

High Street, Old Town Stevenage: Summary of public engagement feedback

We are exploring ways to enhance the High Street for residents, visitors and businesses.

The primary purpose of the engagement period was to gain insight into the potential opportunities to make the High Street a more pleasant place for people to visit and spend time. The feedback is being used to help shape the design ahead of public consultation later in the year.

Since launching the project in January 2023, the Council has spoken to various groups including business representatives, local schools and active travel groups. This included delivering two workshops with businesses and one with the Student Council at Thomas Alleyne Academy.

In May 2023 an online survey was made available to the public to gather feedback on the initial proposals, which included new crossing points, wider pavements and other road safety improvements to make travelling to, from and around the High Street more accessible for people walking, wheeling and cycling. Two drop-in sessions were also held in May and June for people to find out more about the proposals and ask any questions.

Here is a brief summary of the feedback we received during the public engagement period:

- 331 people responded to our online survey and the majority of respondents lived in Stevenage.
- 70% of survey respondents stated that they either 'strongly support' or 'support' the improvements to make the High Street a more pleasant place to visit and spend more time.
- 60% of survey respondents stated that they either 'strongly support' or 'support' the improvements to make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle.
- Respondents to the online survey felt that more crossing points and lower speed limits were important factors to encourage people to walk, cycle to, and spend more time on the High Street.
- There were observations that the provision of free parking on the High Street was important to residents and businesses, but also that free off-street parking options should be provided.
- The most common form of travel to the High Street was on foot/wheelchair with 65% of survey respondents suggesting that they walk/wheel to the High Street at least weekly.



High Street, Old Town Stevenage, public engagement in numbers



70% of survey respondents supported improvements to make the High Street a more pleasant place to visit and spend time



75 business representatives attended the High Street business workshops



25 students took part in an interactive workshop at Thomas Alleyne Academy



Over 1,100 people viewed information about the proposals on the webpage



331 members of the public responded to the online survey



Over 150 people attended the drop-in events to find out more about the proposals



High Street, Old Town Stevenage

Early engagement report

July 2023



Purpose of this document

This engagement summary report outlines



The engagement approach



Summary of key findings from
public engagement



Engagement approach

The Council adopted a two-phase approach to consultation on proposed Active Travel Fund (ATF) schemes, comprising initial engagement followed by formal public consultation:



Initial public engagement opened on 15 May and closed on 11 June 2023. Two open drop-in events were held on the High Street during this period.



Workshops and online meetings were held with local businesses and schools prior to the start of public engagement (January – May 2023). This included two business workshops (one in-person, one online) and a workshop with Thomas Alleyne Academy's Student Council.



Formal public consultation is proposed to take place later this year.

Initial engagement feedback

Business workshops

Around 75 business representatives attended the two sessions (in-person and virtual)

Emerging themes:

- ▶ Concerns about changes to the free, short-stay parking provision on High Street
- ▶ Car parks under-used and not economical for staff parking
- ▶ Mixed views around changing parking layout to improve safety
- ▶ Suggestions for better lighting on side roads
- ▶ Support for improved wayfinding signage
- ▶ Mixed views on street seating and trees
- ▶ Suggestions for more, accessible crossing points that are easier for those with wheelchairs
- ▶ Pavements and roads are in poor condition and need maintaining



Initial engagement feedback

Student Council

Workshop with 25 students who make up Thomas Alleyne's Student Council.

Emerging themes:

- ▶ The High Street is not very appealing to students, they would like to see more colour and greenery, with places to meet friends.
- ▶ They would like more places and modern shops for youths
- ▶ Pavements are too small for the school crowds, and unsuitable for disabled people
- ▶ Suggestion to shorten the duration of on-street parking (e.g. 30 minutes) to encourage people to use car parks
- ▶ Lighting could be improved on underpasses



Channels & feedback mechanisms

A range of channels were used to raise awareness of the engagement exercise and encourage participation, including:

