

Witney High Street and Market Square Enhancement Scheme

Public Consultation Report

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Summary

This document reports on the findings of the public consultation exercise conducted between 11 September and 9 October 2024 for the Witney High Street and Market Square Enhancement scheme.

The purpose of the consultation was to seek feedback from residents, businesses, and stakeholders on draft proposals for changes to the High Street and Market Square. The proposals aimed to deliver improvements based on feedback received from the 2023 community engagement exercises, technical studies and budgetary parameters.

The consultation involved participation in an online survey on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire engagement platform. Feedback was also received from stakeholder meetings, other comments by email/post and face-to-face engagement with businesses in the project area.

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 public consultation demonstrate general support for the proposals, whilst the feedback has also identified requirements to adjust certain aspects of the designs.

Key findings

- The survey shows majority support for the proposals, but overall support has slightly decreased compared to the engagement conducted in September 2023.
- Respondents with disabilities or long-term health conditions expressed less support, citing concerns about reduced accessibility due to fewer blue badge parking spaces.
- Feedback highlights the need for more on-street loading facilities.
- There are issues with proposals to introduce bus waiting areas. Stakeholders have requested a new bus stop instead.
- Concerns were raised about plant species, seating arrangements, and the importance of maintaining those features.
- Respondents want bolder measures to promote walking and cycling, such as fully pedestrianising the High Street and better enforcement of the traffic restriction.
- Of the 417 respondents, younger age groups (16-34) were underrepresented, while those over 65 were overrepresented compared to local demographics.

Background

The implementation of the traffic restriction in Witney High Street and Market Square that was made permanent in December 2021 formed the basis of a funding application to Active Travel England with the following criteria:

- 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

Oxfordshire County Council was subsequently awarded £1.98m for full project delivery of a further scheme to provide improvements to a section of the town centre comprising: the High Street between its junction with Welch Way up to and including the Market Square. In 2023 the county council conducted a series of community engagement exercises with the aim of defining an agreed set of project objectives and prioritising improvements to be taken forward in the design stages of the project. Witney Town Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and local county, district, town and parish councillors were integrally involved in the engagement planning and supporting the promotion of and informing about the project.

Following the completion of the community engagement exercises, the council published a Community Engagement Report. Key findings demonstrated broad support for the project objectives and identified specific items for implementation in the designs but also highlighted other concerns around traffic management/road safety and access for businesses. The feedback was used to fine-tune the scheme for future phases, ensuring that community concerns were addressed in the design development stages that followed.

Design development

After carrying out a range of technical surveys of the project area, the council contracted consultants to begin a feasibility study which reviewed the current conditions in Witney High Street and Market Square, highlighting issues including congestion, safety concerns, and outdated infrastructure. The study also used data from the surveys and public feedback from the community engagement to identify key areas needing improvement.

Proposed solutions to these issues were offered focusing on enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, improving public transport access, and preserving Witney's historical character. The study report includes plans for redesigning street layouts, adding green spaces, and implementing traffic calming measures, with a phased approach to minimise disruption.

This initial feasibility report shown in **(App.01)** presented a vision for optimal public realm improvements across the whole project area. It was acknowledged that budget

limitations would not allow for the complete realisation of this vision, however it would be a cost-effective exercise to conduct the report to reflect the full vision at this point. This means that the report could be used to support future bids for additional funding to enable the delivery of more components of the bigger vision. The initial plans were descope and refocused how the project could deliver key objectives using the funding available.

The design development stages were reviewed by monthly project steering group meetings which included officers from Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, and Witney Town Council. The plans were reviewed throughout, taking on feedback from the group and resolved to meet the project's core objectives, reflecting community engagement feedback, technical constraints, and budgetary limits while still providing key infrastructure improvements.

The plans shown in **(App.02)** were published for the public consultation on 11 September 2024 and were accompanied by information boards shown in **(App.03)** and artist impressions of the designs **(App.04)** which contained easy to read annotations and project narrative to aid interpretation.

Alignment to Oxfordshire County Council strategy

The project 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 by prioritising walking, cycling and shared transport. Additionally, the project helps OCC to meet headline targets that underpin the vision and key themes set out in the LTCP:

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.

Witney High Street and Market Square enhancement project supports the following of the county council's nine stated 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 public consultation period began on 11 September 2024 and finished 28 days later on 9 October 2024. The public consultation comprised:

- an online survey (<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/witney-high-street-2>) including:
 - downloadable copies of the plans
 - artist's impressions of the High Street if draft designs were implemented
 - full feasibility report carried out by the appointed design contractor: Phil Jones Associates (this was thorough and in-depth with the intention that it could complement potential future funding bids to build on improvements to the town centre)
 - slides of the information boards shared at the drop-in events
 - flyer distributed to all addresses in Witney
 - poster put up around Witney town centre
 - frequently asked questions
 - link to related webpage
 - links to the 2023 community engagement survey pages and report
- a press release (<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/share-your-thoughts-on-design-for-witney-high-street-improvements/>). This 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.
- dedicated webpage (<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/roadworks/future-transport-projects/witney-high-street>).
- social media posts on X (Twitter) and NextDoor (geotargeted to Witney and surrounding villages).
- subscriber bulletin entries including the county council's travel bulletin (approximately 4,000 registered recipients) and Your Oxfordshire email bulletin (approximately 35,000 registered recipients); and West Oxfordshire District Council's Business Matters newsletter.
- two drop-in events held in Witney Methodist church.

- as well as promotion from colleagues in Witney Town Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, and local councillors via their preferred channels.
- Stakeholder meeting with bus service providers.
- In person visits to every business in the project area to determine requirements for on street loading facilities and absorb any other feedback.

Physical communications were sent out in the form of:

- emails to key stakeholders – including (but not exclusively) emergency services, local transport operators, interest and access groups, and businesses.
- A two-sided A5 colour flyer (**App.05**) summarising the scheme and proposals with written links and QR codes for the survey webpages, and details of the drop-in events. This was hand delivered to every address in the town by a local cycle courier and comprised over 15000 addresses.
- A4 colour posters (**App.06**) promoting the survey and drop-in events, which were put up around the town centre.
- Paper survey packs with copies of the plans and additional flyers were available for collection from the town council and the library. A further pack was delivered to the retirement village following previous recommendations from councillors and local residents who raised concerns that some residents in the retirement village would like to contribute to the survey but had difficulty accessing it online and could not easily attend the drop-in events.

The two **public engagement drop-in events** gave people the opportunity to pop in to learn more about the project, ask officers any questions they might have, and share their feedback. People were also able to collect paper survey forms to fill in and additional copies of the flyer if they wished to. The events were timed to be more accessible for families, older people and people finishing work. Both events were held in the main worship room in Witney Methodist Church on the High Street:

- Saturday 14 September 2024 between 10am and 4pm
- Thursday 19 September 2024 between 5pm and 8pm

At the events, there was a display of information boards promoting and summarising the proposals, and large-scale paper copies of the draft plans so that visitors could pinpoint any exact concerns or recommendations on the plans. All information provided at the events was also published on the survey webpages to ensure that it was available for people unable to attend the events.

The team of officers at the event were from the project team and comprised the project manager, transport planners, communications and engagement officers and a designer from the appointed design contractor: Phil Jones Associates. This ensured a good representation of distinct aspects of the project and a breadth of specialised expertise to assist visitors. A comments book was provided for people to write in if they wished to do so,

and officers running the event made notes of all the verbal feedback they received. This has been considered with the survey responses, letters, and emails, as a part of the analysis. 12 paper surveys were completed during the events, and these have been added to the overall survey analysis (along with other paper surveys received).

There were 185 visitors to the event on 14 September and 87 visitors to the event on 19 September.

Overview of digital engagement

Over 1,800 people visited the online survey on Let's Talk Oxfordshire during the community engagement period. 417 survey responses were received (382 people completed the survey online, and 35 paper surveys were returned). Almost all respondents lived in the town or a neighbouring village. 870 people accessed multiple features of the survey pages, and there were over 2900 document downloads:

| No. people downloaded | Document description |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 750 | Consultation plans |
| 400 | Artist's impressions |
| 390 | Detailed, formal technical plan |
| 235 | Feasibility report |
| 200 | Information boards |
| 160 | Posters |
| 120 | Flyers |

Additionally, 150 visitors accessed the frequently asked questions section (FAQs).

Most people accessed the survey webpages directly, many also accessed it from social media links, or from the related press release and webpage on Oxfordshire County Council's website.

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

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Social media (especially Facebook and X/Twitter) | 377 |
| Emails (including subscriber updates in local authority e-newsletters) | 115 |
| Search engines (mostly Google) | 151 |
| Referrals (mostly from Brevo – an email marketing tool) | 175 |
| Gov.uk websites | 402 |
| Direct | 1192 |
| Total | 2412 |

There was a daily average of 420 visits to the survey page. Of this, there was a daily average of 73 individual visitors who viewed and/or completed the survey questions, and/or viewed documents to the survey webpage whilst the survey was open.

