

Canterbury Business Community's Response to Canterbury City Council's consultation on proposed changes to charges and conditions in Council car parks

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

Canterbury City Council (CCC) is seeking to make a number of changes to charges and conditions in Council car parks and is currently consulting the public on these proposals. 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 are heard, as part of the consultation.

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

1.2. Involving Canterbury's business community - methodology

A short survey was conducted online which ran from 30th November to 21st December 2020.

An online workshop was held on 9th December with representation from Canterbury businesses, to gain their views on the proposed changes.

Businesses were also invited to provide comments/feedback directly to CBID.

1.3. Key feedback themes

1.3.1 Survey

- The majority of survey respondents are based in the city centre (94%) – two are from outside the city centre. 74% are independent businesses and 61% have been trading for 11 years or more in Canterbury city
- The vast majority of respondents believe the proposals will put their business either **at some or great risk** (94%)
- The proposed changes deemed to be **of most value** to businesses are:
 - Investigate the most appropriate ways to offer parking discounts on certain days (or parts of the day) in order to attract customers into our towns and city (59% high value, 20% medium value)
 - Investigate the most appropriate way to offer parking discounts linked to a minimum spend in stores and restaurants etc. (41% high value, 28% medium value)
- The proposed changes deemed to be of **least/no value to businesses**:
 - Reduce the free parking period in public car parks from 3 hours to 2 hours for blue badge holders (50% no value, 30% low value)

- Amend the overnight charge so that it becomes a £2 cap once the usual hourly rate charge has reached this amount, rather than an additional £2 flat rate charge (37% no value, 28% low value)
- The **decreases in tariffs** proposed (Station Road West, Holman’s Meadow, Castle Street) are deemed to have a **positive impact** by at least half the respondents
- The **increases in hourly tariffs** proposed are deemed to have a **negative impact** by over half of respondents (highest for Watling Street car park - 69% negative impact)
- The proposed **changes to Park & Ride hours** are deemed to have a **negative impact** by 59% of respondents and the **increase to the Park & Ride tariff** is deemed a **negative impact** by 67% of respondents
- The **car parks of greatest importance** to businesses are:
 - Watling Street
 - Whitefriars
 - St Radigunds
 - Pound Lane
- Almost half the respondents do not believe the proposals take into account **environmental concerns** (48% not at all) and 38% believe they somewhat do
- 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

Proposed changes – issues and concerns

- There needs to be better signposting and information about parking options and tariffs
- Many people will still park for convenience rather than price
- Consideration could usefully be given to making the differential between high and low demand car parks bigger
- Concerns that the overnight charge might further disadvantage hotels, guest houses and B&Bs that have lost significant income this year, due to the pandemic
- Concerns about how the Kingsmead development might impact on city centre shops and hotels
- High quality, high performing public transport is inextricably linked to car park charges and they should be considered together
- Parking, congestion and air pollution have to be addressed within the wider infrastructure context, including public transport

Incentives

- There was strong consensus that the best use of the incentive money would be a targeted campaign around particular days/times of the year/events, as well as free parking from 6pm in the evenings in Summer (possibly in just some car parks)
- There was also strong support for parking discounts linked to spend and how this might be done electronically

- Based on last year's feedback - that Park & Ride isn't considered fit for purpose or working as well as it could – it was considered that incentives would be used more effectively on car parking
- Any changes made should take into account local residents' needs
- The changes need to take into consideration the wider infrastructure, particularly the availability and use of public transport
- Incentives should enable people to stay out in the evenings and get home safely
- Staff working hours and their safety should be taken into account
- It will be critical to ensure that, however the incentives are used, they don't disadvantage people who have less/little money

1.4. Conclusion

Feedback from local businesses through the engagement activities outlined above shows that the business community in Canterbury have concerns regarding the Council's proposals and the potential impact on their businesses.

Feedback regarding potential use of incentive money strongly advocates exploring in more detail the potential for creating an innovative, targeted campaign to attract people into the city on specific days, times and events.

These concerns and suggestions will be submitted to the Council in response to its consultation on the proposed changes.

CBID will invite CCC to meet with business representatives to continue discussions regarding how to make the best use of the incentives to maximum benefit to people in the district and city employees.

These discussions will also explore how local businesses and CBID can support CCC in engaging with KCC regarding the wider infrastructure discussion.

CCC's public consultation ends on 11th January and the CCC Budget and Policy Committee is being held on 8th February when decisions regarding the proposals will be made. Changes will be implemented on 1st April 2021.

