

Queen Street traders say plan will hurt business

THE partial road closure of Queen Street carried out by Devon County Council last week for a survey appears to have given traders a taste of things to come, with several reporting that they were already hundreds of pounds down as a result.

More than 50 business owners, councillors and residents of Queen Street and the Avenue met at Meddy Turkish restaurant last Thursday in a 'council of war' to discuss opposition to the council's plans for Queen Street.

The 'traffic reduction and pedestrianisation scheme', funded by the Future High Street Fund and passed by the chamber last month, will remove 55 parking spaces from Queen Street, make it 'access only' and send most traffic back around the town towards Kingsteignton.

The scheme has had a chilling effect on local traders, with many at the meeting citing similar schemes that have failed in Paignton, Torquay, Totnes and Exeter. Midtown residents, meanwhile, were concerned about the loss of parking and the funneling of so much traffic via the Avenue.

Gail Anderson, manager of Johnson's Dry Cleaners, said: 'Takings are down £1,000 over just these three days of disruption. It's very concerning.' Jackson's fish shop similarly reported an 18 per cent drop in trade, while Shaldon Bakery

said its sales had fallen over the week.

The night-time traders, including the managers of Meddy Bar and Grill and Tean's Thai restaurant, also noted that the road closure had significantly dented their evening business with some traders saying they had closed early.

Claire Qudvenec, manager of Jackson's Fish Shop, said: 'Our business is successful and has been in town for over a century. It is wrong for our livelihood to be put at risk by this damaging scheme.'

Imam Dogan, the owner of Meddy, added: 'I took on this unit after Burger King walked away. It had been empty for a year and a half and nobody else wanted it. I have no doubt that I'll have to close down if this goes ahead.'

The meeting had been organised by the South Devon Alliance political group, which has long opposed the Liberal Democrat and Conservative blueprint for the district. Following an official consultation by TDC, SDA members carried out their own survey of Queen Street businesses - this found about 75 per cent of traders opposed to the council's plans.

An SDA spokesperson said: 'A final council consultation which demonstrated overwhelming opposition to the scheme was never aired at the meeting where the scheme was passed by the



● Gail Anderson of Johnson's dry cleaners.

Conservative-led Devon County Council and Lib Dem-led TDC. The council's SDA members have however opposed all plans brought forward in the council's Future High Street Fund proposals, including a scheme to hollow out and repurpose the Alexandra Theatre which TDC appears now to have been excluded from the plan.

SDA Devon County Councillor Janet Bradford, who also

represents College Ward at TDC said: 'The claim that this scheme has the support of the business community can now truly be laid to rest. People here want to dismantle these plans.'

Carmen Hanif, representing the Federation of Small Businesses, said that the organisation would support the Queen Street traders in their struggle, having seen 'time and again' how similar schemes had faltered and

been reversed. Former Newton Abbot mayor and Town Councillor Mike Joyce added: 'The scheme is not widely supported and it will stop the beating heart of the town. The Town Council has been ignored by District and County as usual. This scheme and the 'just shut up' attitude displayed is one of the reasons why I left the Lib Dems.'

The meeting concluded with a call to further action and an open invitation for TDC representatives to 'stop hiding behind online consultations and inaccurate claims', and instead actually meet the business owners face to face.

SDA Leader Richard Daws, councillor for Ambrook Ward, said: After demonstrations and uproar, TDC took the Alexandra Theatre out of its Future High Street Fund plans saying it had listened to the town. The retailers are asking the council to listen to the town again, and change tack now before more of our High Street is lost.

Businesses represented at the meeting included Austin's, Waffle Inn, Johnson's Dry Cleaners, Thomas Trophies, Jackson's Fish Bar, Jackson Fishmongers, Meddy Bar & Grill, Tean's Thai Restaurant, The Pharmacy Café, Age UK, Percy's Fabrics, Ivor Dewdney, Rupp & Fraser Accountants and Shaldon Bakery, with many others busy running their operations passing on their support.

