

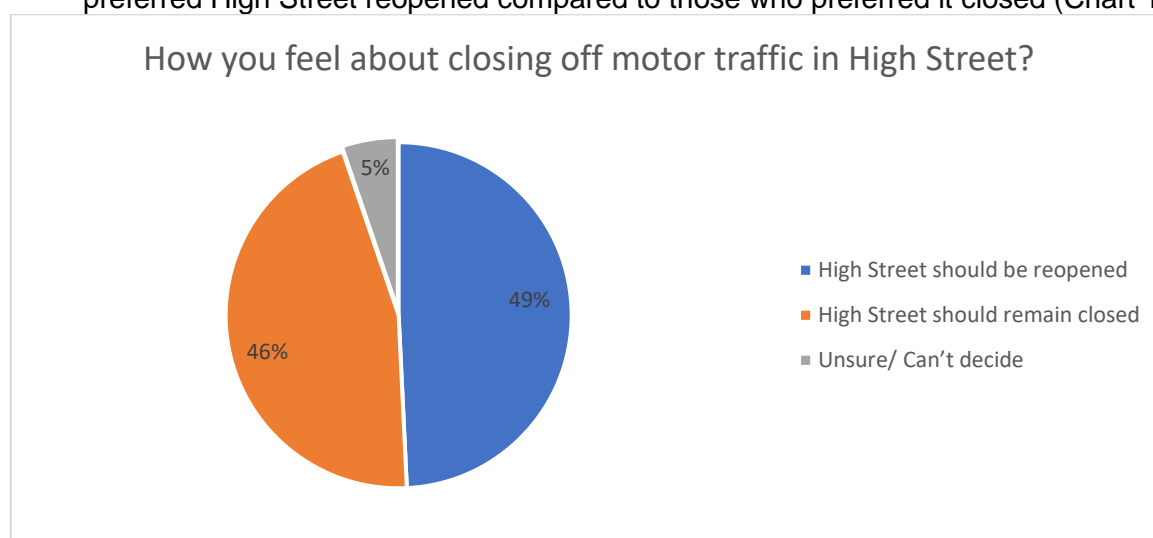
Rickmansworth High Street Recovery Engagement Survey Report

Summary

Public opinion on whether High Street should remain closed or be reopened to traffic are divided almost 50:50. The majority of people who usually arrive on foot to Rickmansworth High Street feel the trial measures have had a positive effect on their journey and support the trial measures being made permanent. The majority of people who usually drive to Rickmansworth feel the trial measures have had a negative effect on their journey and tend to want the road to re-open. Many local businesses are not supportive of the road remaining closed to motor vehicles.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Rickmansworth High Street Trial officially commenced on Monday 6th March 2023 supported by an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO). The road section had been closed prior to this as a legacy of Covid-19 measures. 493 individuals responded to a consultation survey at that time, 68% of which supported the idea of a further trial. The ETRO provided a legal basis for enforcement and was supported by new signage.
- 1.2. The TRO team have received one formal comment in relation to the trial. This expressed concern about the impact on the trial on local shops and the ability of disabled people to get to the shops. Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) have added two Blue Badge bays at the Ebury car park. Business and local economic development is a TRDC function.
- 1.3. A public engagement survey was launched on Wednesday 1st March and ran until Sunday 10th September. This considered whether the High Street should remain closed or be reopened to motor vehicles. **861** completed responses were received. For a Highways consultation this is considered a good result however this sample size would be regarded as statistically insignificant to produce an accurate opinion for the population of Rickmansworth overall.
- 1.4. Based on the feedback received, **46%** of respondents were supportive of the trial measures (that is no access for motor vehicles along a section of High Street between 10am and 6pm Monday to Friday; and 10am Saturday through to 6am Monday). **49%** would prefer the road to be reopened. 32 more people indicated they preferred High Street reopened compared to those who preferred it closed (Chart 1).



| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| High Street should be reopened | 423 |
| High Street should remain closed | 391 |
| Unsure/ Can't decide | 45 |

Chart 1 – Overall High Street Open or Closed

2. Equalities

- 2.1. There is a clear differentiation of whether people would like High Street reopened or to remain closed by age. Most people under 49 would like High Street to remain closed and the majority of people over 50 would like to see the High Street reopened. Modal response groups were 50-59 and 60-69 (see chart 2). 68% of respondents were aged over 50 years old.

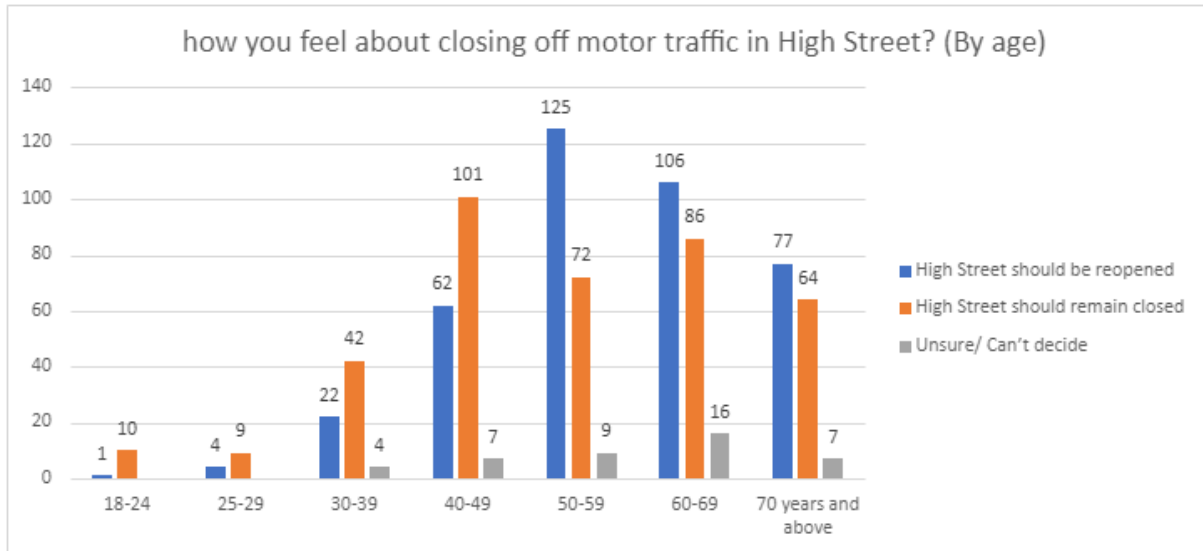


Chart 2 – Opinions by age

- 2.2. While the majority of females who responded would like High Street re-opened to traffic, the majority of males would like it to remain closed (Chart 3). More females than males responded. One transgender person responded, preferring that the road remained closed to vehicular traffic. Females are most likely to state they visit Rickmansworth by car, with 257 of 496 respondents say they visit this way.

