

Faversham Chamber of Commerce

13th December 2006

A survey of the town centre business response to the proposal to close the Town Centre to traffic between 10am and 4 pm on Tuesday and Friday (week day market days)

1 Background

For some time there has been a desire on the part of some councillors to close the Town Centre to traffic, some clearly wish it to be a permanent closure.

Swale Borough Council and KCC Highways have now been asked to implement an experimental 6 month closure to traffic on market days between 10am and 4pm.

The underlying reason for this desire is not abundantly or immediately clear, press reports of the proposed experimental closure during market days from 10am till 4pm do not clarify the motivation for the closure. Some mention was made of assisting the so-called "Café Culture". The presence, in the town centre, of delivery vehicular traffic is seen as an irritation to some pedestrians. *No argument or indicators have been presented to demonstrate in any way how the local retail economy, or Faversham would benefit from the closure.*

There is no significant history of accidents or incidents being caused by the passage of traffic through the town centre. Two incidents have occurred in the last twenty years, the first, a fatality caused by a collision between a bicycle and a pedestrian, the second involving an elderly driver who lost control of his car.

There is an increased potential hazard for pedestrians on market days during the week (Tuesday and Friday) particularly in the area between the guildhall and Wards at this point pedestrians have to stand in the main roadway to view the stalls, the stall holders regularly aggravate the hazard by extending outside the permitted market area further reducing the thoroughfare. See picture below.



Faversham Chamber of Commerce

Alternatives to road closure

There are a number of changes that could be implemented to reduce the potential hazard at this point, none of which require closure of the road. The market stalls along Court Street trade towards the pavement – not the road, it is only from the end of the pavement, past the pump across to the guildhall and beneath the guildhall that this orientation changes, forcing potential customers to stand in and reduce the effective width of the busiest part of the thoroughfare for both pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

1. Constrain the Market stalls to the correct area.
2. Re-orient the market stalls either to continue to face the western pavement or to face sideways to the main thoroughfare allowing market shoppers to walk between them, standing under the guildhall, not in the main thoroughfare.
3. Relocate some of the market stalls to West Street, which is not a thoroughfare for vehicular traffic.
4. Enforce the existing regulations in respect of vehicular access to the town centre.
5. Control vehicular access to the town centre on market days by manning the entrance with a controlled barrier.
6. Alteration of the traffic flow within the town centre, perhaps reversing the flow in Preston Street. All town centre traffic would leave via the Newton Rd. junction traffic lights – removing the opportunity for so-called boy racers using the town centre as a shortcut to bypass the traffic lights.

These are all measures that could be taken to enhance comfort and safety for market shoppers without taking the drastic and potentially disastrous step of physically closing the road to traffic.

2. Survey

Uniquely those who have made the investment of personal resources, money, time and family in renting and stocking trading premises in this part of the town will be those who will be most affected by this proposed “experiment”. A significant number of traders have no other means of access to their business all deliveries in and out have to come via the roads that the proposal seeks to close.

For many their personal wealth and their living are dependant upon the survival and success of their businesses. This group includes people who have recently taken premises in the town; one has opened as a florist and will need to deliver flowers for funerals, weddings and other functions throughout the week; a long standing trader, who won a national BBC award in 1997 and whose lease is due for renewal – they will not renew if this “experiment” proceeds, their business, with a national reputation, will be lost to Faversham. The Faversham Society, manned by volunteer staff is only open between the hours of 10am and 4pm, they operate from three shops in Preston Street and house the Faversham Museum. A Bridal shop has a supplier who will only deliver mens clothing on Tuesday and Friday.

Faversham Chamber of Commerce

In the absence of any real attempt at consultation with the traders as a group by either FTC, SBC members or officers, the Faversham Chamber of Commerce has sought the views of these businesses trading within the town centre area from the junction of Court St. with Crescent Rd. to the junction of West St. with North Lane/South Rd.; the traffic lights at the junction of Market St with Newton Rd.; the junction of Preston St. with Stone St. In all 58 businesses completed or partially completed the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire and a graphical representation of the results are attached.

3 Results

The results show that those who actually trade in the area affected and have experience of running businesses in the town are very strongly against the proposed closure - 82% of the 58 businesses surveyed.