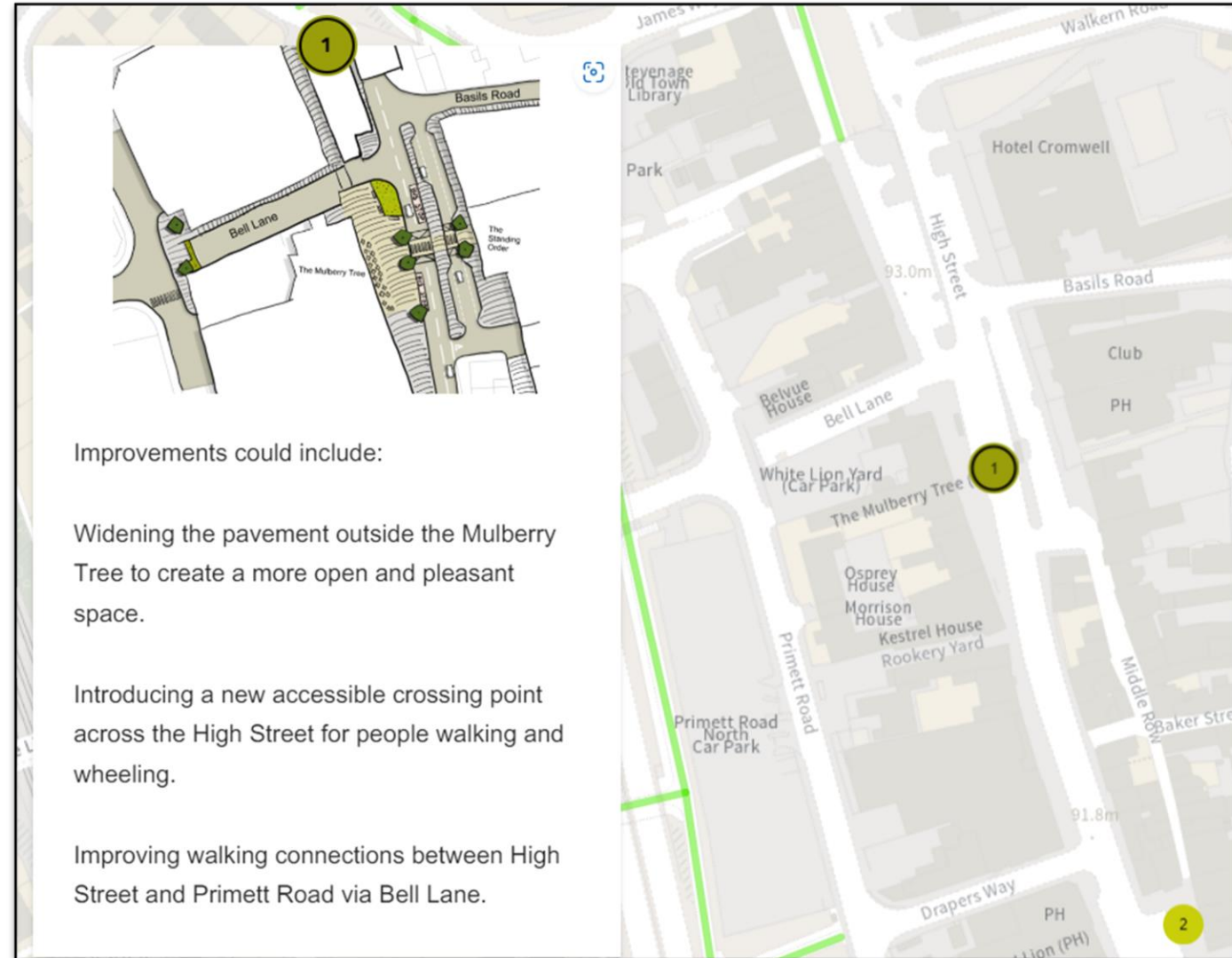
- ▶ Website
- ▶ Survey
- ▶ Story Map including an interactive mapping tool
- ▶ Postcards
- ▶ Social media
- ▶ School newsletter

Story Map

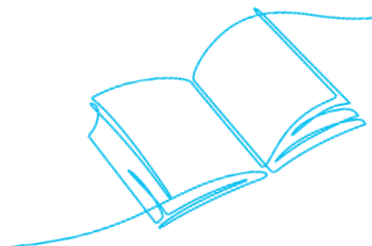
A [Story Map webpage](#) was set up to display the details of the proposals, including maps, sketches and residents' experiences of the High Street.

The page included an interactive mapping tool which allowed respondents to use a pre-labelled pin to 'drag and drop' a comment on the map to indicate opportunities and issues.

Respondents were encouraged to leave comments using the map, as well as the online survey.



Screenshot of the Story Map page



Website

Information about the Active Travel Fund and the proposals was published on the Hertfordshire County Council website ([Active Travel Fund](#) page and [Consultation page](#))

These included:

- ▶ Information about the funding
- ▶ Overview of the proposals being considered
- ▶ Project aims
- ▶ Links to the online survey and to the interactive mapping tool (Story Map)

The consultation page received over 1,100 unique visits and the ATF webpage received over 500 unique visits during the initial engagement period

High Street, Old Town, Stevenage Improvements

Following a successful bid to the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund (ATF), we proposed improvements to the Old Town High Street.

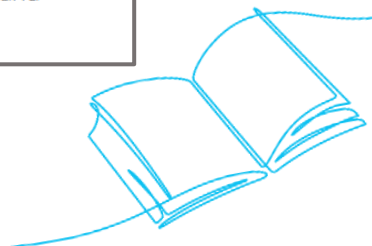
Engagement start date: **15 May 2023**

Engagement closing date: **12 June 2023 (11.45pm)**

[Proposed changes High Street, Old Town, Stevenage >](#)

These improvements will ensure businesses continue to thrive and that all residents can access them, to make walking, wheeling and cycling safer and easier to make best use of all the available space.

Screenshot of the consultation page



Postcards

Around 2000 postcards were distributed to properties in the vicinity of the proposed improvements to raise awareness of the engagement exercise and encourage participation.