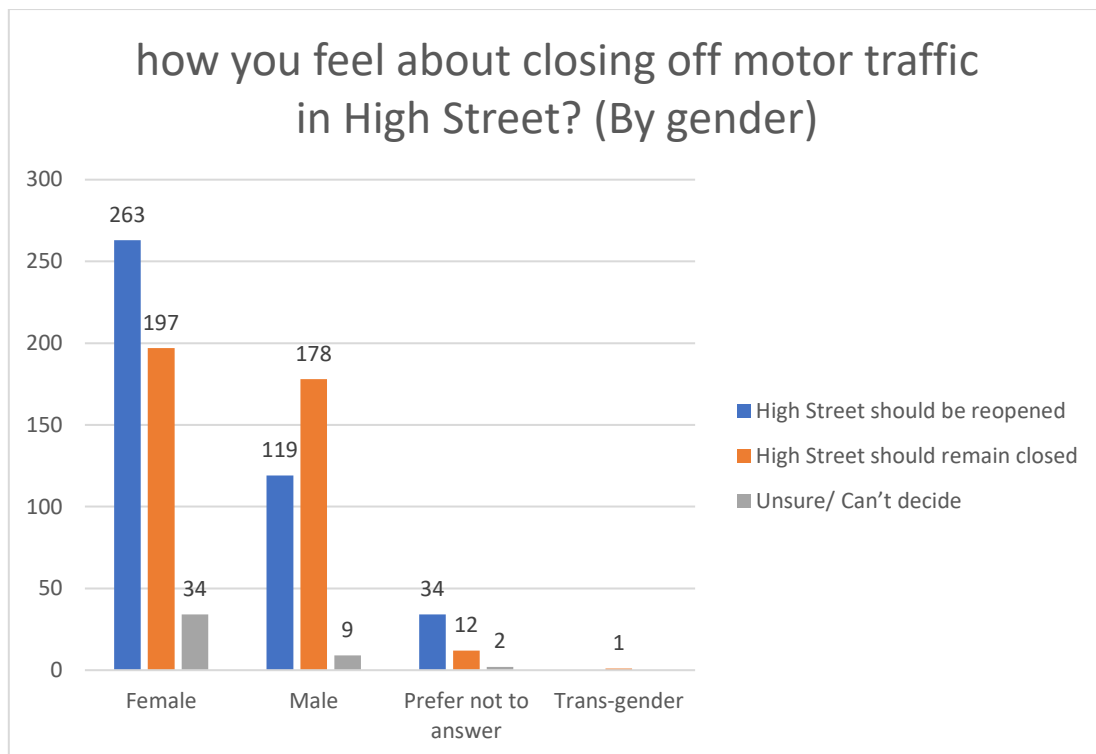


Chart 3 – Opinions by Gender

- 2.3. When asking those with a long-term illness, disability or infirmity, respondents often prefer the road to be reopened, even in the trial locations that have received overwhelming public support (Hitchin and Hertford). 107 respondents indicated that they have a long-term illness, disability or infirmity which limits their daily activities. 29% of respondents that have indicated they have a long-term illness, disability or infirmity would like the High Street to remain closed. 67% would like it reopened (Chart 4).
- 2.4. Blue Badge holders may not have a disability but may have caring responsibilities. These are people that have access to a car. 61 respondents indicated that they were Blue Badge holders. 81% stated they would prefer High Street to be reopened to traffic (Chart 5).

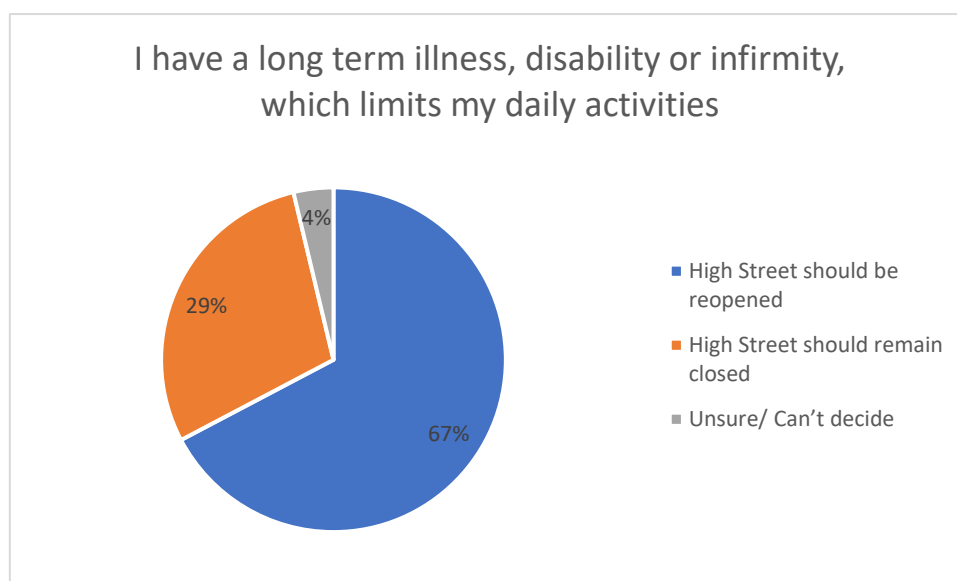


Chart 4 – Views of people with a long term illness, disability or infirmity that limits daily activities

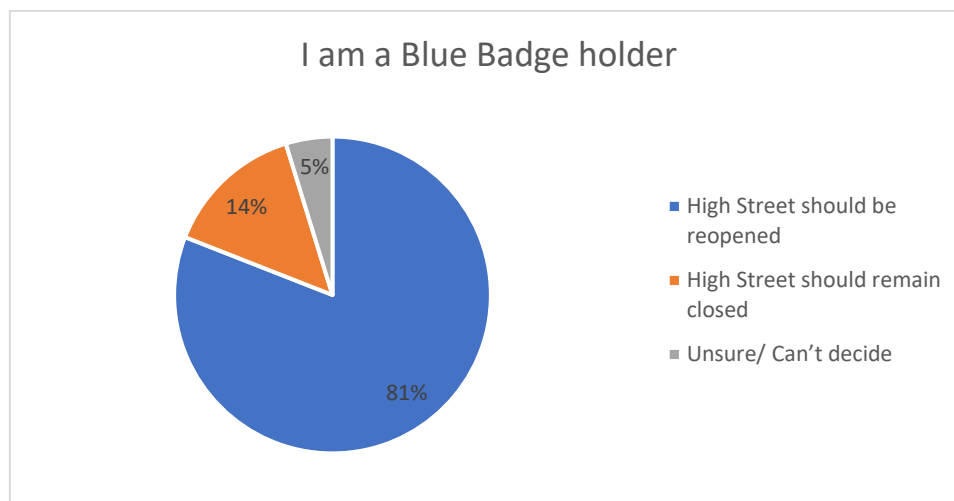


Chart 5 – Views of Blue Badge Holders

- 2.5. 69.6% of respondents who expressed a view thought that disabled parking provision had decreased as part of the trial. There are 18 Blue Badge spaces in Three Rivers District Council car parks in Rickmansworth. There are 2 Disabled spaces available in the scheme area at the western end of the High Street by the Fox & Hounds. There is one further Disabled space by the Pennsylvanian in the restricted section of the High Street. This is only available when the gates are open. There is an opportunity to continue to work alongside TRDC to see if there are options to increase Blue Badge provision within their car parks (or examine whether there is an option of a Blue Badge only car park, as was provided in Hitchin). Two additional Blue Badge bays have already been added at they Ebury car park. If the restricted section of the High Street is to be reopened, there is the option of boosting Blue Badge provision here.
- 2.6. It is difficult to assess patterns according to different ethnicities. Where response rates were significant enough to assess different viewpoints, respondents who indicated their ethnic origin as 'other' were more than twice as likely to want the road closure to remain. Those that did not wish to disclose their ethnic origin were almost twice as likely to want the road to be reopened. British, Irish and Indian respondents were more broadly aligned with the overall views towards the scheme presented earlier in Chart 1.
- 2.7. The Equality Impact Assessment considers the impact of the trials and whether it discriminates in relation to the nine protected characteristics. This will be reviewed in light of the responses received during this consultation.

3. Perception of Journey and Preference by Modes of Transport

- 3.1. 48% of respondents indicated they usually travel to Rickmansworth by car and 44% of respondents indicated they usually walk into Rickmansworth (Chart 6).

