

Canterbury Business Community's Response to CCC's Proposals to Change Parking Arrangements

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

Canterbury City Council is seeking to make a number of changes to its car parking strategy. Canterbury Business Improvement District (CBID) is aware that these changes, if implemented, are likely to have an impact on the business community and are keen to ensure that the views of local businesses and organisations are heard, as part of the consultation. The Council's consultation opened on 25 November 2019 and finishes on 10 January 2020, which is a short time frame over an extremely busy time of year. The changes being proposed, if approved, would take effect from April 2020.

CBID commissioned a local independent organisation, the Public Engagement Agency Ltd, to work with them in obtaining feedback from the business community and to write up an independent report, to be shared with the Council.

1.2. Involving Canterbury's business community

CBID was keen to hear from as many local businesses as possible, to identify the key issues concerning the proposals, from a business perspective.

A short survey was conducted online (*survey is at Appendix A*). The survey ran from 9 to 23 December and the link was sent out to over 600 businesses.

A workshop was held on 10 December with a cross-sector representation from Canterbury businesses - including hotels, retail outlets, estate agents - to gain their views on the proposals and the potential impact on their businesses.

Businesses were invited to provide comments/feedback to CBID by mid-December, to be included in the final report.

1.3. Key feedback themes

1.3.1. Survey

The majority of respondents to the survey are independent businesses and have been trading for 11 years or more in Canterbury city. Nine in ten of the respondents believe the proposals will put their business either at **some or great risk**.

The top three recommendations considered to be of **most value** to businesses are:

- Improve the visitor welcome
- Support Electric Vehicle users to charge vehicles at Park and Ride and at home
- Introduce measures to boost Park and Ride use

The three recommendations considered to be of **least/no value** to businesses are:

- Apply charges for parking overnight in Canterbury city centre car parks
- Re-balance parking supply in favour of Park and Ride
- Significantly reduce the number of off-street parking permits available and reduce the level of discount provided

The single proposed change that most respondents believe will have a **positive impact** on their business is **discount for regular Park and Ride users**, whilst **closure/loss of city centre car parking spaces** is seen as potentially having the most **negative impact**.

The **top three important features of a successful park and ride** are considered to be:

- Frequency of buses
- Opening times
- Priority bus lanes to reduce congestion

Most respondents believe the proposals **somewhat take into account environmental concerns**.

Respondents overwhelmingly believe that it is **very important that Canterbury businesses are involved in any future consultation** on an integrated transport system.

1.3.2. Workshop feedback and additional comments

Workshop participants - and business representatives who submitted further comments - believe that **the move to reduce inner city car parks** would have a **significantly negative/damaging impact on business** and **significant revenue will be lost**.

The proposed **increase in car parking tariffs** and charges will have a **significant negative impact on staff, volunteers and customers**, with people potentially shopping and working elsewhere, and is seen as another tax on local business.

The **park and ride scheme** is seen to be **under-utilised, not fit for purpose and needing to be radically overhauled** before any of the other changes can be put in place.

Increasing the **cost of permits** will have a **negative impact** on businesses and doesn't align with the visitor economy strategy which strongly encourages incentives for overnight stays.

Public transport is **costly, unreliable and not always accessible**, so not a viable option for many.

Overall, businesses considered the proposals to be:

- Focused on the **short-term** and not considering the longer-term impact of loss of car parking revenue, future investment and businesses moving elsewhere
- Trying to look at/resolve **two very different issues**: congestion and car parking
- **Not joined up** with other relevant traffic and environment strategies
- **Not creative** in exploring possible future solutions

There was very **strong agreement that the Council needs to work with businesses to think through some of the issues and consider more practical solutions** before making the proposed changes.

1.4. Conclusion

The feedback from local businesses through the engagement activities outlined above shows that the business community in Canterbury has significant concerns regarding the Council's proposals to change parking arrangements. These concerns will be submitted to the Council in response to its consultation on the proposed changes, for consideration by councillors early 2020.

CBID will be attending the Council's Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 5th February 2020 to share some of the issues raised and has suggested that some business representatives also attend.

It was also proposed that CBID ask Committee members to meet with business representatives before the Committee meeting, to discuss the key points face to face and explore other possible approaches.

