

Decision sought on plans for town centre

Times-Herald May 3, 1975

CHRISTCHURCH'S "new direction" junction at Stony Lane will stay. So will the mini-roundabout at the top of Castle Street.

With these two exceptions, Bridge Street will go back to its old state once the gas men have gone.

But the long-term implications of the closure, which is being viewed in many quarters as an experiment, are now the main concern of traders, councillors and officers alike.

Borough Engineer Mr. Richard Mockridge, reporting on the early stages of the closure to the works committee last week, appealed to the meeting, and the council, for a clear policy for the town centre to be reaffirmed.

"You must stress that the Town Centre Map is your policy and that the Purewell Policy Plan is your policy, or, if not, tell me what you want.

"We are working towards them and the traders should know we are working towards them, because it has a tremendous effect on trade in Bridge Street. They will then have a period of time to either readjust their businesses, or re-orientate their businesses, or realise that their businesses are going to collapse—because probably some businesses will collapse, while others will thrive. And the professional people, and the residents, must also know what you are aiming at and what you are doing."

This was the grimmest warning for the traders.

In his report on the partial closure of Bridge Street during the laying of a gas main, Mr. Mockridge appealed to councillors to use this opportunity to see the long-term effects of this type of traffic scheme.

The works committee meeting last Thursday followed immediately on a meeting between a deputation from the local Chamber of Trade and Coun. Bill Bentley and Coun. John Beachamp, chairman and vice-chairman of the works committee. This meeting was also attended by Town Clerk Mr. John MacFadyen, the Borough Engineer, and the Borough Planning Officer, Mr. David Pratley.

The traders came along in protest against the closure, and explained that they had lost up to 60 per cent of their takings during the last few weeks.

But their main concern was for the future of the area, and, sitting in the public gallery during the works meeting, they heard their worst fears confirmed, as Grill-between-the-bridges owner Mr. Peter Herbidge commented later.

Mr. Mockridge explained to the committee that the three reference documents now in use by the chief officers of the council were the Purewell Policy Plan, the Christchurch Town Centre Map, and the Dorset County Council Transport Policy and Programmes.

BUDGET

He said that the Purewell plan referred to the Purewell link road, aimed at taking all through traffic from Purewell Cross out on to the bypass. It was in the county budget for 1978-79, he said, and he thought there was no reason to suppose it would not be constructed at that time, if not before.

Mr. Mockridge quoted from the plan:

"In view of the large number of existing shops and its proximity to the town centre, there appears to be adequate local shopping provision already in Purewell to serve a

considerably increased population, and any additional shops might lead to a declining standard of service.

"Messrs. Drivers Jonas and Co. (commissioned valuation advisers to Hampshire County Council and Christchurch Council on town centre development) consider that the shops in Bridge Street are likely to detract from town centre development and that extension of town centre activities in that direction should be discouraged if the future prosperity of the town centre is to be ensured."

He went on to say that the plan picked out the area between the bridges and shaded it, denoting an area of special visual merit.

"The town centre map does not call for a closure of Bridge Street at the car park, but, in the long term, for pedestrianisation of the lower High Street, and 'semi-pedestrianisation' of the area around the junction with Church Lane and into Castle Street as far as Millhams Street.

"It does therefore suggest that through traffic must be severely limited.

"And the closure we have in force at the moment only simulates the town centre map. It does not do exactly what the map suggests, but it does stop the majority of through traffic coming in from Bridge Street. So you are getting an idea of what effects the implementation of the map would have."

Mr. Mockridge outlined the objectives of the map. The main one was "to retain an attractive, convenient compact and prosperous shopping centre."

He said that since this ideal type of shopping centre did not exist at the moment in Christchurch, it would not be viable to implement the town centre map at this time.

The Borough Engineer went on to tell the committee:

"I recommend to you that you must open the road and let through traffic through again, because as yet we don't have sufficient car parks, and we don't have rear service roads, we don't have proper turning facilities, we don't have proper bus servicing, but most of all we don't have the thriving alternative compact shopping centre."

Mr. Mockridge appealed to the committee not only to reaffirm its policy on town centre development but also to look for ways in which it could best be implemented, and consider all possibilities for preventing the use of the town as a through route and getting heavy vehicles out of the town centre.