

# **Witney High Street and Market Square Enhancement Scheme**

## **Engagement Report**

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## Summary

This document seeks to report on the findings of the community engagement exercise conducted between 5 September and 3 October 2023 as part of the Witney High Street and Market Square Enhancement scheme.

The purpose of the engagement was to seek feedback from residents, businesses, and stakeholders to form parameters and priorities for the design stages of the project. This was achieved through community participation in a survey on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire engagement platform, in person stakeholder workshops, two face to face public events and other comments received by email and post.

To maximise participation, the project team delivered a communications plan which involved the distribution of leaflets to Witney households and business premises, social media / website updates, press releases, bulletins, councillor interviews and two public events.

The results of the engagement exercises show general support for the project objectives and have identified preferences for a range of street improvements that can be considered in the project design stages.

## Key findings

- The survey results show a majority of the respondents support each of the five scheme objectives, particularly the objective to support local businesses and the market. There were similar levels of support for the scheme objectives amongst those respondents who identified as having a disability.
- Improved footway surfacing, more trees, plants and gardens, more seating and more information on history and heritage were the most popular improvements that people would like to see in the project and were similarly popular amongst those who identified as having a disability.
- Free text responses highlighted the importance of helping the local economy whilst also advocating for place-based interventions such as more greenery, more seating, level paving and well-maintained public spaces.
- Other comments supported reopening the High Street to through traffic but there were similar levels of support for full pedestrianisation. A call for better enforcement of the traffic restriction was expressed in the survey's free text comments and by key stakeholders.
- Councillor workshops identified preferences for new public realm areas, improved safety, and better paving materials. Business workshops identified preferences for more signage, more loading bays, and better seating and lighting.
- There were 643 individual responses to the online survey. The proportion of respondents in the 16-24 and 25-34 age groups was significantly lower than other age groups. The proportion of respondents in the over 65 age group was significantly high.
- There was a low participation from local businesses in both the online survey and workshops despite targeted communications aimed to encourage businesses to contribute to the engagement exercises.
- The survey showed that car trips to the High Street by residents living in Witney represented 40% of trips across all transport modes.

## Introduction

The existing traffic restriction in Witney High Street and Market Square was implemented as a trial under an experimental traffic regulation order (ETRO) in summer 2020 and subsequently made permanent in December 2021 through the formal traffic regulation order process.

The reduction of car traffic in the town centre had revealed opportunities to reallocate road space to contribute to a better pedestrian environment, improved cycling access and new retail and leisure activities. A survey by West Oxfordshire District Council (**App.01**) found most residents felt the traffic restriction had a positive effect on the town.

On this basis, the county council applied for and was subsequently awarded £1.98m of active travel (tranche 3) funding for full project delivery – comprising scheme development, design, consultation, construction, and monitoring/evaluation of the project.

Early concept designs were drafted to support objectives included in the funding application:

- Encourage walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport
- Rationalise existing space for taxis and on-street parking
- Improve the road layouts at the junctions of High Street/Welch Way and Market Square/Corn Street to support the existing traffic restriction
- Implement public realm enhancements

For the scheme to have the consensus of residents, businesses and stakeholders and to ensure a fair distribution of investment, officers began the project with a pre-design engagement phase. This phase is crucial to find out what high street improvements are most important to the local community and using that information, officers could better define a design brief which could be taken forward in project design stages.

Acknowledging the absence of a masterplan for Witney town centre, Oxfordshire County Council held a series of officer workshops to agree a project vision statement informed by the county's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and existing policy wording from the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) Local Plan. This provided an overarching concept, providing inspiration and motivation for the project team and alignment with the county and district strategies. Additionally, a revised set of scheme objectives were agreed that:

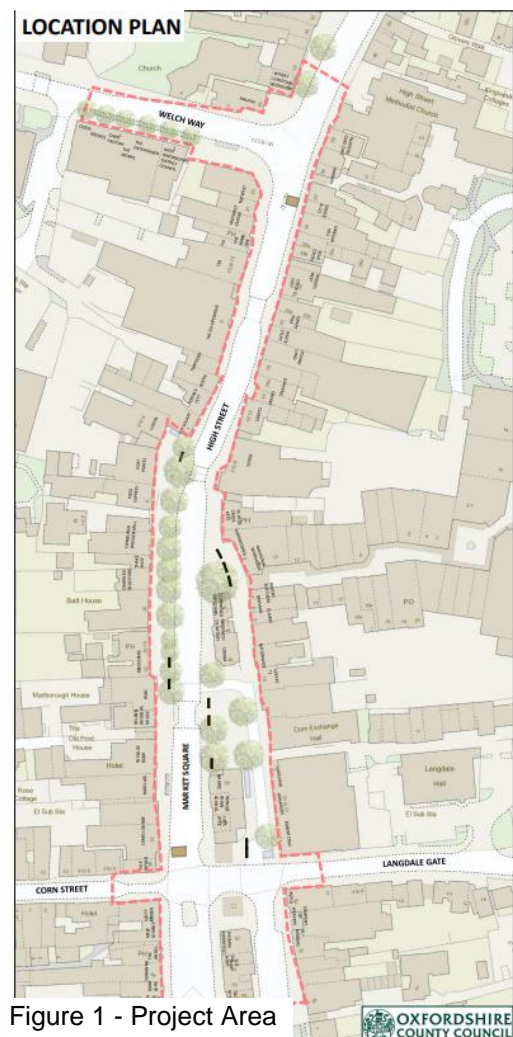


Figure 1 - Project Area

an overarching concept, providing inspiration and motivation for the project team and alignment with the county and district strategies. Additionally, a revised set of scheme objectives were agreed that:

- supported the remit agreed with Active Travel England; and
- set a framework and scope of discussion for the ensuing engagement exercises.

The objectives were based on what officers considered was deliverable within the context of the agreed project area (Fig. 1), budget available and the scope of 'highway improvements'.

The vision and objectives, together with other scheme information were presented on a series of information boards (**App.02**) which were displayed at community engagement events and published online to support the engagement survey.

A series of questions were compiled from the council workshops to be included in the online survey (**App.03**). Questions were designed to show the level of support for each of the scheme objectives and to better quantify the preferences for specific built environment interventions.

In addition to the structured questions, people were invited to comment freely on how they thought the project area could be improved. Comments could be submitted through the survey (online or paper), using the online map (**App.04**) that accompanied the survey, or by direct feedback to the project team. The free text responses allowed for greater context so officers could better understand nuances and wider issues, including points for other actions or that could be considered against future projects.

The draft information boards and survey questions were presented to town, district and county council members in online briefing sessions. Key stakeholders including transport, accessibility groups and a local business group were also briefed. The feedback received was integrated into the final communication materials used and helped to form the communications plan.

### **Alignment to relevant strategy**

The scheme is closely aligned with the county council's vision set out in the '[Local Transport & Connectivity Plan](#) (LTCP, 2022 – 2050)', which includes reducing private car use through making walking, cycling, public and shared transport the natural first choice. In addition, the scheme will play an important role in helping OCC to meet the headline targets that underpin the vision and key themes set out in the LTCP, which are as follows:

By 2030

- Replace or remove one out of every four current car trips in Oxfordshire
- Increase the number of cycle trips made per week in Oxfordshire from 600,000 to 1 million
- Reduce road fatalities or life changing injuries by 50%

By 2040

- Deliver a net-zero transport network

- Replace or remove an additional one out of three car trips in Oxfordshire

By 2050

- Deliver a transport network that contributes to a climate positive future
- Have zero, or as close as possible, fatalities or life-changing injuries as a result of road traffic accidents

The LTCP supporting strategies include the Active Travel Strategy which is aligned to the council's strategic priorities.

The project supports the following county council strategic priorities:

- Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents (priority three)
- Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network (priority five)
- Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces (priority six)
- Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy (priority eight)
- Working with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit (priority nine)

## What happened and who took part?

The community engagement period lasted for 28 days, starting after the state school summer holiday period. The survey and the engagement events were promoted:

- on the county council website and the survey website
- through a series of social media posts (also shared and posted by Councillors, district / town councils communication channels)
- in letters and leaflets direct to properties
- on posters

Ahead of the community engagement, the county council team held steering meetings with councillors and with officers from West Oxfordshire District and Witney Town councils to identify the interests, aims and objectives, and formulate the initial engagement plan. There was also a site walk with officers from the district council to review points of interest. Lead communications, meetings and events were run by the county council.

The online survey was open between 5 September and 3 October on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire platform <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/witney-high-street>. The interactive [map](#) accompanied this and allowed participants to drop coded pins into a virtual map of the project area to highlight issues and recommendations at specific locations.

Two **public engagement drop-in events** were held where people could learn more about the project, share feedback and speak to officers. The events were timed to be more accessible for families, older people and people finishing work:

- Saturday 9 September 2023 between 10am and 4pm at the Witney Methodist Church on the High Street



- Tuesday 19 September 2023 between 5pm and 8pm at Witney Corn Exchange on the Market Square

A0 versions of the information boards and a large plan of the project area were exhibited at both events – setting out the situation/project information and project vision/objectives. The boards helped people focus feedback and visualise opportunities that could be incorporated.

284 people attended the two events, which provided constructive feedback and highlights of common themes. Local councillor attendance at the events was good. Anecdotally, most of the event attendees appeared to be older members of the community and had learned about the events from the leaflets sent to them and/or the posters that had been put up locally.

**Member and stakeholder workshops** were planned with councillors, local businesses and transport/access groups to allow for more focused discussions around specific stakeholder themes. Email invites were sent to all councillors and to transport and accessibility groups. All businesses between 33 High Street and 46 Market Square received a paper invitation to the business workshop.

The workshops comprised an introduction with project summary, followed by a led site walk of the High Street and Market Square, and then discussion sessions. Around 150 feedback contributions were made to paper maps between the councillor and business workshops (roughly 60 and 80 respectively).

Workshops took place on:

- Tuesday 12 September 2023 between 2pm and 4pm at Witney Corn Exchange (Councillor Workshop)
- Tuesday 26 September 2023 between 6pm and 8pm at Witney Corn Exchange (Business Workshop)

The Transport and Accessibility workshop was cancelled due to very low response to invitations. Officers instead reached out to the contacted groups again to seek one to one discussions and subsequently met with bus companies (Stagecoach and West Oxfordshire Community Transport) and Thames Valley Police.

