

May 28, 2012

**To: all members of Swale Transportation Board, meeting June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**Subject: Proposed Extension to the Pedestrianisation Scheme in Faversham on Fridays**

As the former Chair of Swale Access Group, involved in previous attempts by Faversham Town Council to change traffic flows and ban traffic in the town centre, I was invited by Brian Planner to attend a working group, facilitated by Pete Raine, in order to represent the views and needs of disabled people in accessing the town centre and the services within it, particularly on market days.

The key issues I raised were as follows:

1. There needs to be an understanding of the needs of people with different disabilities. For example there is a perception that most disabled people are wheelchair users – this is not the case, and many are car drivers (or driven by carers) who cannot walk far and/or carry any weight of shopping. Equally those people who are blind or are partially sighted have real problems with advertising boards and tables and chairs outside premises, especially at the narrowest part of the market square.
2. Because the town centre is traffic free on Saturdays, the elderly and disabled visit the market on Fridays to buy plants, fish, fruit and vegetables, do their banking visit the hairdresser, meet with friends etc. This includes blue badge holders and the many that access the market area by taxi for drop-off and pick-up.
3. Despite a few additional disabled bays in the main car park adjacent to the toilets, it is almost impossible to find one free after 9.30-10 am on a Friday and Saturday. Unlike other towns, such as Hythe, where traffic is banned until 3pm, in Faversham town centre there is little on street parking/ yellow lines where blue badge holders could park near to the market place.
4. Faversham town centre whilst vibrant and busy on a Saturday with a mix of local people, (especially those who commute out during the week) and visitors, during the week local businesses rely very much on the trade of the elderly or disabled, who cannot or do not wish to shop in the supermarkets in Faversham or elsewhere.

At the meeting the group agreed that for this consultation it was vital to consult with the actual users of the town centre on a Friday, and not just leaflet surrounding streets, which was what was done on previous occasions, and the best way was to have a market stall for several Fridays to seek peoples' views on what was being proposed. I attended the stall on May 4<sup>th</sup> with Pete Raine and Brett Connell from Highways

between 10am and noon and spoke to as many disabled drivers as possible, and detail here some main comments, all of which I support:

1. Insufficient disabled parking spaces in the car park.
2. Disabled bays should be allocated in the parking spaces outside Shepherd Neames' offices in Court Street, which would make access to the market easier.
3. Traffic bans for disabled drivers/ taxis should end at 3pm, not 4pm, to enable people to access the market, attend appointments etc. This should apply to both Saturday and Friday.
4. As cars currently need to be out of the town all together by 10 am it is a rush for disabled people to do all they wish to in the time. It was suggested that whilst the gate would be closed at 10 am that disabled drivers only be allowed to park in Preston Street until say 11 am. Two people I spoke to had to carry portable oxygen and could not walk far or quickly.
5. People were very concerned as to how they could shop at the market and the town centre if traffic was banned on both Friday and Saturday from 10-4pm.

During this time I observed very large lorries negotiating the market place and shoppers, including Iceland vehicles and food delivery ones making deliveries to cafes and pubs in Preston Street. There were also vehicles which were driving through the town centre, that were not disabled drivers nor making deliveries. At no time were the Police present to stop them. Also, the parking contractors were not in evidence checking stationary vehicles.

I was also concerned to note the continual flow of taxis dropping off and picking up elderly and disabled people. The needs of these members of the community must be considered throughout this process of banning traffic on Fridays

I understand the benefits of banning traffic on Fridays as well as Saturdays, but careful thought must be given to this proposal, ensuring equality of access to the market and other services for everyone. I propose the following as a minimum:

- a. Provision of disabled parking bays in Court Street. Perhaps this work can be paid for from Faversham Town Councils budgets? This would include provision of dropped kerbs.
- b. Further disabled bays in the main car park
- c. Extend to 11 am the time disabled drivers can park in Preston St once gates are shut.
- d. Change the times from 10-4pm to 10-3pm on both Friday and Saturday

If the above recommendations are implemented and disabled people engaged in the process, then there will be I feel be a better chance of the review as proposed resulting in a permanent arrangement.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Chester

Member of working group

Former Chair of Swale Access Group

c.c. Pete Raine; Brian Planner