lane and St. Margaret's Avenue to Stour Road.

Dr. Cantlie spoke on the dangers of car exhaust fumes on young children, and stressed the point that permanent brain damage could result from the lead content from a high concentration of traffic fumes.

Dr. Cantlie's views differed from Mr. Robbins in that he favoured the total closure of Bridge Street, at least for a trial period but allowing public transport to go through.

Both agreed that there was no alternative to traffic going out of town other than via Wick Lane and St. Margaret's Avenue.

At this point I must declare my own axe to grind. Having two girls at the Wick Lane Primary School, I feel with confidence, that I voice the opinion of the majority of parents of the 300 children that attend, that they would positively not favour the major traffic flow past the school, or even the remote hazard of permanent brain damage to their children.

The most important point of issue and one that I would stress is that there was no resolution called for the meeting and even more important, no show of hands.

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