### **Printed and online communications:**

All project materials were downloadable from the Let's Talk Oxfordshire webpage, Information was also sent to parish councils.

### **Residents leaflet**

Double-sided A4 leaflets (**App.05**) were delivered to just over 15,000 households and businesses throughout the town. The leaflet outlined the project, the dates of the drop-in events, the survey, and how to contact officers with feedback. A number of visitors attending the drop-in events said they did not use the internet and cited the leaflets as their main information on the project – many collected paper survey copies from the public engagement drop-in events to complete. A3 posters showing summarised

information from the leaflets were put up in the Corn Exchange Hall, Witney Town Council noticeboard, Witney Methodist Church, Witney Library and the WODC shop.

### **Web pages**

A [Witney High Street and Market Square enhancements scheme](#) webpage was published on the 22 August – including a link to the survey webpages from 5 September. This and the [Let's Talk Oxfordshire survey](#) webpage are updated as the project evolves. The survey webpage includes copies of all the project information assets (information boards, map, poster, leaflet/flyer, and frequently asked questions).

### **Press release**

A [press release](#) was published by the county council on 5 September to announce the consultation launch. The release was shared directly with local councillors and media channels by email (including local newspapers, local radio and television, and transport/planning press). Local press ran a story promoting the consultation and BBC Radio Oxford interviewed Councillor Enright, the county council Cabinet Member for Travel and Development Strategy on 21 September.

### **Social media posts**

A campaign of social media posts (**App.06**) was posted on X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn and NextDoor between late August and early October to promote the consultation and engagement events. The initial X posts (promoting the engagement events and then the survey launch also) recorded over 1000 views each, and the later posts on X (promoting the survey) recorded over 800 views each.

Geotargeted posts on NextDoor were shared with neighbourhood groups covering the whole of Witney, and neighbouring villages (Crawley, Curbridge, Delly End, Ducklington, East End, Hailey, Minster Lovell, New Yatt, North Leigh, Poffley End, South Leigh and Wilcote).

### **Bulletins**

Two Oxfordshire County Council travel bulletins promoted the consultation survey and events, which were sent to approximately 4,000 registered recipients. It was also promoted in the Your Oxfordshire email bulletin which was sent to approximately 35,000 registered recipients.

### **Business Letters for workshops**

The 151 businesses within the project area received a letter inviting them to the planned business workshop (**App.07**). Additionally, a note was published in West Oxfordshire District Council's September Business Matters newsletter (**App.08**) to promote it.

Invitees were provided an [online registration form](#) to confirm their attendance. Registrants were also asked the following questions so that the event could be better tailored for them:

- What they would like to get out of the event
- If they had any questions they would like to ask ahead of the event
- To share three key interests related to the event

80 people viewed the registration webpage. 16 representatives from 14 businesses

registered for the workshop. Two representatives were ultimately unable to attend the event. The attendees were from a mix of local independent companies and multi-regional chains representing a breadth of services (including hospitality, retail, local government and professional services).

## Overview of participation

Over 2,500 people visited the online survey and map on Let's Talk Oxfordshire between 5 September and 3 October 2023. 643 people completed the survey online, and 23 paper surveys were returned. Almost all respondents lived in the town or a neighbouring village. 2,243 people accessed multiple features of the survey pages, and there were 737 document downloads:

- 275 downloads of the information boards
- 138 of the map of the project area
- 96 of the project poster
- 228 downloads of other documents
- Additionally, 170 visitors accessed the FAQs

Registration on the survey site was optional – there were 30 new registrations with Let's Talk Oxfordshire to respond to the survey. Most people accessed the survey webpages directly, many also accessed it from social media links, and some through search engines.

Ways people accessed the Let's Talk Oxfordshire survey webpage:

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Social media   | 875  |
| Emails         | 150  |
| Search engines | 171  |
| Direct         | 1469 |
| Total          | 2665 |

Social media access:

|            |     |
|------------|-----|
| NextDoor   | 60  |
| Facebook   | 699 |
| Instagram  | 3   |
| LinkedIn   | 9   |
| X(Twitter) | 104 |
| Total      | 875 |

There was a daily average of 91 visitors to the survey webpage whilst the survey was open.

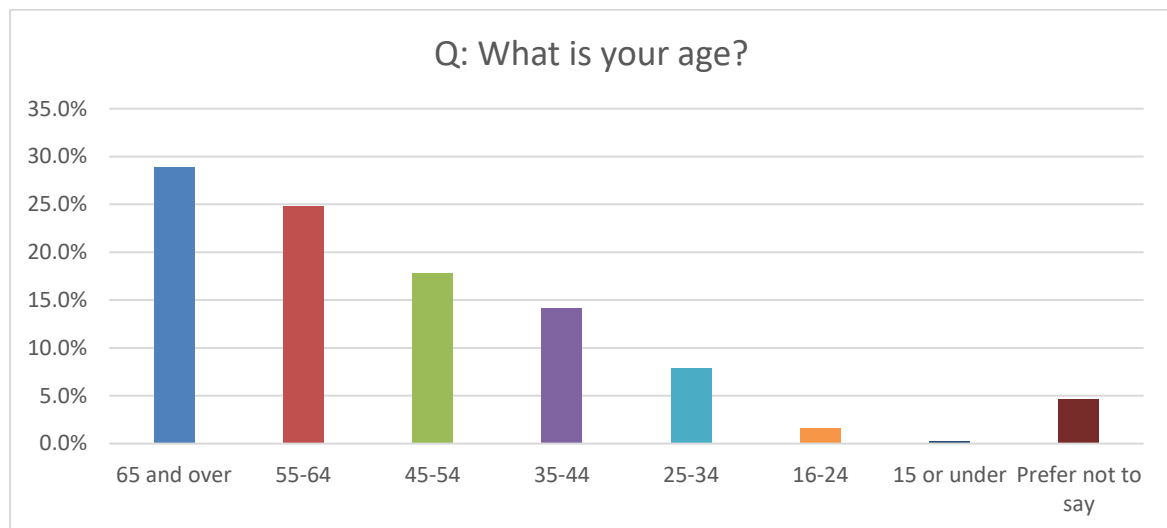
## Survey results

### Demographic data

To understand more about the balance of those who participated in the online engagement, survey respondents were asked to complete a set of demographic questions. Where applicable, the demographic information received from the survey responses has been compared to the Office for National Statistics Census 2021 population data in the Witney parliamentary constituency area<sup>1</sup> to identify any anomalies.

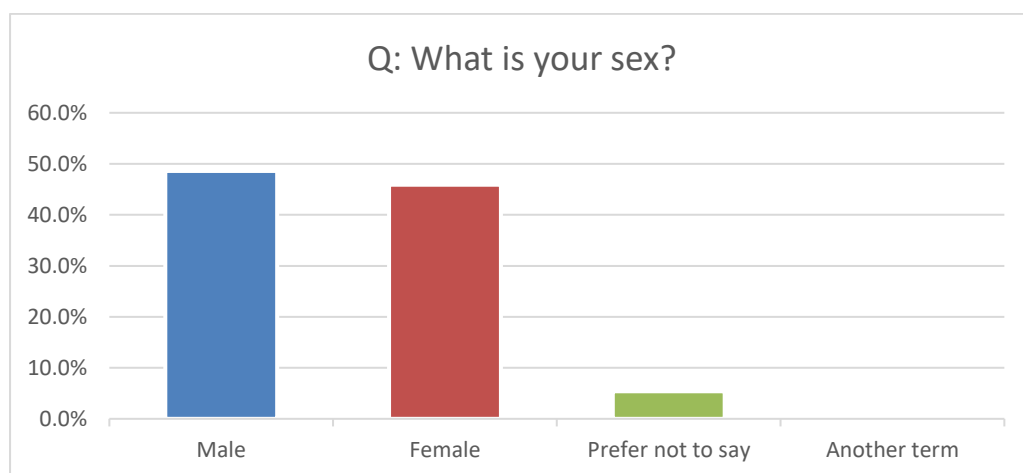
#### Q: What is your age?

Results show that respondents to the survey are heavily weighted towards the upper age groups when compared to the overall age demographics of Witney. There is a notable lack of participation amongst the younger age groups.



#### Q: What is your sex?

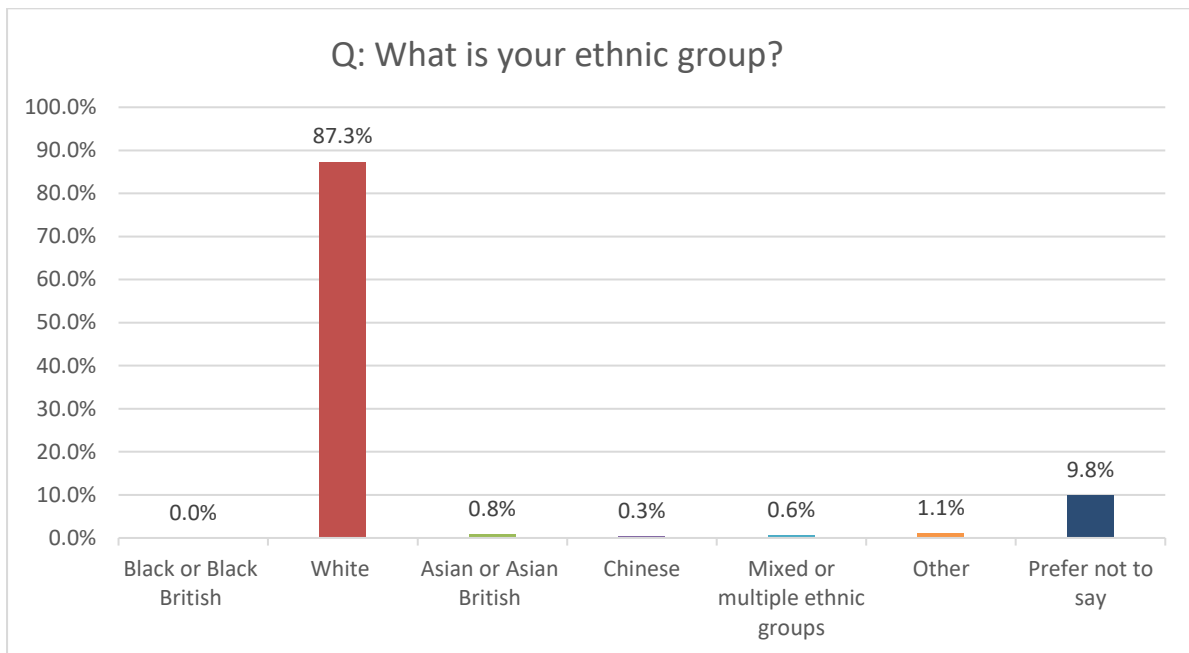
The survey results show that the proportion of male and female respondents is roughly proportionate to the overall gender demographics of Witney (male, 49.1% and female 50.9%).



