

Cllr Tim Bearder  
Cabinet Member for Highways  
Oxfordshire County Council  
County Hall  
Oxon OX1 1ND

March 2022

Dear Cllr Bearder,

**RE: Closure of Witney High Street**

We are writing with regard to Oxfordshire County Council's recent decision to permanently close Witney High Street to all motor vehicles, aside from a few limited exemptions.

Over recent weeks, we have been speaking to traders on the High Street and residents of Witney to seek their views on the impact of the closure. It is overwhelmingly clear that businesses and residents alike do not feel that the County Council has listened to them, both prior to taking the decision to permanently close the High Street and subsequently, when they have expressed concern at the detrimental impact the closure is having on their businesses and daily lives.

As you will be aware, 36 out of 37 businesses on the High Street opposed the closure, as did the majority of residents who responded to the County Council's consultation, with 50% of respondents opposing the closure and a further 10% expressing significant concerns. Nevertheless, these concerns appear to have been ignored, with the County Council going ahead with the closure. **This has led many in Witney to conclude that the consultation was nothing more than a box-ticking exercise, and that the County Council was determined to implement a permanent closure regardless of the views of local residents and the traders of the High Street.**

High Street businesses feel like their concerns continue to be ignored. Despite many traders reporting a considerable downturn in business, the County Council appears unwilling to engage with them. We want to see a bustling High Street that is a welcoming home to the thriving local businesses which are the lifeblood of our town, and this requires a County Council that is willing to listen to and support our local traders. **Sadly, the County Council's cavalier attitude and lack of a clear plan, either to support traders or for a future plan for the High Street, appears to be endangering the long-term future of Witney's centre.**

Local residents are also profoundly concerned at the chaotic way in which the County Council has implemented the closure, with no clear plan or mitigations put in place. The County Council does not appear to have anticipated that the surrounding roads of Corn Street, Witan Way and Welch Way would absorb the traffic banned from the High Street, which has led to long queues, disarray and general misery for local drivers on these roads, compounded by the new 'cycle lane' on Corn Street, which again appears to have been installed by the Council without any long-term planning. **Please could you confirm what plans, if any, the County Council has to address the chaos it has caused on the roads surrounding Witney High Street?**

We hope that the County Council will acknowledge and listen to the concerns which are being expressed widely among residents and businesses in Witney. **Rather than continuing with its dismissive and single-minded approach, we call on the County Council to engage with local residents and traders, and ensure Witney is adequately consulted on a matter which is having a fundamental impact on our town. We also call on the County Council to develop and publish a long-term plan for ensuring that Witney has a thriving High Street for many decades to come.**

We need a full and proper consultation – with a County Council willing to listen – so everyone can have their say on the future of our wonderful town. Currently, due to the absence of a plan from the County Council, the High Street – and the centre of Witney – is left in limbo: neither accessible for shoppers in cars nor properly pedestrianised, neither open nor closed. This cannot continue.

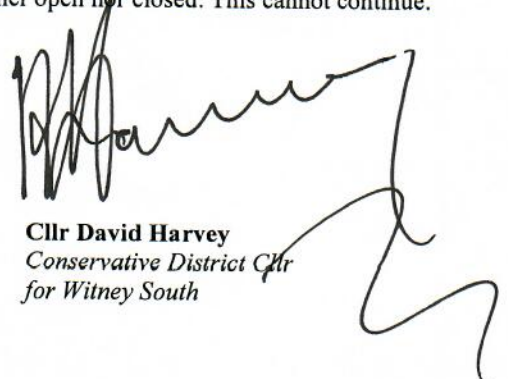
Yours sincerely,



**Robert Courts MP**  
Member of Parliament  
for Witney & West Oxon



**Cllr Mark Johnson**  
Conservative District Cllr  
for Witney South



**Cllr David Harvey**  
Conservative District Cllr  
for Witney South