

## **Scrutiny speech 270825 - Emily Scaysbrook**

Despite officers' wholly inadequate suggestion to make Park & Ride free for two months, let me be clear: the business community is still overwhelmingly opposed to this scheme - as indeed are the majority of consultation respondents, and more than thirteen thousand petition signatories to date. Officers cannot credibly claim that this proposal carries public support. To introduce this scheme immediately before Christmas is reckless. To suggest that free Park & Ride travel for just two months constitutes sufficient mitigation is insulting, simplistic, and does nothing to address the concerns the business community has raised. Officers should be ashamed of recommending it.

I urge this committee to scrutinise whether it is rational or reasonable to jeopardise the survival of small and local businesses at the very point in the year when survival or closure is decided. What traffic "emergency" exists now that is so pressing, so urgent, that even a short delay until after Christmas is unthinkable? And given that officers themselves have admitted the scheme will cause disruption for three to six months, on what basis is just two months of mitigation considered sufficient? More to the point: how can free Park & Ride travel be mitigation when so many people travel by car not because of cost, but because buses do not meet their needs - shift work, rural journeys, mobility issues, or carrying shopping and children. Free tickets do nothing to remove those barriers.

Please also scrutinise whether a six-week consultation held over the summer holidays, with analysis squeezed into just three weeks while key officers are on holiday, meets any credible democratic standard. Scrutinise why infrastructure is already being installed before councillors have even taken their formal decision. Does that inspire confidence in this council or in local democracy? Public faith in this authority is dwindling precisely because of behaviour like this - the clear impression that decisions are predetermined and voices are ignored. Please do not reinforce that belief by waving this scheme through.

And scrutinise, too, the honesty of what is before you. This scheme is called a "congestion charge" not because it accurately reflects its nature, but because officers admit that signage with that wording was most easily available. Is that acceptable?

This committee must subject this scheme to real scrutiny. The timing is indefensible. The process is flawed. The justifications do not withstand serious examination.

Thank you.