Survey results

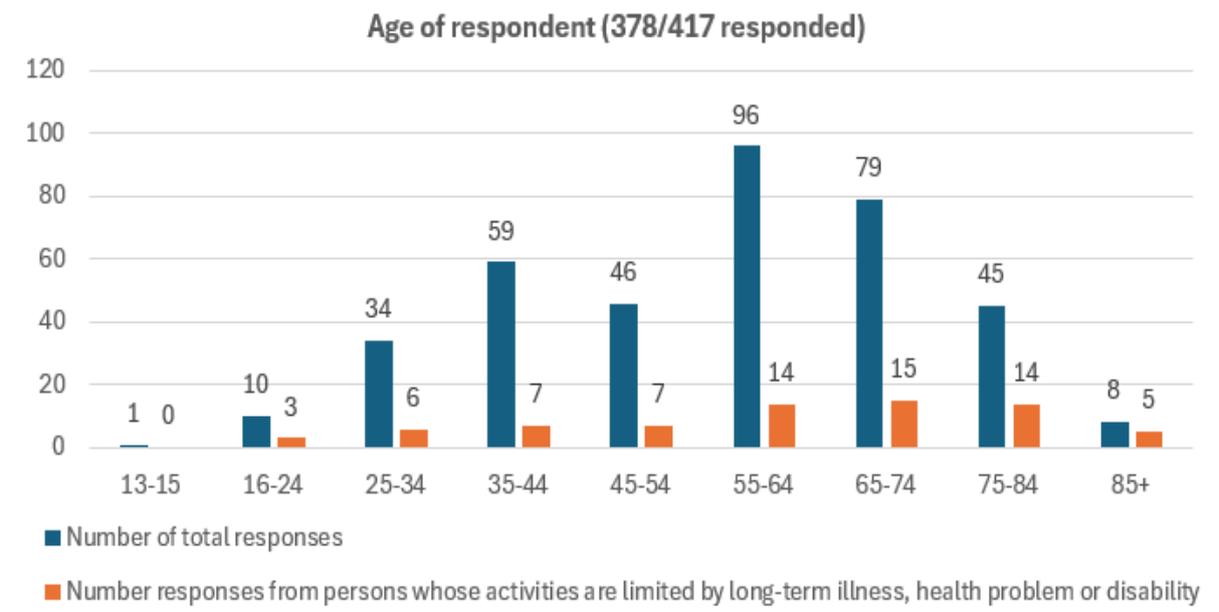
417 people answered the survey, compared to 643 responding to the community engagement survey in 2023. Both surveys were held almost exactly one year apart using similar communications plans and printed materials. The demographics of survey respondents in 2023 and 2024 are broadly similar.

Demographic data

Participants were asked to complete a set of optional demographic questions as part of the survey which helps the county council to understand the balance of respondents and to get a clearer picture of needs relevant to specific groups. As was done in 2023, the demographic information received from the survey responses has been compared to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2021 population data in the Witney parliamentary constituency area¹ to identify any imbalances in participation.

Q: What is your age?

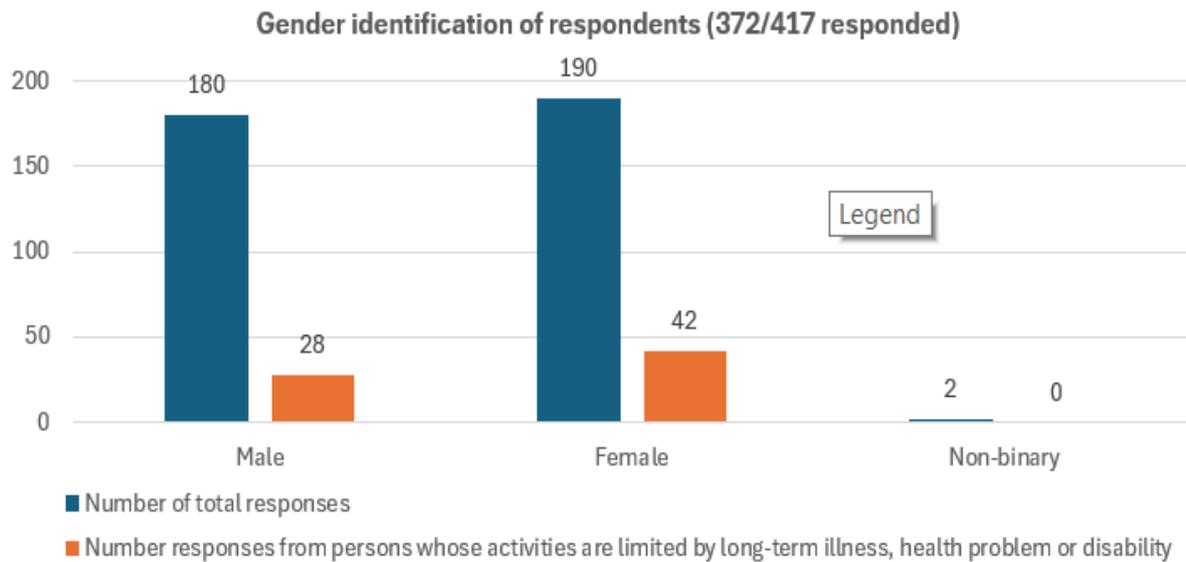
Results show that respondents to the survey are heavily weighted towards the older age groups compared to the overall age demographics of Witney. 55% of respondents are over 55 years old. There is a notable lack of participation amongst the younger age groups although there is an increase in participation from the 35-44 age group compared to the 2023 survey.



¹ www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/

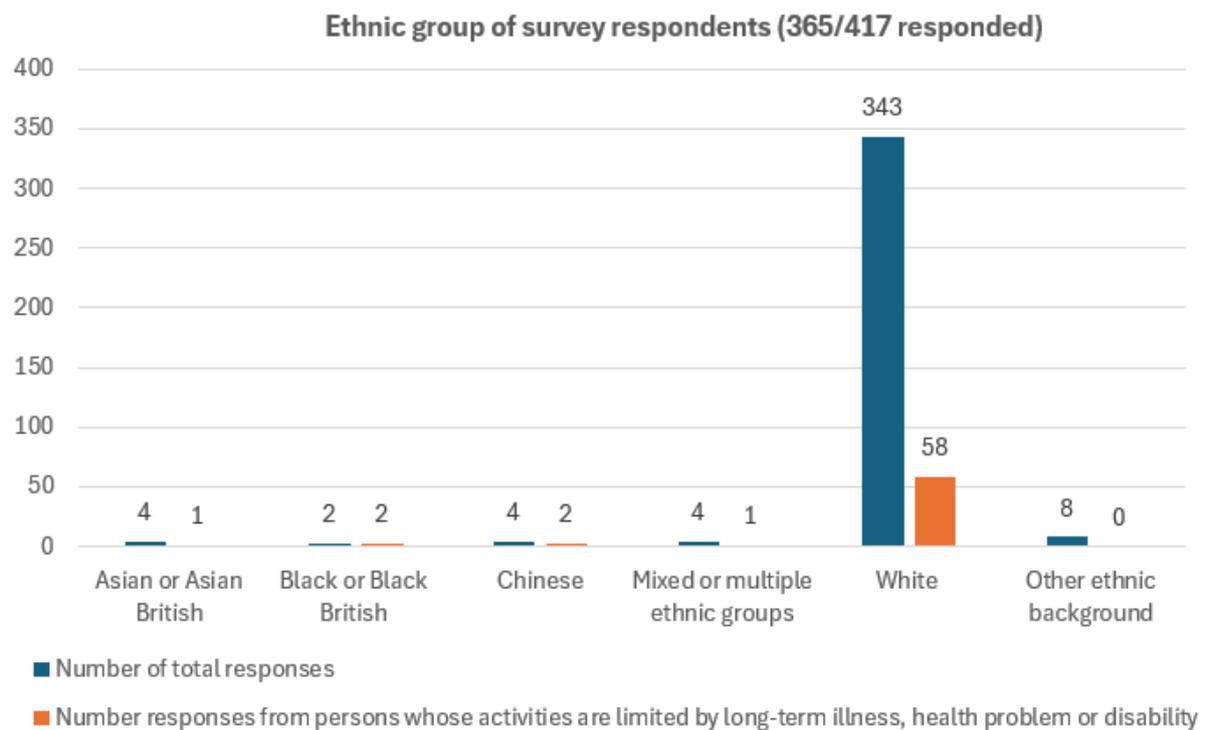
Q: What is your sex?

The survey results show that the proportion of male and female respondents is roughly proportionate to the overall gender demographics of Witney.



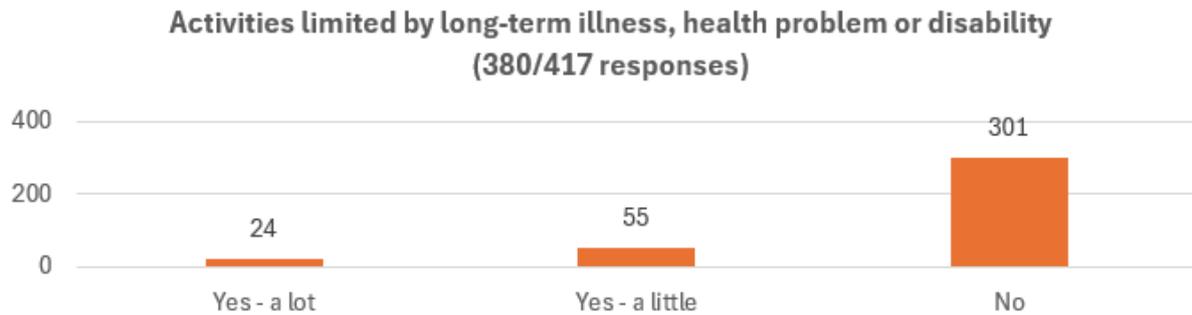
Q: What is your ethnic group?

The survey results show that the share of ethnic groups responding to the survey are roughly proportionate to the overall ethnic demographics of Witney.



