

£120,000 in bus lane fines over the course of six weeks

MORE than 12,500 fines have been dished out to drivers in the space of just six weeks after being caught out by new bus lane cameras in West Bromwich town centre.

Sandwell Council has started punishing motorists who drive through a bus zone in New Street. The council has so far collected £120,000 worth of fines with more to come. Penalties of up to £90 started being issued from December 5 after thousands were let off the hook during a two-week grace period.

Changes due with National Express routes

CHANGES are being made to bus routes in West Bromwich, Bearwood, Oldbury, Blackheath and surrounding areas. National Express West Midlands is looking to make the changes this April, but bus users have until February 5 to express their views.

The affected routes include the 50A and 50C West Bromwich to Bearwood route, the 48 which travels between West Bromwich and Northfield and the 48A from West Bromwich to Bearwood via Salop Road, Bristnall Hall Road and George Road.

Also altering are the 80 and 83 bus routes between Birmingham and West Bromwich, and the 89 from Birmingham to Blackheath, and the 120 that takes in Birmingham to Oldbury and Dudley and the 120A which incorporates Birmingham to Oldbury and Blackheath. To have your say email services@nationalexpress.com.

Full details of the proposed changes are available at nxbus.co.uk/west-midlands/information/service-changes

But thousands of drivers have continued to ignore the rules along the pedestrianised stretch past Sandwell College's Central Sixth Form Campus, formerly The Public arts centre.

Warning signs stating the cameras are running have been put up and it is hoped people will now get the message. Only buses, Hackney carriage taxis and cyclists are allowed to pass through. Initial fines are £60, but if paid within 14 days the total will be reduced to £30. After 14 days it will stay at £60 and if it has still not been paid within 28 days it will rise to £90. A total of 12,579 fines have been issued, with another 2,600 set to go out.

It came after 6,803 warning notices were sent out after the cameras went live on November 21. These drivers were not fined as council bosses agreed to give them a second chance during the first fortnight the cameras were up. Despite the huge number of fines, Sandwell Council's highways boss Councillor David Hosell said the number of drivers cutting through the zone had fallen.

More than 2,000 a day were estimated to have been using the cut through before cameras were brought in. Councillor Hosell said: "The cameras were introduced to reduce the 2,000 motorists a day driving through the town square, bringing dangers to pedestrians and causing delays for bus passengers."

A different sort of tonic at microbar



Will Stephenson, of Halesowen, and Simon Dunne, of Oldbury, at Causeway Green Road

IT used to dispense prescriptions – but a former pharmacy in the Black Country will now be serving up a different kind of tonic as it is on the way to being transformed into a microbar and cafe.

School friends Simon Dunne, of Oldbury, and Will Stephenson, from Halesowen, are aiming to be pulling pints in their new venture, aptly named The Old Dispensary, on Causeway Green Road in Oldbury by the middle of February.

It comes after planning permission was granted in February last year after the building was empty for more than a year.

Mr Dunne said: "We have got a lovely sized garden out the back which will have a smoking shelter there. In the day time we will hope to serve croissants and cakes so that families can come in and then from midday onwards we will be serving drinks. We won't be putting up with any anti-social behaviour we want to be a family friendly place for all the community."

The bar will be able to serve up to around 100 people.

Sandwell Council planning officers recommended approval for the use of the shop to be converted into a licensed bar with beer garden.

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