<sup>1</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/](http://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/)

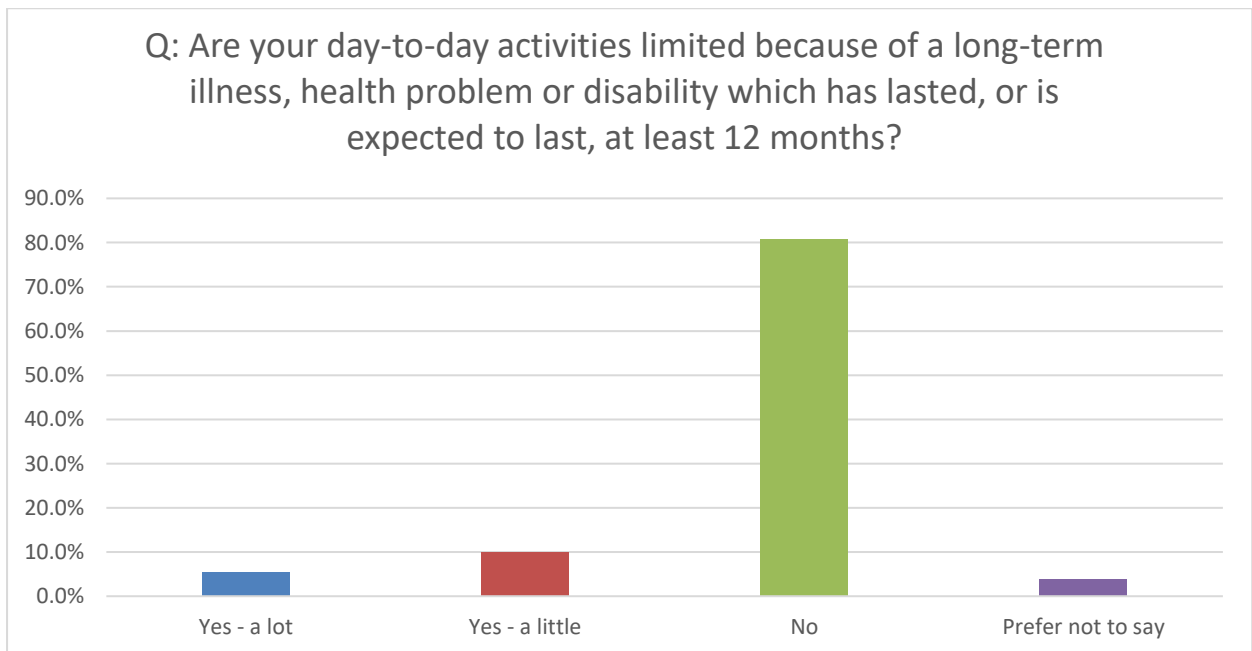
**Q: What is your ethnic group?**

The survey results show that the share of ethnic groups responding to the survey are roughly proportionate to the overall ethnic demographics of Witney (white, 95.2%).



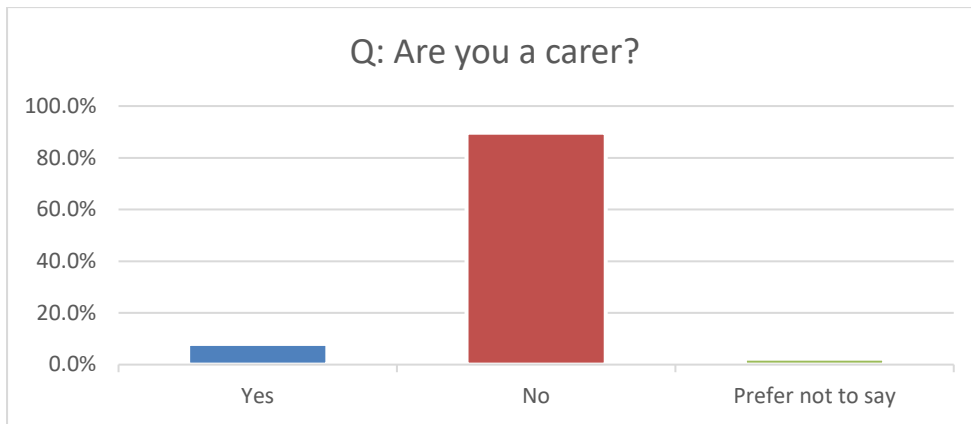
**Q: Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?**

The survey results show that the share of participants who answered “Yes – a lot” or “Yes – a little” is similarly proportionate to the overall share of people in Witney who are identified as disabled under the Equalities Act (15.1%).



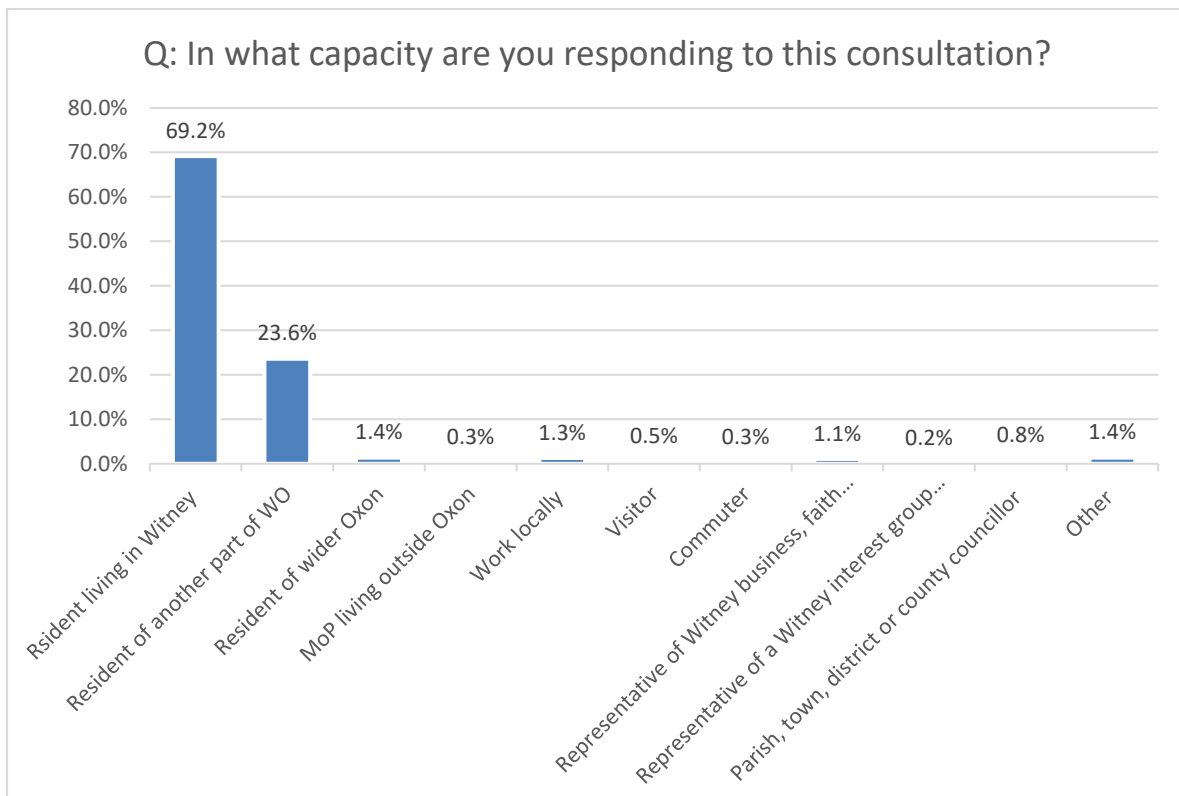
**Q: Are you a carer?**

The survey results show that the share of participants who answered “Yes” is similarly proportionate to the overall share of people in Witney who are providing unpaid care (8.3%).



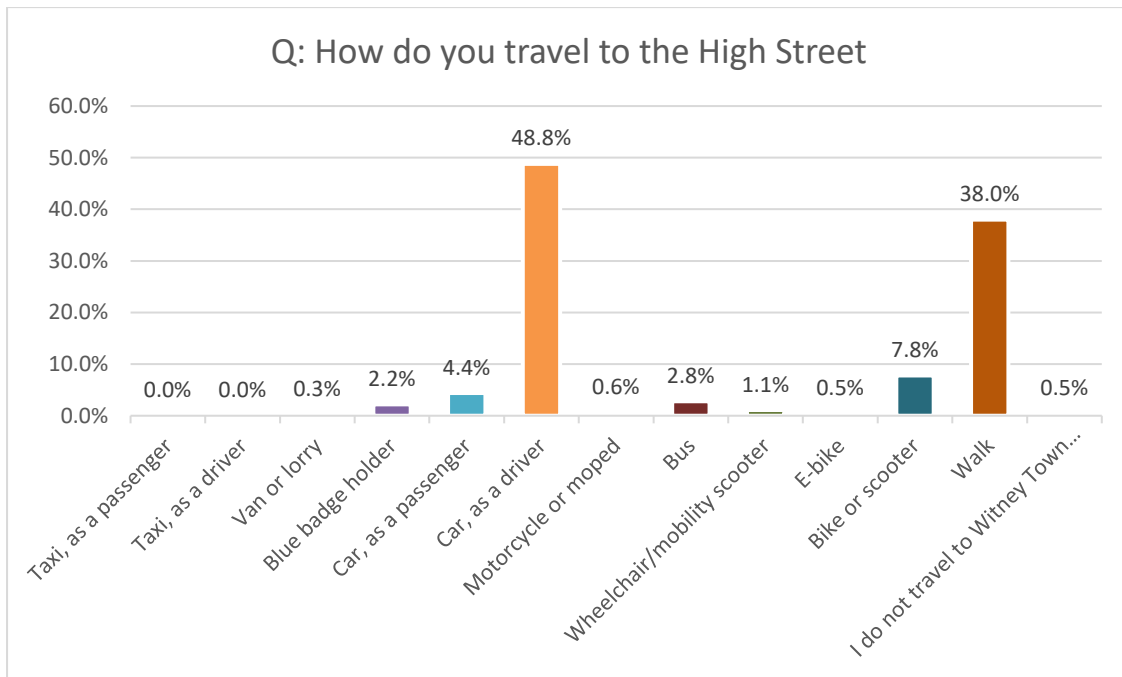
**Q: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?**

The survey results show that most respondents to the survey live in Witney and just under a quarter of respondents are living in other West Oxfordshire areas. Although the survey was promoted widely in posters, leaflets, letters and online, there is a lack of response from local businesses/organisations in the survey.

