

SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD	Agenda Item:
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Meeting Date	Monday 6 th September 2021
Report Title	Temporary Town Centre Road Closures – Informal Consultation Questionnaire Analysis and next steps
Cabinet Member	Cllr Monique Bonney - Cabinet Member for Economy & Property
Head of Service	Emma Wiggins - Director of Regeneration
Lead Officer	Dean Radmore (SBC) – Capital Projects Manager
Classification	Open

Recommendations	For the board to note the contents of the report.

1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report highlights the results from the analysis carried out by the specialist consultant following the informal consultation carried out for Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham between 21st May and 14th June 2021 to gauge stakeholders' views on the implementation of permanent road closures.
- 1.2 This report also sets out the next steps that Swale Borough Council intend to take following discussion with the Joint Transportation Board members.

2. Background

- 2.1 The current town centre road closures (Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders) were introduced in Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham in early July 2020 to assist with the social distancing measures necessary as a result of COVID-19.
- 2.2 At the beginning of January 2021 to coincide with the six-month expiry of the original TTRO's a request was made by Swale Borough Council to extend the orders due to the continued COVID-19 risk and an extension was granted for a further year up to the maximum 18-month TTRO period. This was to allow social distancing measures to be maintained throughout the re-opening phase following the end of the third lockdown period and to allow the measures to stay in place or be re-introduced if there are any re-occurrences of the virus.

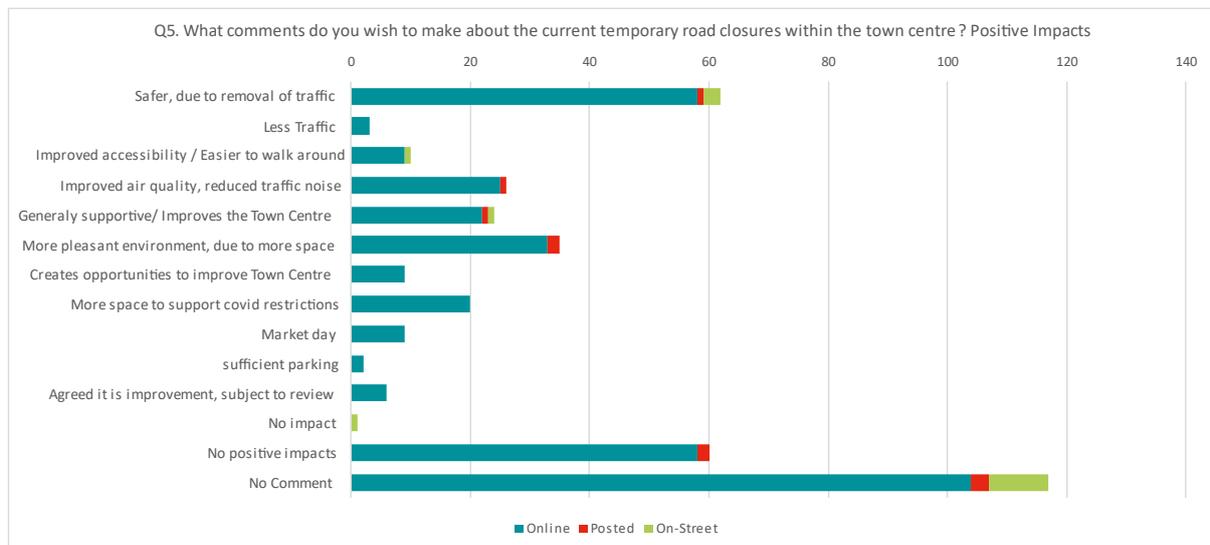
- 2.3 In January 2021, it was agreed to carry out a pre-consultation (informal consultation) exercise to gauge stakeholder feedback on the current TTRO's and ascertain whether permanent road closure orders should be introduced in the three town centres after the current orders have expired.
- 2.4 A specialist consultant was procured to do this work so that it was independent, followed procedure and was open, fair and transparent using the KCC professional services framework and mini competition. The Purchase Order was raised on 30th March 2021 and following conference call meetings and a workshop with the consultant a visit to each town centre was carried out on 20th April 2021.
- 2.5 The pre-consultation (informal consultation) stage included:
- Reviewing the timing of the closures
 - Reviewing the extents of the closures
 - Identifying issues and barriers to delivery
 - Reviewing and making a case for the Economic Benefits for pedestrianisation
 - Reviewing and making a case for the environmental advantages
 - Identifying different options to go out to informal consultation with
 - Carrying out stakeholder analysis to determine all stakeholders required for the consultation
 - Creating consultation documentation sufficient for the informal consultation process
 - Informal Consultation for the three town centres (e.g. initial letter drops, community events)
 - Review of feedback and objections from the informal consultations processes including outline proposals and cost estimates of any required mitigation measures.
- 2.6 Due to the timing of the Kent County Council elections on 6th May 2021 and the associated Purdah period the consultant was advised that the informal consultation questionnaire could not be sent to stakeholders earlier than 7th May 2021. The informal consultation took place as a posted, online and on-street survey between 21st May and 14th June 2021.
- 2.7 Following the end of the social distancing requirements announced by the Prime Minister on 12th July Swale Borough Council instructed the removal of the COVID-19 related temporary town centres closures from Monday 19th July in line with the government guidance. The TTRO's remain available for use up to the 6th January 2022 should further distancing requirements be required as a result of COVID-19.

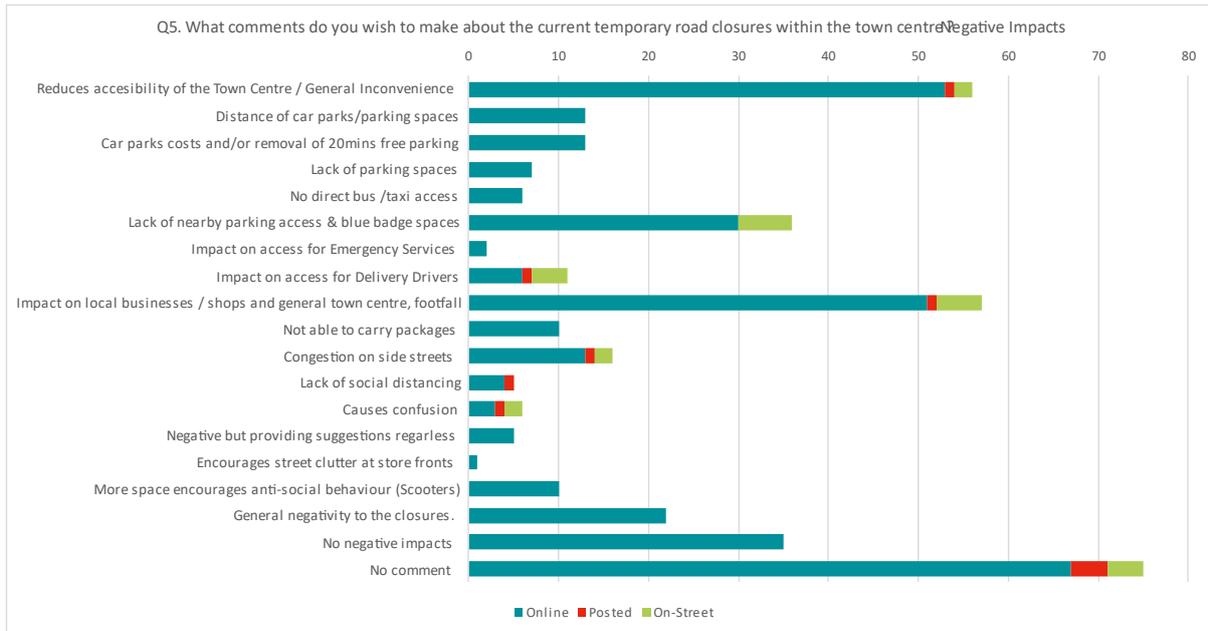
3. Analysis and Results

3.1 Key Summary – Sittingbourne

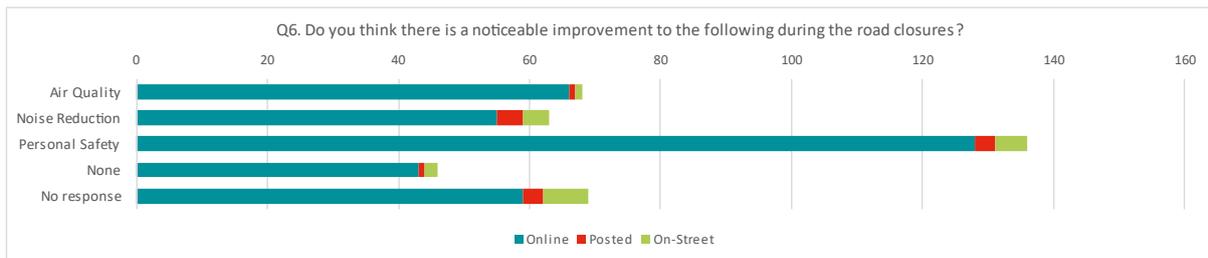
There was a total of 323 responses for Sittingbourne, of which 299 were online responses, 8 mail responses and 16 on-street responses.