This result and the other results speak for themselves and require no further explanatory narrative.

Apart from the very apparent fear that existing businesses would become no longer viable and forced to close by the proposed closure to traffic – a number of other specific problems have been identified by traders as probable consequences if the road closure were to proceed:

At 4pm, when the town is full of school pupils making their way home, the town would become open to a high concentration of vehicles – market traders packing up their stalls, deliveries from suppliers to traders, disabled wishing to make purchases or access their bank accounts. Creating a particularly hazardous situation for all concerned.

4 Recommendation

The Faversham Chamber of Commerce implores members to take the time to explore all other avenues before agreeing to this proposal to close the town centre to traffic on market days. A good and reasonable starting point would be a clear statement of the specific issues and problems that the closure will solve.

It is abundantly clear that the closure carries with it the clear **risk** that local traders will be forced to close or move elsewhere, affecting the **sustainability** and viability of the town centre as a local shopping centre.

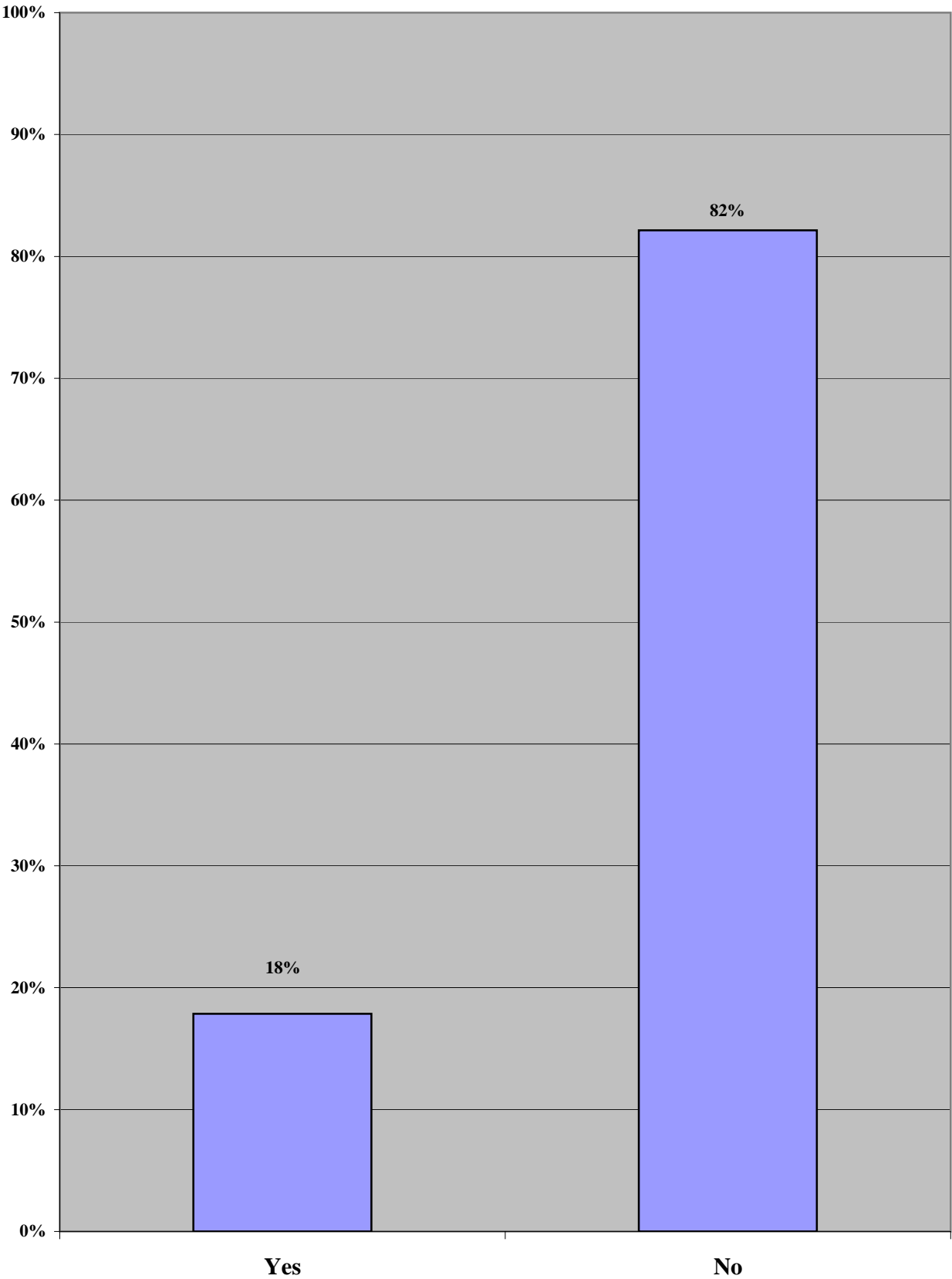


Mike Hill
President
Faversham Chamber of Commerce

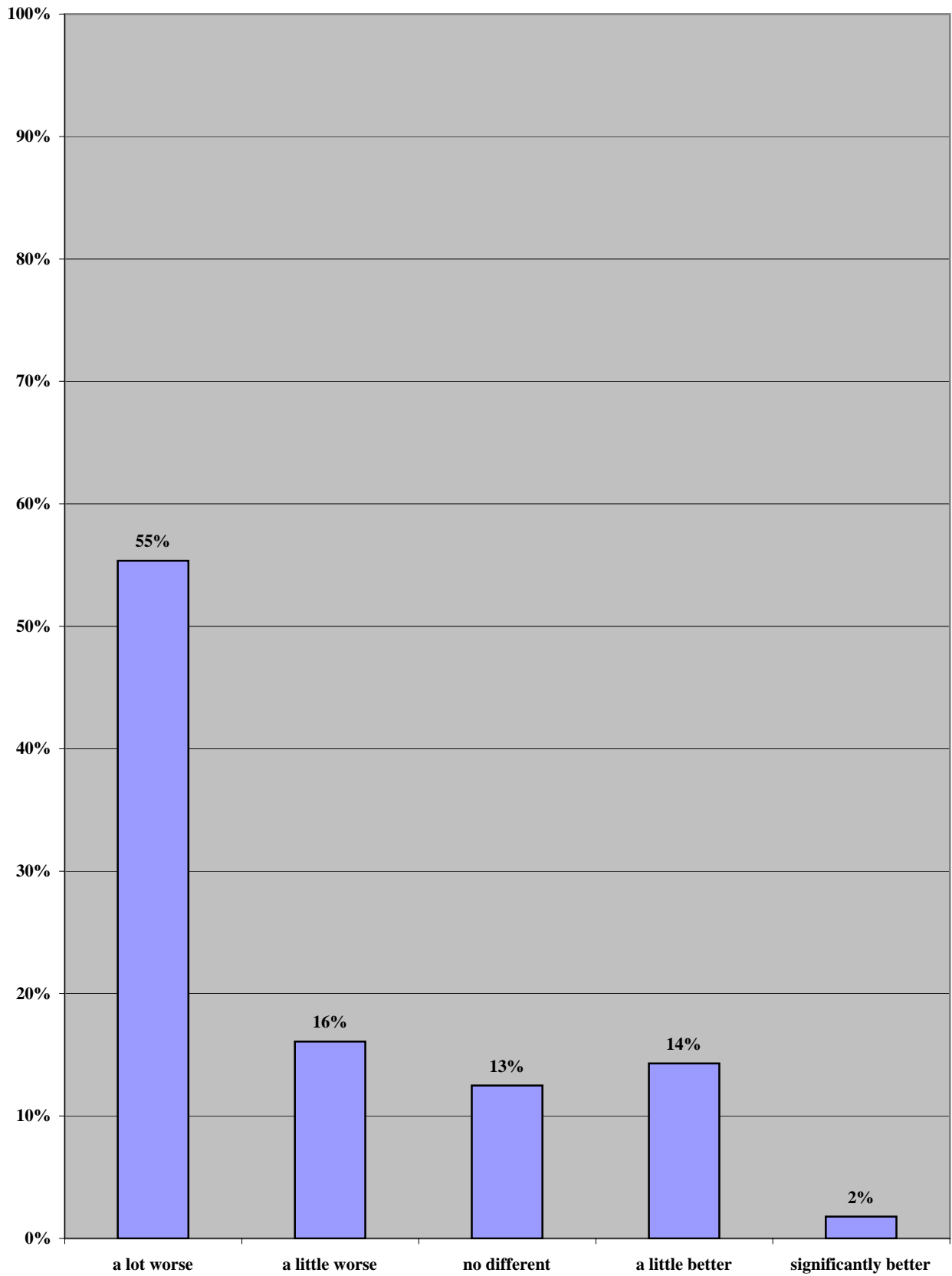
0870 777 7866
statshopsales@aol.com

A full set of copies of the completed survey sheets will be made available to SBC

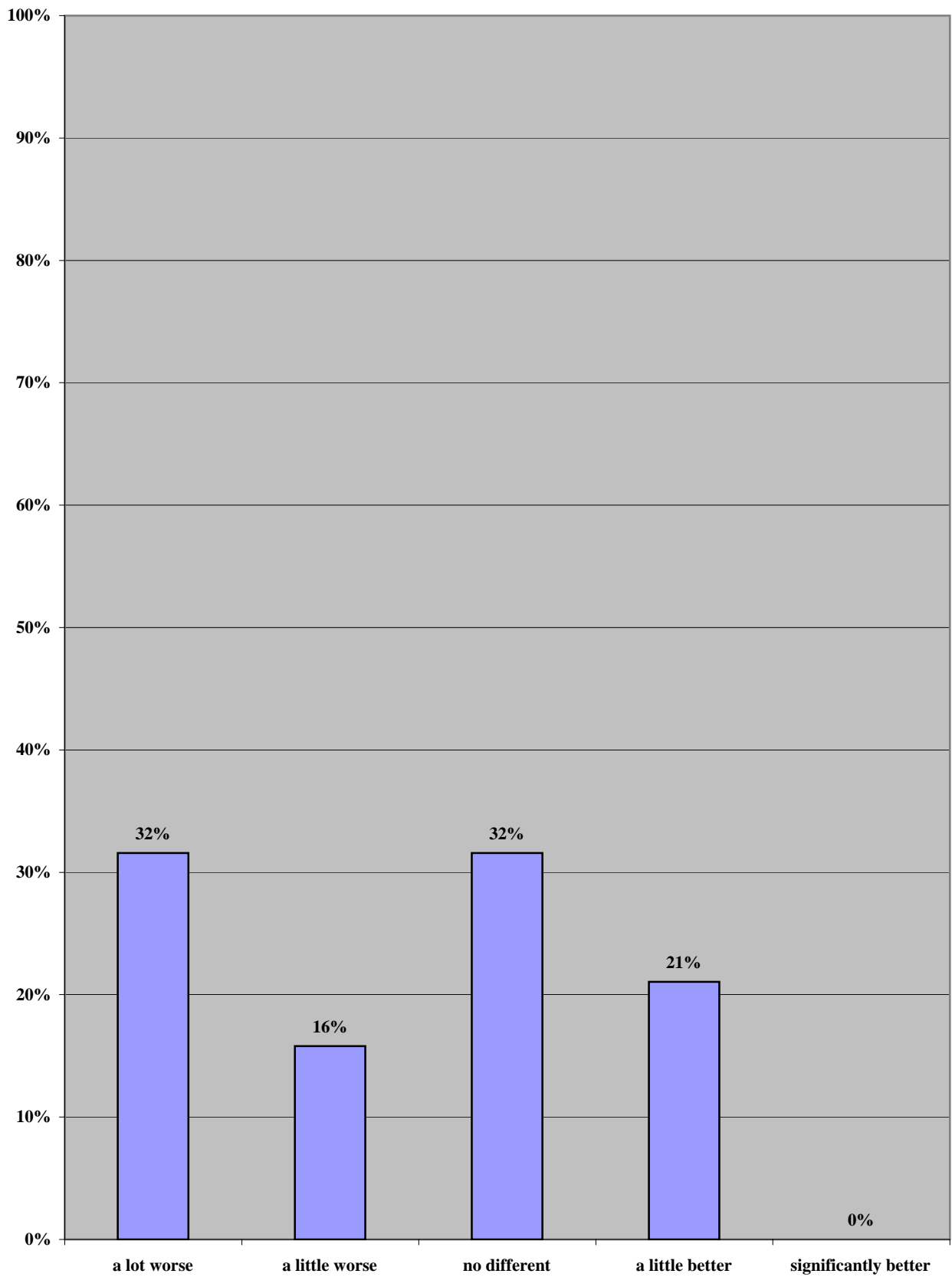
Do you support the proposal of the Council?