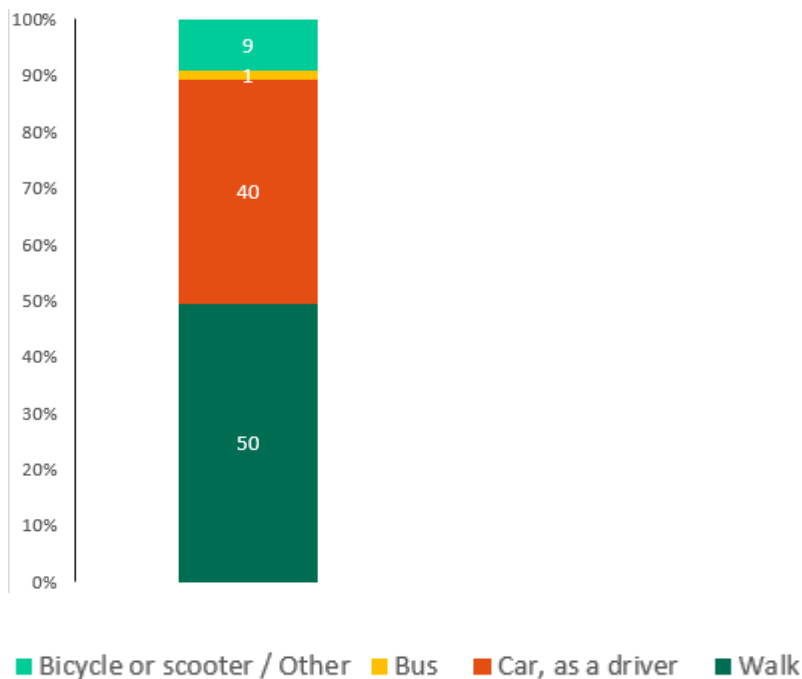


**Q: How do you travel to the High Street?**

The results show that most survey respondents travel to Witney High Street by car, as a driver. These results were also filtered to only show travel behaviours specifically amongst residents living in Witney.



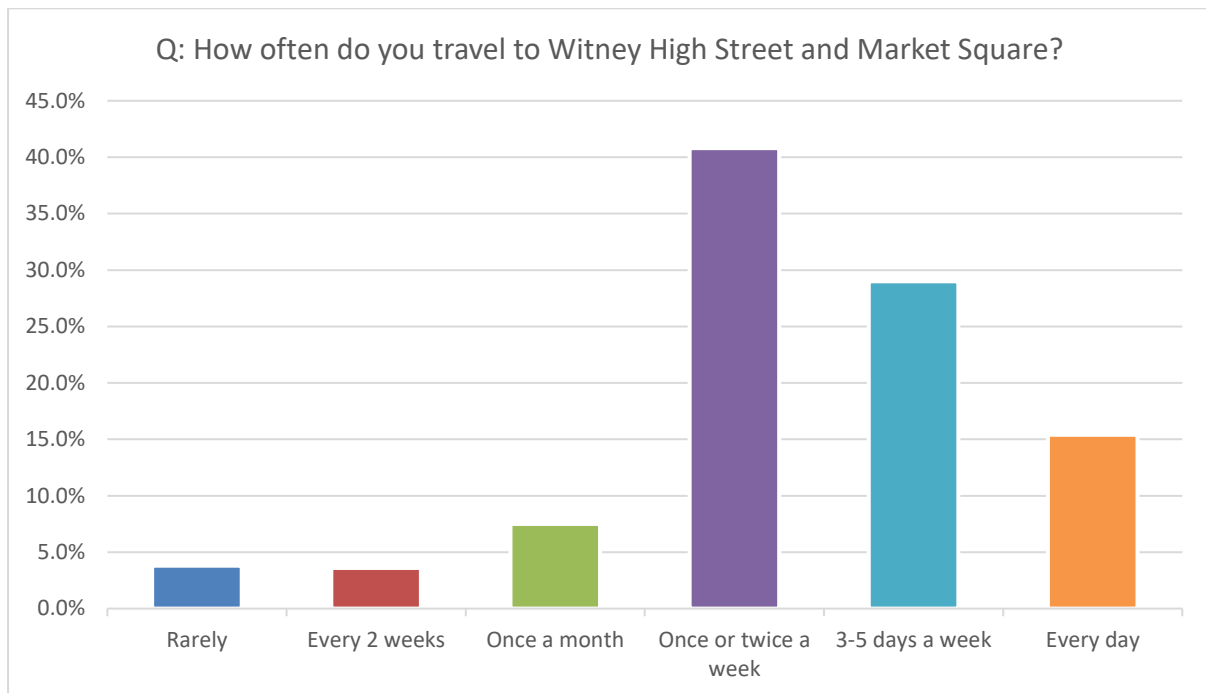
Witney residents: mode share of trips to the High Street





**Q: How often do you travel to Witney High Street and Market Square?**

Results show that around 85% of respondents to the survey travel to Witney High Street more than once a week.



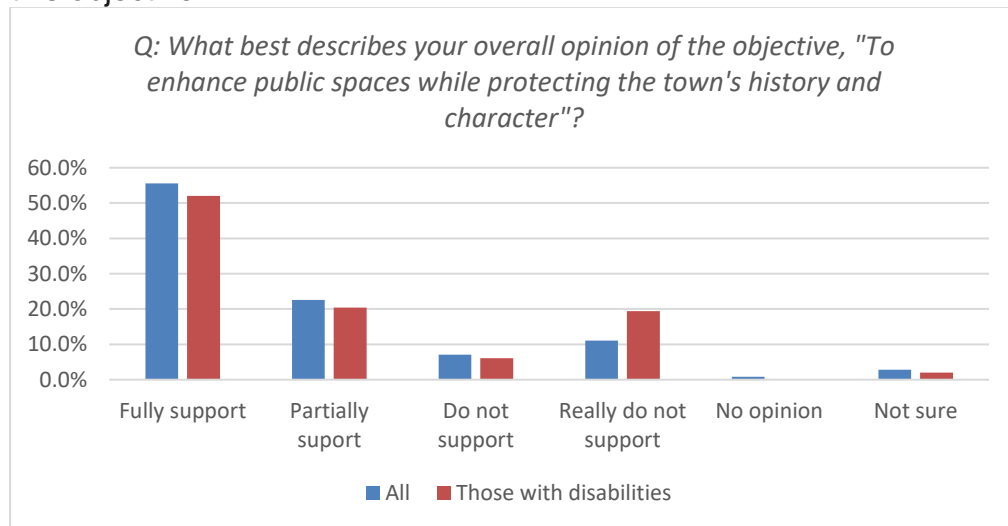
# Survey results

## Scheme objectives

Participants were asked to indicate their level of support for each of the five scheme objectives, with the aim of learning how well certain aspects of the project may be supported. Accessibility is an essential consideration within the project, so overall responses have been compared to those who answered that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability to help identify differential preferences and potential negative impacts for that group.

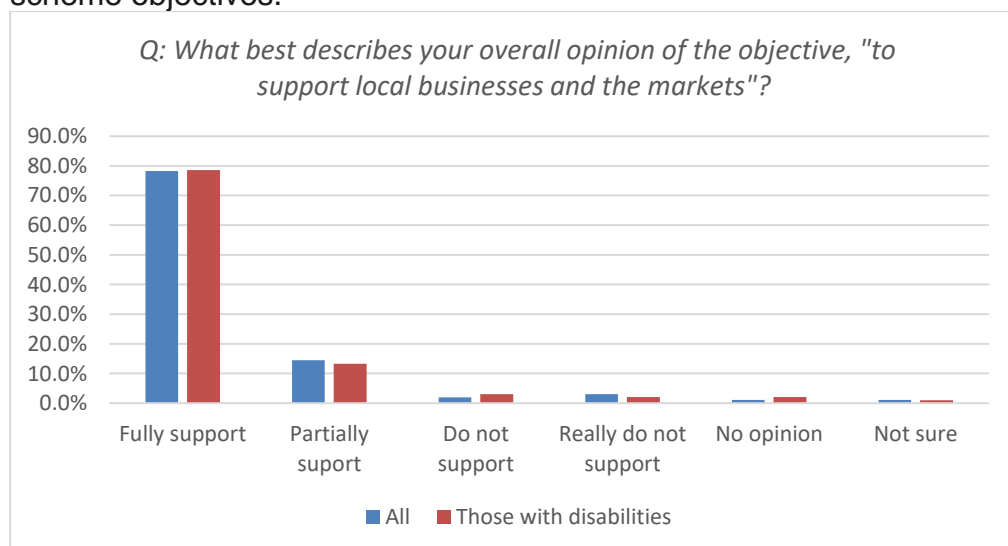
### Q: What best describes your overall opinion of the objective, “To enhance public spaces while protecting the town’s history and character”?

The results show that almost 75% of respondents fully support or partially support this objective.