CBID will be attending the Council's Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 8th February 2021, online, to share some of the issues raised and has asked that some business representatives join them.

2. Detailed feedback

2.1. Survey Results

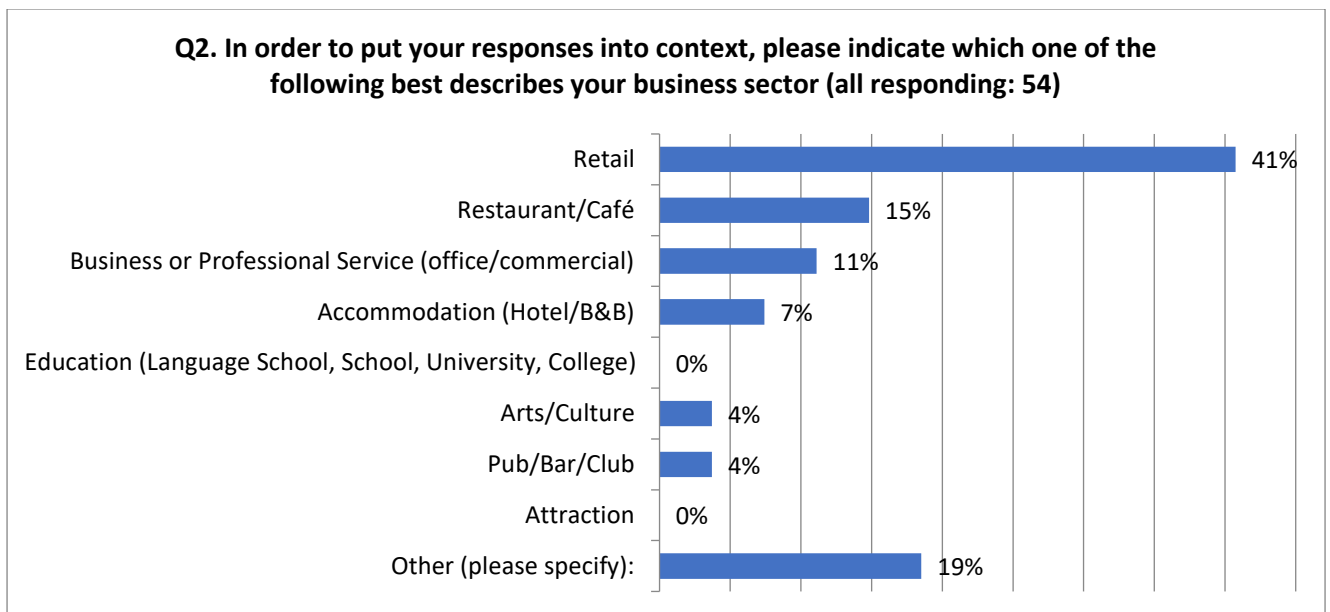
The survey was conducted online from 30th November to 21st December 2020 (survey questionnaire is at Appendix A).

Q1: Business location

The vast majority of respondents are *based in the city centre* (CT1 postcode area) (51) and 1 respondent is based in CT2 postcode area with a further 2 indicating CT4 postcode area (postcodes are at Appendix B).

Q2: Business sector

Two-fifths of respondents *classify their business sector* as ‘Retail’ (41%) as shown below. ‘Restaurant/café’ accounts for 15% of respondents, followed by ‘Business or Professional Service (office/commercial)’ (11%). Other mentions include ‘beauty/hair, ‘events space/management’, ‘place of worship’ and ‘bus operator’.



Q3: Business classification

Three-quarters of respondents classify their business as an ‘Independent’ (74%) and 26% as a ‘National Chain (including Franchises)’.