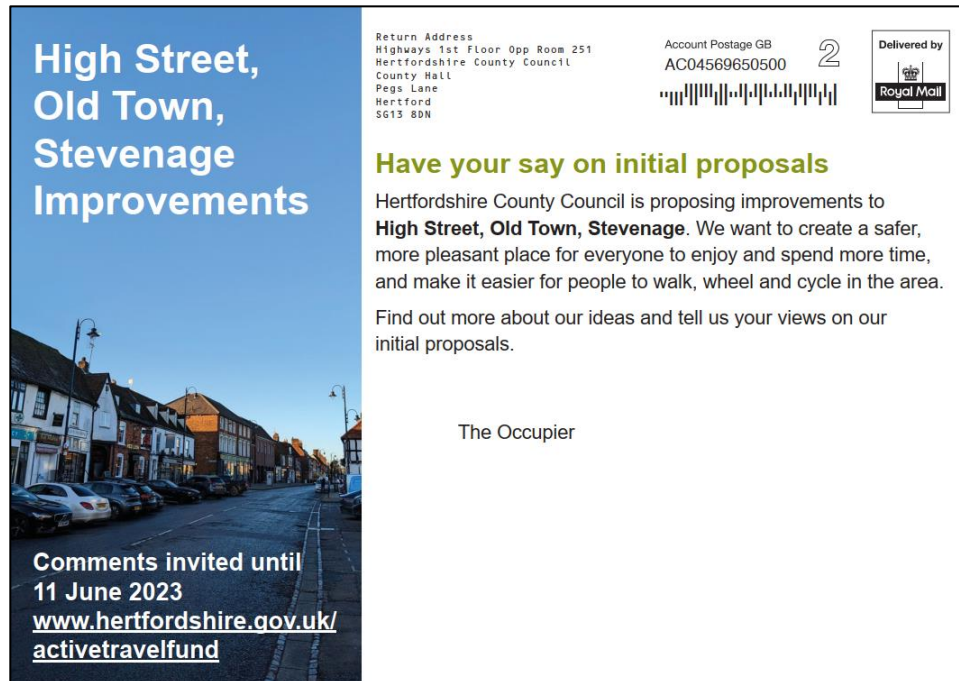


Image of the postcard design and content (front and back)

The back of the postcard features the heading "Project aims:" followed by two icons: a shop and a person walking. The text reads: "Create a safer, more pleasant place for everyone to enjoy and spend more time" and "Make walking, wheeling and cycling easier and more convenient". A QR code is located in the top right corner. Below this, it states: "Improvements could include new crossing points, wider pavements and other changes to encourage lower vehicle speeds in the area. Find out more and have your say at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/activetravelfund".

Drop-in engagement events

25 May, 3pm – 7pm Cromwell Hotel (Bourchier Suite)
6 June, 3pm – 7pm Springfield House Community Centre (Oak Lounge)

You can also find out more about upcoming walking and cycling improvements along **North Road, Stevenage**, where works are due to start in June.

For information in an alternative format, please contact us:
ATFConsultation@hertfordshire.gov.uk
or telephone: 0300 123 4047



Social media & press

Social media posts were included on the HCC Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts to raise awareness of the engagement period.

A series of posts were made throughout the engagement period, outlining the objectives of the proposals and encouraging readers to follow the link to the website for more information. Posts were also made to promote the drop-in events.

A press release was issued to local media and prompted coverage in the Stevenage Comet:

[Have your say on Stevenage Old Town High Street improvements | The Comet](#) (17 May)

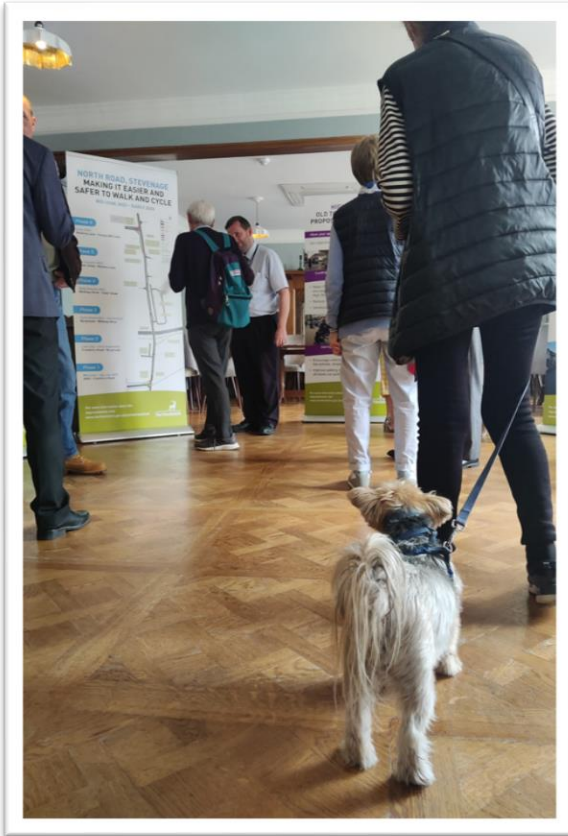
[Stevenage High Street changes: Have your say at drop-in event | The Comet](#) (5 June)



Example twitter post



Drop-in events



Cromwell Hotel drop-in event



Thomas Alleyne Academy drop-in event

Two drop-in events were held for people to find out more about the proposals and ask questions:

- ▶ 25 May, Cromwell Hotel
- ▶ 6 June, Springfield House

Over 150 people attended over the two events.

A lunch-time drop-in event was also held on 6 June at Thomas Alleyne Academy for students and staff.