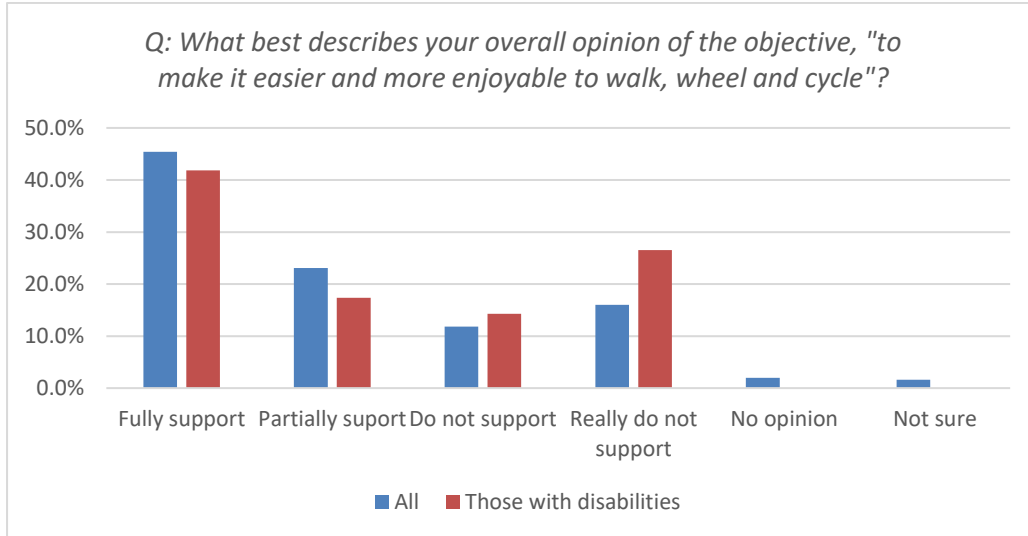
### Q: What best describes your overall opinion of the objective “to support local businesses and the markets”?

The results show that survey respondents support this scheme objective over other scheme objectives.



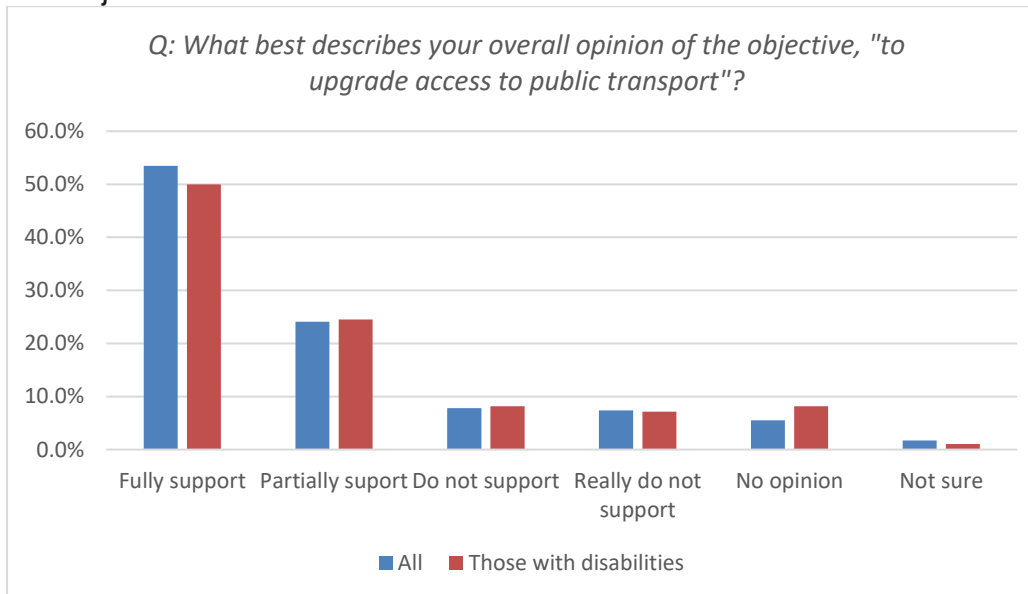
**Q: What best describes your overall opinion of the objective “to make it easier and more enjoyable to walk, wheel and cycle”?**

The results show that this objective is fully supported or partially supported by over 66% of respondents. This objective is the least supported amongst those identifying with disabilities.



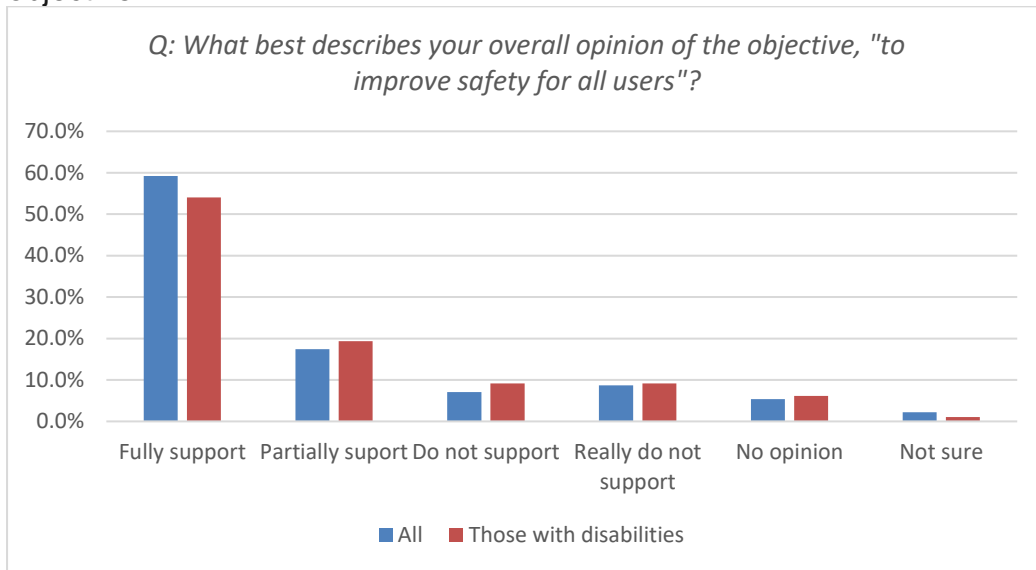
**Q: What best describes your overall opinion of the objective “to upgrade access to public transport”?**

The results show that almost 75% of respondents fully support or partially support this objective.



**Q: What best describes your overall opinion of the objective “to improve safety for all users”?**

The results show that over 75% of respondents fully support or partially support this objective.



**Q: What improvements would you like to see on Witney High Street and Market Square?**

*Optional question (636 responded, 7 skipped)*

Respondents were provided the opportunity to express their support for a range of specific improvements to the high street environment. 21 improvements were listed with the option to support for each.

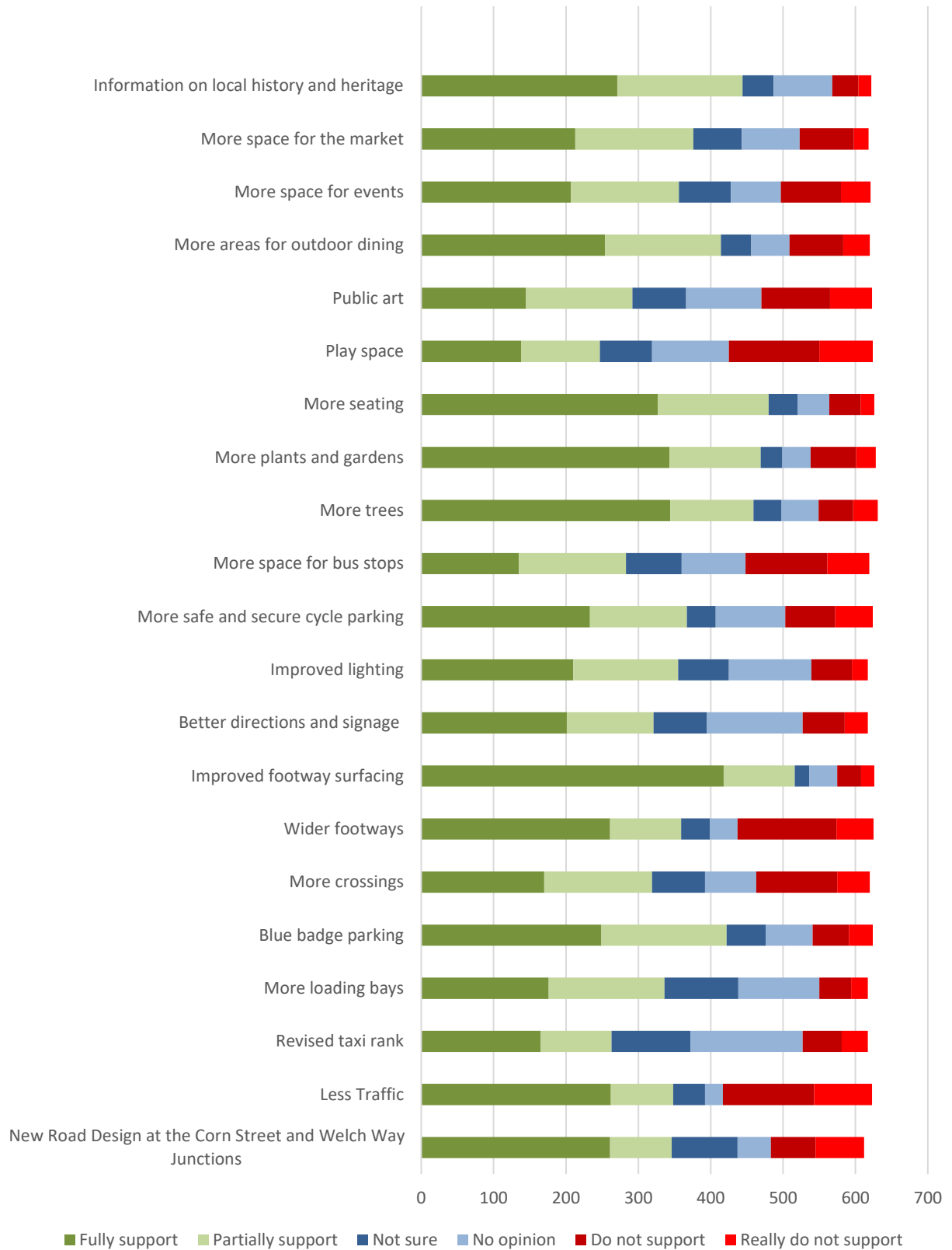
The top five improvements that returned the highest number of those either fully supporting or partially supporting are:

1. Improved footway surfacing, with 516 respondents in full or partial support
2. More seating, with 480 in full or partial support
3. More plants and gardens, with 469 in full or partial support
4. More trees, with 459 in full or partial support
5. Information on local history and heritage, with 444 in full or partial support