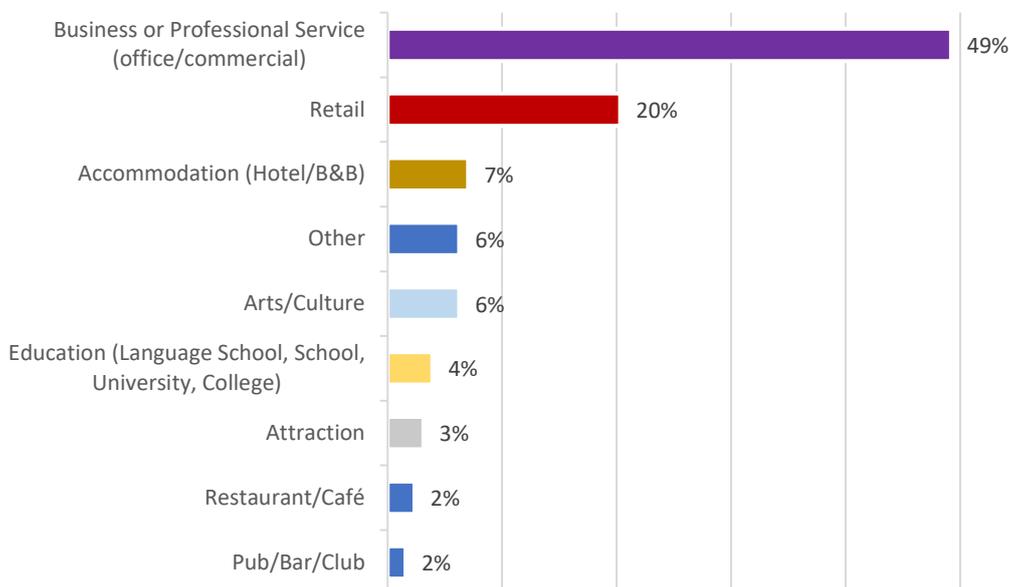
2. Detailed feedback

2.1. Survey Results

Respondent Profile

128 people completed the survey. Almost half of all respondents classify their business sector as 'Business or Professional Service' (49%) as shown below. 'Retail' accounts for a fifth of respondents (20%). Other mentions include 'beauty salon', 'medical', 'place of religion', 'hair and health/beauty' and 'Kent Downs AONB'.

Q1. Firstly, in order to put your responses into context, please indicate which one of the following best describes your business sector. (128)

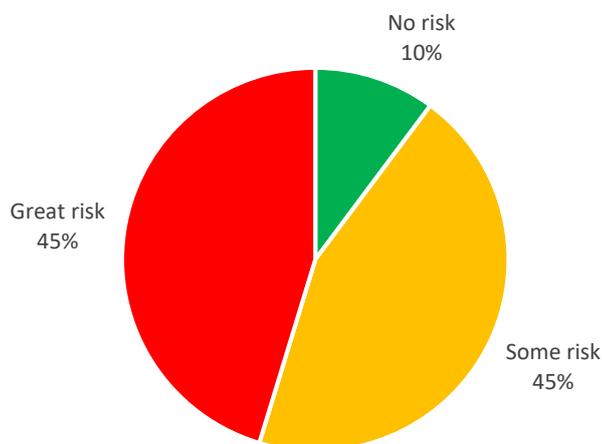


Over three-quarters of respondents classify their business as ‘Independent’ (77%) and 23% as a ‘National Chain (including Franchises)’. Three-quarters indicate they have been trading in the city for 11 years or more (75%). A further 11% have been trading for 6-10 years.

