

Gazette

COMMENT

Car ban is right for town centre

WHEN it comes to the town centre, Colchester Council is damned if it does take action, and damned if it doesn't.

For decades now there have been calls for Colchester to follow the examples set by other towns and pedestrianise its High Street.

But while many shoppers and some traders would welcome the move, others believe changes to the status quo could put their livelihoods at risk.

For the past two years the authority has been working on more modest plans, which would see the High Street become a no-go area for cars and lorries during the day.

While the potential impact on surrounding roads needs further investigation, the principles of the proposed change are sound.

The High Street could become an infinitely more attractive place to shop or enjoy a meal, without the steady stream of cars making their way down the road.

But, as ever, the devil is in the detail.

Traders and disabled residents are justified in questioning why buses, taxis and bikes are allowed down the street, but delivery vans and Blue Badge holders will not be.

Despite the best efforts of both groups, the powers-that-be have singularly failed to articulate good reasons why they should not also be granted exemptions.

They should speak up now, so everyone can get behind this long-awaited project.

● £500,000 council plan going ahead

● Traders: It will kill the High Street

By **JAMES CALNAN**

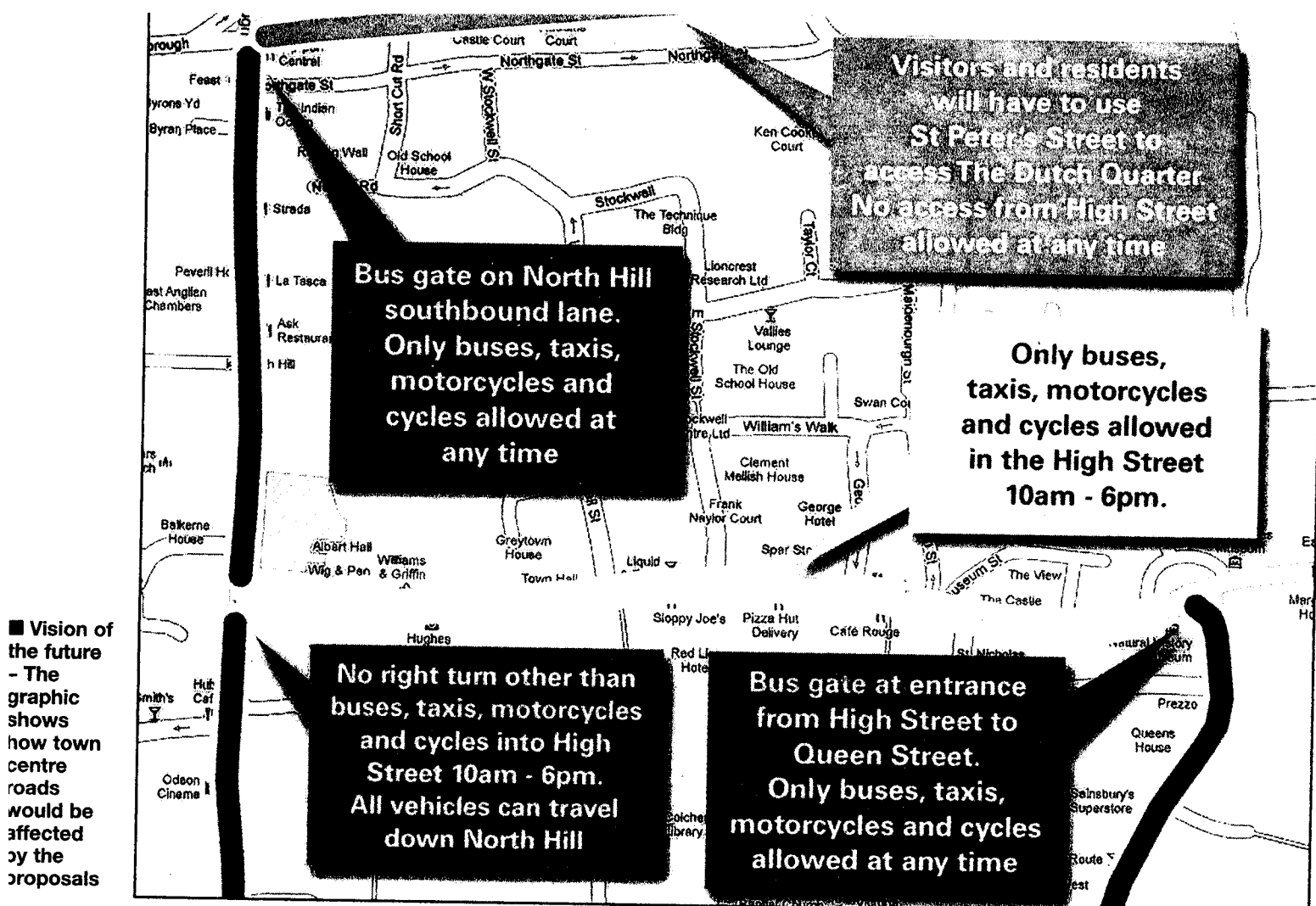
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WORK to ban cars from Colchester's High Street could start this summer.