Q4: Business length of service

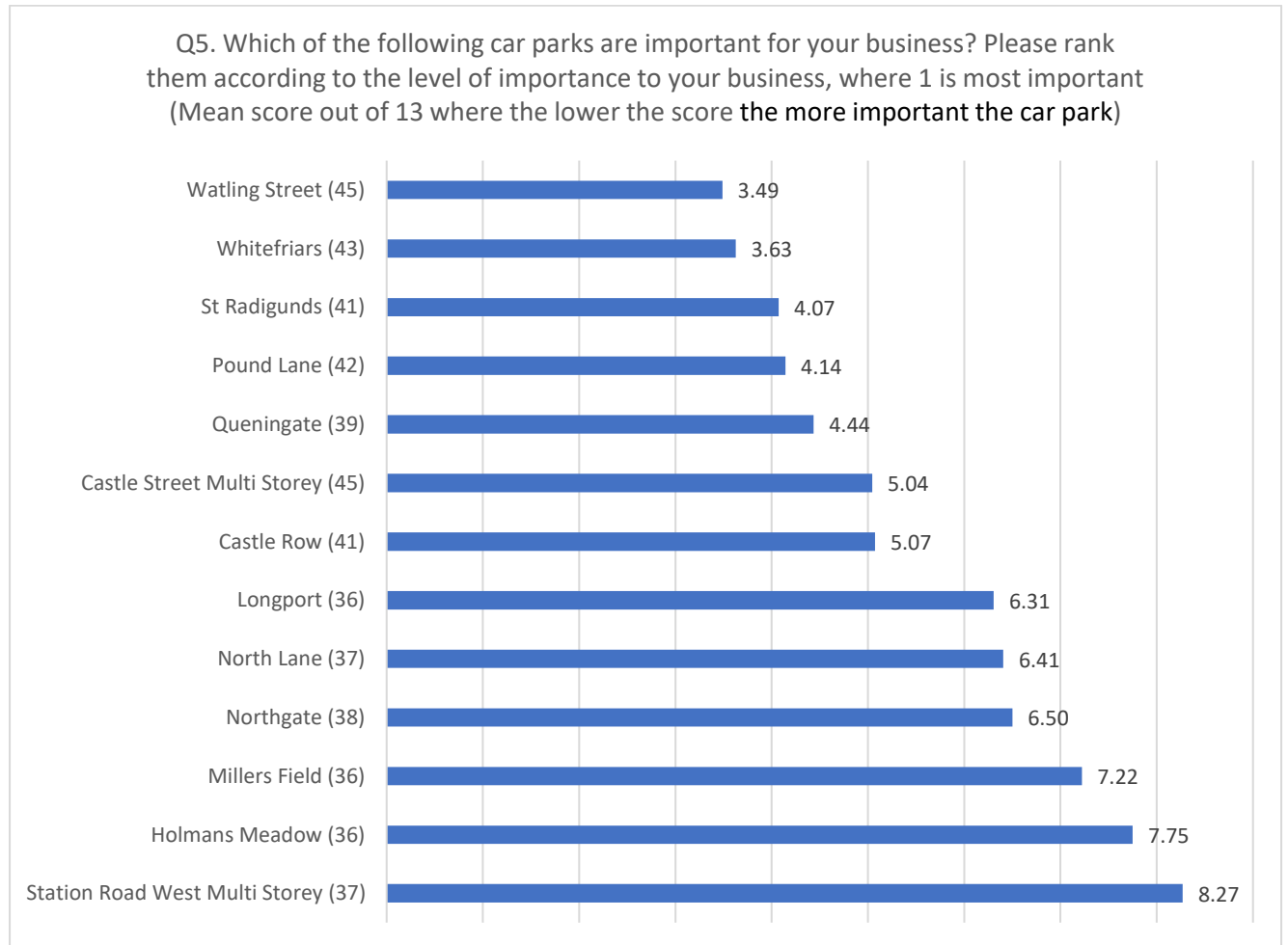
In terms of *how long they have been trading in the city*, three-fifths indicate they have been trading for 11 years or more (61%). A further 22% have been trading for 6-10 years as shown below.



Q5: Importance of car parks to your business

Watling Street car park and Whitefriars car park are deemed most important overall with a weighted mean score of 3.49 and 3.63 respectively out of 13. Followed by St Radigunds (4.07) and Pound Lane (4.14).

Of least importance is Station Road West Multi-Storey (8.27) and Holmans Meadow (7.75).