Impact on Business

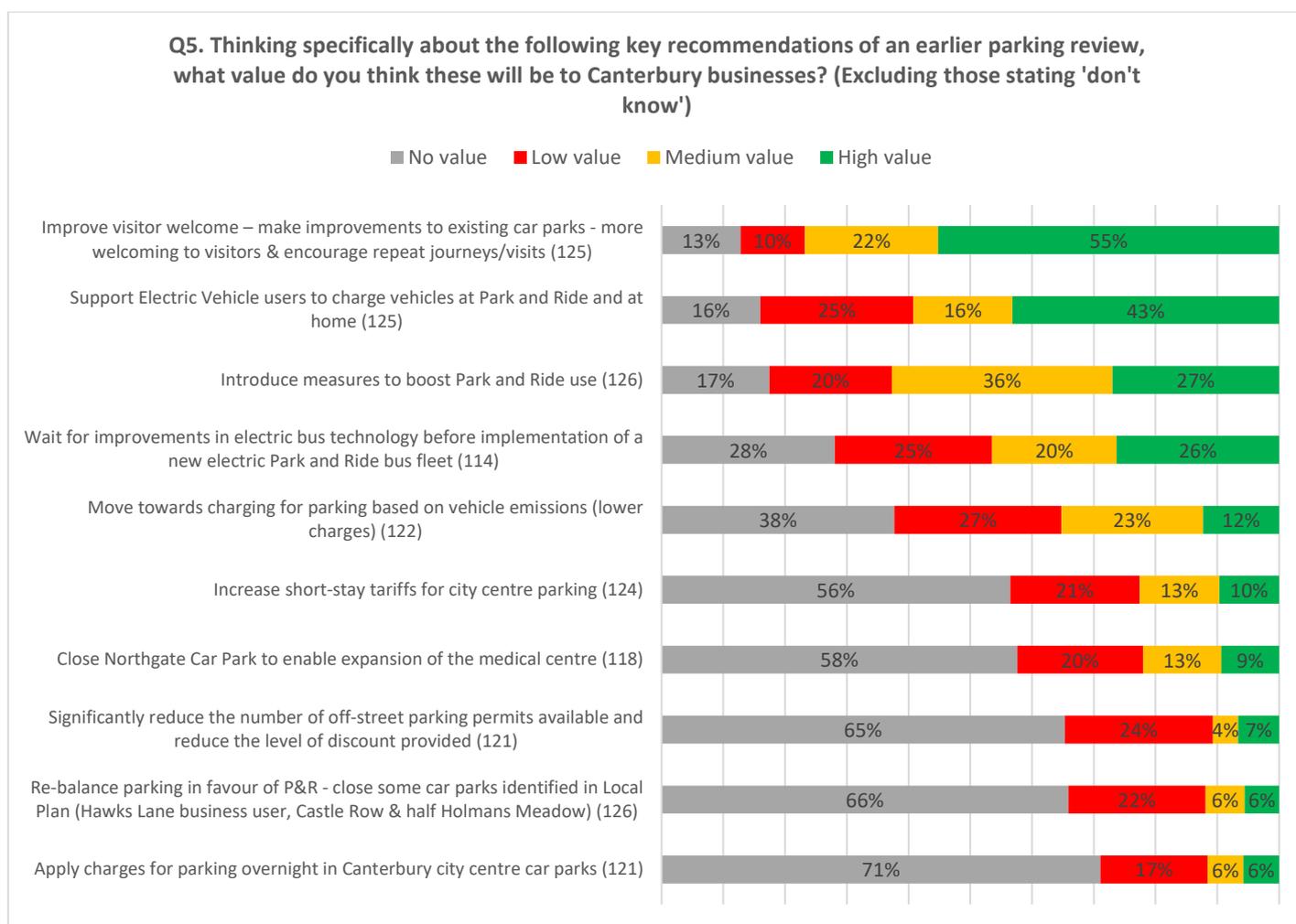
Almost half of respondents believe that the proposed changes overall will put their business at ‘great risk’ (45%). A further 45% believe there will be ‘some risk’.

Q4. To what extent do you think your business will be put at risk by the proposed changes overall? (128)



The changes deemed of **most value to businesses** are:

- Improve the visitor welcome – make improvements to existing car parks so they’re more welcoming to visitors and encourage repeat journeys/visits (55% of high value)
- Support Electric Vehicle users to charge vehicles at Park and Ride and at home (43% of high value)



The changes deemed of **least value to businesses** are:

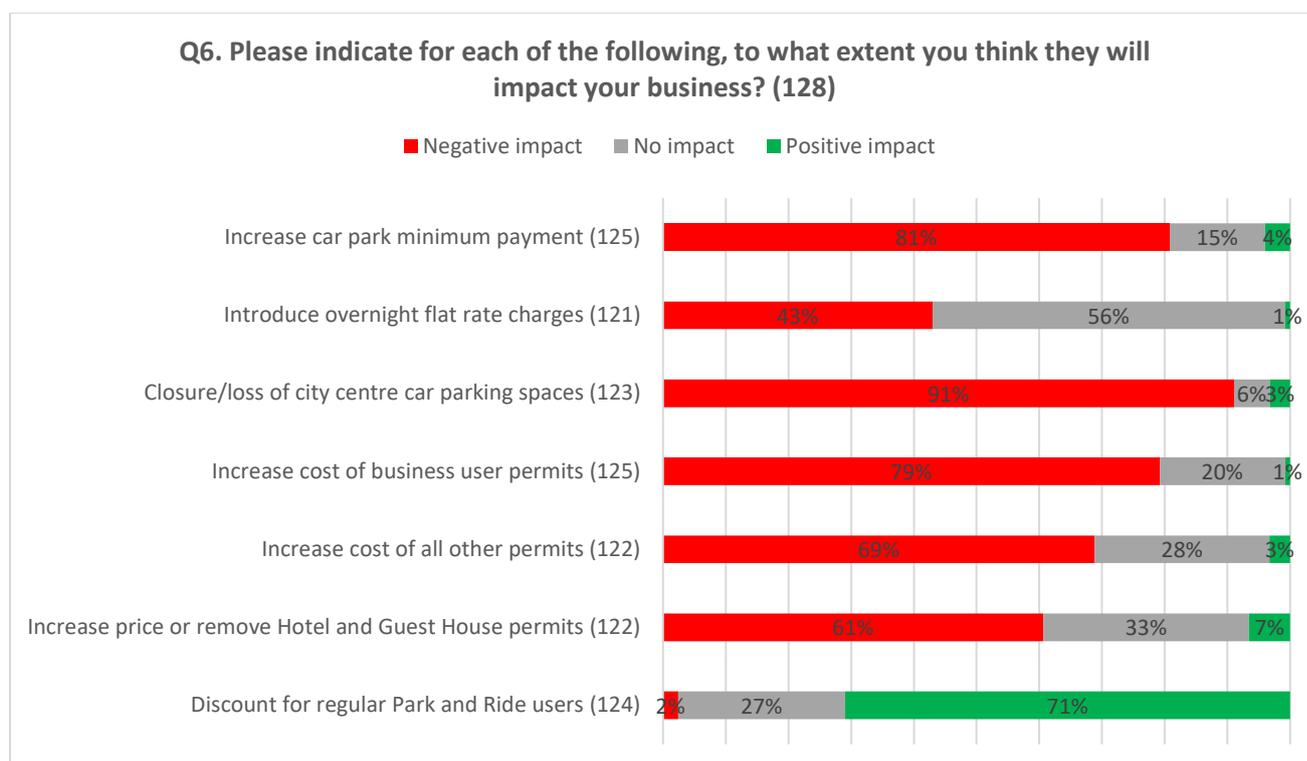
- Apply charges for parking overnight in Canterbury city centre car parks (71% of no value)
- Re-balance parking supply in favour of P&R - close some car parks identified in Local Plan (Hawks Lane business user, Castle Row & half Holmans Meadow) (66% of no value)
- Significantly reduce the number of off-street parking permits available and reduce the level of discount provided (65% of no value)

In terms of those indicating they ‘don’t know’ (excluded from the chart above), the highest level of uncertainty was expressed for ‘Wait for improvements in electric bus technology before implementation of a new electric Park and Ride bus fleet’ with 14 respondents stating they ‘don’t know’, followed by ‘Close Northgate Car Park to enable expansion of the medical centre’ (10 stating ‘don’t know’).

In terms of potential changes to parking, the single proposed change that most respondents believe will have a positive impact on their business is ‘discount for regular Park and Ride users (71% positive impact).

Over half indicate there will be no impact (56%) if ‘introduce overnight flat rate charges’ whilst for each of the remaining changes over half of respondents believe there will be a negative impact on their business.

Nine in ten respondents believe ‘closure/loss of city centre car parking spaces will have a negative impact on their business (91%).