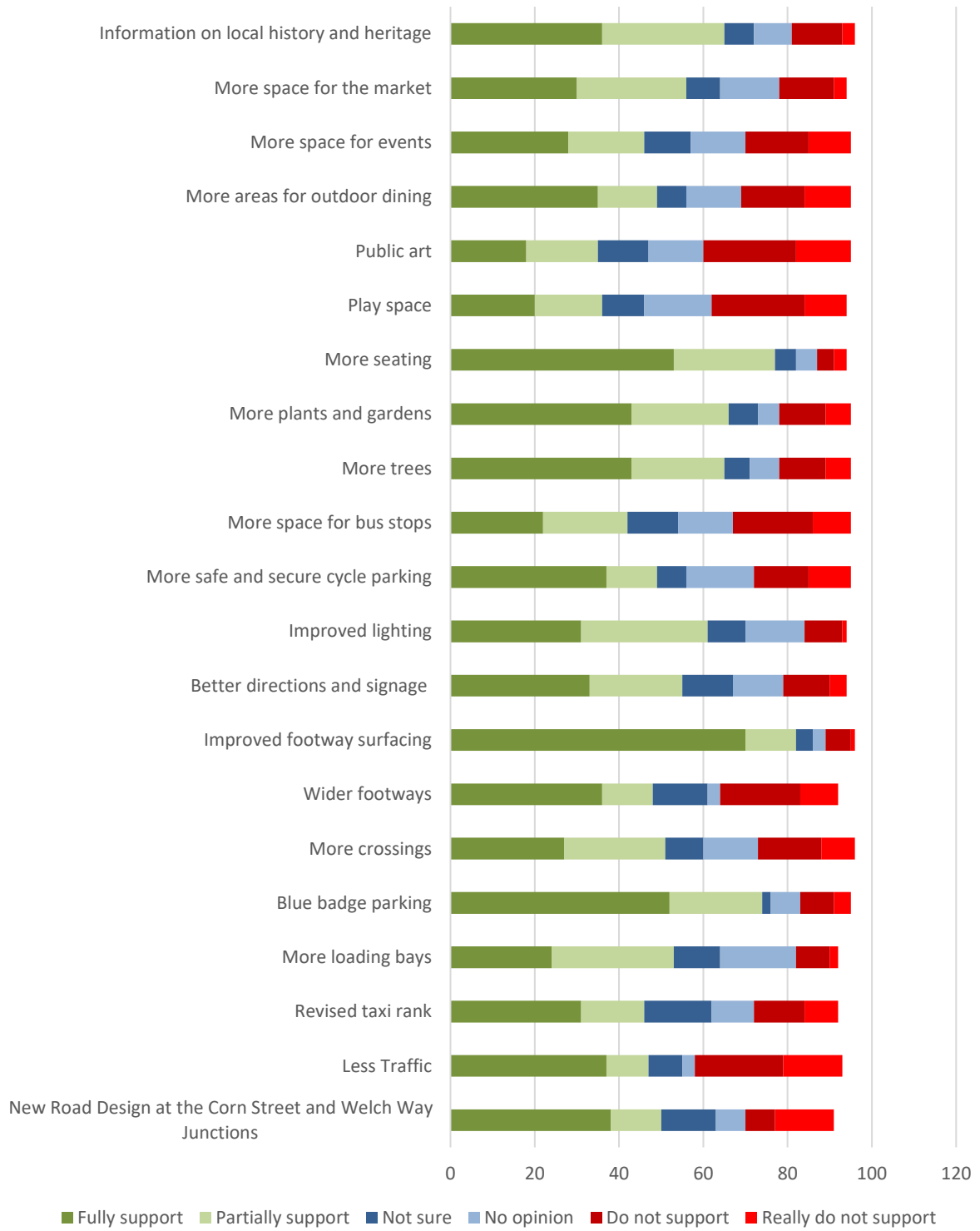
Of these responses, the top five categories from those who identified as having a disability are:

1. Improved footway surfacing, with 82 respondents in full or partial support
2. More seating, with 77 respondents in full or partial support
3. Blue badge parking, with 74 respondents in full or partial support
4. More plants and gardens, with 66 respondents in full or partial support
5. More trees, and information on local history and heritage, both had 65 respondents in full or partial support

Q: What improvements would you like to see on Witney High Street and market Square? (All answers)



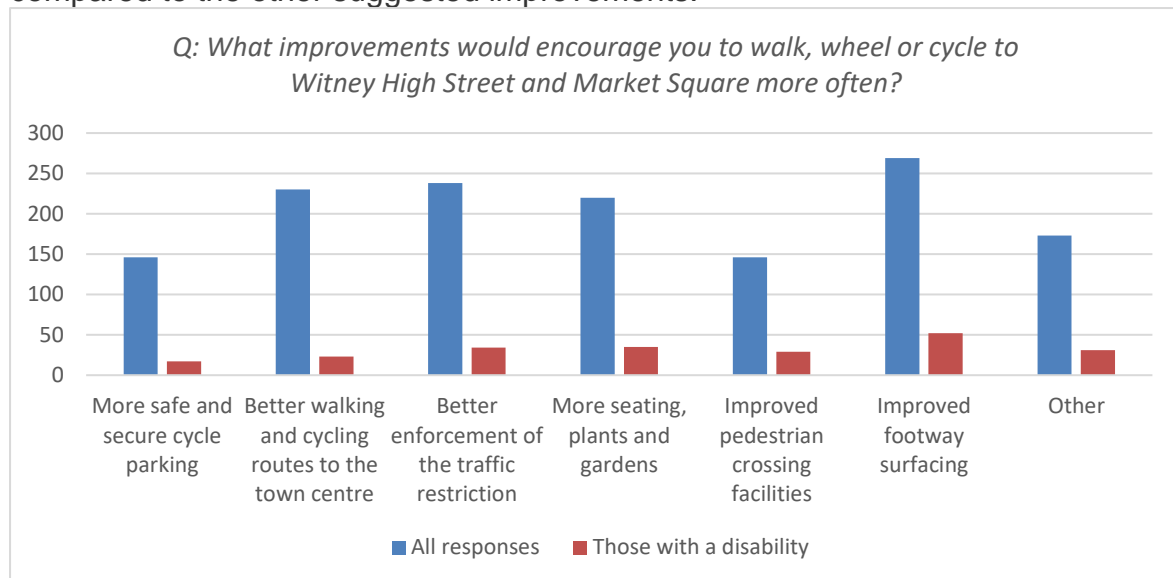
*Q: What improvements would you like to see on Witney High Street and market Square? (Those with disabilities' answers)*



**Q: Improvements that would encourage you to walk, wheel or cycle to Witney High Street and Market Square more often?**

*Optional question (591 responses, 52 skipped)*

The results show less support for more cycle parking and improved crossings compared to the other suggested improvements.



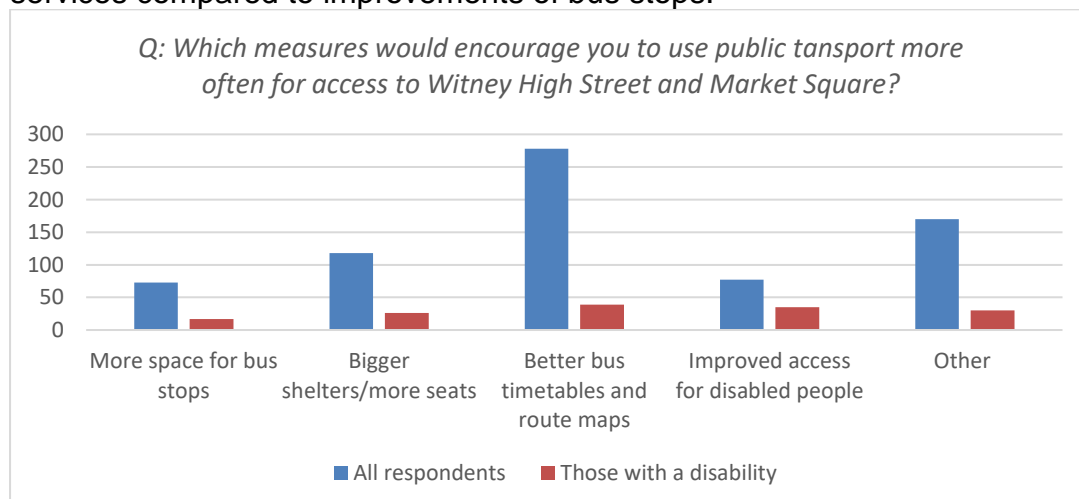
Other responses included:

- Reinstate vehicle access
- Better public transport to/from local villages (twice)
- It's not safe to cycle on the other roads as they now have much more (car) traffic on
- Segregated cycle lanes/footpaths and pavements, better maintenance of greenery
- Spend money on public facilities instead
- Improving cycle lanes into Witney, e.g., the A4095

**Q: Which measures would encourage you to use public transport more often for access to Witney High Street and Market Square? (Tick all that apply).**

*Optional question (495 responses, 148 skipped)*

The results show more support for better bus timetables and route maps of bus services compared to improvements of bus stops.



Other comments included:

- Improved links with local villages
- Better timetables and regular routes
- Bus stops at new developments so they are better connected
- More frequent buses that also run into the evening
- Cheaper fares
- More reliable services

The “Other” answers provided by those who said their day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability did not leave any comments.

## **Qualitative responses (Free text)**

Participants were offered the opportunity to comment freely on any issues or improvements that were not available for selection in mandatory/fixed survey responses. These responses were analysed by counting the number of mentions of key words and applying a contextual appraisal of the points raised. The key words were then grouped into sets of themes for reporting.

A summary of the most mentioned themes and key words have been provided in respect to the following questions.

### **Q: What improvements would you like to see on Witney High Street and market Square? (Free text)**

*Optional question (436 responses, 207 skipped)*

Participants were asked to comment on whether there were any other improvements they would like to see in Witney High Street that weren't listed amongst the 21 selections. From these comments, five key themes were identified:

- Pedestrian and walking environment
- Economy
- Infrastructure/public space
- Traffic/cars
- Cycling

#### **Pedestrian and walking environment:**

The most repeated comments included “pedestrianise” which was used 34 times; this referred to the full pedestrianisation of Witney High Street. Other comments most mentioned were walkways or footpaths, particularly surrounding the widening of pavements and consequent narrowing of the carriageway as well as maintenance such as weeding, resurfacing and consideration of drainage. Further to this, increasing useable crossing points was also mentioned. It was suggested that the current traffic light-controlled crossing could be replaced by a zebra crossing, now that traffic has reduced along the High Street so there is no longer a need for the crossing to be controlled by traffic lights. Crossing points were also mentioned in reference to Corn Street junction, suggesting this was a busy junction where pedestrians and cyclists



were not necessarily prioritised by the current layout. Increased seating and signage in the town centre and car parks were also frequently mentioned.