Q6: Impact on your business

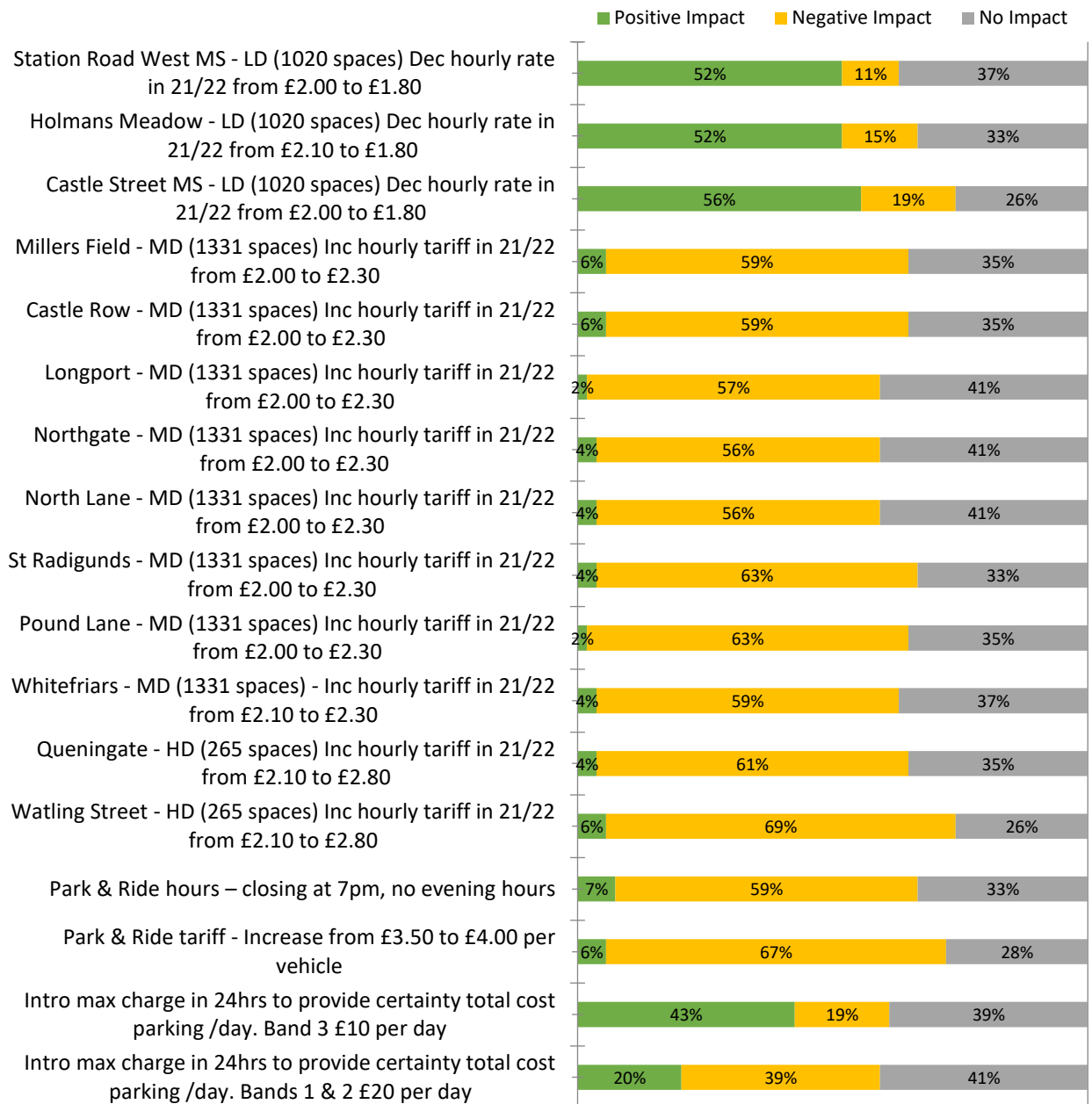
Respondents to the survey were informed that:

“Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) car park data has shown that some car parks are more popular than others which suggests that a different ‘demand based’ tariff approach could be beneficial in:

- a. Maximising the efficient use of parking supply by redistributing demand to car parks that have spare capacity*
- b. Reducing congestion and traffic delays that occur at the busiest car parks*
- c. Encouraging greater use of Park & Ride”*

The following chart shows the likely impact proposed changes will have on business overall.

Q6. The council are proposing the following changes to achieve the aims. To what extent do you think your business will be impacted by the changes overall? (all responding: 54)



As shown in the chart above, each of the three **decreases in tariffs** proposed (Station Road West, Holman’s Meadow, Castle Street) are deemed to have a positive impact by at least half the respondents.