- 76% were a Swale resident, 6% were a business and 7% were a visitor.
 - 55% travelled to the town by car/van and 34% travelled by foot.
 - 46% travel to town 1-3 days per week and 23% travel to town 4-7 days per week.
 - 17% of responses consider themselves to have a disability, with 60% of these stating physical/mobility limitations.
 - 45% of respondents had something positive to say while 66% had negative responses relating to the temporary closures. Key reasons raised in support of the closure included:
 - + Safer, due to removal of traffic (16%)
 - + More pleasant environment, due to more space (9%)
- Whereas key reasons raised against the closure included:
- Reduces accessibility / General Inconvenience (15%)
 - Impact on local businesses / shops and town centre, footfall (15%)

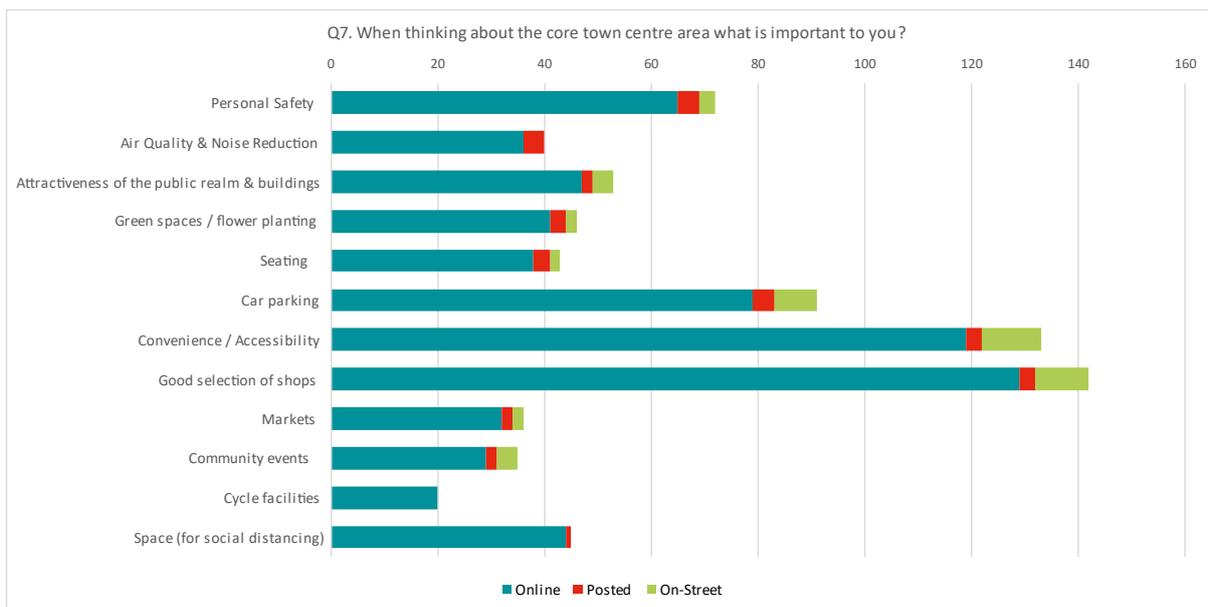




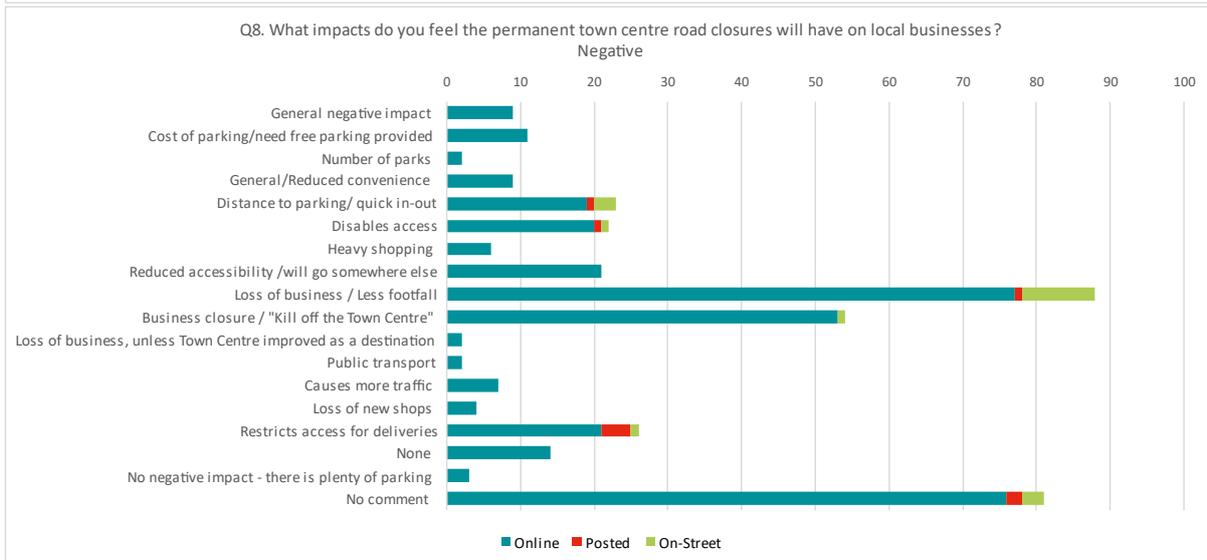
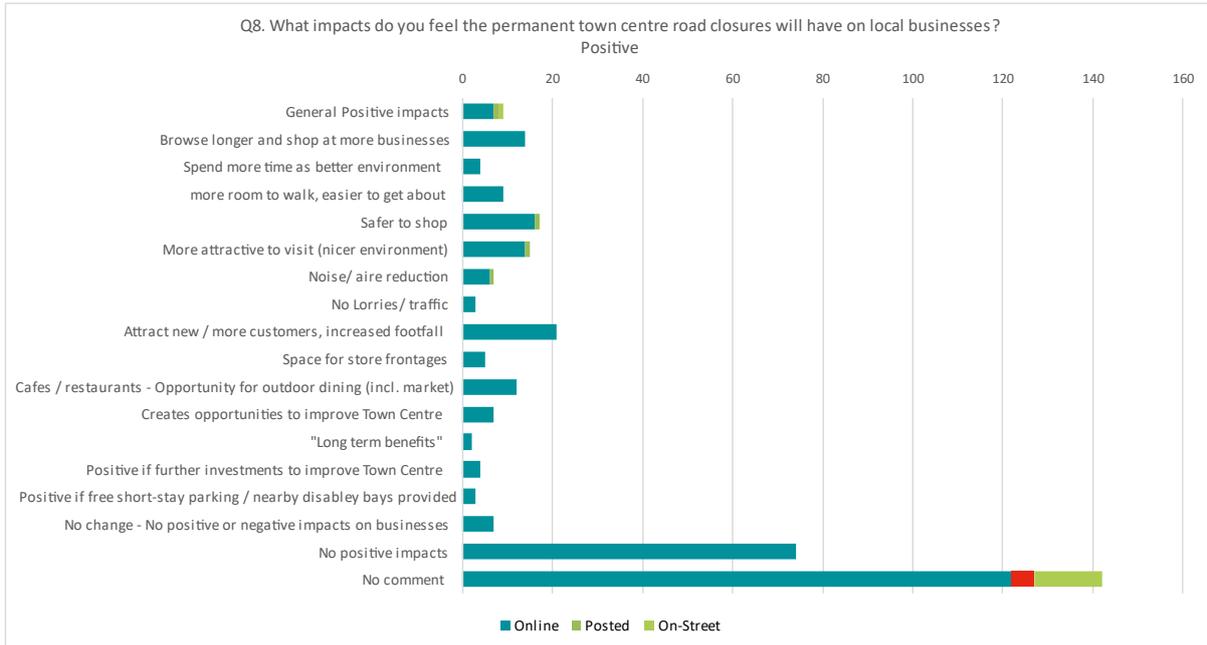
- People felt there were improvements in personal safety with the temporary closures in place.



