



SPEECH TO OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 29 NOVEMBER 2002

I've owned small businesses in Oxford since 1989 and I have detailed knowledge of that sector so I'm here representing the 1000 or so small independent businesses with a shopfront in Oxford – launderettes, newsagents, hairdressers, pubs, cafes, takeaways etc. These are run by incredible people who individually don't have a voice, which is remarkable as together we support about 10K jobs.

I've had a brief look at the business impact statement which the council commissioned – it's mostly data taken from the internet and shows little actual knowledge of Oxford's SMEs with a shopfront – it's tick box nonsense. Organising focus groups with shop owners to hear each business's unique experience is what should have happened.

However much modelling the council does it's no substitute for reality and we're already seeing the catastrophic effects of the LTNs on the east Oxford businesses. There can't be anyone here who doesn't admit the LTNs are the major cause.

The effects of the traffic filters in Oxford is on a vast scale and would negatively impact a whole city's businesses. The impact would not just be financial but there's the human cost – the loss of someone's livelihood and the destruction of their dreams. Many small shops operate on a month by month basis and will not survive. To see the despair in their eyes is heart breaking.

We have the worst inflation in 40 years and the biggest drop in disposable income in six and a half decades. With the current focus on growth in the UK, the council should not be proposing a traffic scheme which is going to suppress trade. Instead, they should be saying 'What can we do to help?'

It's simply untrue that traffic filters won't affect the businesses. The councillors know it and we know it. You need to be accountable.

We should rethink the traffic filters. Give us free, world class park and ride and sort the school run issue instead. The whole thing feels rushed and we need to go back to the drawing board.

Bernadette Evans

Co-owner of Branca Restaurant, Walton Street, Jericho