

Westside Traders Group – Statement of Fact

Dear Mr Simkins,

Date: 25th May 2022

You requested a summarisation of our grievances with the situation of Westside. Early March, the traders of Westside brought to your attention and other council representatives, in good faith, some serious issues affecting their businesses.

We are now feeling very dejected and disparaged by the absence of resolve to the issues raised. This has been further fuelled by Isobel's recent proposal 'the financial health check', which was **not** asked for and does **not** solve **any** of the current issues, in fact it raises concerns to us that there is no coherency in resolving issues – we are not being heard. We are still awaiting the "working document" that was agreed 8th May that was going to be produced to work closely with the Westside traders.

To be clear on the chain of events. The negligence in not involving Westside during the consultation and planning processes has culminated in putting businesses and livelihoods at risk. By your own admission, not fully understanding and realising the sheer impact it would have on Westside businesses is not only a clear oversight but a gross failure in the project management and the vision going forwards. As direct consequences of this failure to confer, some businesses have lost their livelihoods and others are facing financial hardship. The mistakes made by both the contractors and council has left businesses in dire straits. Thus, the financial health check as it stands will not assist businesses but questions and implies business viability as opposed to addressing and rectifying the problem that has been created by the council and contractors. **Businesses are being asked to justify how and why are they being affected, their sustainable existence and viability. There is a need to provide immediate financial hardship relief to mitigate the losses that this has caused to allow businesses to stabilise and a sustainable plan to support businesses going forward.** Over time, Westside has been stripped of footfall, market relocation, buses and taxis and the last straw being the roadworks now almost completely cutting off accessibility to Westside which has directly impacted businesses and their ability to serve the greater community. **Time is a major factor in saving Westside from irrevocable loss and recovery through negligent and lack of timely responses.**

It seems apparent that there isn't much appetite or urgency from the council to deal with these matters; despite 5 businesses closing and 40 plus asking for help to get through this difficult time outside of our control. Frankly, not much is being resolved as verbal reassurances are not being followed or articulated and are open to misunderstanding.

To be clear how to go forward, we would like to **request a formal written response** to the main points listed below which are underpinned by the minutes of 7th April 2022, a copy of which you received. Please acknowledge receipt of document by 30th May 2022.

WESTSIDE TRADERS GROUP REQUIREMENTS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.

1. Financial hardship relief to counter the losses incurred due to the roadworks to be set in place within 2 weeks and we should have results and pay out within next 6 to 8 weeks for any eligible businesses.

2. All business rates payable should be exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on the map attached- this should be actioned within the next two weeks. We make reference to Section 49 of Local Government Finance Act 1988 allowing Council to grant rate relief where ratepayers are suffering hardship or severe difficulties. **In National Non-domestic Rates Explanatory Notes 2022/23 it clearly states "Local Discounts and Hardship Relief Local authorities have a general power to grant discretionary local discounts and to give hardship relief in specific circumstances. Full details can be obtained from the local authority"**.
3. All bid payer payments to be cancelled/exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on map- this should be actioned within the next two weeks.
4. A council strategic plan to reflect over the next 24-36 months how you will bring this side of towns footfall back and resume business back to normal. i.e. strategic plans for recovery for the area and the timely figures expected for the return of footfall and share a copy of this plan with us in the next 4 weeks.
5. Social media to boost presence whilst works are going on.
6. Plan of all works, phases in detail in writing over the duration of the works to be shared with us so this can be shared with all our members.
7. Regular monthly meeting with updates on everything on the list and any new concerns. The "working document" needs to be presented within 2 weeks as this was agreed 8th May and would provide a means to have regular meetings, share timescales, give opportunity to raise and address issues proactively in a conducive manner for beneficial of all parties.

THE GROUP WOULD LIKE TO BRING IT TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT WE CONTACTED WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL AROUND EARLY MARCH 2022 AND NOW WE ARE ALMOST 3 MONTHS ON AND NOTHING OUT OF OUR REQUEST LIST HAS BEEN DONE.

SUB GROUP MEMBERS:

ANDREW BRADLEY



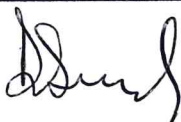
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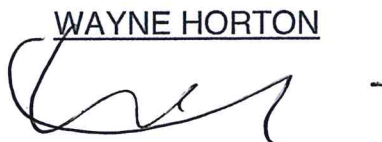
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