Analysis of responses



The following section outlines the results of responses to the survey questions



Note that percentages, where included, have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage point and, as such, totals may not always equal 100



Percentages are based on the total number of respondents who answered that particular question (detailed in the accompanying text)



Response statistics

The table below shows the number of responses and comments received during the public engagement period

Method of response	Total number
Online survey	331
Interactive map comments (Story Map)	52

Of the 323 respondents who answered the 'About you' question:



9/10 respondents were Stevenage residents



Local travel habits

Walking

- ▶ The most common form of travel to the High Street was on foot/wheelchair with 65% of respondents suggesting they walk/wheel at least weekly

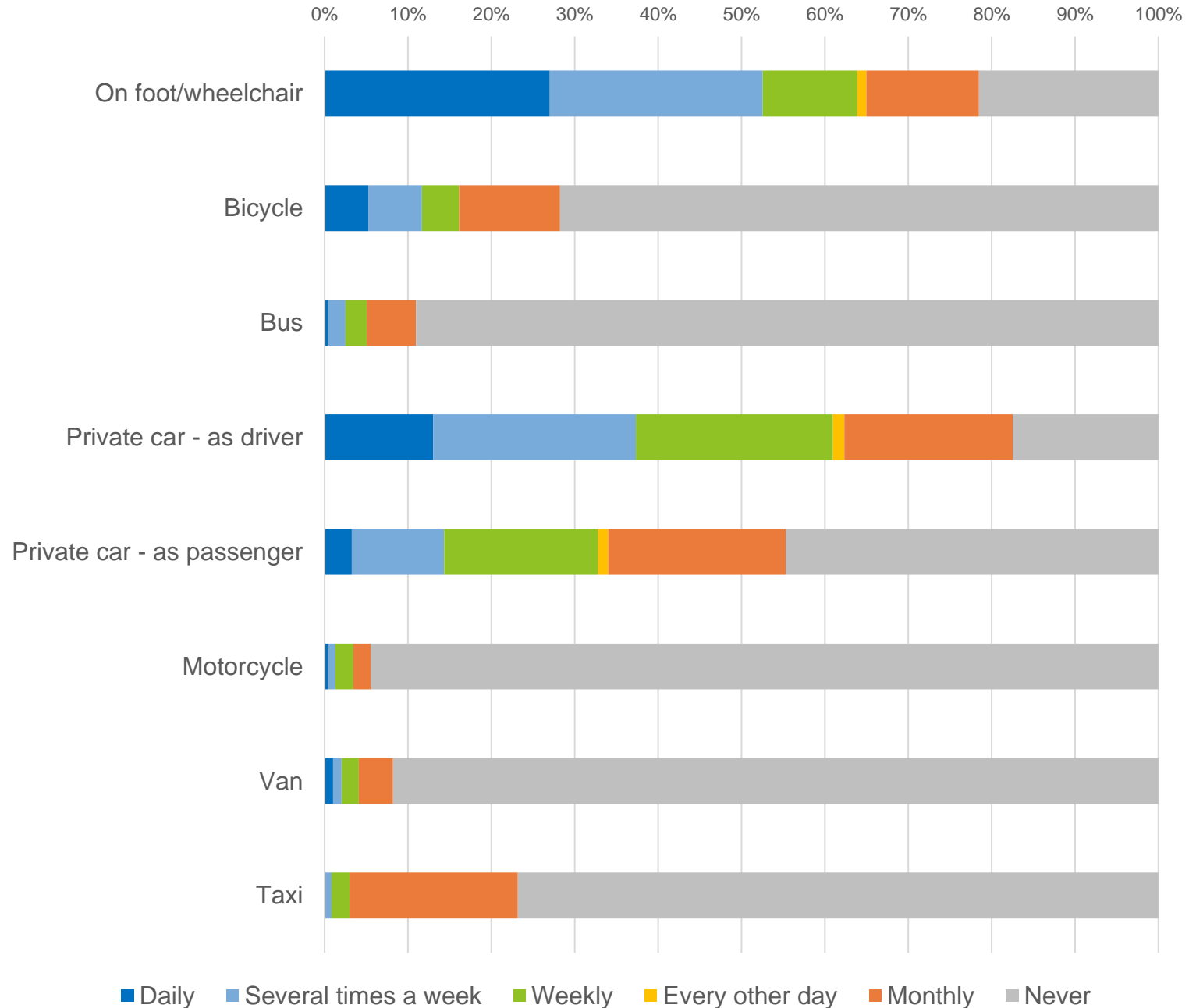
Car

- ▶ Driving a private car was the second most common form of travel to the High Street, with 62% of respondents driving at least weekly