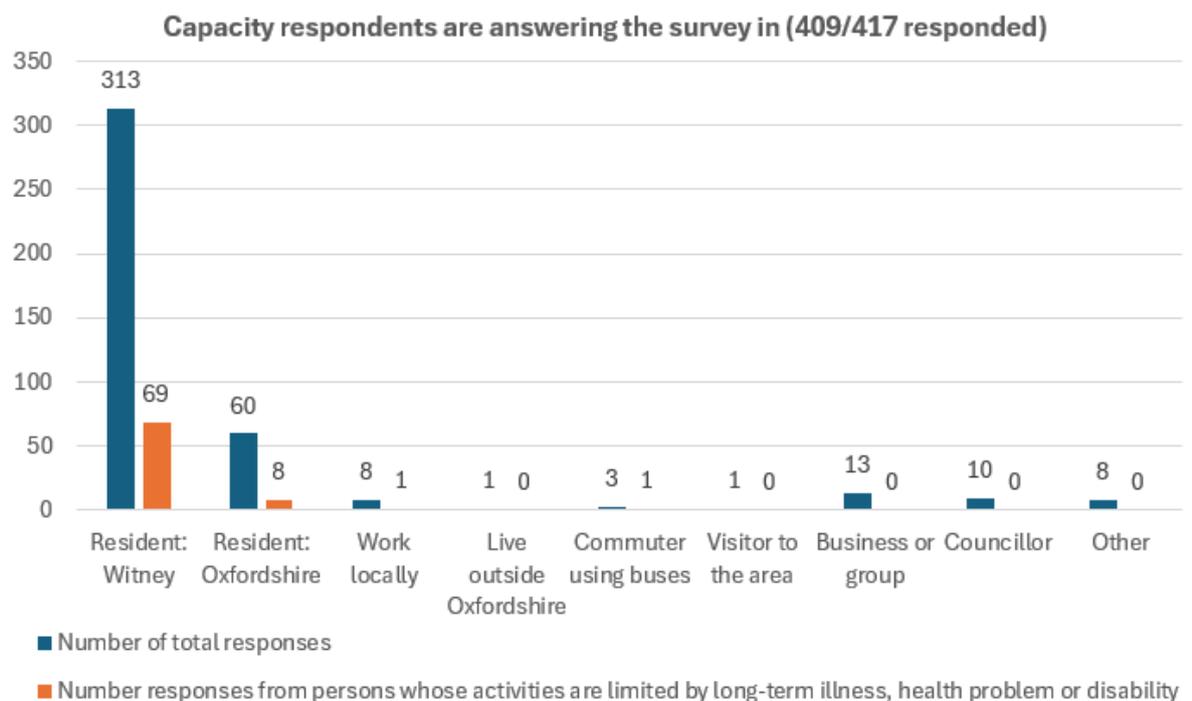
Q: Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

19% of total participants to the survey said their day-to-day activities were limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. 15.1% of Witney’s population is formally identified as disabled under the Equalities Act. This is in line with the comparative 2021 ONS figures for west Oxfordshire and for the county (the overall figure for England is 17.7%).



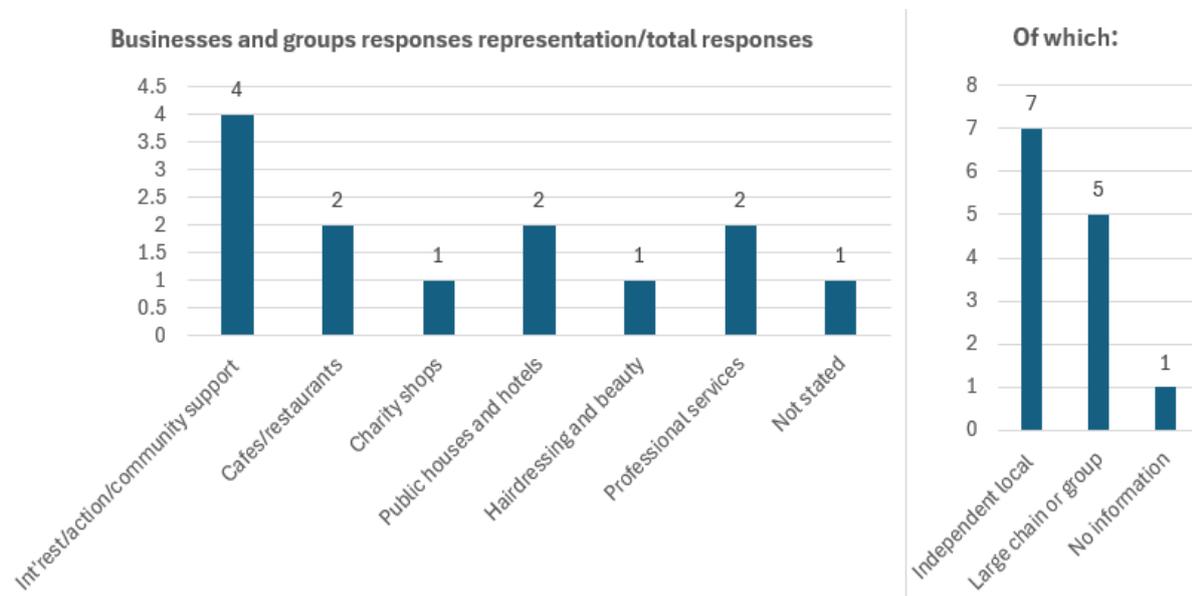
Q: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

Almost all respondents live in Oxfordshire. The survey results show that most respondents to the survey live in Witney (75%) and 12% of respondents are living in other West Oxfordshire areas (based on postcode data entered by respondents). Although the online survey was widely promoted there is a lack of participation from local businesses/organisations (3%). Despite the small number, a good breadth of businesses and groups responded to the survey, with just over half of them being independent local enterprises.



Businesses, faith, education and interest groups:

13 groups answered the online survey in total, just over half of which were independent local businesses or independent local organisations.



Question responses

Survey participants were asked to submit their level of support for each of the aspects of the design proposals and had the opportunity to add comments to provide more context. The comments provide important qualitative insight helping to demonstrate how people interact with the town centre, and their individual experiences. Written summaries of these free text responses are included with the following results analysis. The summaries seek to highlight key points and recurring themes identified in the comments.

Accessibility for disabled persons 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.

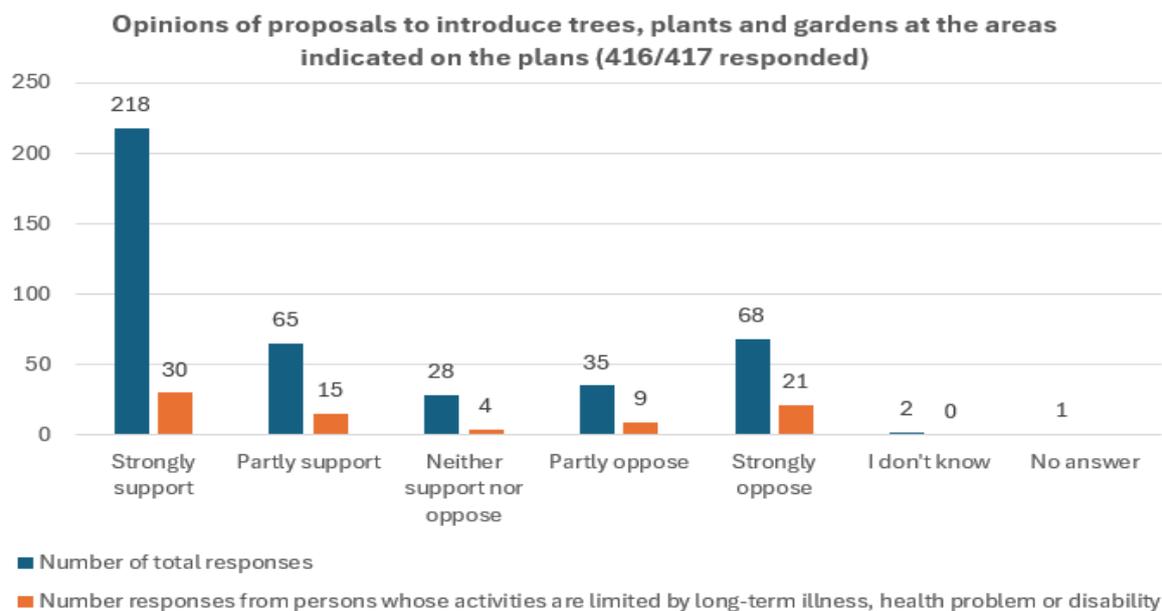
Q: (Trees, Plants and Gardens) What best describes your opinion of our proposals to introduce trees, plants and gardens at the areas indicated on the plans?

The results show that 68% of total survey participants either fully or partially support the proposals for trees, plants and gardens and 25% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

217 respondents provided free text comments. Several respondents expressed concerns about the long-term maintenance of the proposed trees and plants, drawing

attention to issues experienced in the past with overall upkeep and also concerned about potential leaf shed. A recurring suggestion was the preference for cherry blossom trees or other specific types of trees, which were viewed as aesthetically pleasing additions to the town.

There was also a notable divide in feedback, with some respondents offering positive views on the proposals, stating that the changes would enhance the town's appeal. However, a few others were disappointed with the overall ambition of the plan, feeling that it could have been more daring or innovative. These responses provide insight into both enthusiasm and concerns surrounding the proposed green spaces and the types of trees being considered.



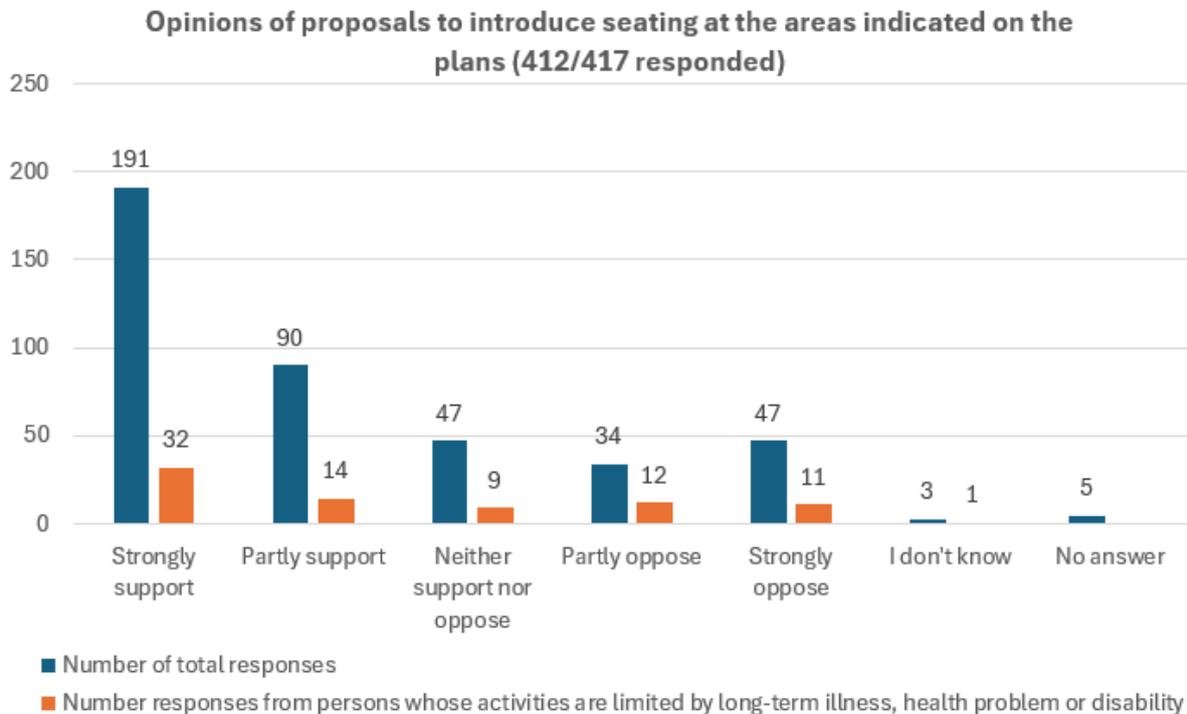
Q: (Seating) What best describes your opinion of our proposals to introduce seating at the areas indicated on the plans?