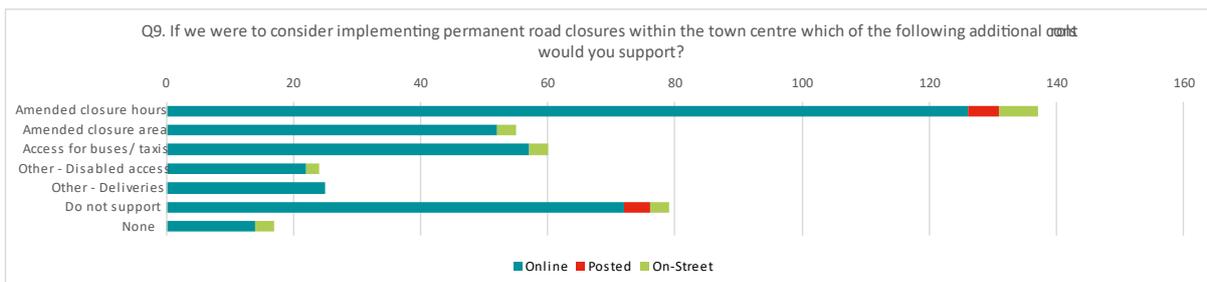
- There were clear themes that were important to people with regard to the town centre.



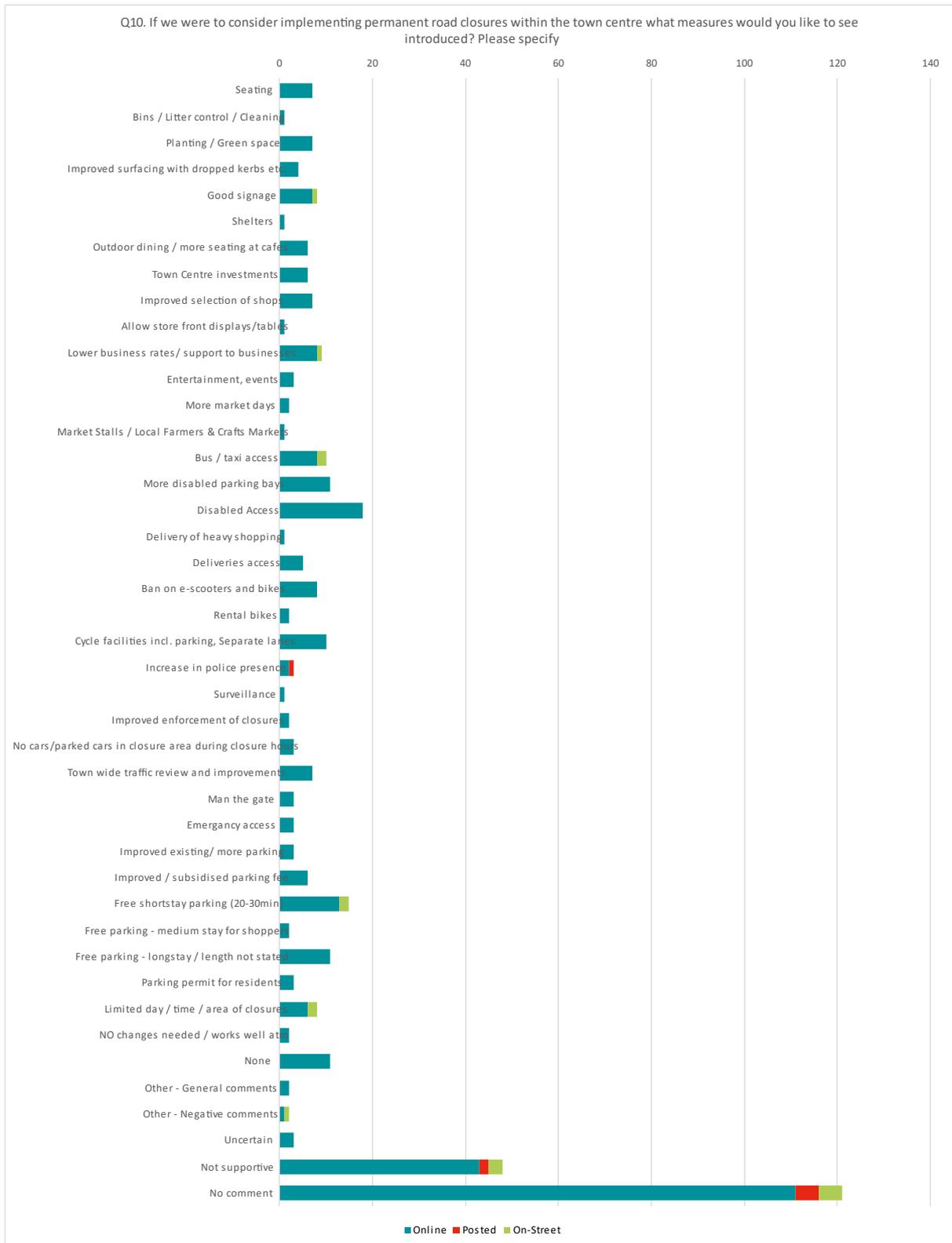
- However people thought that there were both positives and negative impact to local businesses with the permanent closures in place.



- The key suggestion for additional controls for the permanent closures was amending the closure hours however most people still indicated a preferred 10am-4pm closure period with 24hours coming a close second.



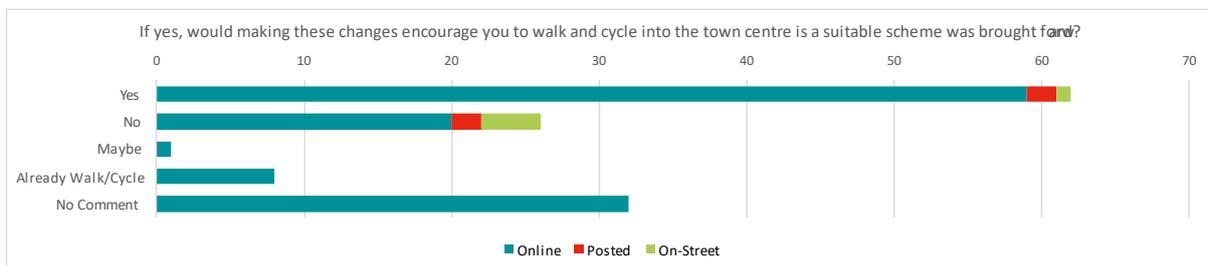
- Key suggestions to improve the permanent closures, should they be implemented permanently included:
 - Disabled Access (3% and 5%)
 - Free parking (20-30min) (4% and 3%)



- Out of 323 responses 39% were in support of the closure and 59% were against the closure in Sittingbourne.