Cycling

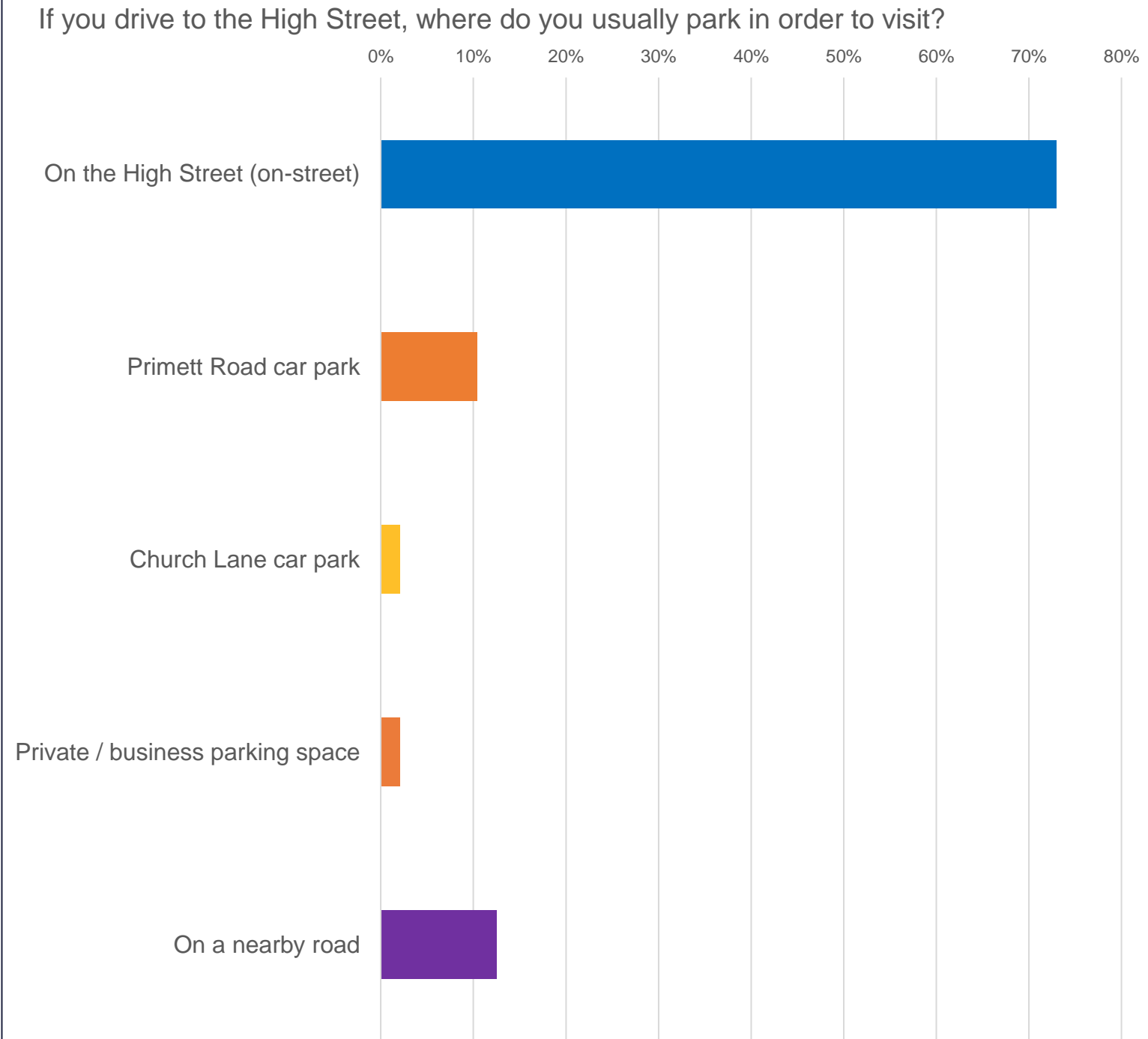
- ▶ Relatively few respondents (16%) said that they cycle to the High Street on a weekly basis
- ▶ 72% of respondents claimed to never cycle to the High Street

How often do you use the following transport methods to get to/from the High Street?



Parking

- ▶ Most of the respondents who drive to the High Street said that they choose to park on-street (73%).
- ▶ 13% of respondents said that they park on a nearby road.
- ▶ Only 10% of respondents said that they choose to park in Primett Road car park.