The results show that 67% of total survey participants either fully or partially support the proposals to introduce seating at the areas indicated on the plans and 19% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

169 respondents provided free text comments. While some respondents appreciated the idea of additional seating to encourage people to spend more time in the area, others felt that too much seating could clutter the high street, particularly in already narrow footpath areas, and hinder pedestrian movement.

Participants expressed concerns about the location, design, and positioning of the proposed seating. Some noted that benches facing towards the shops seemed impractical, and there were suggestions to face them towards the road or vary their direction for better views. Others highlighted the importance of ensuring seating is in places that offer shade or align with the natural surroundings, such as near trees or away from high-traffic areas like bus stops. Several respondents also mentioned that seating should be accessible and beneficial for people with mobility issues, the elderly, or parents with children.

Additionally, some respondents raised concerns about the potential for seating to attract antisocial behaviour or become damaged or vandalised. A few were worried about the ongoing maintenance of the benches, noting that low-maintenance, durable materials should be used. A number of respondents asked for bins to be installed with seating to reduce the risk of littering.



Q: What best describes your opinion of our proposals to reduce the carriageway width, expand the pedestrian footway areas and resurface the footways?

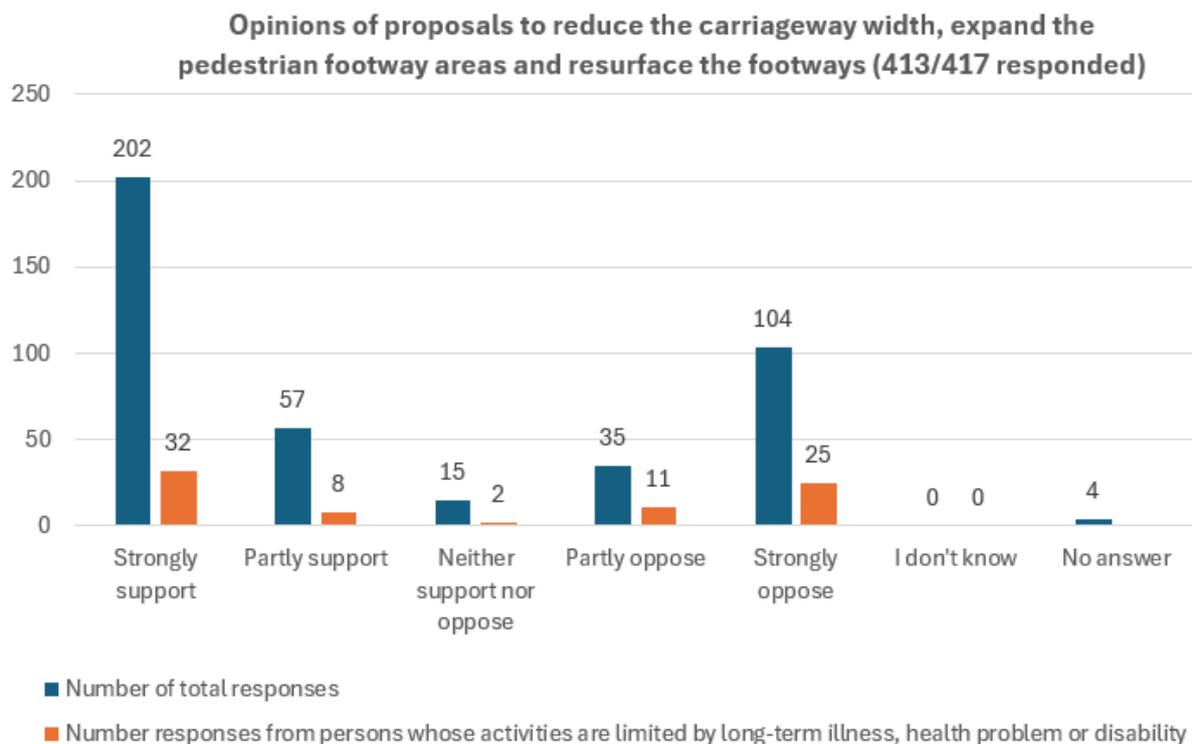
The results show that 62% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to reduce the carriageway width and expand and resurface footways and 33% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

237 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents expressed a need for resurfacing the footways, noting the current state of disrepair, which makes them uneven and unsafe for pedestrians, wheelchair users, and people with pushchairs. There was also a consistent call for accessible footpaths, with some emphasising the importance of accommodating mobility scooters and ensuring the new surfaces are safe and smooth. Some participants appreciated the shift towards a more pedestrian-friendly town centre, seeing the proposal as a way to enhance public spaces and make the High Street more welcoming.

A significant number of respondents raised concerns about narrowing the carriageways, fearing this could lead to traffic congestion, especially for buses, emergency vehicles, and deliveries. Many called for clearer enforcement of traffic restrictions, citing ongoing problems with unauthorised vehicles using the High Street and illegal parking, which could be exacerbated by the changes. Some suggested full pedestrianisation of the High Street,

while others felt that reopening it entirely to traffic would be a better solution. There were additional concerns about the impact of the proposed changes on businesses, particularly regarding delivery access and disabled parking.

Some important observations are made about accessibility which would warrant some more focussed discussion with particular stakeholders with accessibility interests. This includes concerns raised about the most suitable space and surfacing for better disabled access (e.g., level footways and access points; and clear footway and crossing distinctions for those with sight impairments, and that best suit the features guide dogs are trained to recognise).



Q: “Loading Bays” - What best describes your opinion of our proposals to introduce loading bays outside Terence Lett Jewellers (3 High Street) and Cotswolds Opticians (43-45 High Street) and to restrict vehicles waiting/loading where parking and loading bays are not provided?

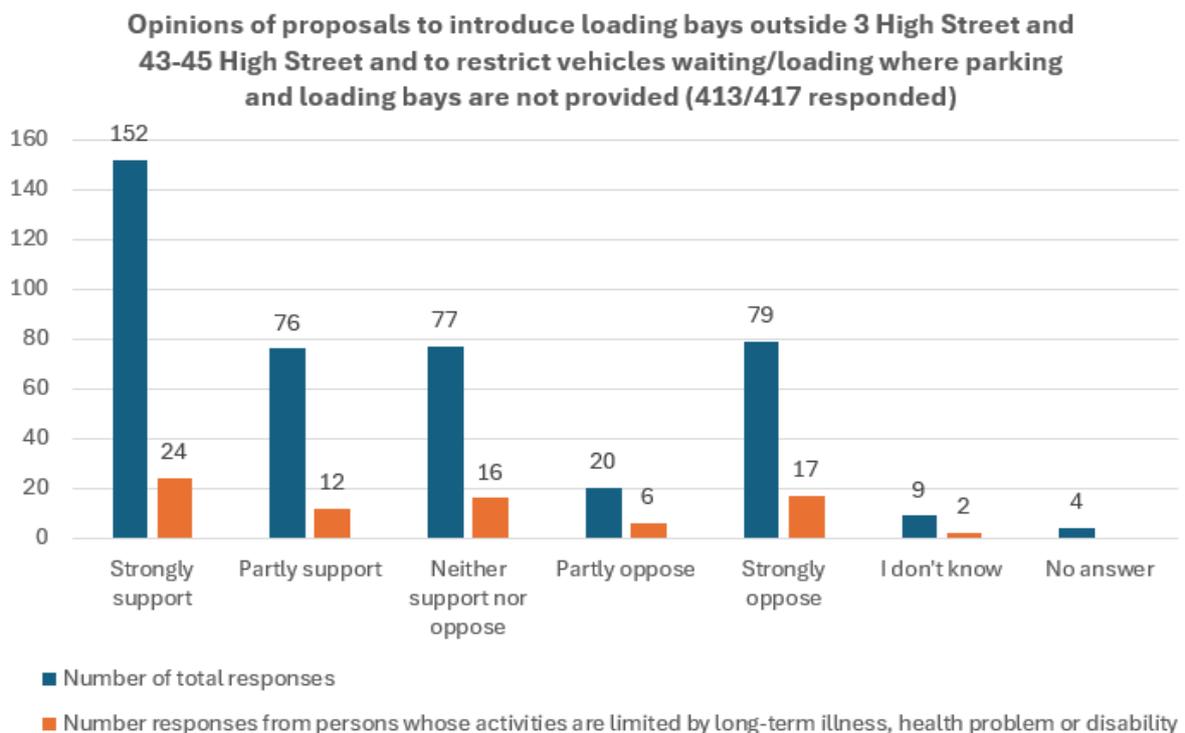
The results show that 55% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to introduce loading bays outside Terence Lett Jewellers (3 High Street) and Cotswolds Opticians (43-45 High Street) and to restrict vehicles waiting/loading where parking and loading bays are not provided and 24% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

182 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents emphasised the importance of loading bays for the successful operation of businesses in Witney, particularly for shops that do not have rear access. Several respondents stressed that businesses need easy, close access for deliveries, and that the proposed loading bays

may not be sufficient in number or well-located for all businesses. This included deliveries to businesses and also the need for customers to collect bulky items (and donate re: charity shops).