Traffic regulation orders to make the £550,000 scheme legal are about to be issued and traders and residents will then have 21 days to object.

The Colchester Retail/Business Association says it will fight the move unless delivery vehicles are allowed access, and traders fear it will harm business.

SPECIAL REPORT: P8-9



■ Vision of the future - The graphic shows how town centre roads would be affected by the proposals

Plea for help to Mary, Queen of Shops

COLCHESTER Council is turning to the Queen of Shops to boost its shopping centre. The authority looks set to apply for £100,000 from a scheme headed by shopping guru Mary Portas, who was commissioned by the

Government to write a report on how to save our high streets. The Government has invited 12 councils to bid for a share of £1million. Nick Barlow, councillor responsible for economic development,

said he had discussed the idea with local businesses. He said: "I am pretty sure we will make a bid. "Obviously the money is a boost, but we have to be wary that all the focus will be on us."

Witham MP Priti Patel has encouraged Witham Town Council and Braintree District Council to bid for funding. She said: "The Portas pilots offer a fantastic opportunity to re-invigorate our town."

PEDESTRIANISATION: THE VIEWS ON THE STREET



Alistaire Frost, 35, of Mersea Road, Colchester, said: "They need to get this sorted quickly. "It will be better for the public and healthier as it will reduce pollution. "Less traffic will make it safer for shoppers as well with people not having to dodge traffic. If you are in the shops you can feel the traffic vibrating through."



Helen Fraser, 29, of Hythe Quay, Colchester, said: "The way people drive down the High Street is mad. Pedestrianising it will stop the boy racers and idiots racing around town. When you go shopping you can feel the fumes in your face. I agree that it probably will increase traffic elsewhere, but it will be better, overall, for the economy."



Richard Fincham, 71, of Stockwell, Colchester, said: "This should have been done 20 years ago. The shops would thrive. It's nice when you go to other towns, like Chelmsford, and stroll in the High Street. Things have changed a lot round here. You can't stop progress, but you can stop towns progressing in the wrong way."



Marilyn Fincham, 66, of Stockwell, Colchester, said: "There is a problem at the moment where buses can't park, because of all the traffic. "Half of the time the buses have to drive straight past you. We've missed buses twice because of that. "Having a bus lane would improve it and breathe life back into the High Street."

By JAMES CALNAN

Chief reporter

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TRADERS have issued a plea to Colchester Council to throw out plans to pedestrianise the town centre.

Traffic regulation orders will imminently be issued, banning cars and lorries from the High Street during the day.

The move is part of Colchester Council and Essex County Council's long-awaited plans to revitalise the town centre.

Once the orders are published, residents and traders who oppose them have 21 days to object.

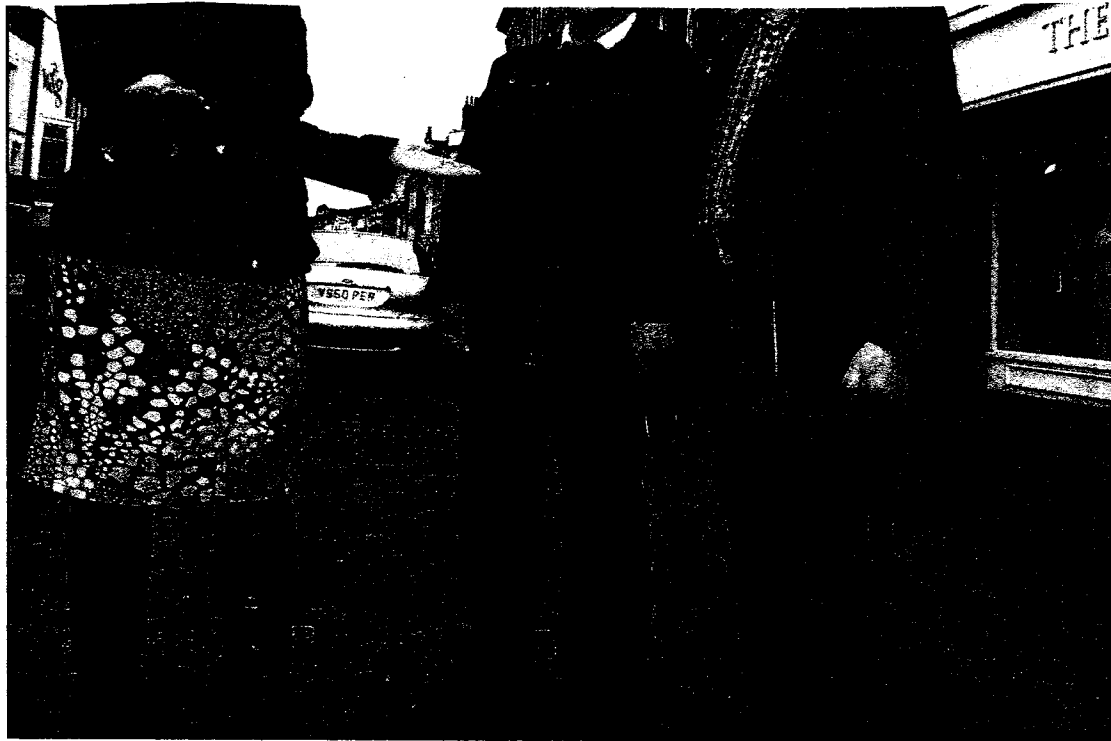
The changes, which will cost £550,000, are set to be implemented in the summer holidays.