Park and Ride

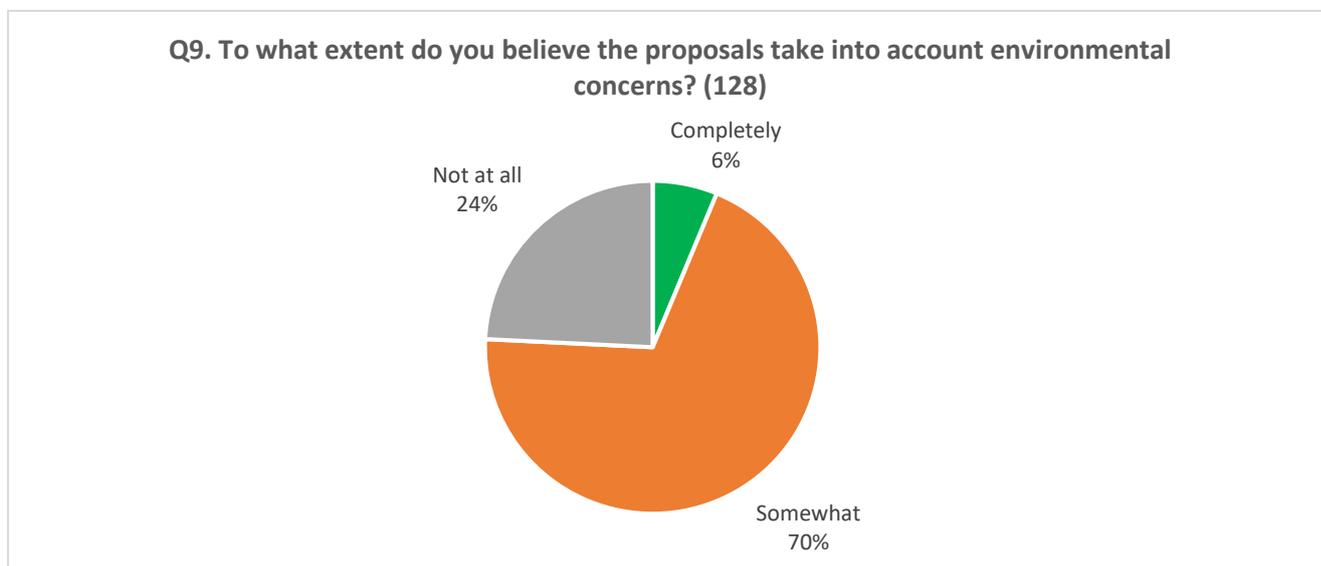
For Park and Ride services, the following elements were ranked in order of importance in terms of delivering an excellent park and ride offering for Canterbury City.

Rank	Items
1	Frequency of buses
2	Opening times
3	Priority bus lanes to reduce congestion
4	Security and lighting
5	Passenger facilities
6	Site layout
7	Integration with other transport e.g. walking, cycling, train
8	Signposting
9	Marketing and promotion

‘Frequency of buses’, ‘opening times’ and ‘priority bus lanes to reduce congestion’ are deemed to be the top three most important features of a successful park and ride service.

Environmental Concerns

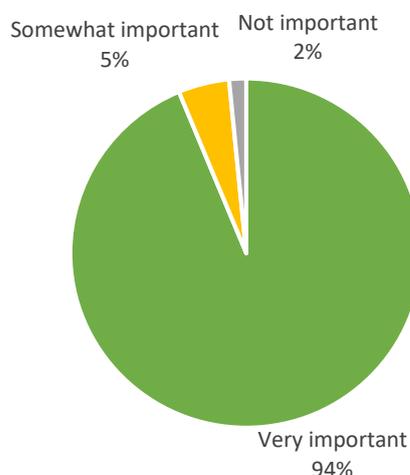
Most respondents believe that the proposals ‘somewhat’ take into account environmental concerns (70%), although a quarter indicate they do ‘not at all’ (24%).



Future Consultations

Overwhelmingly, 94% of respondents believe that it is ‘very important’ that Canterbury businesses are involved in any future consultation on an integrated transport system.