Some respondents suggested that loading for business deliveries should be restricted to specific times (such as early mornings or late evenings) to minimise disruption during peak shopping hours, while others called for flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of businesses, including deliveries by larger vehicles or regular deliveries throughout the day. Concerns were also raised about the practical enforcement of loading bays, with many urging for stricter regulation to prevent misuse by unauthorised vehicles.

Another recurring theme was the impact of the proposals on Blue Badge holders and disabled parking. Several respondents highlighted the importance of maintaining adequate disabled parking near the High Street and raised concerns that the focus on loading bays could lead to a reduction in accessible spaces for disabled individuals. Many respondents called for a balance between loading bays and accessible parking, with some suggesting dual-use spaces or time-limited loading zones. Others voiced strong opposition to the perceived "anti-car" nature of the proposals, advocating instead for reopening the High Street to general traffic to support both businesses and ease for customers.



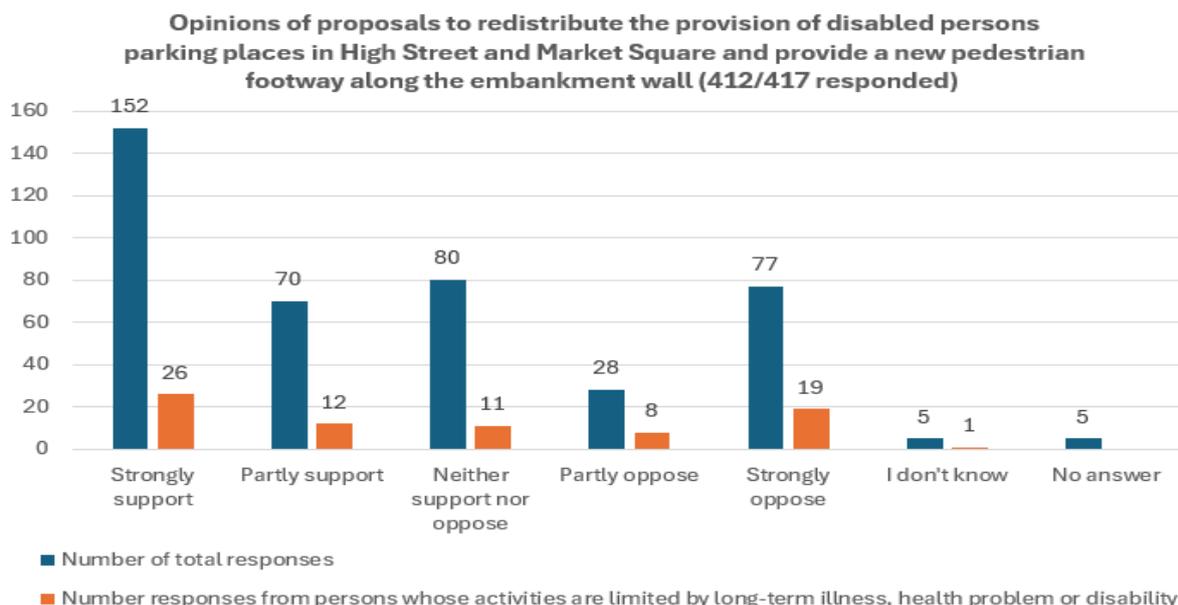
Q: What best describes your opinion of the proposals to redistribute the provision of disabled persons parking places in High Street and Market Square and to provide a new pedestrian footway along the embankment wall?

The results show that 53% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to redistribute the provision of disabled persons parking places in High Street and Market Square and to provide a new pedestrian footway along the embankment wall and 25% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

151 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents expressed strong support for retaining or increasing the number of Blue Badge parking spaces, emphasising the importance of accessible parking for disabled individuals to ensure they can continue to visit the High Street and access local businesses.

Some felt that the current number of disabled spaces is insufficient, with a few sharing individual experiences of struggling to find available parking. There was also concern about potential misuse of Blue Badge parking by unauthorised users, with calls for stricter enforcement, such as through automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras. Additionally, several respondents highlighted the need to ensure that the new spaces are well distributed across the High Street and Market Square, with unobstructed access and adequate space for mobility aids, such as wheelchairs.

Some respondents questioned the necessity of having as many Blue Badge spaces in the town centre, pointing out that there are already disabled parking options available nearby, such as in car parks like Waitrose. These individuals felt that central High Street parking should be minimised, particularly if the area is being partially pedestrianised, and argued that disabled spaces could be better placed at the ends of the High Street or in adjacent parking areas. A few responses also critiqued the proposed new pedestrian footway alongside the embankment wall, stating it would not significantly improve accessibility or suggesting that it would unnecessarily reduce the carriageway space.



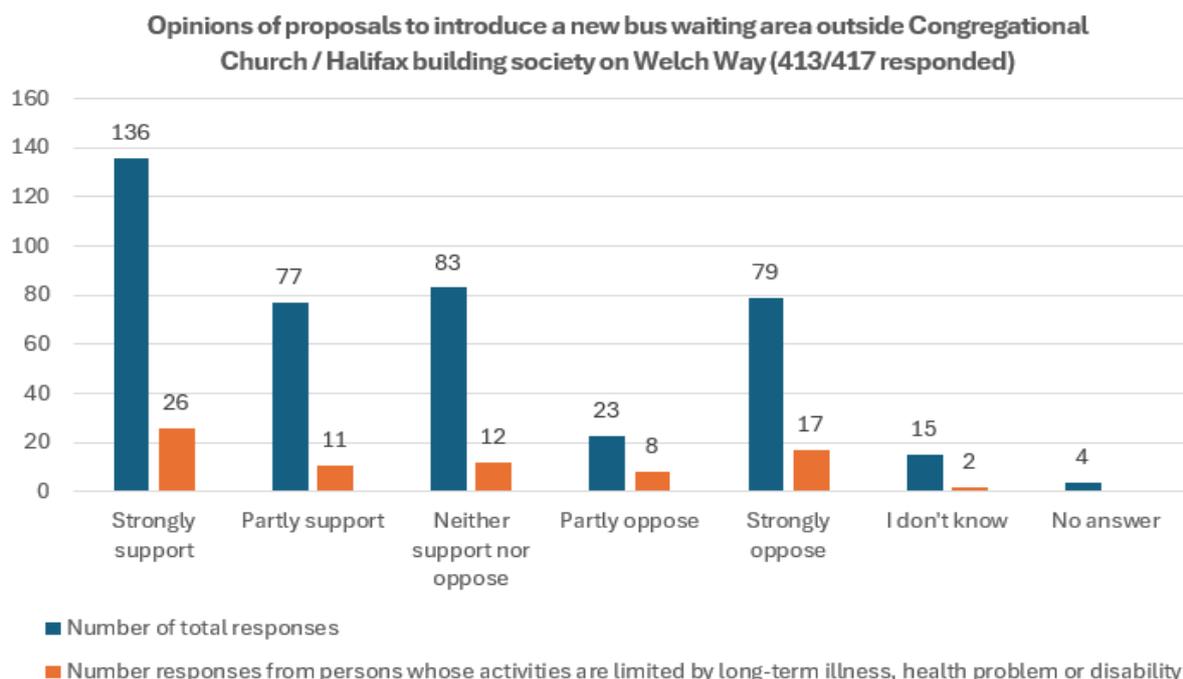
Q: (Bus waiting areas) What best describes your opinion of our proposals to introduce a new bus waiting area outside the Congregational Church / Halifax building society on Welch Way?

The results show that 51% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals introduce a new bus waiting area outside the Congregational Church / Halifax building society on Welch Way and 24% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

156 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents concerned about potential traffic congestion and pedestrian safety, particularly on Welch Way. Several comments highlight the risk of buses waiting in already congested areas like near the Halifax building society, Greggs, and the congregational church, where illegal parking often occurs. Respondents fear that placing bus waiting areas here could worsen traffic flow, reduce pedestrian visibility at crossings, and limit access for funerals, weddings, or disabled users attending the church.

There were frequent calls for better enforcement of parking restrictions and the consideration of alternative locations, such as in Langdale Gate or by the leisure centre in Witan Way. Some respondents also expressed concerns about buses idling in waiting areas, which could contribute to pollution and disrupt the pedestrian-friendly character of the area.

Some respondents noted that the proposal could help reduce bus congestion in Market Square and improve overall public transport connectivity. Several people suggested that re-routing more buses through Welch Way, away from the High Street, would be beneficial, especially if accompanied by measures such as zebra crossings to ensure pedestrian safety. Others recommended consulting bus companies to determine the best operational routes and placements.