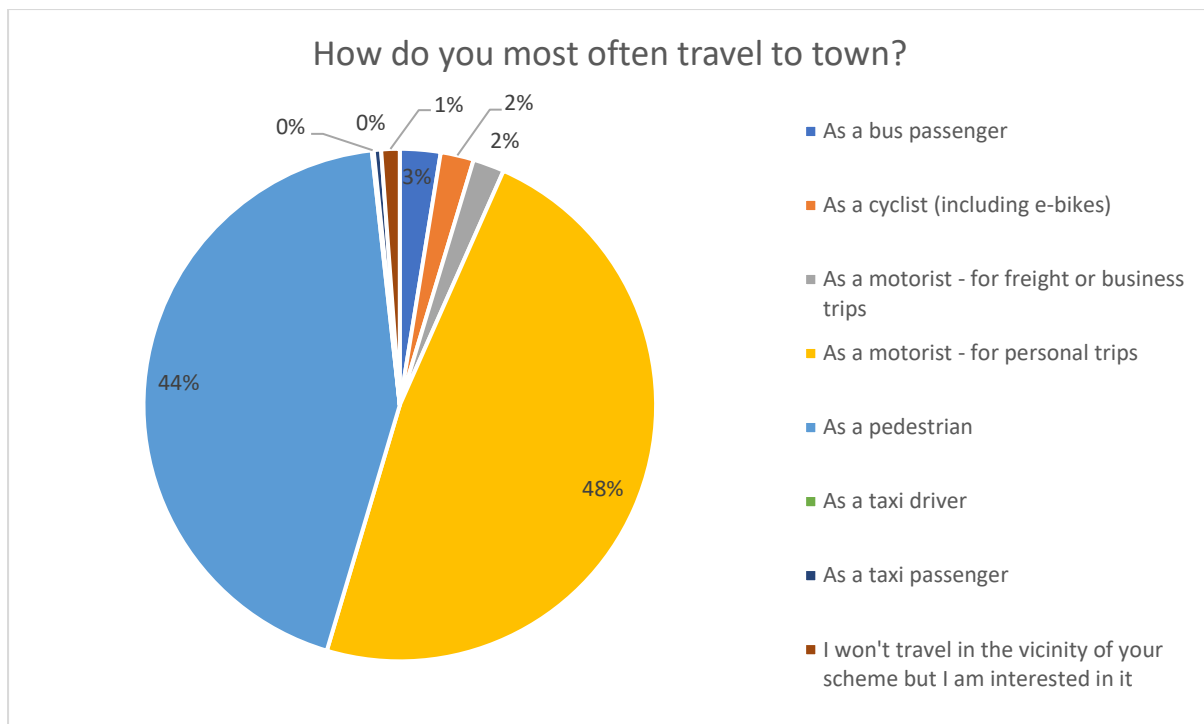


Chart 6 – Journey by modes of transport

- 3.2. The modal respondent was people who usually travel as a motorist for personal trips. 412 respondents selected this category. 375 respondents selected they normally walked to Rickmansworth, 37 less than personal motorists. There are two ways of interpreting this: either slightly more people usually drive into Rickmansworth than walk; or drivers were more inclined to respond to the engagement survey. Overall, 32 more people opposed the trial measures as supported the trial measures.
- 3.3. As Chart 7 suggests, there is an almost perfectly inverse relationship between how people that often walk into Rickmansworth and people that tend to drive feel the trial has affected their journey. 51.5% of motorists view the impact of the trial measures on their journey negatively. 51% of people walking think the trial has had a positive impact on their journey.
- 3.4. While there were only 22 respondents, those that usually travelled into Rickmansworth by bus tended to feel the impact on their journey was negative. A bus stop was removed and services re-routed to Northway. Motorists for business or freight trips (17 respondents) also mostly felt the impact on their journey was negative. People who most often cycle (18 respondents) primarily felt the impact on their journey was positive.

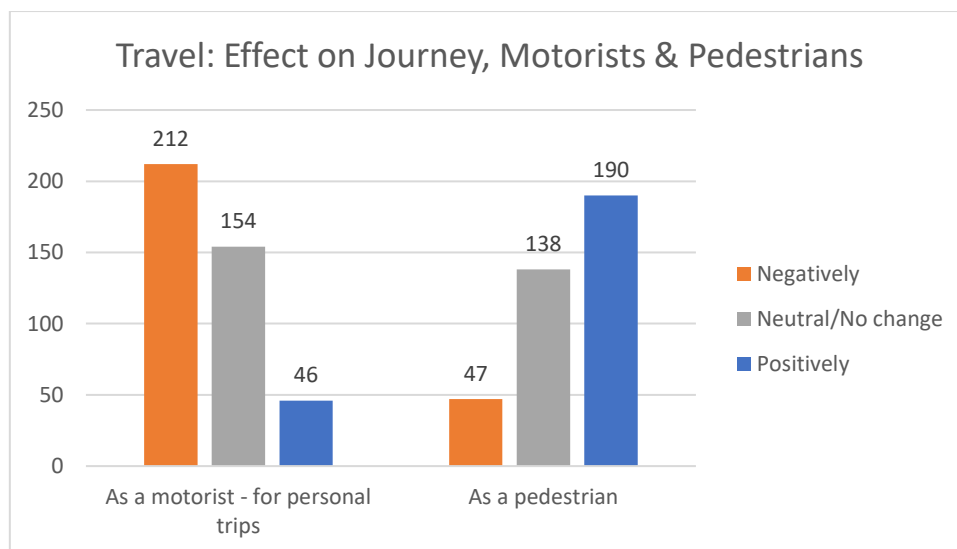


Chart 7 – Effect on journey: views of motorists and pedestrians

- 3.5. 65.5% of people that most often drive there think Rickmansworth High Street should be reopened to traffic. 65.6% of people who usually walk think Rickmansworth High Street should remain closed to traffic but open to people. Chart 8 shows this contrast.
- 3.6. The majority of bus passengers and business/freight motorists would prefer the High Street reopened to traffic. (n.b. bus operators have indicated that they would continue to operate through Northway and will not re-route back through the High Street in the event of it reopening.) The majority of people who most often cycle would like the High Street to remain closed.

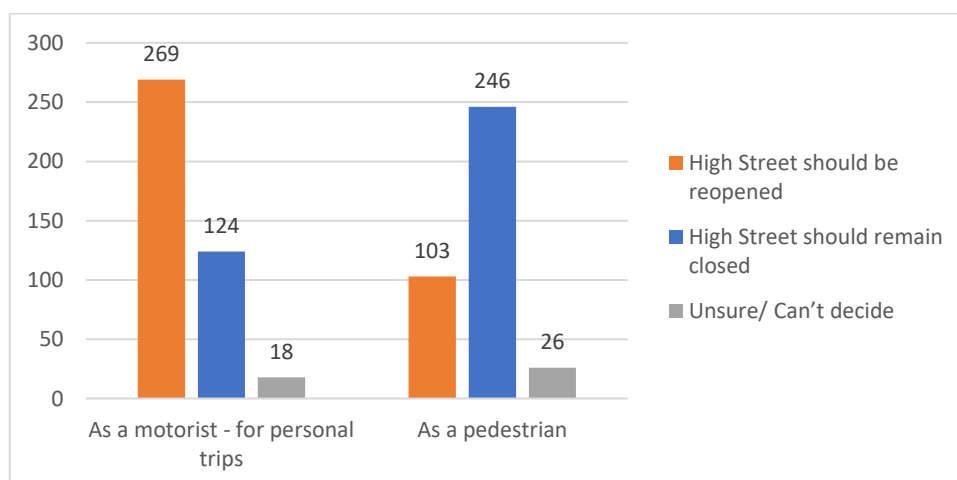


Chart 8 – Trial Perception by Mode of Transport

4. Business & Employment Viewpoints

- 4.1. 68% of those who stated they travelled to work in Rickmansworth thought High Street should be reopened but only 37% felt their journey had been impacted negatively (Chart 9).