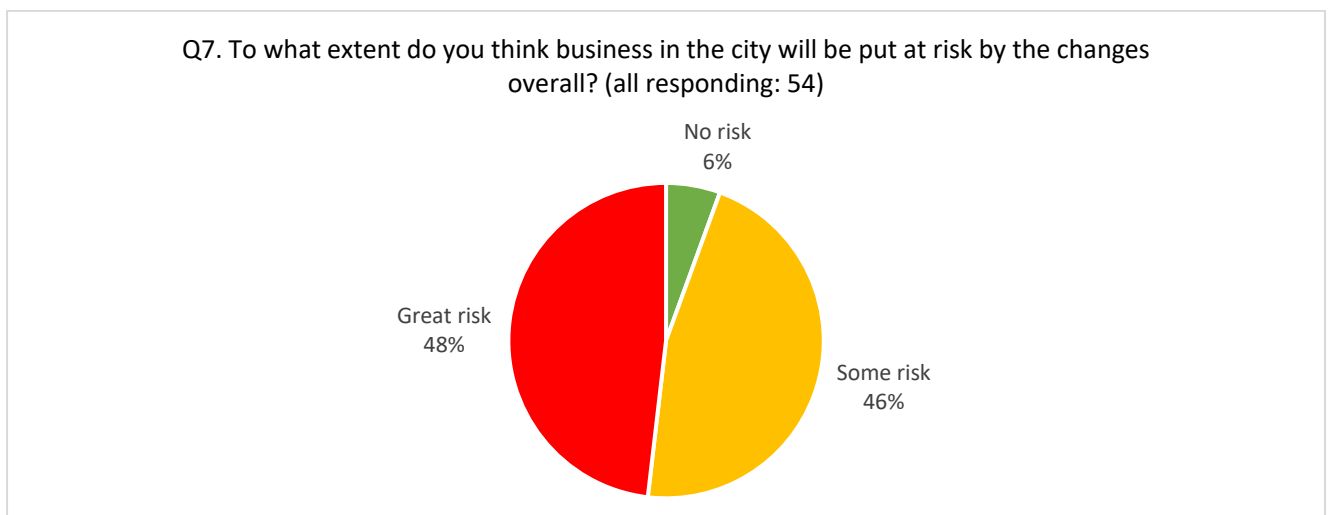
The car parks where **increases in hourly tariffs** are proposed are deemed to have a negative impact by over half of respondents (highest for Watling Street car park 69% negative impact).

The proposed *changes to Park & Ride hours* are deemed to have a negative impact by 59% of respondents and the *increase to the Park & Ride tariff* is deemed a negative impact by 67% of respondents.

The introduction of a *maximum charge in any 24 hour period* (Band 3 £10 per day and Bands 1&2 £20 per day) are deemed to have a positive impact by 43% and 20% of respondents respectively.

Q7: Business Risk

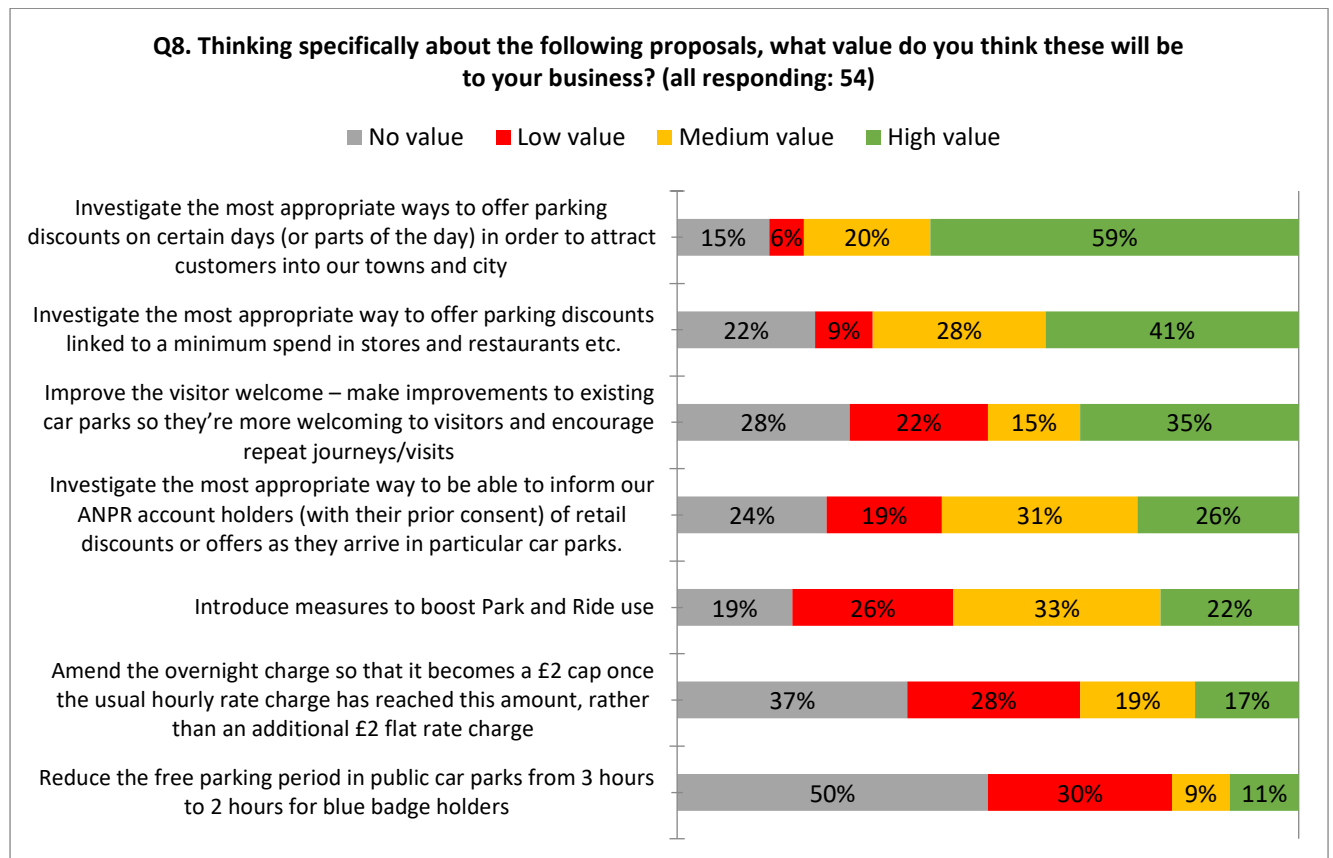
Almost half of respondents believe that the proposed changes overall will put business in the city at 'great risk' (48%). A further 46% believe there will be 'some risk'.