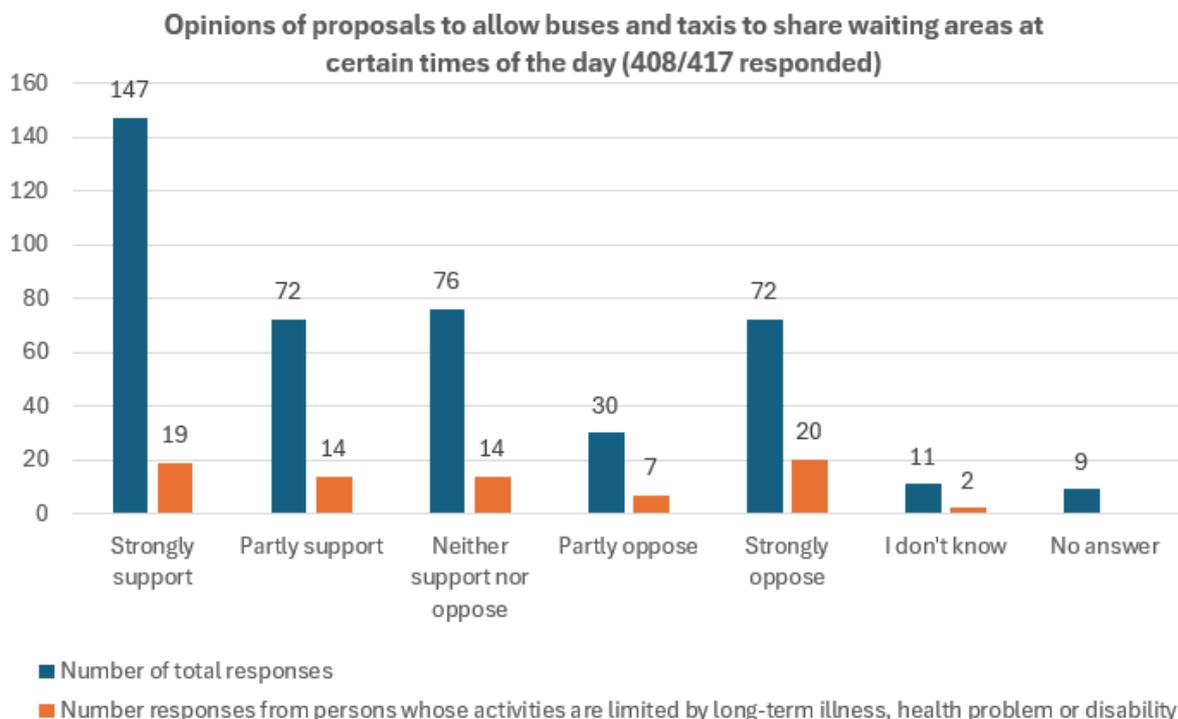


Q: (Shared bus/taxi waiting areas) What best describes your opinion of our proposals to allow buses and taxis to share waiting areas at certain times of the day?

The results show that 52.5% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to allow buses and taxis to share waiting areas at certain times of the day and 24% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

128 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents are concerned that waiting buses and taxis could obstruct pedestrian crossings, create blind spots, and block traffic in already busy areas such as Welch Way and Market Square. Some argue that moving the taxi rank away from Market Square would negatively affect taxi trade, particularly during busy periods, and lead to more pollution as taxis circle for space.

Additionally, concerns were raised about illegal parking near bus stops and the need for better enforcement of parking restrictions. Suggestions include enforcing no-idling rules to reduce pollution, improving signage, and consulting transport operators before finalizing plans. There is some support relocating or sharing waiting areas for buses and taxis to alleviate congestion in the town centre and improve traffic flow. Many believe that prioritising buses and taxis over private vehicles is crucial to maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment on the High Street. Several comments highlight the importance of safety for pedestrians and suggest that better planning, including testing proposed changes before implementation, is necessary.



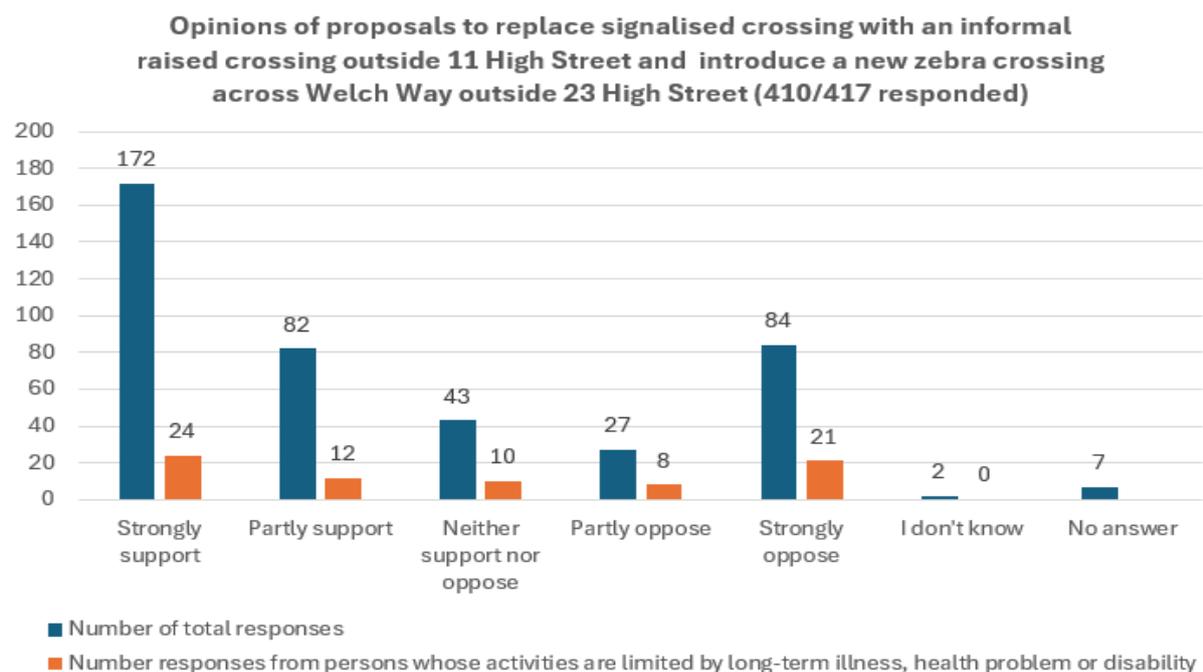
Q: (Pedestrian Crossings) What best describes your opinion of our proposals to replace the signalised crossing with an informal raised crossing outside the Co-op (11 High Street) and to introduce a new zebra crossing across Welch Way outside NatWest bank (23 High Street)?

The results show that 61% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to replace the signalised crossing with an informal raised crossing outside the Co-op (11 High Street) and to introduce a new zebra crossing across Welch Way outside NatWest bank (23 High Street) and 27% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

187 respondents provided free text comments. Many respondents highlight the importance of proper enforcement of traffic restrictions and speed limits, as well as the need for clearer signage or even the installation of cameras to manage illegal traffic movements in areas like the High Street.

Some comments welcome the proposals for new crossings, particularly in locations like Welch Way, as a way to slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety. However, others are concerned about potential dangers, especially for blind and partially sighted people, who may rely more on signalised crossings. Several respondents argue that zebra crossings might not be as effective as signalised crossings, particularly in areas where traffic is heavier, feeling vehicles might be less inclined to stop at a zebra crossing. There is also support for more crossings in other High Street locations including outside Boots and Marriotts Walk. Other respondents feel that too many crossings could lead to unnecessary traffic congestion and slow down the flow of vehicles, particularly on already busy roads.

A significant number of people believe that zebra crossings could be redundant if pedestrianisation of the town centre was fully implemented, suggesting that the need for such crossings is tied to the continued presence of vehicular traffic.

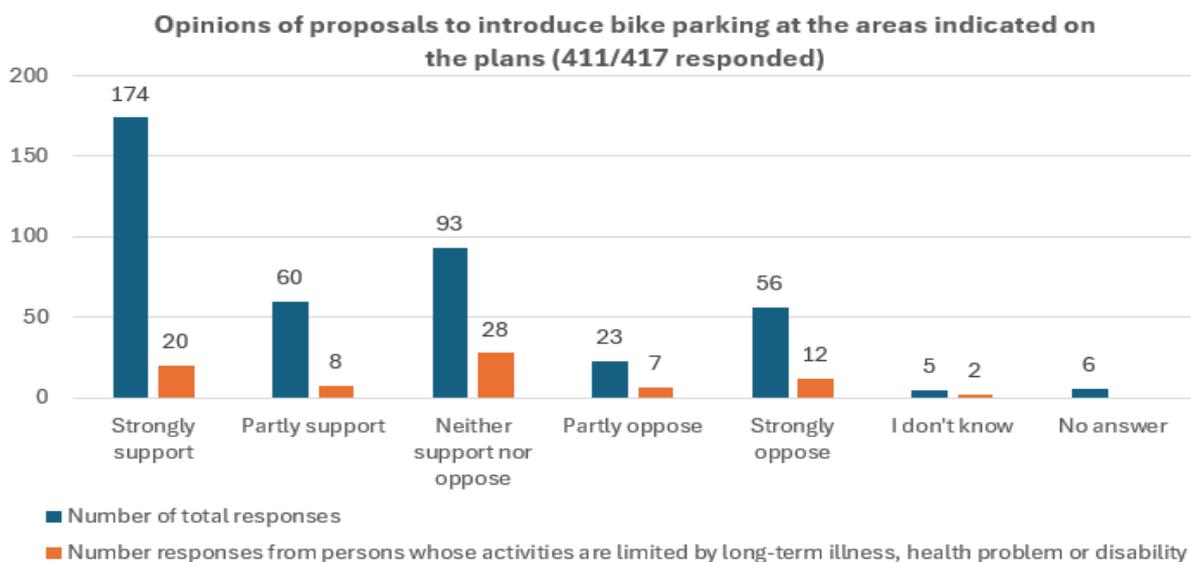


Q: What best describes your opinion of our proposals to introduce bike parking at the areas indicated on the plans?

The results show that 57% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the proposals to introduce bike parking at the areas indicated on the plans and 19% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

141 respondents provided free text comments. Many people support the addition of more cycle parking, recognizing it as beneficial for the environment and public health, as well as a means of encouraging more sustainable modes of transport. However, several respondents stress that bike parking should not clutter footpaths or take up space that could be used for pedestrians, with some suggesting that bikes could be parked on the road instead. There are calls for secure, well-lit, and intelligently designed parking areas to accommodate modern bikes, such as e-bikes, and to reduce the risk of theft. Others emphasise that the plans should not solely focus on adding bike parking but also improve cycle routes leading into town, as unsafe roads are currently a deterrent to cycling.