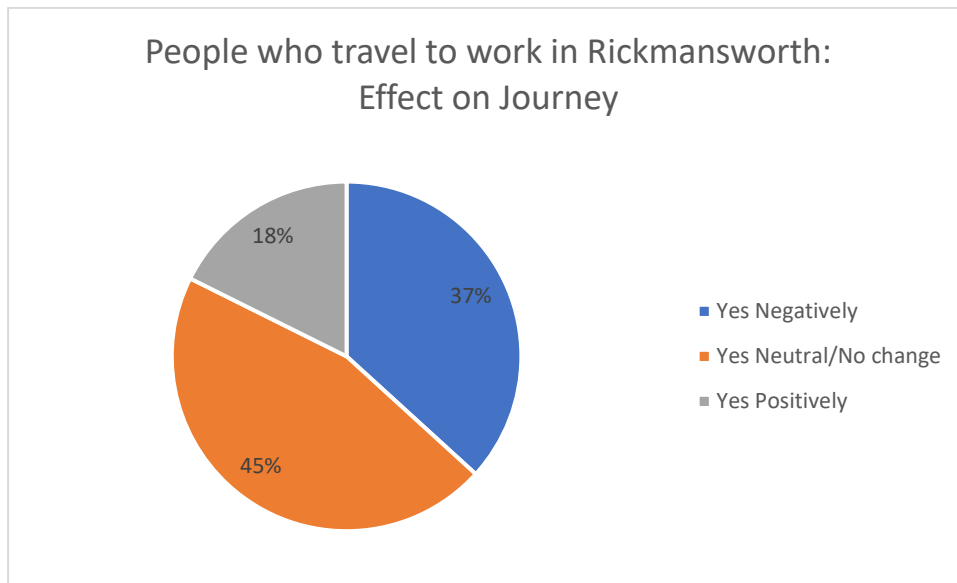


Chart 9 – Effect on journey: work in Rickmansworth

- 4.2. 23 respondents to the public engagement survey identified as local business owners. 19 of these felt High Street should be reopened. 21 respondents indicated they were employed locally. 14 of these felt High Street should be reopened. 9 respondents said they were a commuter to the area. 7 felt High Street should be reopened.
- 4.3. A business survey was shared with board attendees and RickyBiz. This garnered 36 responses. 80.5% of respondents thought the changes had had a negative impact on their business. The same proportion said the changes had resulted in less customers and had decreased their turnover.
- 4.4. Comparatively, 47.2% felt online shopping and 61.1% felt the 'cost of living' crisis had negatively affected their business. Traders appear more likely to see local than national issues impacting their business; and are perhaps more likely to feel they have a sense of control, influence or a stake over the latter.
- 4.5. Other key findings are listed below:
- 66.5% felt visitors did not benefit from traffic free spaces when shopping or accessing services.
 - 86% thought traffic-free space was not being used positively to benefit the local economy.
 - 75% do not believe footfall has increased in Rickmansworth in the last year.
 - 72% do not believe people are staying in town longer than they did before the pandemic.
 - 39% have seen the footfall and dwell time data shared with businesses by HCC.

5. Town Usage and Congestion Issues

- 5.1. 81% of respondents visit the town centre weekly or more frequently. 7% visit monthly or less frequently (Chart 10).

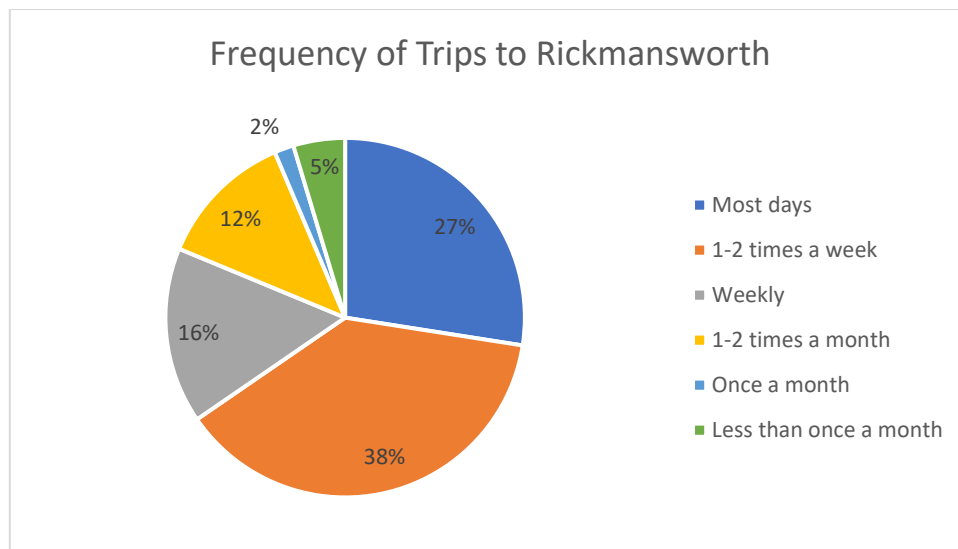


Chart 10 – Frequency of visiting the town centre

- 5.2. Respondents were given the opportunity to select their top three reasons for visiting Rickmansworth. 72.3% selected visiting pubs and cafes and 46.5% said they met with others (Chart 11).

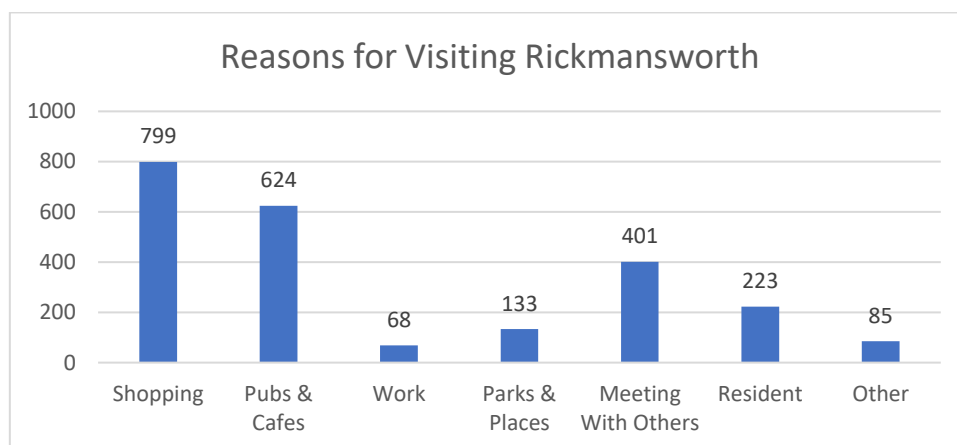


Chart 11 – Town Usage

- 5.3. The nature of high streets is changing universally. While each High Street is unique, all are having to adapt to certain realities. For example, the recent departures of banks and M&Co in Rickmansworth would have occurred regardless of whether there are pedestrianised areas and parking restrictions. It is useful to compare town usage with other High Street Recovery projects in Hertfordshire. Hertford and Hitchin received strong overall public support for their project. Rickmansworth and St Albans proved divisive, with almost 50:50 support/opposition ratios. Royston received overall public opposition via consultation. Our thinking is that higher percentages of “Using Pubs/Cafes” and “Meeting With Others” are either precursors or indicators of a successful and well supported trial. An existing strong hospitality sector could be supported by more space for people; similarly, more space for people (if used well) could be a precursor for a more vibrant hospitality sector. Observationally, Hitchin could be seen as an example of the former and Hertford of the latter, though clearly both elements can be mutually self-supporting. Higher proportions of “Shopping” can sometimes result in a certain proportion of respondents used to “popping in” or otherwise used to using the car to visit centres to shop to feel inconvenienced by road closures and restrictions. Rickmansworth has high percentage values for both

“Shopping” and “Using pubs, cafes, etc”. Therefore there may be potential in persevering with trial measures in some form but also it is possible to appreciate why there is divisiveness in consultation responses. Rickmansworth High Street still has an Iceland store, WH Smiths, Boots, several independent shops and chain cafes such as Costa, Starbucks and Café Nero. Developing the business and local economy is a TRDC function.

| | <i>Work</i> | <i>Shopping</i> | <i>Using pubs, cafes etc</i> | <i>Visiting parks/places</i> | <i>Meeting with others</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Rickmansworth | 3.2% | 37.9% | 29.6% | 6.3% | 19% | 4% |
| St Albans | 7.2% | 31.2% | 15.5% | 21.7% | 19.9% | 4.5% |
| Hertford | 5.7% | 26.0% | 29.8% | 14.7% | 20.2% | 3.5% |
| Hitchin | 4% | 31% | 28% | 10% | 22% | 5% |
| Royston | 3.6% | 33.4% | 26.3% | 16.8% | 15.5% | 4.4% |

Table 1 – Town usage at Hertfordshire High Street Recovery Trial areas as a percentage of total responses

- 5.4. For Chart 12a-d below, it must be remembered there will be considerable overlap within these comparisons (respondents may have selected both “shopping” and “using pubs, cafes” as reasons for visiting Rickmansworth. This series of charts show that those who selected “Shopping” were more likely to want High Street reopened and slightly more inclined to feel the trial had had a negative effect on their journeys. Those who selected “Using pubs, cafes, etc” were more likely to want High Street to remain closed and were slightly more inclined to feel the trial had a positive effect on their journeys.