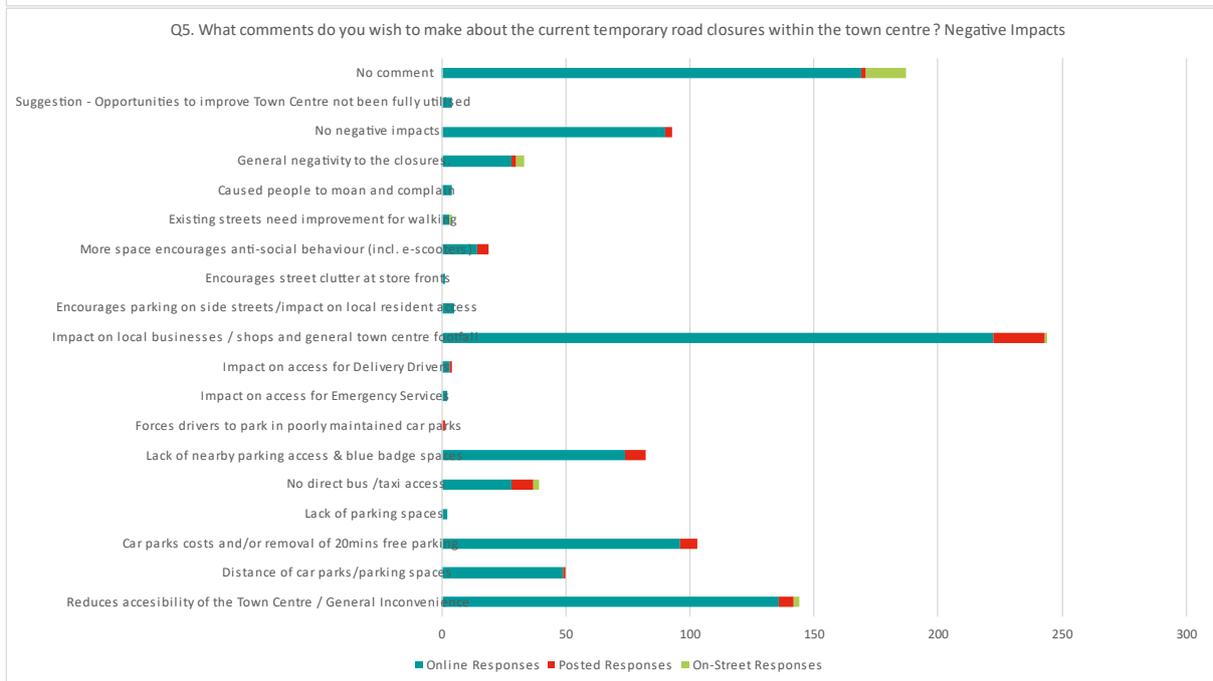
Of those in support, 48% said that the introduction of permanent town centre road closures would encourage them to walk/cycle into town.



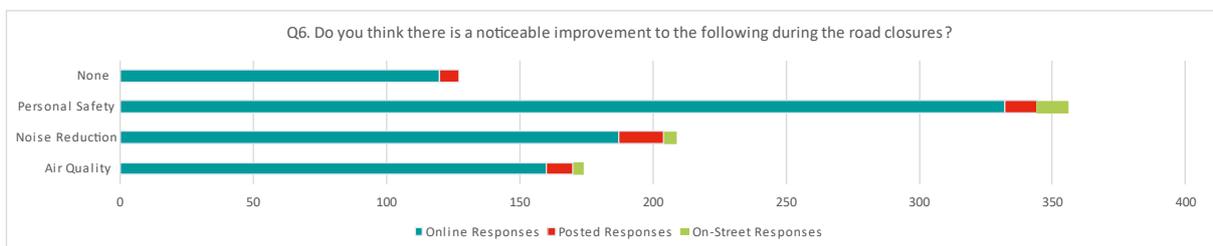
3.2 Key Summary - Sheerness

There was a total of 810 responses, of which 744 were online responses, 41 mail responses and 25 on-street responses.

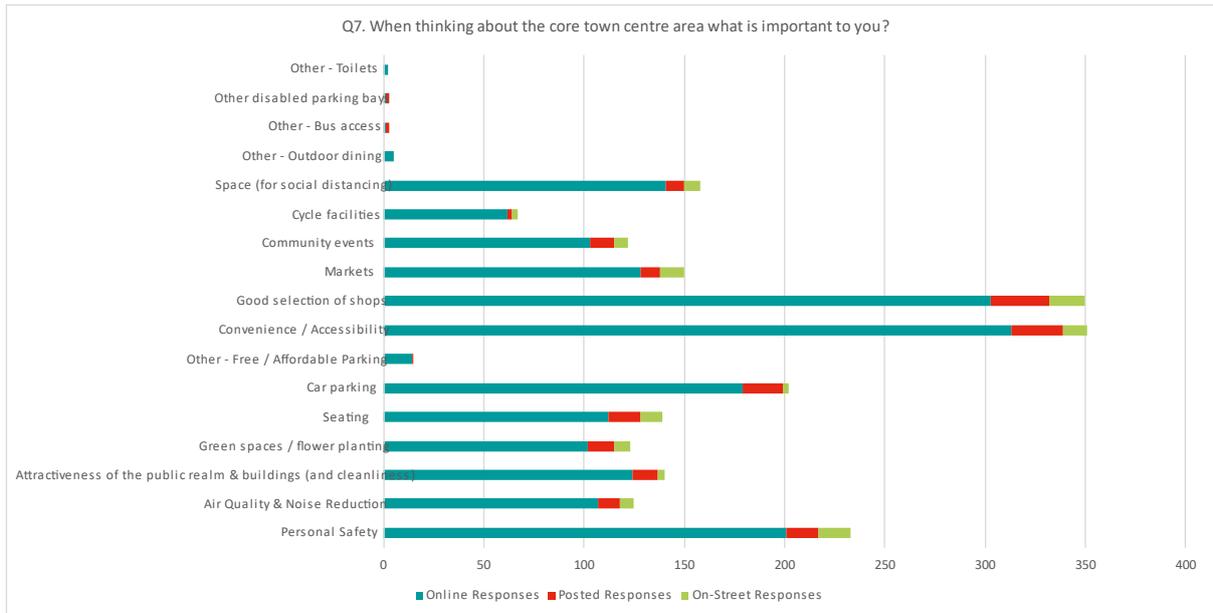
- 71% of responses were a Swale resident, 5% were a business and 10% were a visitor.
- 64% travelled to the town by car/van and 25% travelled by foot.
- 56% travel to town 1-3 days per week and 31% travel to town 4-7 days per week
- 28% of responses consider themselves to have a disability with 77% of these stating physical/mobility limitations
- 47% of respondents had something positive to say while 65% had negative responses relating to the temporary closures. Key reasons raised in support of the closure included:
 - + Safer, due to removal of traffic (20%)
 - + More pleasant environment, due to more space (13%)
 Whereas key reasons raised against the closure included:
 - Impact on local businesses / shops and general town centre, footfall (24%).
 - Reduces accessibility / General Inconvenience (14%)



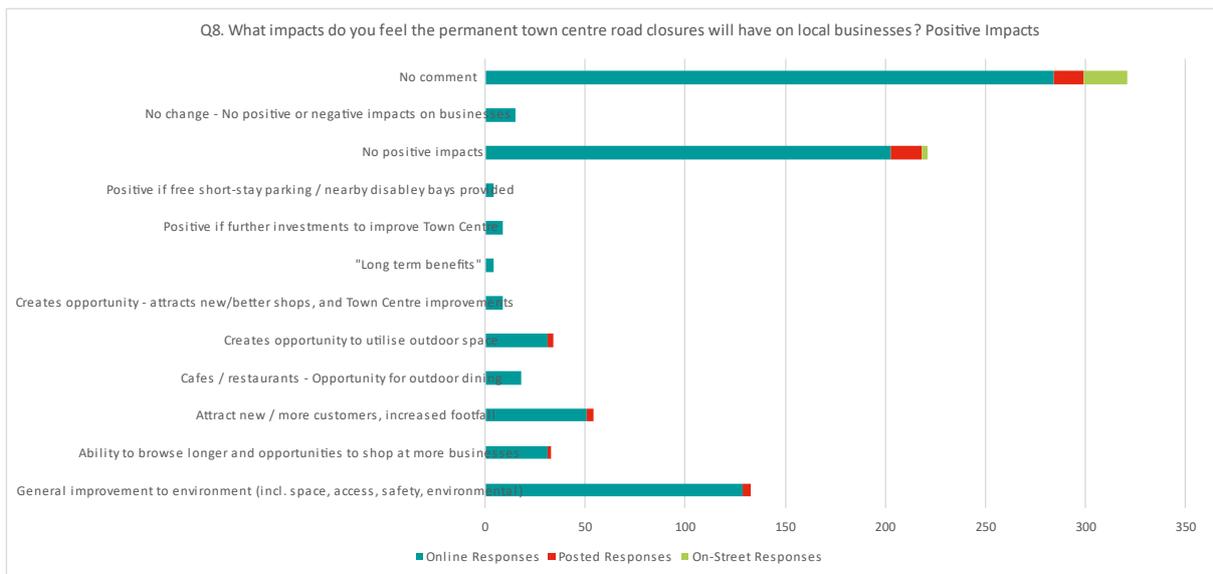
- As with Sittingbourne, people in Sheerness felt there were improvements in personal safety with the temporary closures in place.