Q8: Value of proposed changes to your business

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

- Investigate the most appropriate ways to offer parking discounts on certain days (or parts of the day) in order to attract customers into our towns and city (59% of high value, 20% medium value)
- Investigate the most appropriate way to offer parking discounts linked to a minimum spend in stores and restaurants etc. (41% of high value, 28% medium value)



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

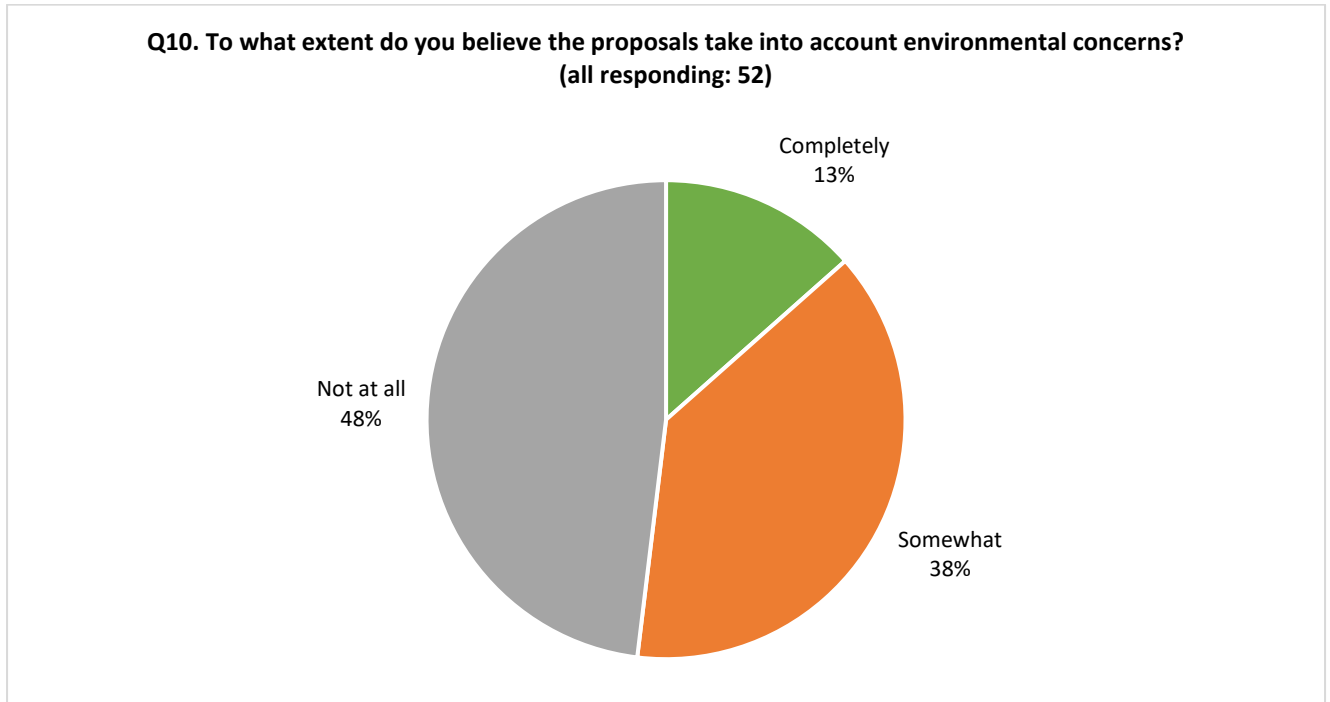
- Reduce the free parking period in public car parks from 3 hours to 2 hours for blue badge holders (50% of no value, 30% low value)
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Q9: Future consultations

