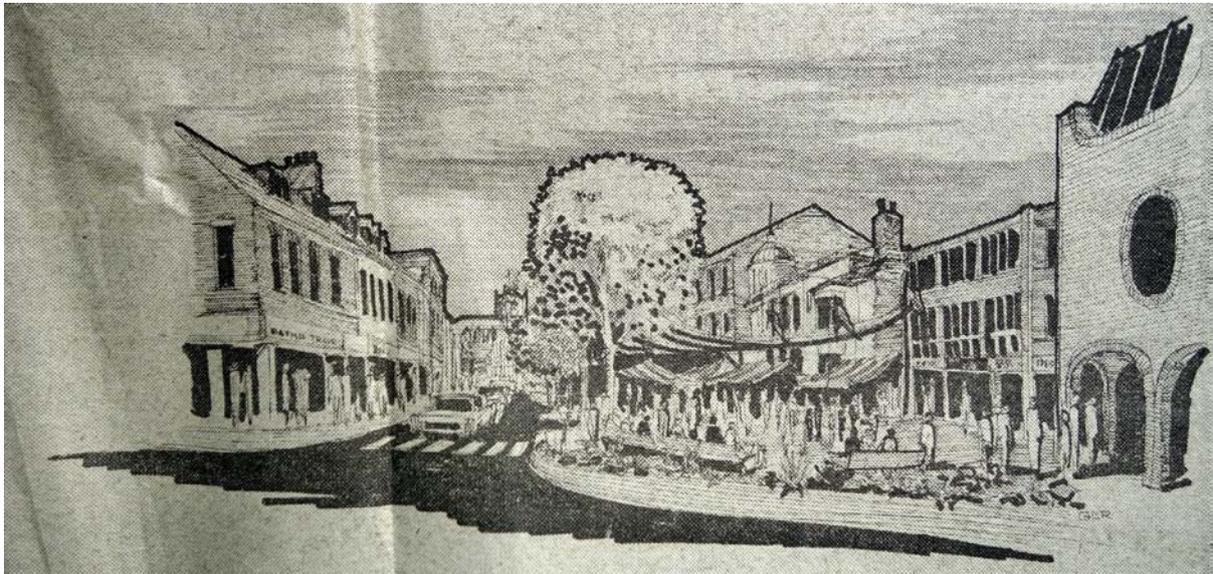


New - look town plan praised

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A TREE-LINED High Street, dotted with flower tubs, parking bays, one-way traffic and a bustling weekly market. This is part of a new-look Christchurch town centre plan conceived by local architect Gordon Robbins and put forward as his contribution to European Cultural Heritage Year as a member of the Dorset Association of Architects.

And although the idea is currently just a drawing board dream, it is already beginning to be taken seriously in local circles, including the town's Chamber of Trade.

Early reaction came from Mr. Roger Mason, chairman of the chamber's traffic subcommittee, who told the 'Times:' "There may be faults but at least someone has put something down on paper which will utilise what we have got, improve it with, out razing buildings and spending a lot of money."

Initial enthusiasm has also come from Coun. Michael Hodges, chairman of Christchurch Council development control committee and member of the local preservation society.

He commented: The overall idea of re-establishing a street market can only be good. Look at the increased trade that market day brings to Ringwood and Lymington."

The plan also includes one-way traffic throughout the centre of the town, 50 extra parking spaces, and a tree-lined High Street with wide pavements and street furniture,

"The only cost which need be involved would be the turning round of a few one-way signs already there, and the painting of a few white lines for the time being." Mr Robbins told the 'Times' this week.

His plan is to make the High Street a one-way north to south road, with traffic proceeding into Church Street and down Wick Lane. Bridge Street and Castle Street would also be one-way, east to west, again filtering down Wick Lane.

The present gyratory, system at the Quay/Priory area would be reversed, leading traffic out of the town centre via St. Margarets Avenue and Sopers Lane.

Millhams Street would be one way as it is now, with traffic turning right into Castle Street, and so on to the Church Street-Wick Lane gyratory.

Other features are pedestrianisation of part of the top end of the High Street.

From the roundabout down to the Druitt Library, where the High Street is particularly wide, Mr. Robbins envisages extending the pavements on the west side to what is now the middle of the road.

This would allow for parking bays for eight cars at possibly five places in the High Street, separated by large trees.

A street market could be held at the north end of this "precinct" with perhaps only the lower parking bays in use.

Gordon Robbins hopes that local organisations would provide the trees, which would form a focal line leading up to the Priory, whose trees have just fallen to Dutch Elm disease.

Tubs of flowers and street furniture could be provided on the widened pavement, creating a meeting place in the town.

"I think the great advantages of a scheme like this is that a one-way system keeps the town alive, as opposed to the cul-de-sacs which result from pedestrianisation.

"This could be implemented without great capital expenditure, and I would like to see it as something the town could do during European Heritage Year, at very little cost," Gordon Robbins told the 'Times.'

He suggests that buses could stop at Bridge Street and at the Fountain, but accepts that alternatives to this may be desirable for the shopper.

"Buses could follow the one-way system if they must come through the town, but I am not in favour of big lorries thundering through," he said.

"My only vested interest in this scheme is that, as a resident of Christchurch, I would like to see the town improved."

"AN ASSETT"

Roger Mason, of the Chamber of Trade, commented: "It provides car parking in the High Street, and the Chamber can only view that as an asset. Fifty more parking spaces must be a good thing.

"And I think it is a much better idea than turning Bridge Street into two culs-de-sac (the plan which comes into operation on April 1 for approximately six weeks).

"The funeral has already started in the High Street, and Bridge Street will become the coffin at end of it."

"And, since the new scheme won't cost a lot of money, it could be financed from the car park reserve fund (which now stands at £29,000).

Borough planning officer Mr. David Pratley sees several drawbacks to the drawing - board scheme, however.

He feels that one-way systems almost inevitably increase the speed of the traffic, that buses really should go through the town centre, and that it is not desirable to route all traffic, including lorries and service vehicles that need to come into the town, down narrow roads like Wick Lane and Church Lane.

But Mr. Pratley is in favour of the theory that it is not practicable to completely pedestrianise the town centre at the moment.

He says that total pedestrianisation is not viable until the economic climate allows commercial redevelopment of the High Street, and rear access routes are constructed.

THOUGHT

He believes that the town might be pedestrianised "in not before 10 years time, and possibly 20 years."

"But I welcome the fact that someone is prepared to give thought to the problem, and we are always willing to discuss any scheme with members of the public," Mr. Pratley told the 'Times.'