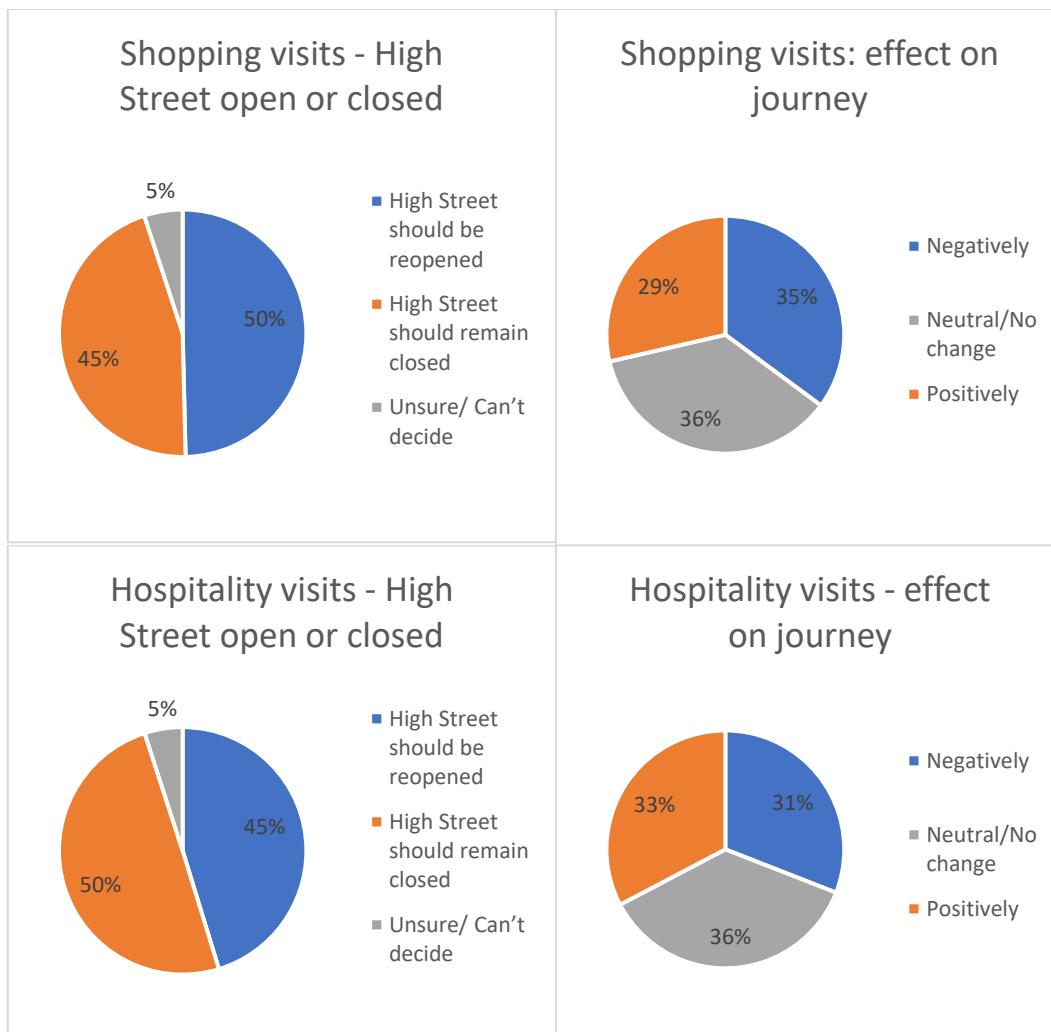


Chart 12a-d – Shopping/Hospitality Usage Comparisons: Rickmansworth

- 5.5. 71% of respondents stated that they walked more or as often as before in the trial area. As with surveys for other High Street Recovery trials in Hertfordshire, there is a tendency amongst some respondents opposed to the project to state they walk less in the scheme area, justifying this by stating they no longer visit as it is harder to park. 77.5% cycled more or as often before in the trial area. 65% of respondents said they drive in less in the area in comparison to before the scheme. From one perspective, this is an objective achieved, but from another perspective, it is an inevitable consequence of the trial. 34.5% of those that responded to the question said they used public transport less in the scheme area. A bus stop has been moved from the High Street to Northway, and operators have expressed a preference not to return routing through the High Street, even if the trial measures are permanently removed. (Charts 13a-d.)



Chart 13a-d – Journeys within the scheme area

- 5.6. Over 90% of respondents felt walking in the trial area at least as safe as before, with 53% saying it felt more safe (Chart 14).

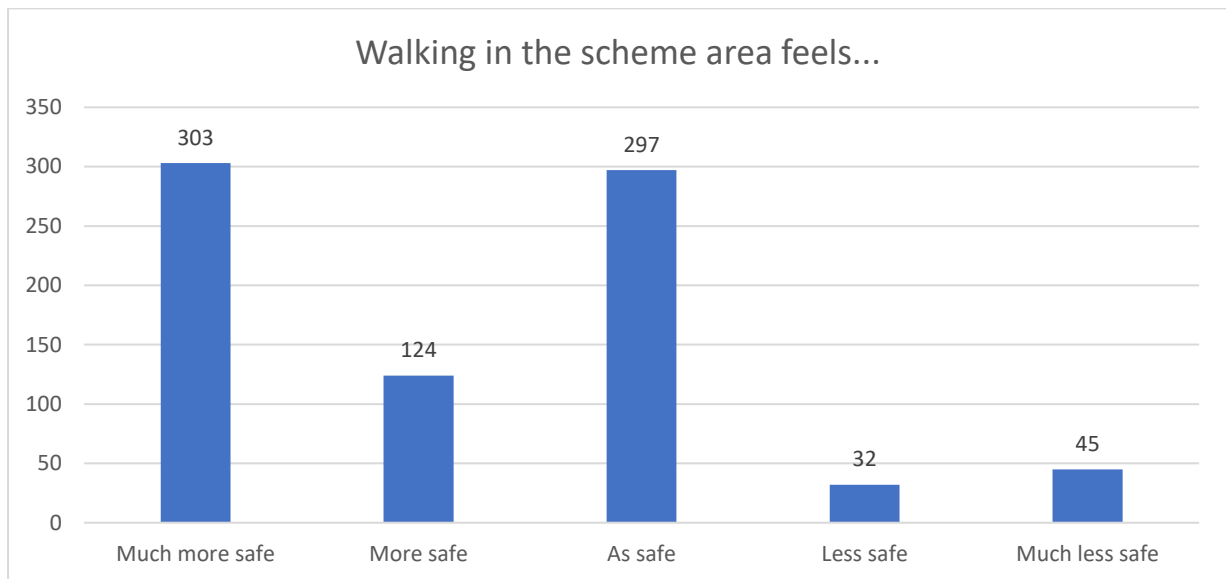


Chart 14 – Perception of safety by pedestrians

- 5.7. Of those giving an opinion, 52% of respondents felt cycling had been made more safe or much more safe (Chart 15). 17% feel it has been made less safe.