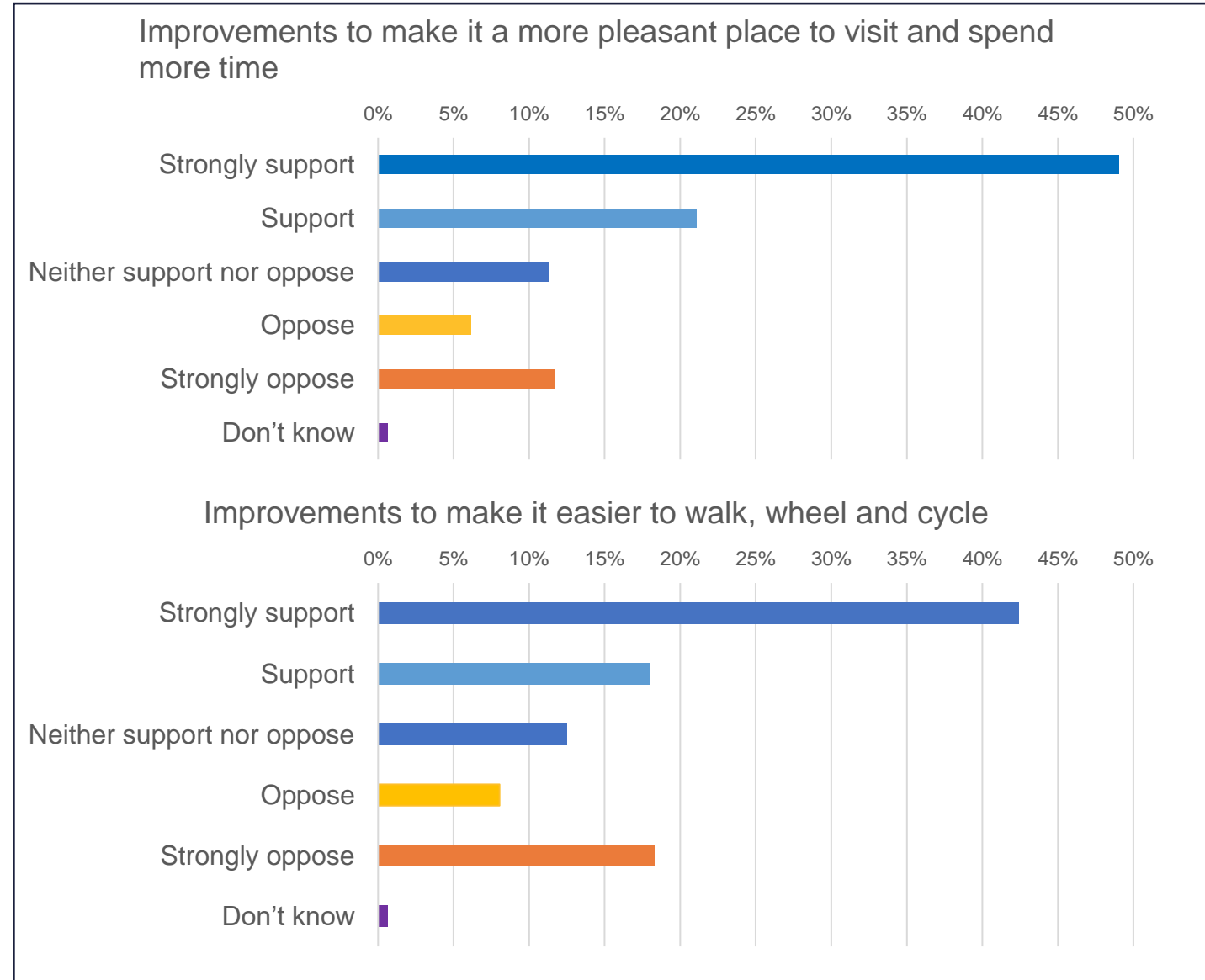


Support for the proposed improvements

Respondents were asked to what extent they support the proposed improvements to the High Street.

Of the 311 respondents who answered the question:

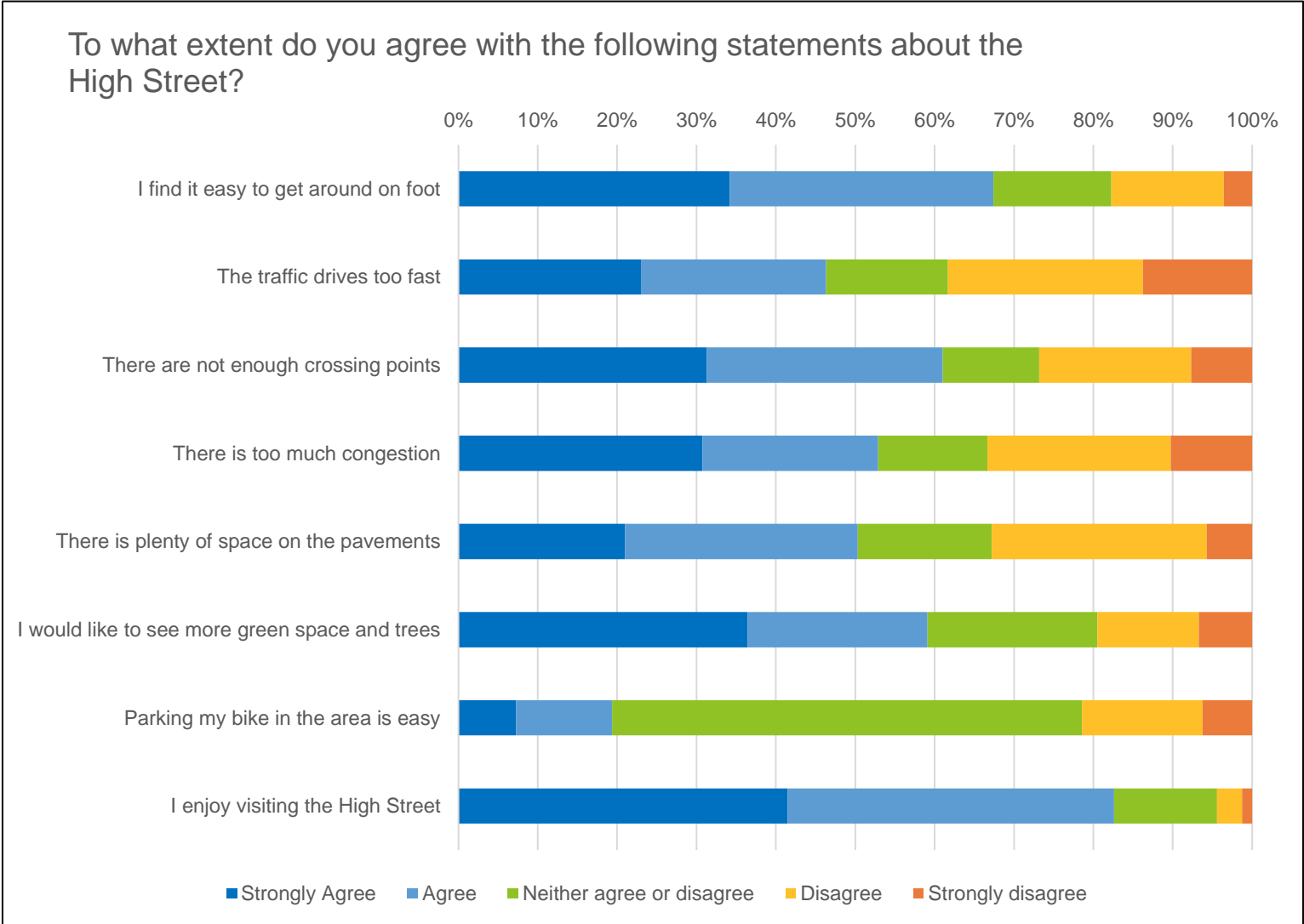
- ▶ 70% of respondents either 'strongly supported' or 'supported' improvements to make the High Street a more pleasant place to visit and spend more time
- ▶ 60% of respondents either 'strongly supported' or 'supported' improvements to make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle