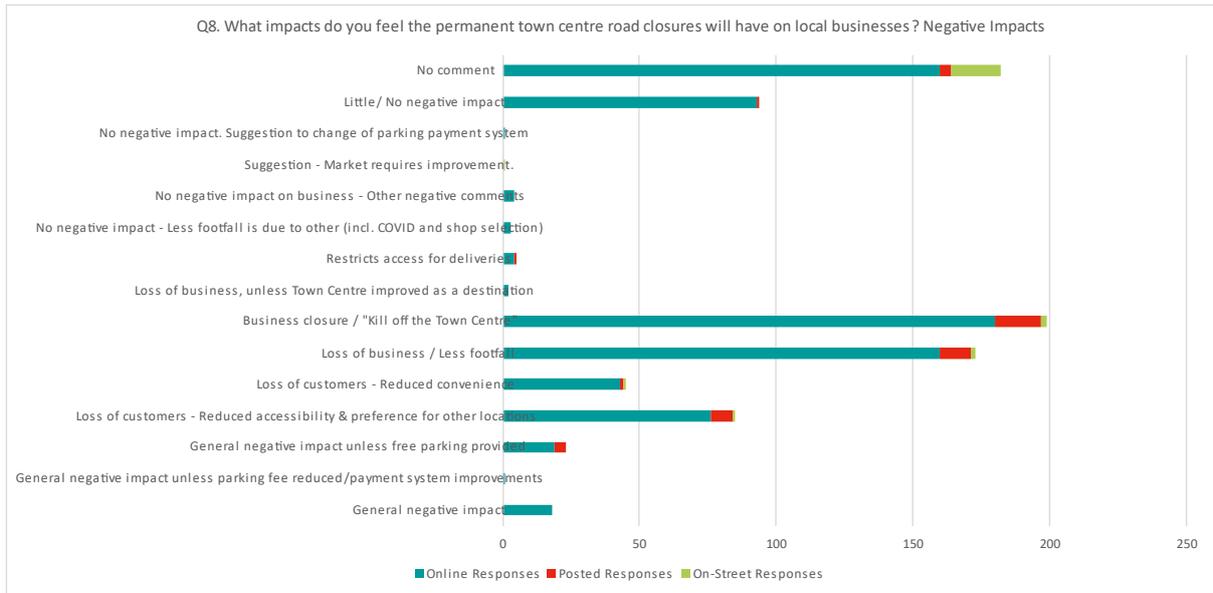


- There were clear themes that were important to people with regard to the town centre.

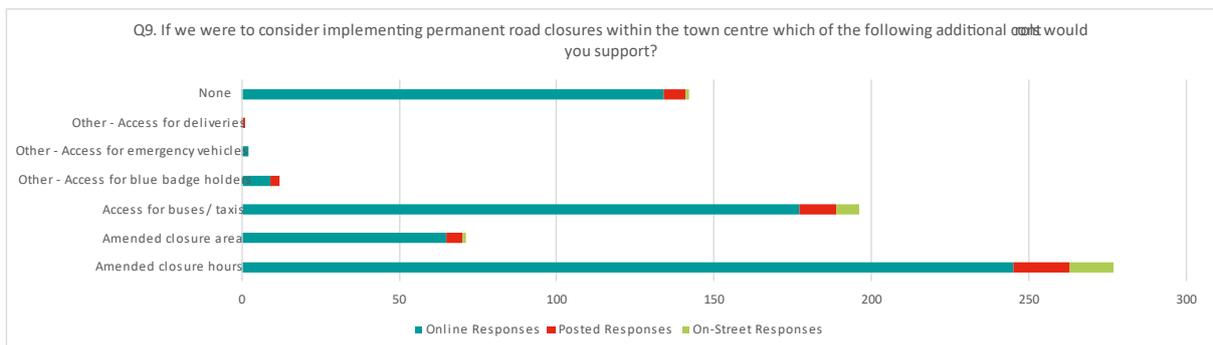


- However, people thought that there were both positives and negative impact to local businesses with the permanent closures in place.