On the other hand, some respondents question the need for additional cycle parking, citing that the current facilities are often underused and that Witney, being a rural town, has limited cyclists compared to urban areas. Concerns are raised about the impact of bikes on pedestrians, particularly in crowded areas, and about the potential for more bikes to exacerbate issues with bike riders using footpaths irresponsibly. A few respondents feel bikes should be parked in car parks outside of the High Street and cycling restricted from High Street and Market Square to address this concern and concerns about aesthetic impacts from bike parking. There is also scepticism about whether bike parking aligns with the needs of all residents, especially those who rely on cars for shopping or have mobility issues. A few respondents suggest that the focus should be on repairing roads and maintaining existing infrastructure rather than expanding bike parking facilities.



Q: Overall proposals - How do you feel about the overall scheme proposals?

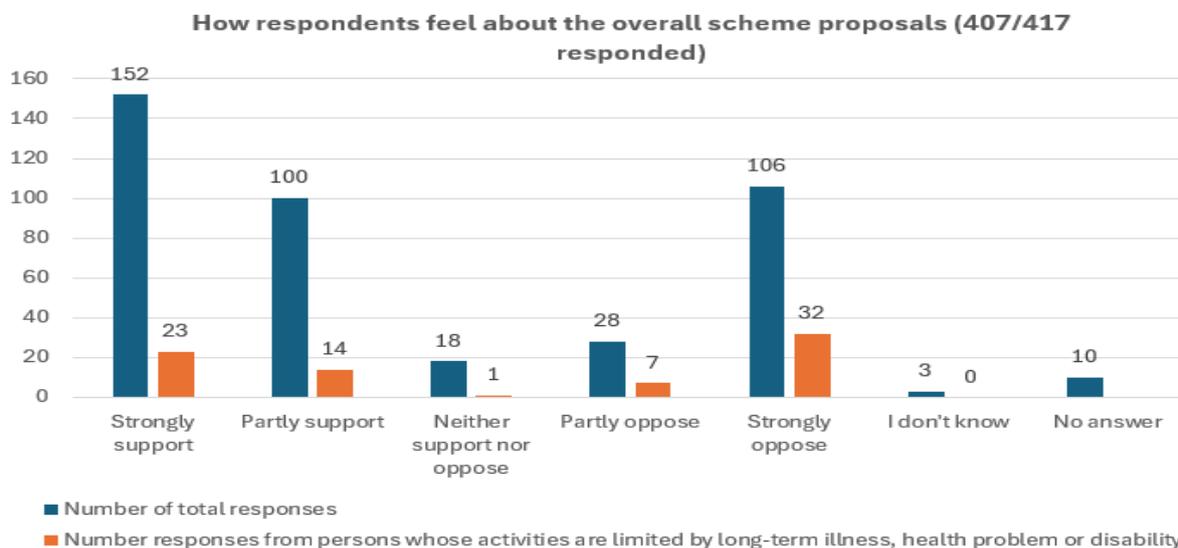
The results show that 60% of total survey participants either full or partially supported the overall proposals and 32% partially oppose or fully oppose them.

254 respondents provided free text comments. A significant number of respondents feel that the proposals would restrict vehicle access to the town centre too heavily: pushing traffic onto surrounding roads like Witan Way, Corn Street, and Bridge Street, which are already congested. These respondents worry that local businesses, particularly those relying on quick access and deliveries, will suffer as a result, leading to a decline in footfall and impacting the character of the town’s retail and hospitality offering.

Many view the changes as unnecessary and detrimental, expressing the sentiment that Witney is a rural community where cars are essential, and pedestrianising more of the High Street would further alienate residents who rely on vehicles. Some are calling for a more balanced approach, perhaps with time-limited vehicle access rather than full closures.

Just over half of respondents support the proposed changes, with a number of associated comments appreciating the focus on creating an attractive, more pedestrian-friendly environment with enhanced green spaces. There is a sentiment that the plan would help to modernise the town – making it more attractive and enjoyable for residents and visitors, with wider pavements, new seating areas, and more space for outdoor dining and public events. Some emphasise that the scheme should go even further by fully pedestrianizing the High Street, reducing traffic even more to make the area safer and more appealing. A few highlight the need for better enforcement of traffic restrictions to prevent unauthorised vehicles from entering pedestrian areas and suggest that the plans should focus more on sustainability and long-term benefits for the community.

After looking at comments from those identifying with having disabilities or long-term health condition, there do not appear to be many specific concerns addressing accessibility issues for disabled persons. The comments primarily focus on issues such as financial concerns, traffic management, enforcement, and seating arrangements. However, some general comments about seating or bus routes might indirectly relate to accessibility, as excessive or poorly placed seating and changes to public transport could impact individuals with mobility challenges.



Additional engagement results

Business surveys

On 24 September and 8 October, an Oxfordshire County Council officer visited all businesses on Witney High Street and Market Square in the project area to look at their on-street loading needs. The survey aimed to identify any additional demand for loading bays beyond what was presented in the public consultation. The officer inquired about rear property access, the number of daily deliveries, and the timing of peak deliveries, while also gathering further feedback to understand specific business challenges. The survey results are presented in **(App.09)**

The survey revealed several issues with rear property access, including steps, narrow corridors, and shared access with residents, which obstructed deliveries. It also highlighted that many delivery drivers still preferred to unload on the High Street, indicating assumptions about businesses' ability to use rear access were somewhat incorrect. These findings pointed to the need for additional on-street loading bays to accommodate businesses' delivery needs effectively.

Most businesses were uncertain about the daily timing of their deliveries and the lack of information in this regard does not provide any immediate guidance towards time restricted loading restrictions.

Comments from the events

A total of 272 people visited the two public drop-in events hosted by the county council at Witney Methodist church. Many of the visitors took the opportunity to discuss their thoughts with officers face-to-face, and several submitted either paper notes with comments on or wrote in the guest book provided at the events. In summary, the key feedback points from the events were:

- Many visitors were concerned about sense of wellbeing and safety as pedestrians or wheelchair users due to a high number of non-exempt vehicles coming through the traffic restrictions. A number of these visitors asked specifically if automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras would be installed. Other visitors were advised by officers that ANPR was being looked at as a possible option to enforce the restrictions.
- There were a number of concerns raised, especially by visitors using mobility vehicles, about changes to disabled person's parking places and loss of informal parking that is currently useable by blue badge holders.
- Quite a few people expressed a sentiment that they felt the funds would be better directed to general repairs to the town's roads outside the centre, or to supporting members of the local community in a cost-of-living crisis – especially people

impacted by pensions cuts. A significant proportion of visitors also asked that the existing traffic restrictions be lifted as they felt that the restrictions impact easy access to shops and businesses, and therefore also local retail footfall.

There were 185 visitors to the event on 14 September.

- Visitors were mostly positive about the proposals, but many were concerned that drivers were ignoring current restrictions on the High Street – meaning that they felt it was not as safe as it should be walking in the area.
- Many of these visitors asked for ANPR to be installed to improve safety and wellbeing in the town centre.
- There were many constructive suggestions for aesthetic enhancements including recommending plant species, and heritage waymarking.
- A number of visitors were concerned about disabled parking access on the High Street and near the Market Square – some were concerned that removing some of the available parking space could impact disabled drivers, especially if other drivers use the designated spaces; others raised concerns that the current designated disabled persons parking spaces were difficult to access and exit the vehicle from, especially due to the wall.
- Some visitors were concerned that the proposed bus waiting area on Welch Way impacted space informally used for parking by people attending services and events at the congregational church.
- Visitors came from the town and wider west Oxfordshire. They were mostly representative of the older members of the local community, there were some visitors who were younger members of the community including young families and people newly moved to the town.

There were 87 visitors to the event on 19 September

- Many of the visitors to this event were concerned that the existing traffic restrictions on the High Street and Market Square were impacting businesses' footfall, and a recent social media post to Witney residents from a local business was mentioned by a small number of these visitors.
- A number of visitors felt that the money should not be spent on the town centre (multiple messages were taken about issues on other highways within or near the town and passed to colleagues for separate review), the existing traffic restrictions should be removed in full, and local authorities should be focussing on resolving cost-of-living problems and pensions cuts.
- Some local businesses raised concerns about a lack of loading bay provision.
- Several visitors felt that county council officers would be too far removed from local knowledge to oversee the project with the benefit of a personal understanding and

familiarity with the town. They were assured that several of the county council project team were former or current local residents for several years or more. These team members were at the events. Additionally, project managers and the appointed design contractor regularly visited the town to make site and monitoring visits.

- Visitors came from the town and wider west Oxfordshire. They were mostly representative of older members of the community, and people of more recent retirement age.

Additional stakeholder responses

Witney Town Council

Witney Town Council provided a formal response to the survey questions by letter received on 9 October 2024 ([**App.10**](#)).

Witney Town Council supports the High Street enhancement designs, appreciating the public consultation and proposed improvements such as trees, benches, bike racks, and better paving. They emphasise the need for clear maintenance responsibilities for which funding should be allocated, collaboration with businesses on loading bays, and effective traffic enforcement. Concerns include the safety of the Corn Street and Langdale Gate roundabout, the potential removal of buses to improve pedestrian and cycling conditions, and the inclusion of public art reflecting Witney's heritage. The council looks forward to a greener, more pedestrian-friendly High Street.

West Oxfordshire District Council

West Oxfordshire District Council provided a formal response to the survey questions by letter received on 9 October 2024 ([**App.11**](#)).

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) is providing feedback on the proposed enhancements to Witney High Street and Market Square following the 2021 permanent vehicle restrictions in the area. These enhancements, supported by £1.98m from Active Travel England, aim to improve walking, cycling, and public transport opportunities. WODC stresses the importance of clear communication with local businesses during the process, acknowledging the modest funding as an opportunity to make important improvements while identifying future development needs. Independent design architects have been engaged, and public consultation is key to refining the plans and objectives.

