



Address to Delegated Decisions – Cabinet Member for Transport – 26 March 2026 Witney High Street and Market Square Enhancements

I'm Robin Tucker, Co-Chair of the Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel, a federation of 25 groups across the county, including Witney and county-wide groups.

All over the country, high streets are struggling to come to terms with an economy that has first undergone a massive switch online, then seen a rise in home food deliveries, and then an economy in the doldrums with rising energy prices.

How do you get people back in the shops? Not by letting them drive past, creating a noisy, polluted, intimidating environment. "Cars don't shop, people do" – the words of Janette Sadik-Khan, former New York Transport Commissioner who transformed large parts of their city streets from congested nightmares into pedestrian plazas.

The key lesson they learned was about bums on seats. When Sadik-Khan's team closed off part of Times Square they realised they had regained about two football fields worth of space for people, but there was nothing there for them. They went to local hardware stores, bought about 400 folding chairs and set them out. People reclaimed the space and made it their own. They met, they talked, they ate their lunches. And they forgot that the week before, thousands of cars had dominated the space.

Now I'm not saying that New York is like Witney, but if you can make it there... .. and Abingdon is a lot like Witney. And we did reclaim our Market Place from cars – it took an Act of Parliament in 1978. But this has enabled markets and more than a dozen cafes to thrive, and other shops benefit from the people they bring.

That is why we are delighted to see this proposal come forward. This proposal in formal terms deals with the technicalities and the TROs, but it also enables the public realm improvements that will encourage people to visit and linger – the seating, greenery and materials that indicate that this is a place for people and not for traffic. There are plenty of car parks nearby, but the pedestrian pound is powerful, and we should encourage it here.