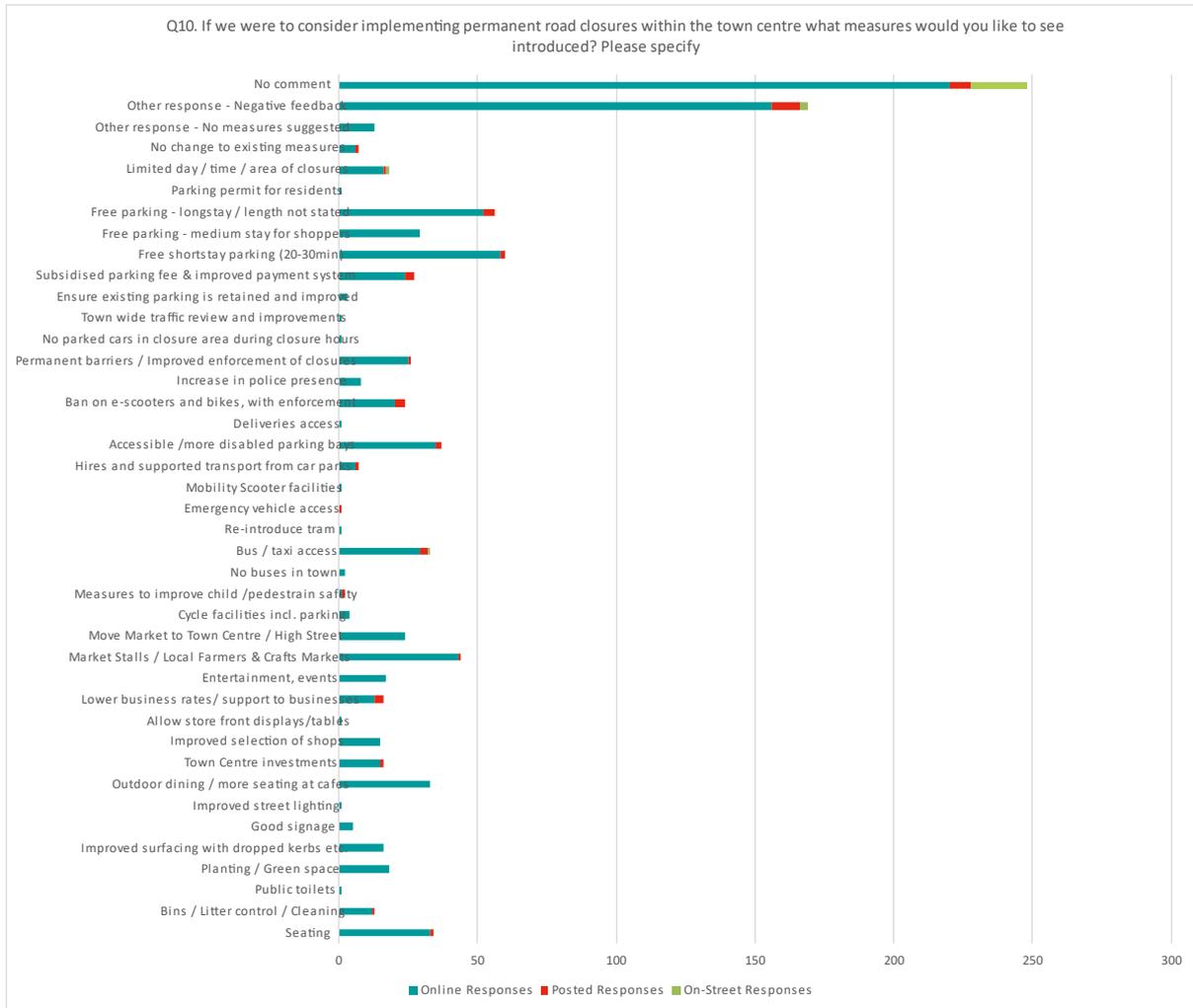




- The key suggestion for additional controls for the permanent closures was amending the closure hours followed by access for buses/taxi's. Most people still indicated a preferred 10am-4pm closure period with 24hours coming second followed by 10am-2pm and then 10am- 3pm.



- Key suggestions to improve the permanent closures, should they be implemented permanently included:
 - Free parking - long stay / length not stated (5%)
 - Free short stay parking (20-30min) (6%)
 - Accessible / more disabled parking bays (4%)



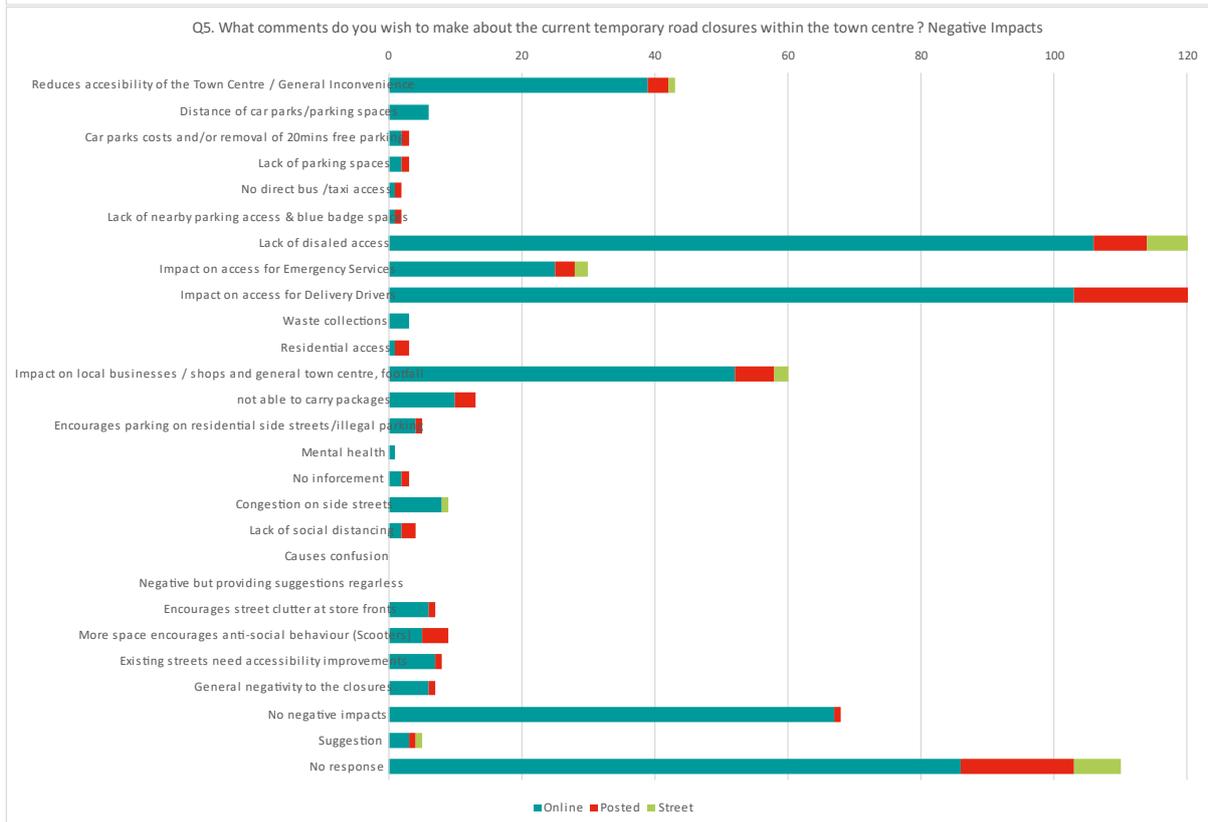
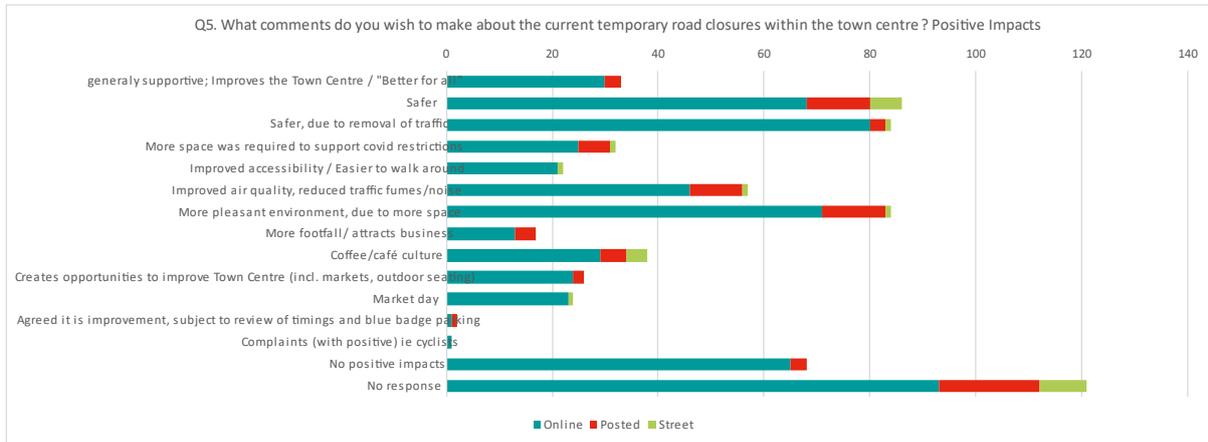
- Out of 810 responses 41% were in support of the closure and 58% were against the closures in Sheerness.
- Of those in support, 59% said that the introduction of permanent town centre road closures would encourage them to walk/cycle into town.

3.3 Key Summary Faversham

There was a total of 468 responses, of which 396 were online responses, 53 mail responses and 19 on-street responses.

- 68% of responses were a Swale resident, 9% were a businesses and 8% were a visitor.
- 37% travelled to the town by car/van and 51% travelled by foot.
- 46% travel to town 1-3 days per week and 41% travel to town 4-7 days per week.
- 19% of responses consider themselves to have a disability, with 69% of these stating physical/mobility limitations.
- 60% of respondents had something positive to say while 62% had negative responses relating to the temporary closures. Key reasons raised in support of the closure included:

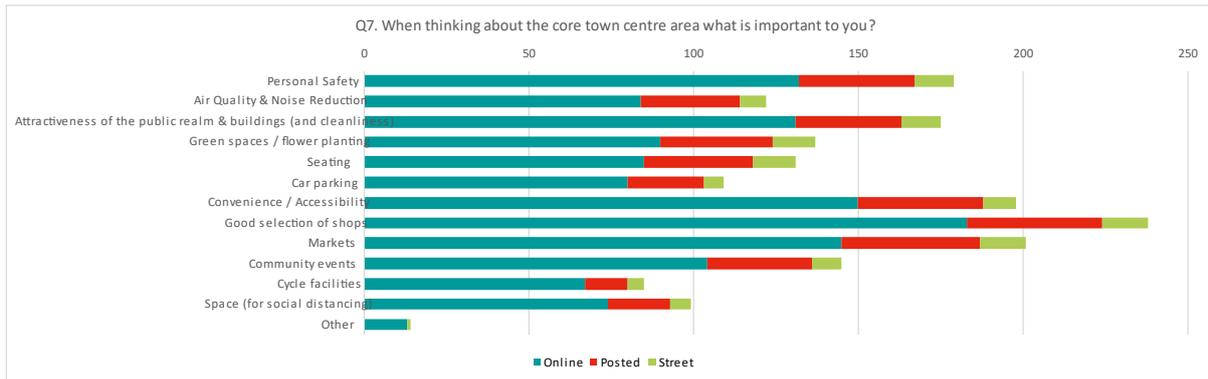
- + Safer, due to removal of traffic (24%)
 - + More pleasant environment, due to more space (12%)
- Whereas key reasons raised against the closure included:
- Lack of delivery access (20%)
 - Lack of disabled access (19%)
 - Impact on local businesses and reduced footfall (9%)



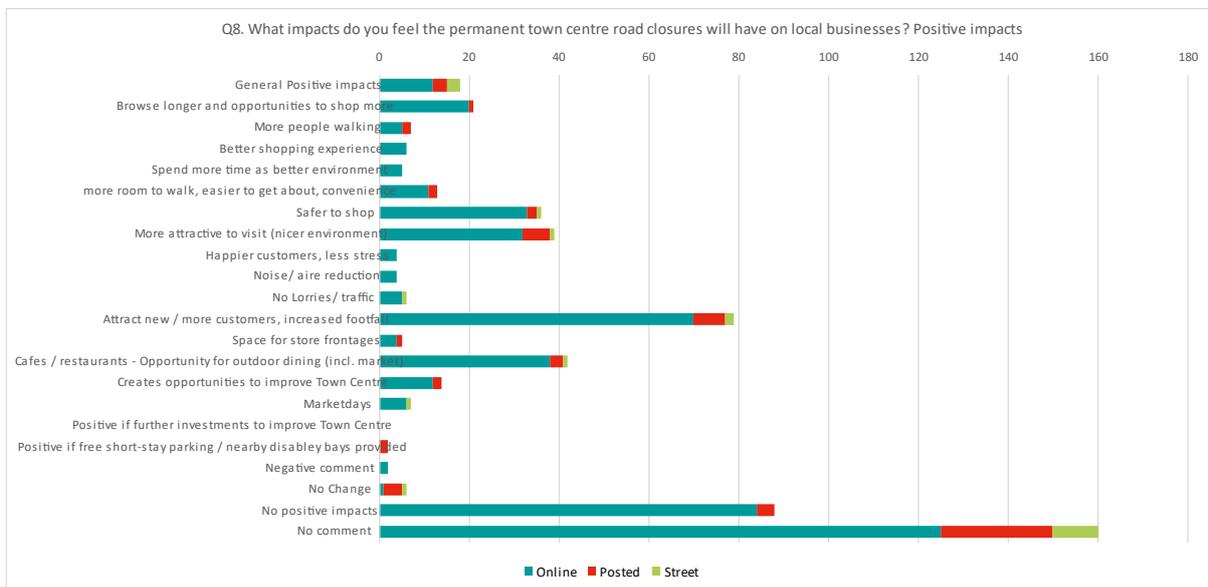
- As with Sittingbourne and Sheerness, people in Faversham felt there were improvements in personal safety with the temporary closures in place.

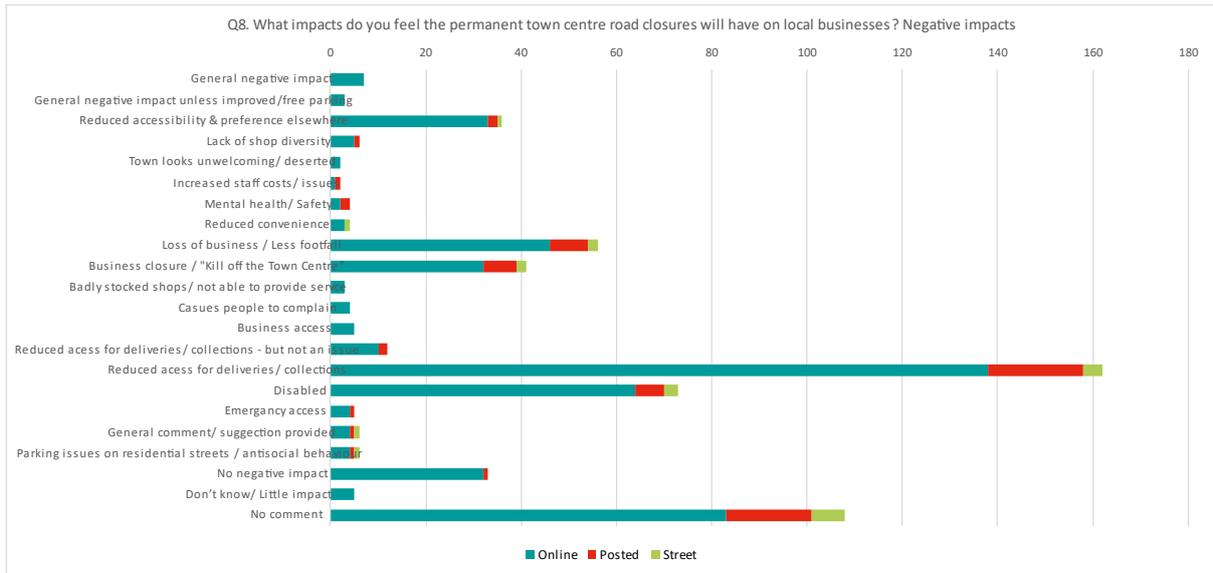


- There were clear themes that were important to people with regard to the town centre.



- However, people thought that there were both positives and negative impact to local businesses with the permanent closures in place.