The vast majority of businesses indicate that it is 'very important' that Canterbury businesses are involved in any future consultation on an integrated transport system (98%) with the remaining 2% (1 respondent) indicating it is not important.

Q10: Environmental concerns

Almost half the respondents believe that the proposals ‘do not at all’ take into account environmental concerns (48%), with 38% indicating they ‘somewhat’ take into account environmental concerns.



2.2. Workshop

2.2.1. Introduction and proposed changes

An online workshop was held on 9th December, with representation from Canterbury businesses (participant list is at Appendix C) to gain their views on the proposed changes.

Lorraine Denoris, independent facilitator, introduced the session and Lisa Carlson, Chief Executive, CBID, explained that the purpose of the survey and workshop was to gain the views of as many local businesses as possible on the proposed changes.

Richard Moore, Canterbury City Council, provided an overview of the proposed changes (Appendix D) and how these had had to be revisited due to the changes in the Council’s financial position, caused by the pandemic. The intention is to reduce prices where there is less demand and increase charges where there is greater demand, to try and influence where people park and reduce congestion. There would only be £1 differential per hour between the car parks. It’s proposed to increase Park & Ride tariff from £3.50 to £4, to reduce the subsidy which will remove negative thoughts about it being paid through council tax. This is still competitive compared to other tourist areas outside of Kent.

2.2.2. Discussion regarding the proposed changes

The key discussion points and questions regarding the proposed changes are outlined below.

Informing businesses and the public

There was some discussion about the ways in which people could be signposted to other parking options especially during busy periods. Whilst some people will continue to go to the one most convenient for them, there was a view it was worth developing ways in which drivers might be presented with alternatives.

This information appears on CCC's website but there was agreement that this could be better promoted, working with local organisations and CBID. Greater use of the less popular car parks could have a significant impact.

Clearer, earlier advertising is needed so that people are aware of cheaper options before committing to a car park. It was suggested that CCC could put banners up in the key car parks outlining the lower costs in other car parks and make use of public information boards. It was noted that variable message signs around the city, owned by KCC, need an upgrade and some investment so they can display accurate information. There are also free text signs on the outskirts which could be used.

Variable tariffs

A participant asked for the total and individual capacity of the car parks. Figures can be found in the attached Policy Committee paper - open to the public and dated 11 November 2020 (Appendix E).

It was suggested that the tariffs could be altered so that car parks with high demand could be raised even more, and those with lower and middle demand could be lowered, making the differential much bigger. This approach had minimal support at CCC at this time but would be reviewed next year.

There was some surprise that Whitefriars isn't in the top band, as it is really expensive, busy and often congested. Participants were advised that, in terms of demand, Queningate and Watling Street car parks are full every day whilst that is not the case for Whitefriars.

Overnight charge

Participants suggested that a review of the overnight tariff might be timely, as hotels and guest houses/B&Bs have suffered significantly due to Covid related lost business. This concern was compounded by a risk to post-Brexit business and tourism.

Participants were informed that Councillors accept that hotels and the hospitality sector have suffered significantly this year and that, whilst CCC is still planning to raise this to £10 in 2021, there were no plans for any further price hikes. Visitors to the city might be put off by a high hourly rate so CCC considered it more appropriate to set a maximum overnight charge. People parking in the Band 1 and 2 car parks will pay a maximum of £20 a day and £10 in Band 3. Hotel and guest house guests will only pay maximum £10, with vouchers

Impact of Kingsmead development

The impact of the Kingsmead development that is outside the centre was a cause of some concern, particularly the potential displacement of trade from the centre to the outskirts and subsequent parking availability. CCC were currently forecasting a medium band demand, comparable to Whitefriars.

