

Harrogate Gateway

I write to you in view of the upcoming Area Committee meeting on May 5 with specific reference to the Harrogate Gateway project. I see from the recent consultation that those surveyed are broadly in support of the project. However, I am also aware from reports in the media that there is still some opposition to the project within the business community (Harrogate advertiser 1/07/22). In particular it would seem that the chamber, the BID and independent Harrogate have concerns. To be frank, I struggle to understand the reluctance of some retailers to embrace this change. As my representative, it would be good to understand your position on the project?

My interest in the subject is primarily centred around wanting my children (and their children!) to grow up in a vibrant, thriving and accessible community. I imagine a town full of tourists & residents socialising, relaxing and enjoying life. I can also view the project with over 25 years experience in retail leadership for the likes of Apple and it is with that experience that I can not understand the reluctance to improve the fortunes of the town centre. In simple terms I feel that there are assumptions and misunderstanding of what impact the project will have. Specifically, a focus on active travel & reducing car dependence appears a key concern. If you don't mind I would like to highlight some experiences and research which counters most of the objections raised.

This Government document offers a clear insight into the economic benefits of cycling and walking.

<https://content.tfl.gov.uk/walking-cycling-economic-benefits-summary-pack.pdf>

Some of these benefits are likely to be immediate and tangible, people that walk, cycle and use public transport spend 40% more each month than car drivers. Other benefits would be less immediate, like retail vacancy rate 17% lower and retail rental values increased by 7.5%

Interestingly, (and despite initial opposition) 90% London BID members surveyed felt LTNs create vibrant areas and 83% felt they attracted more customers.

The study also shows that businesses tend to overestimate car usage, believing that 63% of people used a car to arrive in the area. Yet only 20% of people used cars, 64% walked, 54% used public transport with 12% cycling.

	Business estimate	Visitors response
By Car	63%	20%
Walk	49%	64%
Public Transport	41%	54%
Cycle	12%	12%

Another 'hidden' benefit for business, employees who cycle to work have 27% fewer sick days and 73% of BID members felt the environment created by LTNs was important to attract and retain staff.

Will fewer parking spaces mean less business? Well, no. In fact the opposite is probably true, as this analysis from Canada outlines; <https://locallogic.co/blog/does-more-parking-bring-more-business/>

While this may seem counter intuitive, there are a number of reasons that when looked at logically start to make sense; More parking means more traffic and more traffic generally creates a less appealing environment for socialising and spending time in – no one enjoys having an alfresco lunch next to a busy road or parked cars. The space used for moving the cars and (in particular) parking cars could be used for less crowded walkways along with more outside retail, entertainment and hospitality space. Each of which would be far more economically valuable than having an empty car parked there for two hours.

To quote directly from the article;

research has shown over and over that parking is not critical to retail streets. From 2010 to 2015, Philadelphia removed 3,000 downtown parking spots — 7% of the total — and has seen increased retail vibrancy in that period. In New York, the construction of new bike lanes — using space that could be taken up by parking instead — corresponded with a 24% increase in retail sales nearby. And on top of this, drivers often spend less per month compared to cyclists and pedestrians — nearly two-thirds that of pedestrians, according to one British study. As such, incentivizing drivers might just be bad business

This website also offers some detail into specific research and findings; <https://www.cycling-embassy.org.uk/wiki/shopping-and-cycling-the-evidence>

It is important to point out that NO ONE is talking about banning cars or parking!

It feels like a lack of imagination and a fear of the unknown is holding people back. While I understand that not all businesses will benefit in the same way or by the same amount, I do believe that ALL businesses will benefit from increased footfall (cars don't have feet!) and I would go as far as to suggest any business that does not benefit is not a viable business in the first place.

Footfall & linger time are key pillars that all retailers should strive for and benefit from. Cars don't have feet and people in cars don't linger!

Finally, when I think about the image Harrogate would like to show the world, the postcards, the instagram posts, the tourist websites, the hotel websites and the Christmas market pictures...not a single one of those images are focused on cars, parking and roads.