

## COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12

### QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

**Question** from Mr Matthew Knowles:

Given the summer weather is soon to end and the closure of Fleet Road is temporary, will the Council now reopen it fully & undertake not to close it again before elections can be held to seek the opinion of the local electorate?

**Councillor Cockarill's** response:

The issue of Fleet Road pedestrianisation is obviously on the agenda to be debated this evening with the Motion that's being put forward, so it would be absolutely wrong for me, at this stage, to pre-empt what Council decides to do. I am sure Mr Knowles will be very interested in progress and the final outcome of the vote. Obviously, as a member of the Cabinet, I will be guided by whatever Council chooses to do this evening.

**Supplementary question** from Mr Knowles:

Thank you. I have lived in Fleet for more than 10 years and it is a great place to live. I am sure you've all shared in that feeling of pride when the town has been blessed with the best place in the country to live several times. During that 10 plus years, I never recall the police having to put in place a dispersal order for the Fleet Road area before. Do you believe as I do, that this new and concerning development is due to the closure of the road and the lack of passing traffic to dissuade anti-social behaviour when the shops are closed on an evening?

**Councillor Cockarill's** response:

Again, thank you for the supplementary Mr. Knowles. I have no evidence to say what has caused the police to issue dispersal orders. It's not something that that I've been made aware of personally. Others may have more information, but I have no evidence to suggest that the pedestrianisation has had any effect in terms of people gathering as they should not be gathering. In fact, part of the whole reason for the pedestrianisation is to provide people in Fleet with enough space that they can shop and socially distance in a safe and secure way.

**Question** from Mr Bruce Bulgin, Chairman, Fleet BID:

*Would you agree that it is far too early to consider taking down the road closure in Fleet town Centre on the basis that evidence shows that a significant number of independent traders both within and outside of the pedestrianised area are seeing an upturn in trade and have communicated this to Fleet BID and other agencies? In addition, all of the evidence we have seen shows that there has been no significant detrimental impact on traffic flows in the surrounding area.*

**Councillor Cockarill's response:**

Thank you for the question. I am afraid my answer is going to be very similar to the answer of the previous question. I will be hoping to make an intervention into the debate later on this evening and members of the Council and members of the public will be able to gauge what my position is in relation to pedestrianisation at that time. Again, I don't want to pre-empt what the Council might decide to do later on.

**Supplementary question from Mr Bulgin:**

I think we've all seen that COVID-19 has accelerated high street decline and footfall is down 50%. Online Shopping is up 30%, many high street businesses will close and 67% of people have told us that they visited this less in early August than they did in February. So if you are a Councillor planning to vote the scheme to be removed before time for it to be evaluated, to determine whether it's successful, what are your alternative plans to revive the high street and Fleet and when will they be implemented?

**Councillor Cockarill's response:**

Thank you for the supplementary question. What I will say is that as the portfolio holder for economic development, which falls under the Place portfolio we are very keen to try and support all of the businesses in Fleet and the Hart area through this very challenging and very difficult economic situation, which seems challenging and then not very good for next few months, either. We will be happy to look at any schemes that come forward, whether it be something similar to this pedestrianisation scheme or anything else that Fleet BID or other organizations think we can help with. So there is an open invitation to come and talk to us about ideas that you think might help, and we will certainly do our best to facilitate those as we have done, for example, with the recent street markets in Fleet High Street, which I gather have been successful.