

8th September 2020

Letter to Hart District Councillors from Fleet Business Improvement District

We published our views on the plans to trial pedestrianisation of a central area in Fleet in July. Public safety is the priority. The additional space also provides the opportunity to promote the town centre with attractive landscaping as well as COVID-safe events and activities to bring people into the town.

The temporary scheme was installed on 24th August with the landscaping element due to be installed over the next few weeks. As the Business Improvement District, we are finalising a plan of events for the next few months so that the space can be used in a safe way to encourage people into the town and to support local businesses while they are there.

The events we have organised so far include a craft market with the support of Fleet Town Council, street art activity as well as buskers in the town. These have all been received positively by local residents and have increased trade for some businesses, even at such an early stage.

As the BID we believe that this scheme needs to be given sufficient time so that it can be evaluated properly. This includes:

- Time to understand the long-term traffic flow implication.
- Time for the landscaping scheme to be implemented and to understand how this affects the use of the town.
- Time to measure footfall over an extended period.
- Time to measure car park data.
- Time for activities to be organised and for businesses to have the opportunity to get involved.
- Time to evaluate the success of events and activities.
- Time for businesses to see the impact on trade over time as people come into the town for events and activities.

If the scheme is removed at such an early stage, before it can be evaluated to determine whether it is successful, what are the alternative plans? Fleet needs to be a safe place to visit where activities and events can take place that reflect how town centres are changing. This is the environment that is required to support a town's economic recovery and any decision to remove the scheme now puts this fragile recovery at risk.

Fleet Business Improvement District (BID) Company Ltd.

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We do not underestimate the task in hand. Our research shows that 67% people were visiting Fleet less in early August than in February and demand for many sectors has reduced. Many businesses are at risk of closure due to COVID and are having to change their business models and adapt to survive.

The task of recovery will require significant vision and leadership to overcome the challenges faced not just in Fleet, but up and down the country. We therefore urge all councillors to put politics aside and do what is best for the future of our high street to ensure it not only survives but thrives.

This is not ideal, but we are not in an ideal world. This is a trial. But without a fundamental rethink of the use of space and a vision to adapt as society changes, the alternative is managing decline, which we believe is unacceptable.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Bulgin
Chairman of the Fleet Business Improvement District

About the Fleet Business Improvement District

Fleet Business Improvement District is a not for profit organisation led and funded by the business community in Fleet, Hampshire. Fleet BID was established in 2017 representing the business community in central Fleet to deliver events and activities in Fleet, Hampshire to make our town a great place to eat out, shop, work and do business.

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