

I'm a local business owner. I also cycle and take the train to commute into Oxford. I'm a Green Party member, and I don't own a car. I have an environmental focus as well as a commercial one here today, and I am concerned from *both* perspectives.

These traffic filters will increase total emissions, and increase road congestion - albeit not in the city centre, but on the ring road and remaining arterial roads. I and many others believe that the vast majority of people who currently drive into Oxford will continue to do so, driving a more heavily polluting route to the same destination. Tourists and shoppers will drive to a more amenable city, further away. I appreciate that many of you do not agree with this and believe that the outcome will be positive. Great. But **what if you are wrong.**

I have asked officers multiple times to clarify how they will measure both the failure and success of this scheme, if it goes ahead. To no avail. I have only been told that it will be monitored ongoing, which is *not* good enough when livelihoods are at stake. It is totally irresponsible to be so cavalier. **If any version of this scheme goes ahead, I urge the council to explicitly, precisely lay out quantitative measures of failure and success, so that the scheme may be removed if the worst happens.**

The council calls this a 'temporary' scheme. And by definition it may be. But in reality that is incredibly misleading. ETROs like this are allowed up to 18 months to run before analysis is required: more than enough time to cause irreparable damage to city businesses, forcing many to close permanently.

Local businesses are struggling. Costs of operating are increasing, margins are shrinking, and we have to compete with online giants who can benefit from better economies of scale, as well as much lower rates and rents if they are based outside of the city centre. The cost of living crisis rages on, increasing our costs at the same time as disinclining customers from spending the reduced disposable income they have still available. The Oxford Living Wage, which we are proud to pay, has gone up; courier costs have also gone up, and we must cover that cost ourselves to remain competitive; and supply chains are increasingly unstable. We are doing what we can, but many are fearful that these traffic filters will prove the final blow. You may not agree with me, you may decide to put this scheme in place anyway. But **I urge councillors to have some humility. What if it proves to be the wrong decision? You are playing with people's lives.** How will you measure failure? You *must* have an idea of what constitutes failure before any plans are implemented, so that if the worst happens, the scheme can immediately be removed.

Officers and councillors alike have been unbelievably flippant in suggesting that businesses will "simply have to adapt", while others have confirmed in no uncertain terms that yes, businesses will close as a result of the scheme's introduction. They have also explicitly told me that no funds whatsoever have been planned to support local businesses negatively affected by the introduction of the scheme if it goes ahead. Many shop-front business owners are personally liable for their leases, so not only are their livelihoods at stake if this scheme has unfavourable consequences, but so is their personal solvency. It is appalling that no plans have been made to support businesses through the implementation of a scheme like this. I urge councillors, if this scheme does go ahead, to rectify this. A thriving independent business community is an important part of what makes Oxford special - without it, the city is a museum, lined with identikit national chains.

Oxford does not exist in a vacuum, please do not make decisions on transport as though it does. The choice facing would-be visitors is not one of Oxford or nothing, but Oxford or numerous other beautiful towns and cities in the county and surrounding area. Ones that are easier, quicker and cheaper to access. The additional concessions recently proposed are confusing, random, and honestly laughable. Any scheme controlling access to a city *must* be simple to understand, and this is not that. This is a sledgehammer solution that will devastate viable businesses and the heart of the city.

I entirely appreciate that rush hour traffic must be reduced, but it does not follow that this is the most reasonable solution. A congestion charge must be reconsidered. Depending on success rate, charges could be increased and/or the hours increased over time, but this gentler approach would at least reduce the possibility of chaos on implementation.

I urge councillors to have the humility - and bravery - to step back from this precipice and reconsider these plans.