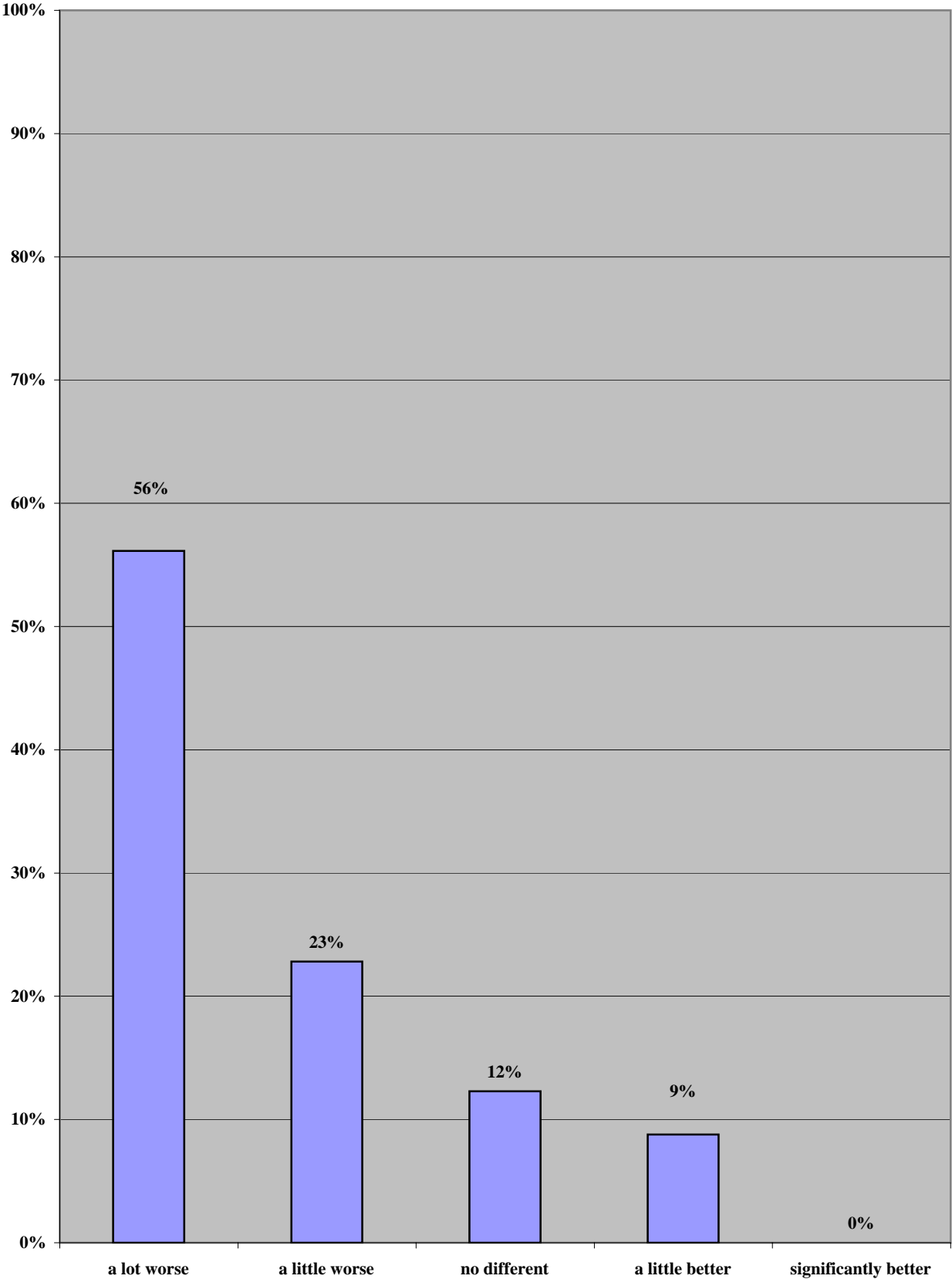
Do you believe it will improve the business for the town overall?