Public transport

Concern was raised that it was difficult to discuss parking, congestion and air pollution without considering public transport. There would be less resistance from businesses if there were other ways for people to get into the city. Parking prices become more of a problem when there aren't appropriate public transport alternatives.

Participants were advised that this wasn't under CCC's control, but that they could influence the planning through the transport strategy. District and county councils need to talk together about incentives and public transport issues.

It was confirmed that parking permits (and on-street parking on the outskirts of town), will also increase.

2.2.3. Discussion regarding the suggested incentives

Participants were informed that £50,000 has been put aside for incentives. However, this could be spent quite quickly without having a significant impact on attracting people to the city, so a range of potential options were offered (Appendix F) for wider discussion and ideas.

Park & Ride

There was discussion about how Park & Ride could be used on certain days or for certain events, such as Christmas evening shopping. This would need to be thought through and planned in advance and advertised widely. This could be a good use of the fund if it was a good experience, if buses were regular and not stuck in traffic. Feedback suggests that this is not however the case, and there are concerns about people's safety particularly at night.

Park & Ride sites are relatively close to the city, but the hours aren't helpful. Theatre audiences all leave at the same time, in large numbers, so it's not practical. The demographics also show that this isn't an audience that wants to get on public transport late at night and would rather walk to a car park.

For people who work in the city it may be the only option – although it doesn't accommodate all staff shifts and may not be the best way of using the incentive.

Targeted days/evenings/events

It was suggested that there could be a reduced price for parking on, for example, Sundays and other days/times when the City would want to encourage people into the city.

A good way of using the incentive would be for targeted events, such as late-night Christmas shopping, switching on Christmas lights and evening shopping. The Open Golf event was also suggested, as people that go to that are high income visitors and “high spenders”. This could be a really useful campaign.

There was some consensus that incentives need to address ways of encouraging people back in the early and late evenings, even if the focus was just on particular days in the year.

Employee discounts

It was suggested that there should be a discount for employees who work in the high street and/or a reduced Park & Ride fee, although again it was noted that current timetables won’t meet the needs of all staff. It was noted that there is an incentive whereby regular users get a discount – use four times a month provides the fifth journey free of charge.

Around 300 volunteers help run the cathedral, so these need to be included in any incentives for ‘staff’. The cathedral refunds car parking for around 50 volunteers. If CCC keeps increasing the tariff in car parks near the cathedral it won’t be able to continue with the refund. If Park & Ride was extended it might help, as some live outside of the city.

It was suggested that the first half hour could be free in low demand car parks. This would be helpful for brief local visits and support the local those community rather than tourists. The counter argument to this was that people just coming into the city for half hour just adds to congestion and poor air quality, so local people need to think about other ways of getting into town, such as cycling or walking.

Discounted promotions - ANPR

ANPR gives discount to account holders who are mainly staff and residents, so this could be an incentive for them. Participants discussed how this could be used more widely and how this could be enabled. If, for example, a business is having a sale, they could target their offers to particular account holders, although there would need to be some form of consent to use their data.

CCC has thousands of ANPR customers who are potentially retail customers and have given consent for their data to be captured. They could be asked to tick that they’re happy to receive information about what’s on offer in the city.

Participants discussed how to link with ANPR technology to provide a discount to customers. They were advised that, at point of sale, retailers would need to issue a QR code to the customer and there would need to be a set limit of how much the discount would be against how much was spent. The process could be very unwieldy.

It was suggested that another option would be to give retailers a tablet and the customer would go to, for example, a customer service and a discount would be automatic but not many retailers would be large enough to do this.

CCC has some software technicians looking at this but they hadn’t come up with a solution yet. Whatever discount system is identified it will be quite intricate and GDPR requirements would also need to be addressed.

One participant said they used tablets for allergen guides within stores and suggested that there might be an opportunity using existing equipment. The software is web-based, so could be used in different settings.

There was concern that if discounts are linked to the amount spent, people who have less disposable income would benefit less.

2.3. Individual feedback

Businesses were also invited to provide comments/feedback directly to CBID. Feedback from the CEO of the Digital Tourism Think Tank can be found at Appendix G.

3. Conclusion

Feedback from local businesses through the engagement activities outlined above, shows that the business community in Canterbury have concerns regarding the Council's latest parking proposals and the potential impact on their businesses.

Feedback regarding potential use of incentive money strongly advocates exploring in more detail, the potential for creating an innovative, targeted campaign to attract people into the city on specific days, times and events.

These concerns and suggestions will be submitted to the Council in response to its consultation on the proposed changes.

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