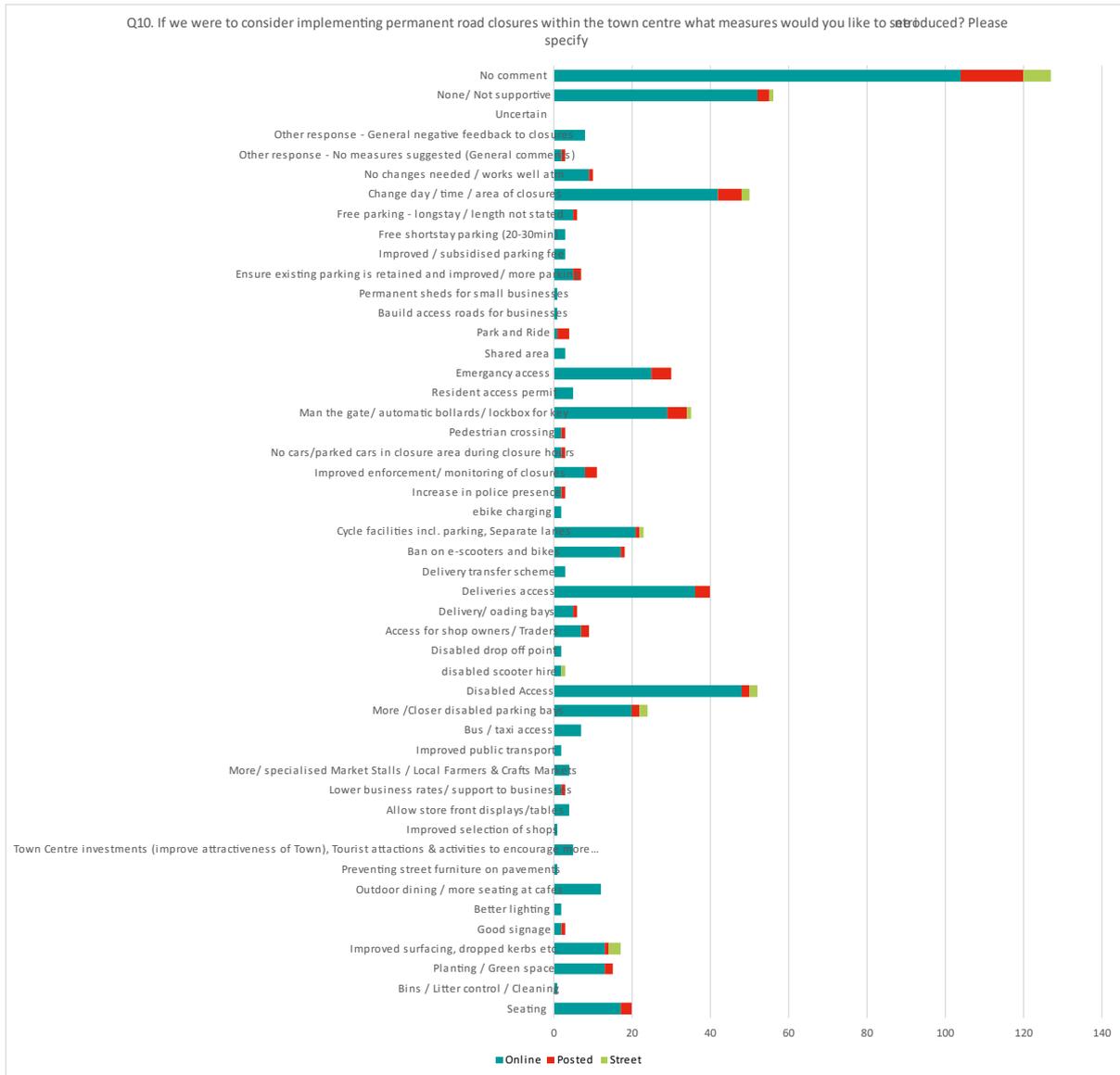




- The key suggestion for additional controls for the permanent closures was amending the closure hours. Most people still indicated a preferred 10am-4pm closure period with 24hours coming second followed by market days only.



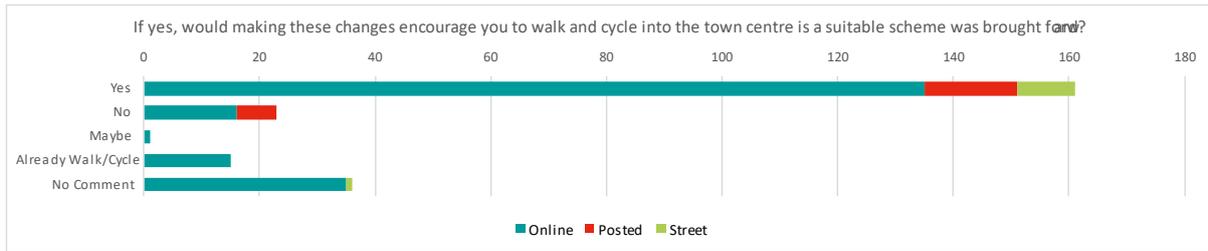
- Key suggestions to improve the permanent closures, should they be implemented permanently included
 - Disabled Access (8%)
 - Change day / time / area of closures (8%)
 - Deliveries access (6%)



- Out of 468 responses 51% were in support of the closure and 46% were against the closure



- Of those in support, 68% said that the introduction of permanent town centre road closures would encourage them to walk/cycle into town.

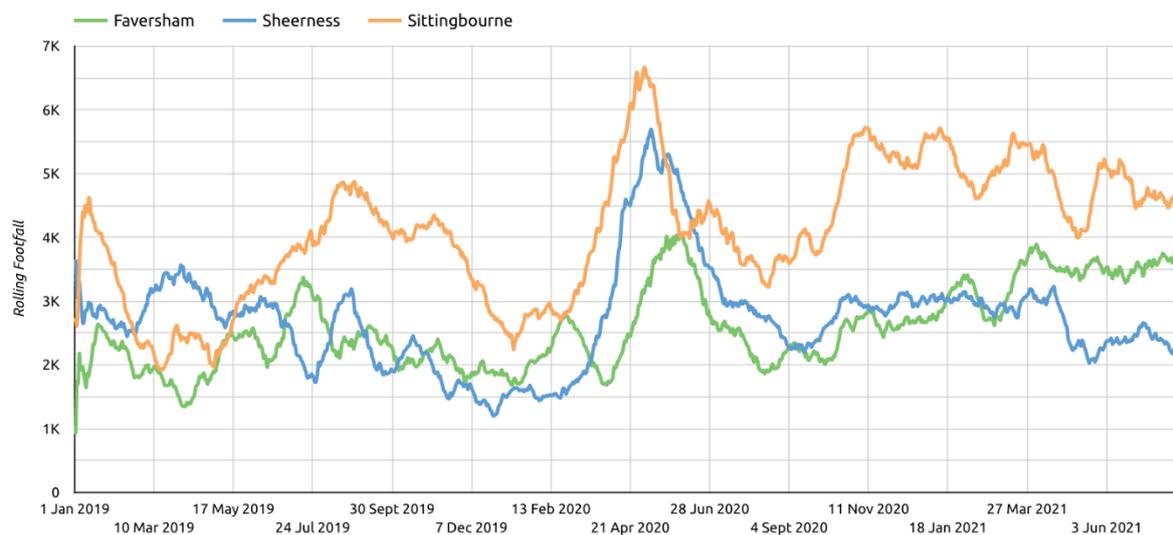


4. Town Council/Stakeholder Discussion

We have had regular meetings with both Sheerness and Faversham Town Councils over the last 6+ months and the results and analysis from the informal consultation will be shared with both town councils along with any points raised and discussed with the Joint Transportation Board.

5. Footfall Data

Footfall data (based on mobile phone locality information) has recently been obtained from Huq Industries that shows rolling footfall data in the three town centres. This clearly shows peaks in all three towns in April 2020 early into the 1st lockdown period and then higher or similar numbers when compared to pre-Covid levels. What is not clear from this data is any correlation to spend which is currently being sought along with outcomes from other similar towns that have also introduced closures.



6. Next Steps

- 6.1 There are clear themes and key responses captured within the informal consultation analysis within Sittingbourne and Sheerness that Swale Borough Council will now focus upon, as part of the capital projects programme, to introduce improvements to the town centres.

The results from the informal consultation indicates that there is support for the permanent town centre road closure orders in Faversham. Other initiatives in the town are all working towards reducing vehicle speeds and improving the built environment for pedestrians and cyclists, these can also be supplemented by the Active Travel Funding bid. Carrying out further work on the Faversham Permanent Town Centre Road Closure scheme would therefore be advantageous in supporting these other initiatives at this time.

Swale Borough Council are to progress to the next stage in Faversham, to work with a consultant to review the informal consultation feedback for Faversham in more detail, to review additional information received from key stakeholders including disability groups and traders and use all of this information to develop the closure extents and timings for the permanent scheme ahead of preparing the draft order.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 For the board to note the contents of this report and the consultation responses.

8. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Improving Community Safety through safer Highways.
Financial, Resource and Property	Cost of developing the permanent closure further to draft order stage the cost of carrying out the formal consultation exercise in Faversham, drafting the Traffic Regulation Order, processing the Order plus the cost of installing any physical changes/measures in each of the town centres.
Legal and Statutory	Drafting of Traffic Regulation Order, Sealing of Order in due course.
Crime and Disorder	None at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	EIA's will be undertaken as part of the consultants work in progressing with any measures or changes in relation to the implementation of permanent town centre road closures.
Sustainability	Improved air quality by removing traffic pollution from the immediate town centre

Health Implications	<p>The introduction of permanent road closure orders in Faversham town centre is likely to:</p> <p>Make the town centres safer during the closure period enabling customers and workers to freely use the town centre without worrying about passing vehicular traffic and the risk of pedestrian/vehicular conflict.</p> <p>Improve air quality by removing traffic pollution from the immediate town centre.</p>
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9. Appendices

- 9.1 Summary Report – Faversham
- Summary Report – Sheerness
- Summary Report – Sittingbourne

10. Background Papers

- 10.1 None