Existing situation on the High Street

Respondents were asked for their thoughts on a number of statements about the High Street. Of the 314 respondents who answered the question:

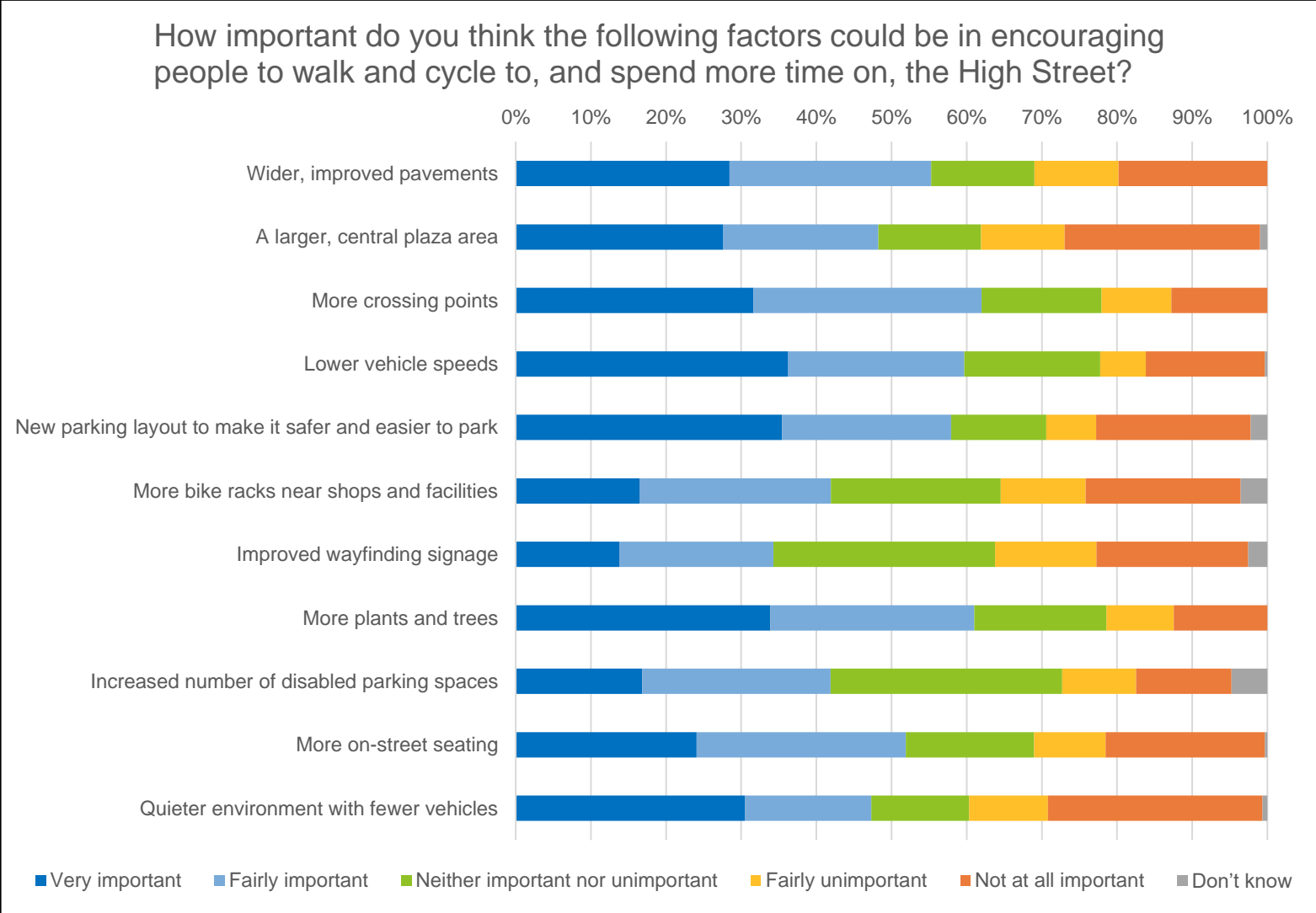
- ▶ 82% of respondents said that they enjoy visiting the High Street
- ▶ 68% of respondents said they find it easy to get around on foot. However, 61% of respondents believed that there are not enough crossing points.
- ▶ 59% of respondents said that they would like to see more green space and trees