Q8. How important is it that Canterbury businesses are involved in any future consultation on an integrated transport system? (128)



2.2. Feedback from workshop and additional comments

2.2.1. Potential impact of the proposals on the business community

The following issues were identified by participants at the workshop - and people replying directly to CBID - as having a potential impact on their businesses.

Car parking closures

- Some people shop for convenience and want to park, shop and leave quickly
- Particular needs have to be taken into account, for example: people with mobility issues, mothers with pushchairs who can't use park and ride with young children
- Walking and cycling are not practicable for people with mobility issues or shopping
- Canterbury allows disabled drivers to park with blue badges on any double yellow line, adding to traffic congestion
- School traffic is the biggest cause of congestion
- Castle Street multi-storey is not fit for purpose. It's not good or safe enough
- Many staff have to come in an hour earlier to find spaces, find the costs prohibitive in relation to their wages and are not finding it appealing to work in Canterbury
- Many staff – for example, sales, solicitors, accountants, architects – work in the middle of the city but go in and out all day and spend a lot of time looking for parking spaces throughout the day
- Many businesses are considering moving out of the centre and going elsewhere, such as business parks, where there is more, cheaper/free parking

“It roughly costs our business £1000 a day in hours spent looking for a space and parking costs”

“I would suspect it would be likely that our business would have to move out

of town if this is implemented in order to function, creating another empty shopfront and less city centre high street spending as a result.

Our staff spend regular money in the city centre which would be taken away”

Car parking tariffs and charges

- East Kent is quite a deprived area and many people can't afford even a slight increase in charges
- Increased problems regarding cost and availability of parking/transport will mean people will choose to go to other centres with no or lower parking charges (for example, Ashford, Westwood Cross, Bluewater)
- The premium on arriving before 9am is clearly targeted at workers in the City
- Many people need access to offices outside of office hours - early mornings, late evenings and weekends – and public transport doesn't meet these needs

“I currently travel to meetings in London from my Canterbury office about twice a week – I need to use the Station Road West car park as well as Castle Row to work effectively – how will that work if they move onto different parking schemes?”

Park and Ride

- Very few people use the existing park and ride and numbers haven't increased
- It doesn't run on Sundays which is a popular day for visitors to the City (Wincheap Park & Ride)
- It stops running early in the evening so isn't appropriate for people who work late in the service industry or want to spend the evening in the City
- The cost, which is due to increase, puts people off
- Certain areas coming into Canterbury - such as from Faversham, Whitstable and London - are not serviced by park and ride, increasing traffic in the city centre
- Traffic is increased in the city centre by people driving across the city to get to park and ride, to come back into the centre
- It's not appropriate for people carrying heavy/bulky items into work or people with luggage, heavy shopping, mobility issues, mothers with young children and buggies, staff who have to carry goods to their businesses

“I have odd meetings at clients and at the University of Kent which would be inefficient if using park and ride or 'regular' bus services”

Permits

- Increasing the cost of permits will have a negative impact on large conferences and similar, as large numbers of delegates will need parking and may not sign up if this is not available
- Accommodation is already in competition, as people are looking for the cheapest rates, and uptake is significantly lower this year. Taking away hotel parking will mean

hotels will cease to trade. This will have a knock-on effect on restaurants and retail outlets. Guests have luggage so won't use park and ride

"People come Saturday morning, spend the whole day in Canterbury, stay Saturday night, go home Sunday. People are already saying it's going to cost them a lot and are deciding whether it's worth coming"

Public transport

- Not affordable – any increase in prices will make it even less so
- Not reliable or accessible in some remote areas
- Stagecoach dictate how they're going to run and when but this is different to how people want to use the service

General feedback

- Short termism – in the long-term businesses will move out and revenue will decrease
- Traffic congestion and car parking are two different problems
- Other opportunities to increase revenue – for example, encouraging greater footfall through public events/festivals - are not being considered
- The large body of students will be discouraged from staying in Canterbury after graduation, reducing the 'pool' of young people and start-ups
- The current transport and parking issues are increasingly prohibiting the future of inward investment and of the longevity of people's careers in the city
- The main driver for the consultation appears to be raising revenue rather than reducing emissions
- A high percentage of the traffic is passing through, not stopping in Canterbury
- There is no mention of encouraging more cycling or motorcycling
- The plans are not joined up with Traffic or Road Improvement Strategies

Specific examples of potential impact on businesses

The following were given as examples of how the proposals would impact on businesses in Canterbury.