### **Economy:**

A variety of shops being present on the High Street, with a focus on increasing the number of independent/local businesses, was a priority point respondents would like to see in Witney High Street. Similarly, higher occupancy rates of units on the High Street and maintenance of current empty shop frontages were also frequently commented on. It was suggested in the responses that space for pop-up shops or markets for independent businesses could improve the High Street.

**Public space:** As a public realm scheme, the theme of **public space** was repeated frequently. It included suggestions for pavement improvements and resurfacing as well as maintenance of the current streetscape. This included weeding, drainage and litter picking. Again, full pedestrianisation of the street was frequently mentioned, however a relative number of responses also called for the road to be fully reopened to all traffic. Alongside this, the current signage outlining who is eligible to access the High Street was mentioned to be unclear and cluttered on the streetscape. Regarding public space, it was also commented that the two ends of the project area feel unrelated and some more linkage between the Market Square and Welch Way ends should be considered. It was additionally suggested that linkage to other areas of Witney outside of the scope area such as Marriotts Walk should also be considered. Increased seating options and the creation of a social hub/meeting point also featured in the comments.

### **Traffic:**

Responses highlighted the potential to move the taxi rank out of the High Street. This would allow space for more loading bays which was frequently mentioned as an issue. The current disabled parking available on High Street has accessibility issues as the wall of the sloping bank is on one side and the carriageway on another. It was suggested that these bays could be replaced with drop off/short stay provision such as 30-minute parking bays for everyone.

One of the town's attractions is its free parking. Commenters said that this should stay as it is. Enforcement was mentioned in multiple contexts: the restriction of the traffic to be enforced through Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras or rising bollards and the disabled parking to be checked and enforced more strictly by traffic officers.

### **Cycling:**

Cycling was referenced regarding current infrastructure – in particular cycle parking and designated cycle spaces such as segregated cycle lanes or widened shared pathways. It was mentioned that cycle parking, although well used, was not in the most appropriate locations and lacked some appropriate features such as lighting and effective design of the cycle racks for their position. Moving cycle parking to more appropriate locations could help discourage pavement cycling, which was highlighted as a priority concern due to pedestrians feeling unsafe. This would also be helped by

delivering more designated cycle spaces. It was commented that Corn Street's cycle lanes would be more useful on the High Street.

**Q: In your opinion, what makes a successful High Street?**

*Optional question (540 responses and 103 skipped)*

Participants were asked what they thought made a successful High Street and given the opportunity to respond with free text. Three key themes were identified:

- Economy
- Environment
- Infrastructure

**Economy**

Independent and local shops was the most mentioned response to what participants thought made a successful High Street. Access for small businesses was mentioned as a key to success, either through incentives such as lower business rates or the opportunity to take part in local markets or events. A successful High Street, to respondents, meant the street having a “buzz” something that comes from elements such as an entertainment space, outdoor seating, café culture and a nighttime economy. To support the feeling of a “buzz”, shops needed to be filled and diverse, with functional businesses alongside local businesses so that locals as well as tourists can use and benefit from the High Street.

**Environment:**

In terms of the surroundings and conditions as well as the ambience, respondents felt a High Street was successful if the streetscape was clean, uncluttered and natural; displaying flowers and plants that celebrated the town while providing shade and contributing to cleaner air. The ambience was also important to respondents, suggesting a High Street should feel like a community space where visitors feel safe and secure, especially as a pedestrian.

**Infrastructure:**

Visitors wanted to feel more safe and secure as pedestrians. This could help to be achieved by providing a designated cycle area to reduce pavement cycling. Need for suitable lighting was also highlighted to improve a sense of safety, especially at nighttime. From the comments, a successful High Street was somewhere that had functional seating and access for all ages, including children and the elderly. This included level paving, easy access to shop fronts and comfortable seating at different levels. Other infrastructure such as wayfinding signage, a map of the town centre and the wider area plus information on local events, facilities and transport options was considered key to a successful High Street – particularly for tourist benefits. It was suggested these elements should be in keeping with other signage and infrastructure and celebrate the heritage of the area.

**Q: Please tell us anything else you would like to say about Witney High Street and Market Square.**

*Optional question (414 responses, 229 skipped)*

Participants were asked if they wanted to say anything else about the High Street and Market Square many of these responses explained or reiterated responses given to previously asked questions. From this, five key themes were identified:

- Environment
- Infrastructure
- Buses/public transport
- Traffic
- Economy

#### **Environment:**

Introducing a green space and greenery to the High Street was a priority for respondents, as was putting a focus on climate change and improving air quality. Good maintenance was also important, including weeding, litter picking and level paving. The comments relating to the ambience suggested that continental style night-time café culture with al fresco dining was a popular idea, and this would contribute to creating a safer space especially after dark. Many respondents felt the history and heritage of Witney could be more celebrated and promoted. It was suggested that signage and wayfinding should be in keeping with the historic town centre as well as draw attention to and provide information on features such as the Buttercross and the Town Hall.

#### **Infrastructure:**

The unevenness of walking surfaces was highlighted as a concern for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly in terms of mismatched paving types and the sloping of the “bank” on one side of the High Street. Commenters felt that increasing the number of public bins would help reduce littering in the town centre. As discussed earlier in this report, a number of comments included: changing the current traffic-light controlled crossing to be a zebra crossing, introducing designated cycle areas, enhanced promotion of the Buttercross and the Town Hall as heritage assets, and increased appropriate signage and wayfinding.

#### **Public transport:**

There were a number of suggestions for improving frequency and reliability of connections to rural areas and villages. Electrification of buses was mentioned in relation to air quality. Moving the bus stops was also highlighted, mainly noting a concern that buses that spend a long time at the Market Square stops. Cycle parking and issues of bike theft were also highlighted.

#### **Traffic:**

A number of responses said the High Street should be fully opened to traffic, however a similar number called for the High Street to be fully pedestrianised. Further comments were made surrounding enforcement of drivers using the High Street illegally, with suggestions of implementing ANPR cameras as a way of enforcing this. The importance of loading bays for businesses to continue to run successfully was a key theme. A focus on the traffic that has been rerouted as a result of the High Street’s closure was also highlighted plus improvements needed for the Market Square’s junction with Corn Street.

**Economy:**

The importance of tourism, heritage and history to ensuring Witney is fully promoted as an attractive destination for visitors was important. Filling empty shop units by providing businesses with incentives or lower business rates was mentioned as a part of this. Continuing access to free parking was the key element raised.

## Additional engagement results

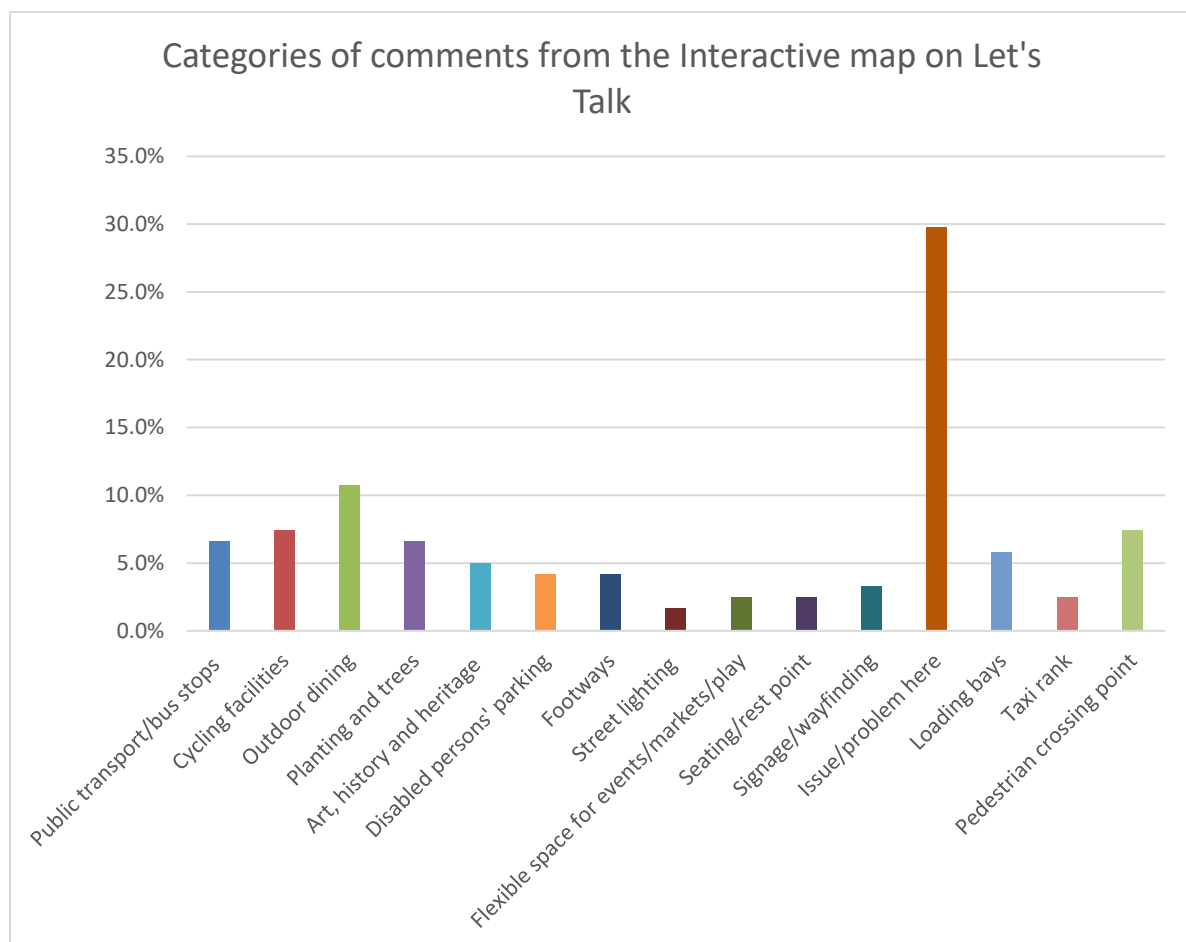
### Let's Talk Oxfordshire interactive online map response

Optional activity - 28 people participated adding 121 pins to the map

Alongside the consultation survey, participants had the opportunity to provide comments by adding pins to specific points on a map of the project area. 15 categories were provided for the pins, and the map allowed pictures to be included if participants wished to add them. A summary of the categories has been provided below while a map displaying the spatial distribution of comments is shown (**App.09**).