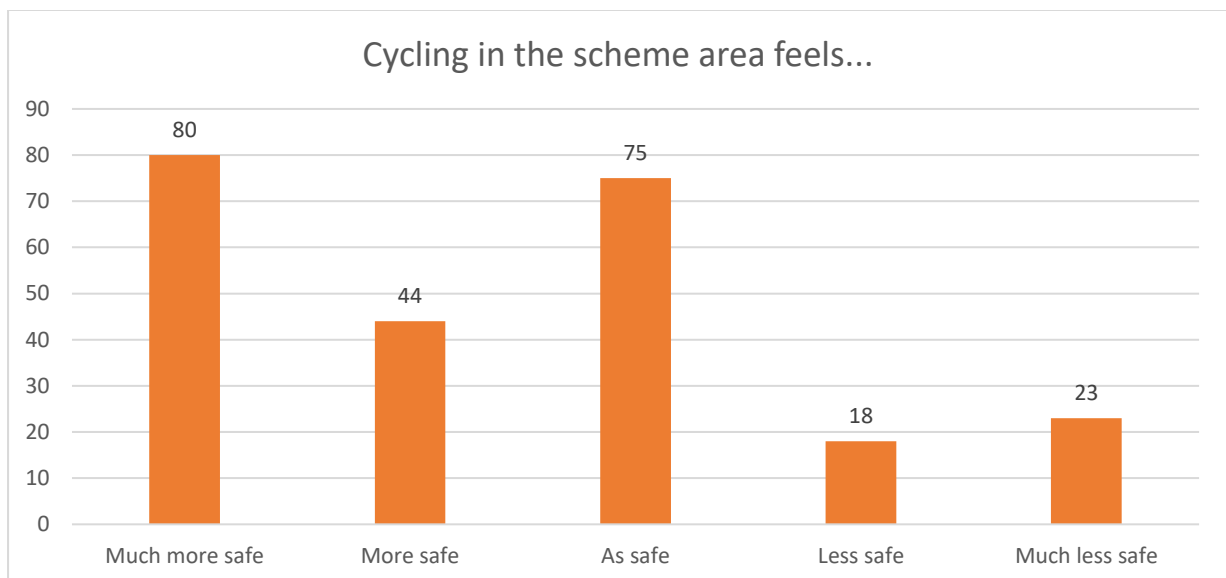


Chart 15 – Perception of safety by cyclists

- 5.8. The modal response relating to traffic congestion and journey times in and around Rickmansworth was that it has stayed the same (Chart 16). Approximately twice as many people think traffic has worsened than improved. Overall, the Rickmansworth trial does not appear to have precipitated the same public perception of worsening traffic conditions locally in comparison to the other trials around Hertfordshire.

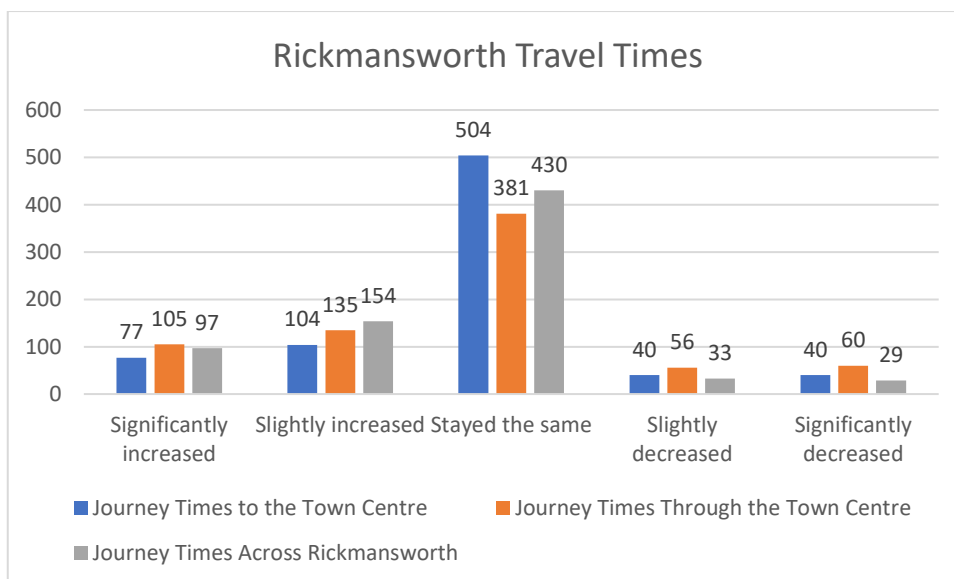


Chart 16 – Congestion and journey times

6. Air Quality and Traffic Noise

- 6.1. The modal response to the statement ‘Air quality has improved in High Street’ implies that the majority of people feel it has stayed the same (Chart 17). 38% feel it has improved and 8% feel it has worsened. Amongst those that feel the trial may have worsened congestion in Rickmansworth, there is often the thought that this has negatively impacted air quality. Air quality data is not available for Rickmansworth High Street, so it is not possible to assess how views compare with real data.

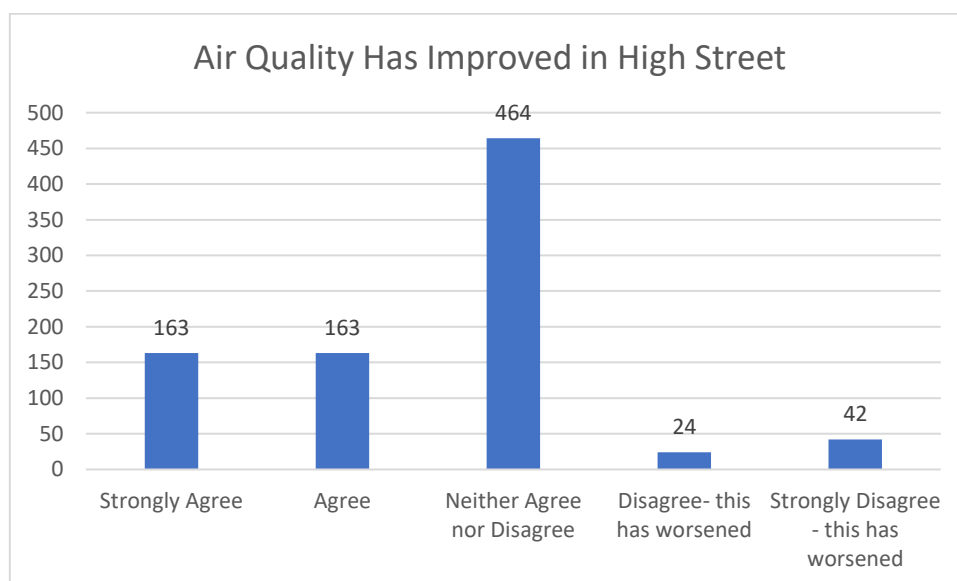


Chart 17 – Perception of air quality

- 6.2. 58% of respondents thought noise levels had improved in High Street (Chart 18).

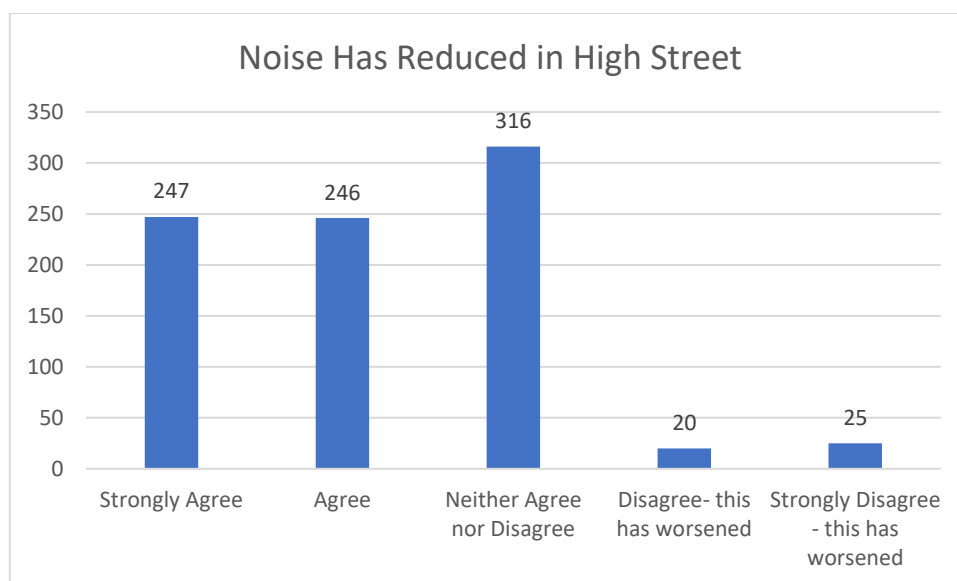


Chart 18 – Perception of traffic noise

7. Look and Feel of the Area and Footfall

7.1. The look and feel of High Street is clearly a divisive matter in Rickmansworth. While the modal response is 'Strongly Agree', a not insignificant 36% disagree with the statement (Chart 19).