Factors to encourage people to walk, cycle and spend more time on the High Street

Respondents were asked how important a selection of factors could be to encourage people to walk, cycle and spend more time on the High Street. Of the 316 respondents who answered the question:

- ▶ 62% of respondents suggested more crossing points
- ▶ 61% of respondents suggested more plants and trees
- ▶ 59% of respondents suggested lower vehicle speeds
- ▶ 57% of respondents suggested a new parking layout to make it safer and easier to park



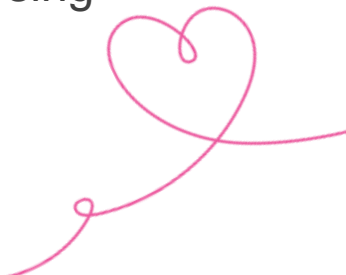
Further comments about the proposals

From the 219 free text responses, the top three comments identified were:

1. **Request for free off-street parking or more parking** – 23% of all comments (50 comments)
2. **Opposition to the reconfiguration of on-street parking layout** – 19% of all comments (42 comments), with respondents expressing concern over loss of on-street parking
3. **Opposition to additional cycle facilities** – 14% of all comments (30 comments), with respondents suggesting that these were not needed/would not be used

Other frequent comments or requests included:

- ▶ Support the aim to make the High Street a more pleasant place for people to visit and spend more time – 12% of all comments (27 comments)
- ▶ Concern about impact on local businesses – 11% of all comments (25 comments)
- ▶ Concern about existing issues with parking (including parking on residential streets and reversing out of spaces on the High Street) – 10% of all comments (21 comments)

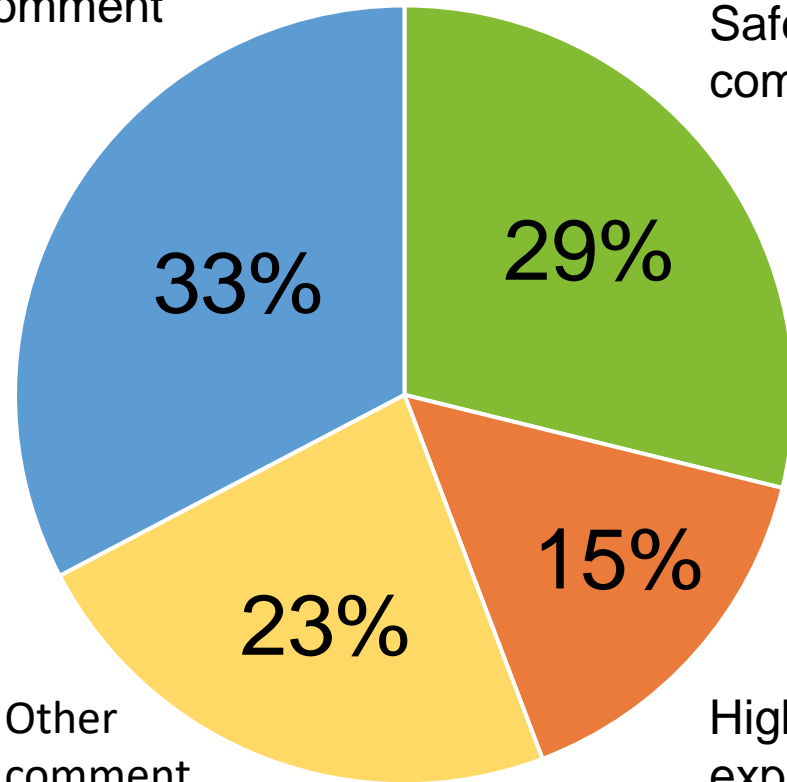


Story Map feedback



Interactive map comments: key themes

Walking, wheeling or
cycling comment



Safety
comment

Total comments	52
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Other
comment

High Street
experience comment



Interactive map comments: key themes

- ▶ Concerns about existing safety for those walking and cycling along the High Street (9 comments)
- ▶ Suggestions for additional cycling improvements e.g. connecting to existing cycle paths and North Road's new cycle path (9 comments)
- ▶ Concerns about speeding vehicles and support for reducing the speed limit (9 comments)
- ▶ Existing issues with the parking layout, with concerns related to safety (6 comments)



Summary



70% of respondents supported the improvements to make the High Street a more pleasant place to visit and spend more time



Respondents suggested that more crossing points and lower speed limits were important factors to encourage people to walk, cycle to, and spend more time on the High Street



Respondents were keen to see free off-street parking options as part of the proposals



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