WODC supports several proposed measures, including widening footpaths for pedestrian flow and maintaining disabled persons' parking provision. They also endorse formal loading bays, tree planting, additional seating, and improved signage related to Witney's history. However, the council highlights the need to balance pedestrian and vehicle safety, especially regarding footpath narrowing, bus waiting facilities, and taxi bays. They recommend further details to ensure accessibility and minimise disruption to businesses and public services.

Enhancements such as additional bicycle parking, informal crossings, and reducing street clutter are fully supported, with a focus on aesthetics and safety. WODC suggests opportunities to modernise cycle parking and make it more visible while also proposing the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) and electric bike charging facilities. Gateways to the High Street should be designed to direct traffic away from restricted zones and improve the streetscape, especially at key junctions like Corn Street and Welch Way.

Finally, WODC strongly supports increasing greenery in the area, suggesting planting options that enhance biodiversity and mitigate climate impacts, such as rainwater gardens. Lighting should also be considered to balance personal safety with wildlife conservation. WODC offers to provide advice on surfacing materials, street furniture, public art, and the incorporation of cultural spaces to reflect Witney's heritage, ensuring the project complements the town's historical significance and conservation requirements.

Unlimited Oxfordshire

Unlimited Oxfordshire, a charity representing the rights and service levels for disabled persons, provided a formal response to the survey questions by letter received on 9 October 2024 (**App.12**).

The letter highlights concerns regarding disabled access. They emphasise the need for retaining sufficient Disabled Persons' Parking Spaces (DPPSs), noting a potential net loss of five DPPSs in the proposed plan, and argue that this reduction could limit accessibility for disabled individuals. The organisation also suggests specific design improvements, such as reducing crossfall at DPPS locations, ensuring level access to businesses, and businesses incorporating more training for staff to support disabled customers.

Additionally, the text mentions the importance of maintaining safe and accessible exits for disabled drivers, especially those using wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs). They stress that features like accessible toilets and adjustments to ensure the safe use of steps and tactile paving for visually impaired individuals should be integrated. These recommendations aim to make the environment more inclusive for people with physical impairments while supporting local businesses and the broader community.

Witney Chamber of Commerce

Letter received via Councillor Liz Leffman (not dated) (**App.13**)

The Witney Chamber of Commerce is raising concerns over the traffic restrictions imposed on Witney High Street, initially put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. They point out that despite a consultation, in which a majority opposed the restrictions or expressed concerns, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) decided to maintain them. They claim the decision was made by a single councillor, without professional input or consideration of the impact on local traders, many of whom support lifting the restrictions.

The Chamber highlights how these restrictions have negatively affected businesses, with traders facing difficulties in loading, unloading, and attracting customers who no longer drive through the High Street. Additionally, the letter expresses that OCC's recent proposal for a long-term scheme is widely criticised as it focuses on maintaining the traffic restriction without addressing the real needs of the town, therefore prioritising an 'anti-car' stance rather than the economic vitality of the High Street.

The Chamber of Commerce urges OCC to reconsider the current scheme and involve local traders and residents in the planning process. They believe that a more balanced and well-researched approach is needed to protect Witney's heritage and ensure that the High Street continues to thrive, rather than suffer from restrictive and ideologically driven policies.

Bus service providers

Following a meeting with OCC officers in August, officials from bus stakeholders were invited to make comments on the proposed plans by email. A summary of key points raised is below.

New Bus Stop for Community Transport: A proposed bus stop near the Cross Keys public house at the edge of the Market Square and walkthrough to the Woolgate would be exclusive to community transport services to reduce congestion at the existing bus stops on Market Square. It would need to accommodate two minibuses and have a dedicated shelter with seating, and a real-time passenger information (RTPI) display. This stop is intended to alleviate traffic at Market Square by diverting services although some may continue to use Stop D.

Issues with the Stagecoach Bus Garage and Bus Waiting: Concerns were raised about the timing of driver changes at Witney Bus Garage, causing delays. It was suggested that the garage should be made a Principal Timing Point (a place where the reliability of the bus service is monitored) to reduce waiting times in the Market Square. An alternative bus waiting area on Welch Way was proposed, but another suggestion was made to cut into a grass verge by Witney Hospital for a waiting area, also providing a much-needed bus stop for hospital services.

Concerns about Traffic and Roundabout Changes: The removal of the mini roundabout at Welch Way/High Street junction is viewed as a potential cause of serious traffic congestion. Suggestions include retaining the roundabout and using planters to discourage pedestrian crossings at dangerous points. Relocating the current island refuge to improve pedestrian safety and re-siting bus stops to ease traffic flow were also recommended.

Wider Implications and Bus Service Growth: The emails highlight the significant growth in bus services, with some operators (e.g., Pulhams coaches) increasing their number of service departures. Anticipated schemes, including Phase 1 of A40 bus lanes, are expected to improve bus service frequency. However, concerns remain about insufficient space for bus stops at Market Square and the impact of proposed changes on bus passengers, including potential aesthetic improvements at the cost of practical functionality.

Additional responses received by email

10 emails were received of which nine were from individual members of the public and one from Witney Congregational church. A summary of the key issues raised follows:

- **Concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety:** Several respondents raised issues about drivers speeding through the High Street, particularly commercial vehicles, despite restrictions. They expressed concerns about pedestrian safety, especially with the absence of effective enforcement like cameras, and emphasised the need to address these hazards before making further improvements.
- **Parking and accessibility:** There were multiple concerns about the reduction of disabled persons parking places and the limitations of proposed loading bays. Respondents noted issues with rear access to businesses and questioned how well the scheme accommodates deliveries and the needs of Blue Badge holders. Additionally, concerns were raised about maintaining clear pedestrian zones and avoiding obstructions like seating in narrow areas.
- **Support and creative suggestions:** Some respondents supported the overall improvement proposals but emphasised a need for design changes. For example, there were calls for a more distinctive, community-centred design that reflects the unique character of Witney, with ideas for public art, festivals, and incorporating local heritage. Others felt that the budget constraints limited the full potential of the High Street redesign.
- **Objections to specific aspects:** Certain proposals, like the removal of the mini roundabout at Welch Way and the establishment of a bus holding area in front of Witney Congregational church, received objection letters. These concerns centred on traffic flow, increased risk of non-compliance with restrictions, and how changes might inconvenience businesses, churchgoers, and Blue Badge holders.

Conclusion

Overall, approximately 60% of survey respondents have expressed positive feedback on the proposals, providing confidence to proceed into the detailed design and construction phase. However, while the plans have incorporated several features identified through community engagement, further changes are necessary to meet the operational needs of businesses and public transport.

Discussions with businesses during canvassing and surveys have highlighted that, although widening footways improves pedestrian accessibility and allows for more greening, it limits loading opportunities. To address this, adjustments are required to the current designs, including the addition of more on-street loading bays, to ensure that businesses can continue their operations efficiently without compromising the pedestrian and public realm improvements.

Concerns have been raised regarding the safety and functionality of the proposed bus waiting areas at Market Square and Welch Way. These areas have not been well-received

by bus operators, members of the public, or the Congregational church, which would be directly affected by the changes. Focused engagement with bus operators has led to alternative suggestions that will be further explored by council officers.

Feedback from disabled persons, and those identifying with long-term illness or health condition, has shown more opposition to the plans and this mainly relates to the reduction of available disabled persons parking places in the scheme compared to the current layout following introduction of the traffic restriction.. Overall, while there is broad support for maintaining Blue Badge parking, opinions vary on the exact number of spaces required and their optimal locations, with a recurring concern about ensuring fair enforcement of the parking rules.

It is essential for officers to continue to review the proposals to balance the needs of disabled users, ensuring their experience in the High Street and Market Square is enhanced rather than hindered. Additionally, the feedback suggests a need for the council to improve how it communicates plans and how it engages with specific groups in future projects.

It is noted that the current seating arrangements in the plan require adjustments, following several comments regarding the location, design, and positioning of the benches. Their proposed locations may potentially impact business operations and reduce available footway space, necessitating reconsideration.

Officers are still evaluating the best options for planting species, considering factors such as soil conditions, available footway space, root growth, natural light, and ongoing maintenance. The development of a comprehensive maintenance plan will be essential to ensure the long-term viability of the scheme, particularly for elements like seating, trees, plants and bespoke footway materials. This plan may require commuted funds to support future maintenance needs and upkeep.

Respondents share a wealth of constructive recommendations and considerations, although there is also a recurring opinion through some responses that the High Street should be fully reopened to traffic and a sentiment that the existing restrictions create a negative impact on local businesses' footfall. It is stated on the programme webpage and in the survey pages (2023 and 2024) that the engagement has no bearing on the presence or continuation of the existing traffic restriction and many other respondents supported the traffic restriction or advised that they would support greater intervention such as full pedestrianisation.

What happens next

Based on the information gathered from public consultation exercises, surveys, safety audits, and costing reviews, the plans will be revised prior to initiating the statutory consultation. This statutory consultation will present the proposed traffic orders and provide an opportunity for any interested party to submit objections. If the plans proceed without significant objections during the statutory consultation, a cabinet member decision will be sought to move forward with the construction phase of the project.

Construction is provisionally scheduled to start in summer 2025. 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 accessibility stakeholders with information and updates through regular briefings as the project progresses ensuring that communications are clear and prompt and ensuring that the needs of users they represent are met.

List of appendices

- 01 [Witney High Street and Market Square Designer Feasibility Report.pdf](#)
- 02 *Consultation plans:*
 - [Witney consultation drawing 1.pdf](#)
 - [Witney consultation drawing 2.pdf](#)
 - [Witney technical drawing.pdf](#)
- 03 [Information boards.pdf](#)
- 04 [Artist impressions.pdf](#)
- 05 [A5 Leaflet.pdf](#)
- 06 [A4 Poster.pdf](#)
- 07 [Frequently asked questions.pdf](#)
- 08 [Examples of online promotions of Witney High Street and Market Place Enhancements engagement in 2024.pdf](#)
- 09 [Business on street loading survey results.pdf](#)
- 10 [Witney Town Council High Street response.pdf](#)
- 11 [West Oxfordshire District Council response.pdf](#)
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