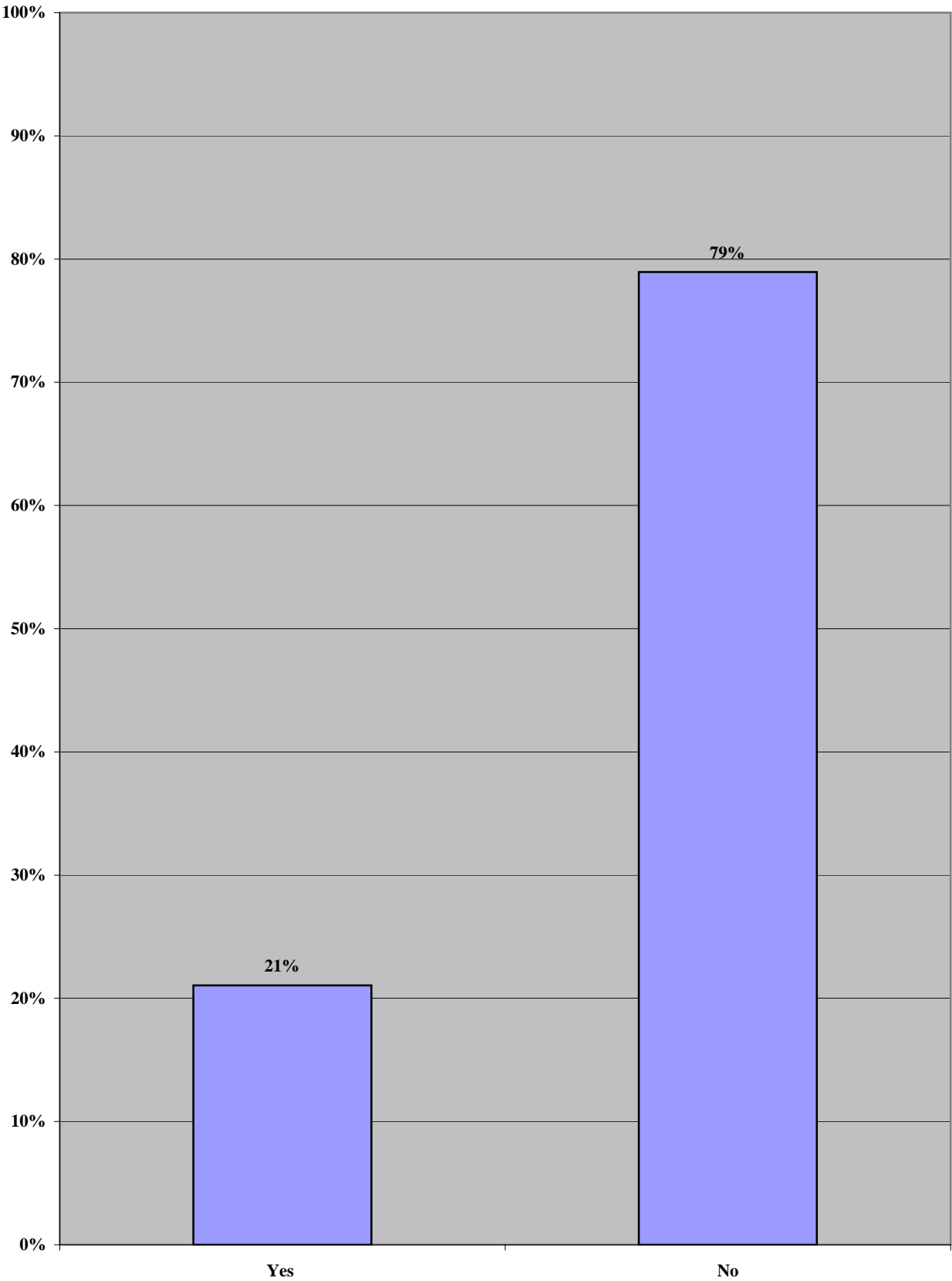
Do you believe it will attract more people to Faversham town centre?