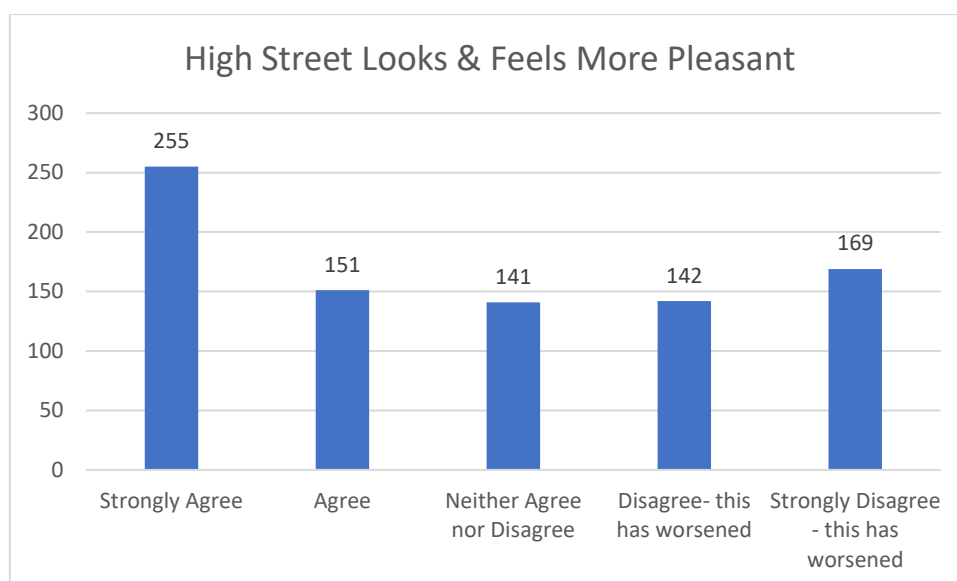


Chart 19 – Perception of look and feel of the area

- 7.2. A Healthy Streets assessment has been carried out for Rickmansworth High Street. This shows an overall 8-point gain. Healthy Streets is a human-centred framework for embedding public health in transport, public realm and planning. The 10 Healthy Streets Indicators focus on the human experience needed on all streets, everywhere, for everyone. A Healthy Streets approach is being embedded in HCC's implementation projects and it is anticipated that it will be integrated in the next iteration of the Local Transport Plan (LTP5).
- 7.3. As Chart 20 shows, significant gains have been achieved in the following indicators: (Future projects have the potential to yield yet further gains.)

Everyone feels welcome: 11 points
 Easy to cross: 16 points
 Places to stop and rest: 10 points
 Not too noisy: 14 points
 People choose to walk and cycle: 11 points
 People feel safe: 16 points
 People feel relaxed: 11 points
 Clean air: 17 points

- 7.4. You will also note that there has been a 17-point reduction in the Shade & Shelter indicator. This is despite trees being added to the streetscape. This is because of the removal of the bus service and the bus shelter. The tree planting is too limited to uplift this indicator.

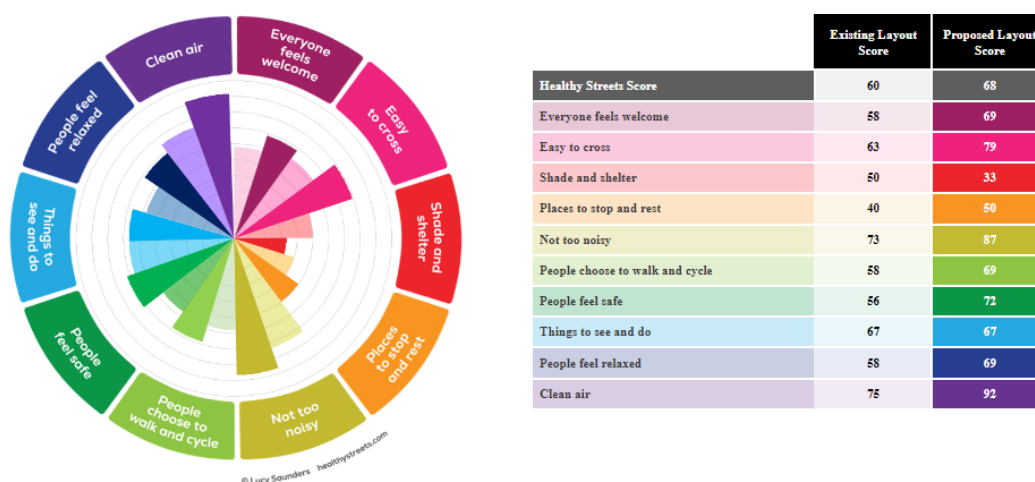


Chart 20 – Healthy Streets Assessment: Rickmansworth High Street

- 7.5. While the modal response to the statement 'I spend more time in High Street' suggested that the largest number of respondents thought they spent roughly the same amount of time in High Street as before, 34% agreed and 38% disagreed (Chart 21).

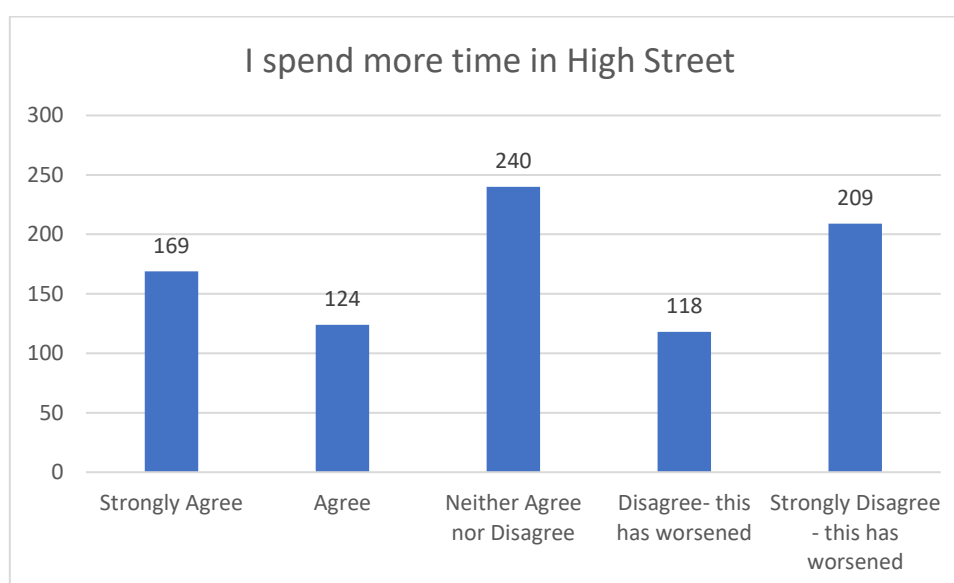


Chart 21 – Time spent in the area

- 7.6. HUQ data shows footfall based on mobile phone location data. Over the past few years, Rickmansworth has shown mixed footfall data. The most notable footfall peaks have occurred February 2019, late May 2019 and during a sustained period between August 2022 and October 2022. Summer 2023 has not followed the pattern of high footfall of summer 2022. While it is tracking above footfall data for 2020 and 2021, it has recently been tracking below 2019 and 2022 footfall data (Chart 22).