Canterbury Cathedral relies very much on income from visitors. Six hundred of its staff are volunteers and their parking charges are being paid for by the Cathedral which is not sustainable. If they lose their volunteers the Cathedral will be unable to maintain the services offered to visitors. This will significantly affect the tourism economy of Canterbury.

Co-working spaces/office space for business start-ups are available in town but parking is more expensive than the cost of using the spaces and users can't get parking permits.

Residents over 60 are increasingly saying they no longer go into town but either go out to other areas, where there are no parking costs, or don't go out, increasing social isolation.

The Council used to have a voucher system where hotel guests could park for £6 or £1.50

overnight. The Council then stopped the overnight vouchers and are considering increasing the £6 or stopping it completely. Currently guests have to book these when they arrive at the accommodation on an iPad, guided, then have to go and find a space.

“Guests aren’t happy as they still have to find parking after dropping off their luggage. They may have to go to several car parks, so they’re already having a negative experience”

2.2.2. Making the transport and access infrastructure work well for businesses and visitors

The following suggestions were made by business representatives regarding how to address some of their concerns about the proposals.

Car parking closures and tariffs

- Review the money made through parking/parking fines versus the potential overall loss through business, retail etc.
- Look at more options such as convenient cycle parking and motorbike bays
- Designate more car parks for sole business use within the walls for those who need the spaces, for the long-term city centre economy
- Test the need/demand for business parking before closing car parks
- Reduce/adjust rates/tariffs at different periods, based on levels of activity, rather than reducing spaces
- Provide staff parking passes or a reduced tariff, as a form of guaranteed income for CCC (regular confirmed hours)

Park and Ride

- Park and Ride needs to be improved **before** any other changes are made
- **Then**, develop a marketing campaign to encourage use of the new, enhanced, efficient and economically priced system (only then close car parks)
- Increase capacity, extend the hours to encourage more Sunday and evening visitors, and provide on routes that meet demand
- Install more bus lanes to make the park and ride quicker
- Reduce, rather than increase the cost, to encourage greater use
- Encourage schools and bus providers to use park and ride facilities
- Consider banning through traffic between 8 and 9 am
- Consider the ‘purchase and collect scheme’ where shopping could be shuttled to the park and ride
- Provide park and ride facilities at all four major entry points to the city to reduce travel across the city (for example, traffic from Harbledown)

Traffic

- Assess the percentage of traffic and congestion that is just passing-through traffic and explore/create alternative routes to reach their destinations

- Reduce congestion caused by disabled drivers parking on double yellow lines by repurposing parking bays in central car parks

Transport

- Increase subsidising of public transport to support carbon reduction
- Work with Stagecoach to improve public transport; review the use of shuttle buses
- Make more buses available to provide a more regular service
- Work with schools and bus services to use the park and ride as a drop off
- Coordinate rail and bus travel so, for example, school buses call at the rail stations, reducing the number of cars

The proposals overall

- Congestion and parking are two separate issues, to be looked at separately
- The Council needs to work with businesses to think through some of the issues and consider more practical solutions before making the proposed changes
- Changes need to reflect the population profile, tourists' requirements and the issues that are unique to Canterbury
- Explore ways of changing behaviour through incentives, reducing as well as increasing charges
- Involve Kent County Council so there's a joint road, traffic and parking strategy and link to other policies and strategies

3. Conclusion

The feedback from local businesses through the engagement activities outlined above shows that the business community in Canterbury has significant concerns regarding the Council's proposals to change parking arrangements. These concerns will be submitted to the Council in response to its consultation on the proposed changes, for consideration by councillors early 2020.

CBID will be attending the Council's Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 5 February 2020 to share some of the issues raised and has suggested that some business representatives also attend. CBID are keen to ensure that this feedback is seriously considered by the Council before it proceeds, so that Canterbury businesses can be reassured that these changes will not undermine their ability to operate within the City Council boundary.

It was also proposed that CBID ask Committee members to meet with business representatives before the Committee meeting, to discuss the key points face to face and explore other possible approaches.