All vehicles other than buses, taxis, motorbikes and bicycles will be banned from the High Street between 10am and 6pm, Monday to Saturday.

Businesses fear their trade could be decimated.

Nicola Garton, who opened the Wedding Shop at the top of the High Street last month, said: "We've got a loading bay for brides to pick up their dresses. That was one of the main reasons we moved to the High Street."

Paul Lonergan, director of Andrews TV, said while his delivery workers picked up most TVs and kitchen appliances before 10am, they and customers frequently needed to load outside the shop during the day.



■ We don't want it! Ron Levy and Michelle Reynolds, chairman of Colchester Retail Business Association, with Nicola Garton, owner of the Wedding Shop

Picture: NIGEL BROWN CO55534_11

He said: "From a shopping point of view, closing the High Street is a brilliant idea. From a delivery point of view, this is the worst case scenario.

"They need to think how to work it properly."

The Colchester Retail/Business Association quizzed 21 shops, restaurants, pubs and hotels on the High Street and found 20 were

opposed to the proposal.

Many fear the displacement of traffic from the town centre will mean more motorists getting caught up in gridlock in already congested roads, like Brook Street and part of Mersea Road.

High levels of nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere caused by queueing cars mean the town centre and nearby routes are set

to be declared an air quality management area later this year.

Earlier this month the association sent its findings and concerns to all 60 councillors along with bosses at both Colchester Council and County Hall.

Secretary Ron Levy said he was disappointed to receive no replies.

He said: "We want these business delivery restrictions

● Businesses urge council to think again
● Shops say deliveries will be affected

removed from the scheme. We'll accept nothing less than that.

"If this goes ahead, we will finish up with more empty shops in the High Street, and that would be the beginning of the decline."

HAVE YOUR SAY

E-mail gazette.letters@nqg.com

New Schuh brings 25 jobs Disabled parking fears

SHOE chain Schuh will create 25 jobs when it opens in Colchester's Culver Square next month, at the former Clinton Cards shop, which closed on Christmas Eve.

The store will be the footwear chain's 65th stand-alone branch and will have a 1,900 sq ft sales floor.

Derek Ashbee, Culver

Square's centre manager, said: "Schuh's arrival reinforces the shopping offer at Culver Square and enhances Colchester's status as a major regional shopping destination.

"In research we conducted last year, Colchester sits at number 12 in a league of south eastern towns, above

Chelmsford, Maidstone, Canterbury, Basingstoke and Basildon and very close in size to Oxford, Portsmouth and Guildford.

"Schuh's selection of international sports and street shoe brands will prove popular with the town's 22,000 student population."

NEW disabled parking spaces to replace ones that could be scrapped in Colchester town centre are too far away for Blue Badge holders, it is claimed.

The plans from Colchester Council and Essex County Council would see disabled parking banned from the High Street and

Head Street. Spaces would be added in Vineyard Street, Priory Street and St Mary's car park, and Culver Square service area.

Jade Hamnett, chairman of Fair Access 2 Colchester, said the plans were flawed.

She said: "It's nothing to do with how many spaces are being provided.

"Someone with a Blue Badge struggles to walk 50 metres or more. The car parks are further away from the shops than that.

"Buses, taxis, motorcycles, bicycles and coaches will still be allowed down it - so what is the harm of allowing Blue Badge holders down there as well?"