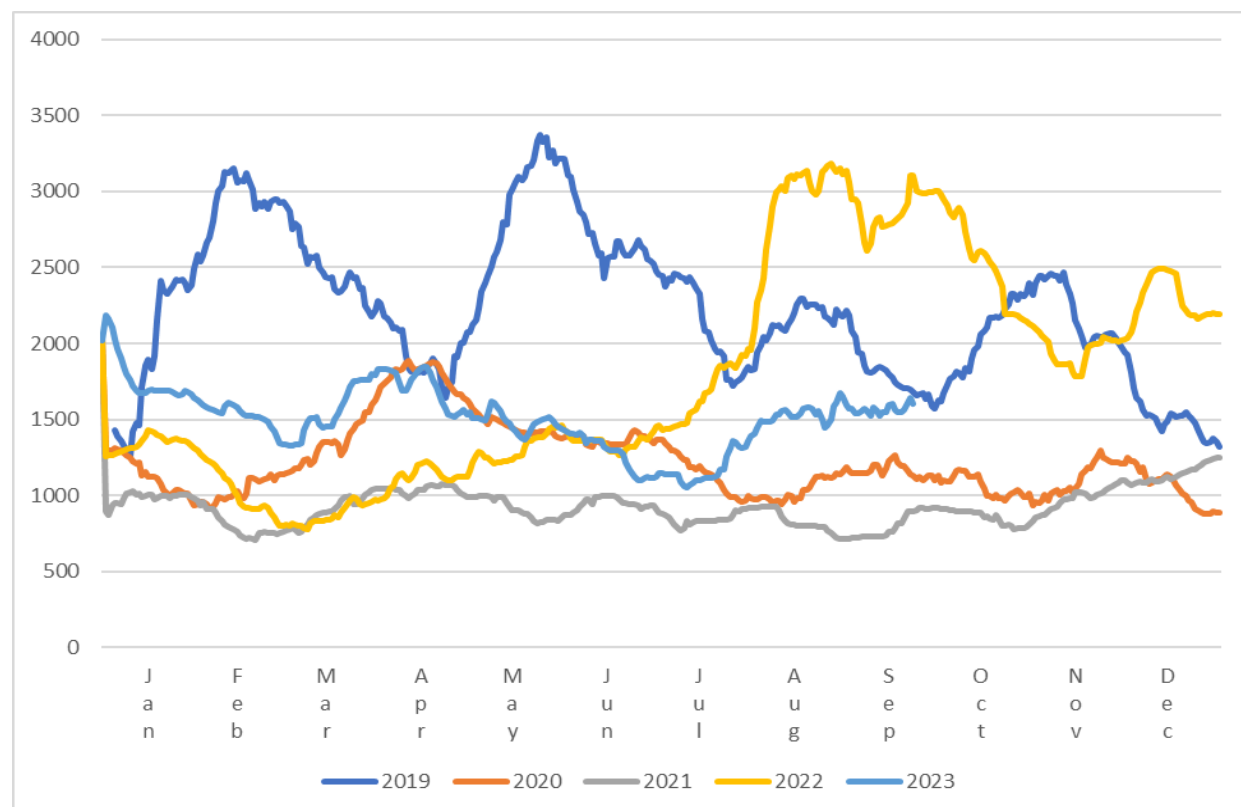


Chart 22 – Footfall, Rickmansworth

- 7.7. Between 2019 and 2022, HUQ dwell times had shown steady increases on all days excepting Saturday and Sunday (Chart 23).

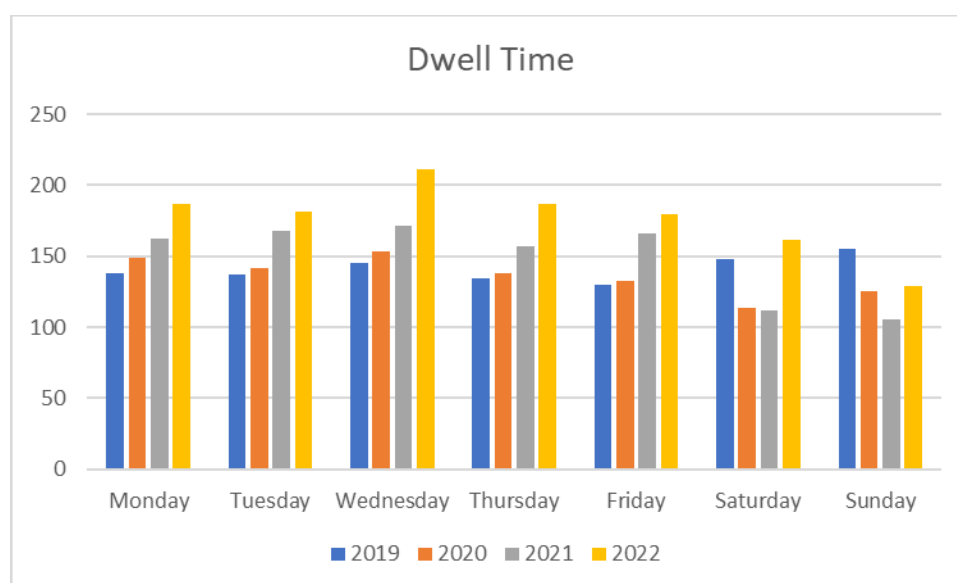


Chart 23 – Dwell Times, Rickmansworth

8. Other Comments and Responses

- 8.1. The largest proportion of comments provided by respondents to the public engagement survey related to the trials impacting local businesses negatively. 111 individual respondents specifically commented on this. 72 respondents specifically raised concerns about accessibility for disabled or elderly visitors to the High Street. 82 respondents specifically commented on price increases for parking and 59 commented on other parking issues.
- 8.2. Other themes that emerge via the comments are a general feeling that the area needs some investment and support from authorities, more greenery, drinking is raised as a concern as well as a lack of variety of shops. A few respondents also raised concerns over the operation of the gates.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. Public engagement shows mixed levels of support for the trial measures amongst respondents, with a narrow majority preferring that High Street is reopened to traffic.
- 9.2. The majority of people who usually arrive on foot to Rickmansworth High Street feel the trial measures have had a positive effect on their journey and support the trial measures being made permanent. The majority of people who usually drive to Rickmansworth feel the trial measures have had a negative effect on their journey and tend to want the road to re-open.
- 9.3. The main reasons for visiting Rickmansworth town centre are for shopping or to visit hospitality venues. Those visiting hospitality venues tended to have a more positive view of the trial than those visiting for shopping.
- 9.4. Some respondents indicate they are walking and cycling more (and are driving and using public transport less) to Rickmansworth town centre. The overall view is that the area feels safer for walking and wheeling, the trial hasn't negatively affected travel times, and has improved air quality and noise levels. However, respondents are more divided on whether there has been any enhancement of the look and feel of the High Street. This division related to 'look and feel' together with the differentiation based on the reasons people visit Rickmansworth could be indicative of a place still seeking to establish a firm identity.
- 9.5. The trial measures have enhanced the Healthy Streets score of the area. Future urban realm measures can be further developed to enhance this score further.
- 9.6. It is possible to differentiate support or opposition to the trial based on age, gender and disability. People aged 50-59 were most likely to prefer the road to be reopened, whereas people aged 40-49 were most likely to prefer the road to remain closed. Women were more likely to prefer the road open and men were more likely to prefer the road closed. Respondents with limited mobility and Blue Badge holders prefer the road reopened.
- 9.7. Business engagement shows a negative view towards the trial measures. The majority would prefer High Street to reopen to traffic. While some respondents did acknowledge more universal challenges such as cost of living and the impact of online shopping, the majority of respondents felt that local issues, and in particular the High Street Recovery trial, had negatively impacted their business. Respondents who indicated they travelled to Rickmansworth to work also tended to prefer the High Street to be reopened.
- 9.8. Footfall data and dwell times appeared to increase during the latter half of 2022. While the footfall trend seemed to continue into the start of 2023, the boost experienced from August last year has not materialised this year. While footfall remains above 2020 and 2021 levels, recovery remains mixed.