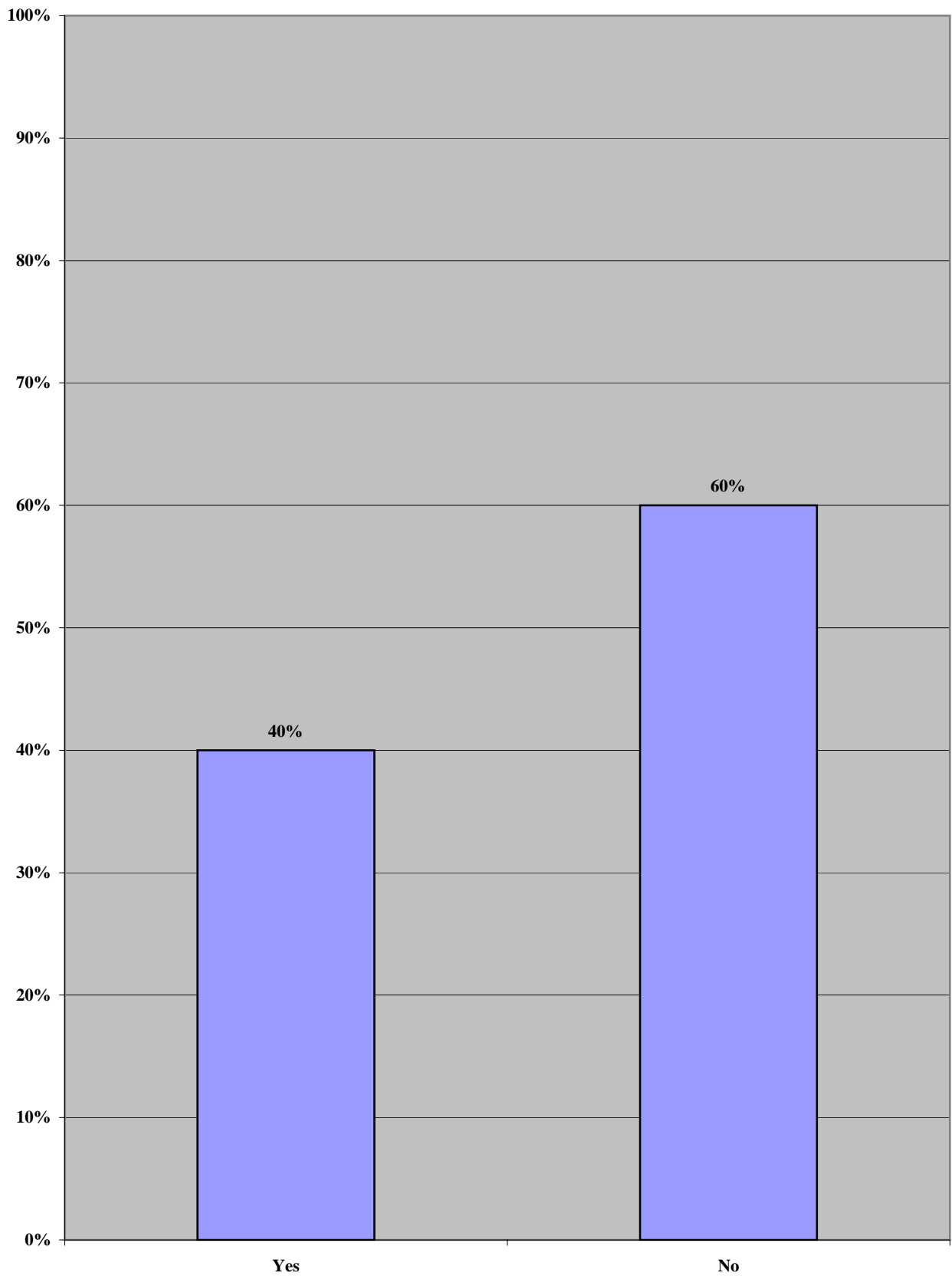
Do you believe it will increase the amount of business you do?



Do you receive deliveries of stock at times that you can influence in anyway?



Do you deliver goods to customers?



Do customers currently use vehicles to collect goods from your business?