Of the 121 comments received, eight users uploaded pictures to facilitate their point. These are found in (**App.10**).

Results show that the largest category used was “issue/problem here” which accounts for 29.8% of all responses. These generally were localised issues, such as missing signs, improvements to specific areas (such as the Buttercross) and suggestions for general improvements to the street.



## Comments from the event book

A total of 14 people provided handwritten comments in a guest book or to officers at the face-to-face public events. These comments were categorised into three key themes:

- Buses
- Cycling
- Infrastructure

People contributing to the handwritten comments thought that it was important to consider rerouting options for the **buses**, especially in relation to buses that park or dwell at Market Square stops. Also mentioned were buses switching off their engines when parked as this is contributing to noise and air pollution.

Further comments were made about **cycling**, suggesting the cycle lane in Corn Street would be better used in High Street so that cyclists do not use the pavement.

**Infrastructure** was also a key theme. Wider pavements were important, so that al fresco dining and seating could be introduced to High Street and Market Square. Maintenance was also mentioned relating to litter and a tidy streetscape.

Other comments included considering the issues surrounding traffic rerouted by the closure of the High Street.

## Stakeholder workshops

The purpose of the workshops was to identify priorities that were specific to the particular stakeholder groups.

Activities involved site walks so that issues/improvements could be discussed between groups “in the field”.

These discussions were then developed into written markers on a group of maps and used as a basis for further roundtable group discussions. The maps and respective comments for each stakeholder group are shown in **(App.11 and 12)**.

The stakeholder groups were asked to create a list of five key priorities for improvement. These lists are shown below:

### Councillor workshop priorities

#### *Group A*

- A new public space outside Church Green & the Angel public house, allowing for businesses to have outdoor dining and introduction of green space.
- Digital signage for a map of shops, search function and bus timetables

- More historic street furniture, benches, lamps etc.
- Improved engagement with retailers. Make their voices feel heard
- Introduction of permanent, stone planters, wider pavements with new trees
- Need to identify most popular mode of active travel

#### *Group B*

- Focus on road safety.
- Think pedestrian priority and "be more Holland" (look more towards a model based on the Netherlands' pedestrian arrangements)
- Beautiful green spaces for dwelling

#### *Group C*

- Better level paving - solve the hotchpotch of paving types
- Celebrate history and way finding
- Add character to the High Street function

### **Business Workshop Priorities**

#### *Group A*

- More/better information and heritage signage
- More/better loading bays in Market Square
- Improved benches and seating
- Streets should be well maintained and policed
- Disabled parking should be improved

#### *Group B*

- Lighting - bright, ambient lighting to enhance the space and bring people in
- Seating - consistent furniture, coordinated with bins etc more public bins. Keep it tidy!
- Realign street - wider pavements
- Better wayfinding and signage – including digital signage by the Town Council and Waterstones/Halifax
- Welch Way junction opportunity for new public square seating near restriction

### **Additional stakeholder responses**

#### **Witney Town Council**

Witney Town Council provided a formal response to the survey questions by letter received on 2 October 2023 (**App.13**).

The letter stated general support for the scheme objectives and provided several detailed comments which included:

- Support for signage/wayfinding to historical visitor sites

- A design that enables expansion of pavement licenses for businesses
- New plans for loading bays and re-organised blue badge parking
- Relocated cycle racks
- Wider footways for pedestrians
- More bus services to regional destinations and better bus information displays
- Improved access for disabled users and participation of access groups
- Formalising road crossings
- Consideration to the implementation of ANPR cameras to enforce the traffic restriction
- Creation of new public realm outside the Angel public house/War Memorial
- Secure of funding for Town Council to maintain new street furniture

### **Oxfordshire Cycling Network**

Oxfordshire Cycling Network (a federation of about 30 cycling advocacy groups and campaigners across the county) provided a formal response by letter received on 19 September 2023 (**App.14**).

The letter provided several detailed comments around general aspirations for the town centre including:

- Development of a town square for socialising
- Enhancing the 'place' through built environment design.
- Creating seating along the raised embankment.
- Declutter of street furniture.
- Increase of benches and cycle parking.
- Redesign of planters for better cycle accessibility.

### **Bus service providers**

In the absence of an in-person workshop with transport and accessibility stakeholders, county council officers met with representatives from two bus service providers: Stagecoach and West Oxfordshire Community Transport, and representatives from Thames Valley Police on 21 September. (**App.15**)

A summary of the key points raised in the discussion follows:

- Limited space for alighting outside the Methodist Church. An additional southbound bus stop would help alleviate this issue.
- Any change to the road layouts at each end of the traffic restriction must accommodate turning movements for buses.
- Many services currently operate through Witney Town Centre, and this often causes the stacking of vehicles where bus stop spaces cant accommodate the number of services.
- A full pedestrianisation of the High Street would have to be balanced against the impact on bus journey times and accounting for plans to introduce more



bus services through Witney (e.g.,: Oxford Tube and Eynsham Park and Ride services).

- The traffic restriction must be enforced to improve road safety. Bus speeds through the High Street can be calmed accordingly.

### **Thames Valley Police**

In the absence of an in-person workshop with transport and accessibility Stakeholders, county council officers met with a representative from Thames Valley Police on 13 October 2023. (**App.16**)

A summary of the key points raised in the discussion are as follows:

- Emergency service vehicle access must be maintained through the traffic restriction at all times.
- Concerns that the traffic restriction is not being enforced.
- Consider hostile vehicle mitigation (measures to ensure a space is best designed to reduce risk of and minimise impact from an event of hostile driving – deliberately driving a vehicle into a group of people) for any new event spaces.
- Closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras are often obscured by tree canopies and their ducting systems are prone to damage. Any new public realm needs to be monitored by CCTV.
- Impact of crime/anti-social behaviour on the nighttime economy is relatively low compared to other towns in Oxfordshire
- The removal of planters at the entrances to the traffic restriction would improve road safety.

### **Additional responses received by email**

30 response emails were received from six businesses, one interest group, one local authority and 13 individual members of the public. Email subjects included survey comments, paper copy requests, promoting local services and some comments around the project itself.

- Three emails were received that offered detailed suggestions for project proposals – two were from individuals and one from an interest group.
- Two people sent four detailed emails opposing the project as a whole and expressing dissatisfaction with existing traffic restrictions on the High Street. One of these people was able to attend the drop-in events and discuss their concerns with officers.

## Conclusions

Overall, the scheme objectives were positively received from roughly 66% of survey respondents. This gives assurance to continue the project into the design stages.

Supporting local businesses and the market was a very popular objective amongst survey respondents. Support of this nature is multi-faceted, and the project is limited to delivering highway improvements only, but this should be coordinated with the planning and licensing authorities in West Oxfordshire District Council and Witney Town Council. The project can help to facilitate new business and event activities by providing space and public realm upgrades where identified.

The information received from the survey and workshops has provided an excellent guide for forming the design brief. In particular, the requirement for improved footway surfacing was a repeated theme throughout all the engagement activities and would help deliver enhancements to the place but also increase the level of service for those with mobility impairments. The introduction of new trees, plants and gardens will add to the aesthetic of the town centre and improve the biodiversity, but those features must be well maintained for the long term.

It is encouraging that responses to the survey from those who declared long term health or disabilities are similar to overall trends in the survey responses. However, the survey also underlines that blue badge parking is still an important facility for those groups. Any reallocation of parking to enable better loading provisions for businesses must be based on robust survey data that can provide accurate information on occupancy levels and user demand.

There was low participation from local businesses in both the online survey and workshops despite targeted communication to achieve higher levels of participation. Officers will continue to reach out to local businesses through a variety of media including emails, letters, and walkabouts. The county council is also considering more door-to-door engagement and intercept surveys to improve participation for future engagements.

The county council has noted a consistently lower survey participation rate from younger age groups and is looking at how this can be improved. It is acknowledged that young people represent a more transient population compared to other age groups who are more settled and invested in their local area.

Improving the pedestrian environment in Witney town centre will encourage more trips to be made by sustainable transport modes but the engagement results show that the number of short car trips to the project area is high. This engagement exercise hasn't sought to strictly define 'trips' in comparison with other travel behaviour data but to make a significant contribution to net zero targets, councils must improve walking and cycling routes across the town but must also work together to enact carbon reduction policies that encourage a significant modal shift away from the private car.

## **What happens next**

Using the information gathered from the community engagement exercise, officers will form an outline design brief to be taken forward to preliminary design stages.

A consultant is currently being procured to assist with the development of the design and their services will also extend to the production of a feasibility study where information collated from technical surveys and other relevant data will further inform the scope of the project.

A series of concept drawings based on the design brief and feasibility study will form the basis of an optioneering exercise with key stakeholders with the aim of finalising a preliminary design for public consultation in spring 2024.

The public consultation will give the community a further opportunity to comment on proposals and if no substantial objections are made, officers would approve the final design for construction at a county council Cabinet Member for Decision meeting.

Construction is provisionally scheduled to start in summer/autumn 2024. At this point, a construction phase plan will be communicated through various channels, and details kept updated, with the aim of completing the project with minimal disruption to residents and businesses.

Officers will commit to providing county, district, town and parish council members and key stakeholders (accessibility groups) with information and updates through regular briefings as the project progresses ensuring that communications are clear and prompt.

## Appendix List

- 01 West Oxfordshire District Council Review of Temporary Traffic Restrictions in Witney High Street 2021.pdf
- 02 Information Boards.pdf
- 03 Witney High Street paper survey.pdf
- 04 Interactive Map.pdf
- 05 Witney High Street Leaflet.pdf
- 06 Witney High Street social media Posts.pdf
- 07 Business Workshop Invitation OCC letterhead 310823.pdf
- 08 Business Matters Newsletter.pdf
- 09 Interactive Hotspot Map.pdf
- 10 Interactive Map pictures.pdf
- 11 Witney High Street Councillor Workshop Comments.pdf
- 12 Witney High Street Business Workshop Comments.pdf
- 13 Witney Town Council High Street response.pdf
- 14 Oxfordshire Cycling Network Response to consultation on Witney High Street Sep23.pdf
- 15 Buses Stakeholder meeting minutes.pdf
- 16 Thames Valley Police Stakeholder Meeting Minutes.pdf