

Linlithgow High Street closure frustrates local

Road-workers carrying out vital work in Linlithgow High Street were subjected to 'aggressive' abuse from frustrated locals, West Lothian council has heard.

The resurfacing of roads and footways completely closed the street for ten days, leaving shopkeepers and shoppers complaining and council staff and contractors on the front line.

And the abuse suffered by staff working on the scheduled and vital upgrade was made worse by anger whipped up on social media.

Local Lib Dem Councillor Sally Pattle – who owns a bookshop in the town – slammed those who had abused staff, but admitted the roadworks had caused “major disruption” to local businesses.

And she called for better consultation and communication over sensitive roadworks.

She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The major roadworks have encompassed several pieces of work that have been rolled into one major disruption, and which has included 10 days of total road closure, effectively cutting Linlithgow in two.”

Councillor Pattle said the total closure had severely impacted people trying to go about their business and those living in

surrounding residential streets which they found became rat runs for traffic trying to negotiate a route through the town.

She added: "Linlithgow High Street is rightly celebrated for its wealth of independent businesses, which should be enjoying a busy run-up to Christmas. Instead, many are sitting in empty shops and cafes."

She added: "In Linlithgow we've got a Town Management Group, a Town Centre Manager, a Business Improvement District, and an active voluntary group of traders.

"None of these groups were consulted about the timing of these works, they would happily have sat down with the roads department and worked out a more suitable time for the works to take place.

"I have repeatedly asked what framework is used by the council to determine when works of this magnitude should take place. In the written response provided to me today, they state that they inform large businesses so they can plan shift patterns, but apparently no consideration is given to small businesses.

"As a trader on the High Street myself, I am acutely aware of the challenges we are facing with the combination of skyrocketing operating costs, the cost-of-living crisis and the result of the recent budget which is adding yet more pressure onto small and medium businesses."

Councillor Pattle castigated those who had targeted the road crews with abuse: "Of course it's not right for anyone to be cross with the workers, in fact they've been incredibly helpful to traders trying to get deliveries etc.

"The issue is the lack of consultation with regards to the timing and the failure to acknowledge the negative impact this decision."

This week, as workmen finalised the work and began dismantling barriers a council spokesperson told the LDRS: "It's a significant amount of work and, sadly, council staff and the onsite contractors staff have been subject to considerable abusive and aggressive behaviour from members of the public.

"We are also aware of abuse directed at our staff by others on social media, alongside misinformation.

"This is from a minority of people but it is really disappointing and nobody deserves this whilst working and doing their job. This kind of behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

"The safety measures that are in place protecting the worksite are there for the protection of the public and road staff carrying out their duties. Cars and pedestrians are therefore not permitted to pass through barriers and into closed roads and footways.

"Unauthorised and illegal access to the site is not permitted at any time and may lead to injury and unfortunately Police Scotland have had to be notified to assist the council in the instances that have been recorded.

"We understand that there are people who are not satisfied with road works and the impact that they have. However, they are carried out to improve roads and paths and they will be over soon."

Councillor Pattle said she intended to raise the issue with the council in the New Year.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter