

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

14 November 2024

Trial reduction in Car Park Charges

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio: Cllr J Andrews, Place Commissioned Services

Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Executive Director: Jan Britton, Executive Lead for Place

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Report Status: Part Exempt Para 3 Appendix 2

Brief Summary: Between 1 July and 31 October 2024, a trial of reduced car park tariffs took place in three level 3 car parks. A review of the impact of this temporary change has been requested by the Scrutiny Chair and Vice-Chair.

A number of factors influence where people choose to park. Particularly for seaside locations, these factors include the weather and the price to stay in the car park.

The data for the review forecasts that income from parking payments directly at Dorset Council's car parks (in the towns where the trials took place) will reduce by £263k during the trial. Overall numbers of vehicles parking in those towns' car parks remained broadly constant when compared to the previous year's data.

The data shows an increase in the number of vehicles parking in the car parks where the tariffs had been reduced during the trial. At an individual car park level this did not balance the loss of income from the reduced tariff. The increase in visitors at the trial car parks is offset by the reduction in visitors to the nearby car parks that weren't part of the trial.

Recommendation: The committee are asked to review the information as shown in this report about the effects of the trial.

Reason for Recommendation: By request of Scrutiny Chair and Vice-Chair.

1. Report

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 From 28 April 2023, the parking tariffs for level 3 locations were increased as part of the annual budgetary process.
- 1.1.2 At Full Council on 13 July 2023, a petition was submitted by Mr Sims-Duff asking to reduce the new charges to match those of other Dorset Council towns. Full Council agreed to refer the debate about parking charges to Cabinet.
- 1.1.3 At Cabinet on 5 September 2023, the decision was made to review the charges at Scrutiny Committee at a later date in the 2023/2024 financial year.
- 1.1.4 On 3 May 2024, following local elections, a review of the parking tariffs with an aim to support Dorset residents and businesses was requested.
- 1.1.5 An operational review paper was written, with options for change and the forecast cost of each included.
- 1.1.6 From this review paper, the decision was made to implement a trial reduction of tariffs in three level 3 car parks: West Bay Road in West Bay, Charmouth Road in Lyme Regis and Swannery in Weymouth.
- 1.1.7 Legal advice was sought to ensure that the process for implementing the trial did not contravene Dorset Council's Rules of Procedure.
- 1.1.8 On 18 June 2024 an Executive Decision Notice detailing the trial was signed by Cllr Jon Andrews, Cabinet Member for Place Services.
- 1.1.9 On 1 July 2024, a trial of a reduced car park tariffs commenced in the three level 3 car parks as listed above.
- 1.1.10 The trial finished on 31 October 2024.

1.2 Trial Review

- 1.2.1 When analysing the effects of the reduced tariff, the following have been looked at: income in the relevant car parks, and in towns and across Dorset, the number of transactions, average payments and

weather. Currently data is available for July to September, so this report looks at this period. Once October's data is available, it will be reviewed again.

Income – details shown in figures 1,2,3,4,5, and 6 of appendix 2

At individual car parks, when comparing to last year's income from July to September, there has been a reduction of £43,000 in Charmouth Road, Lyme Regis; £84,000 in Swannery, Weymouth; and £34,000 in West Bay Road, West Bay giving a total of £161,000. The forecast percentage drop in the car parks was 40% but the actual drop was 30%, so slightly better than predicted.

Across the 3 towns, there has been a reduction in income in all Dorset Council car parks in the July to September period when compared to last year: reductions of £36,000 in Lyme Regis, £89,000 in Weymouth and £53,000 in West Bay. Although there are other factors that affect this, the most probable reason for the majority of the reduction has been the cheaper parking prices.

At a county wide level, there has been a reduction of income in all car parks of 3.3%. In tier 3 car parks, it has reduced by 11%.

Transactions – details in figures 7,8, and 9 of appendix 2.

In individual car parks there has been a small increase in transaction numbers across July to September in the 3 affected car parks.

Charmouth Road (Lyme Regis) had an increase of 1.6%, Swannery (Weymouth) had an increase of 3.7% and West Bay Road (West Bay) had a 13.8% increase.

This increase in transactions did not correspond to an increase of transactions across the towns, where they were on average down by 1.6% from last year.

In the case of Weymouth and Lyme Regis, the reduced tariff car parks were not the ones with the biggest increase in transactions. There was a bigger percentage increase in Broad Street, Lyme Regis and Harbourside, Weymouth.

Average payment/dwell time – details in figure 10 of appendix 2.

Average payments have not changed significantly from last year when the reduction in tariff is taken into consideration. The average payment still relates to a dwell time of about 2-3 hours.

Weather – details in figure 11 of appendix 2.

To help show the effects that weather has on parking income, weather data for the last three years included. Over the last two years, there has been a decrease in sunshine hours and an increase in rain. This year there has been nearly three times as much rain as was experienced in 2022.

Summary

The tariff change has seen a reduction of income by £161,000 so far over the last three months in the car parks affected. It's probable that the reduction in those towns was predominantly down to the tariff reduction. There has not been a significant increase in transactions in the affected car parks and any movement appears to be a movement of users in other local car parks rather than an increase in overall visitor numbers.

- 1.2.2 During the trial, a survey was conducted. The results of the data gathered, and analysis can be found in appendix 3.

The survey was directed at two separate groups: customers of the reduced tariff car parks and local businesses near to the reduced tariff car parks.

Summary of customer feedback.

336 customers responded to the survey with a good split across the 3 car parks. 62% of the people who responded came from out of county, but a promising 71% of them were aware of the permits that we offer.

57% of customers said that parking costs influenced the decision to visit and 86% said that they would visit more often if the charges were cheaper. 88% said that they would stay longer if the charges were cheaper.

52% would have liked the charges to be reduced more but 44% were happy with the reduced level.

69% said they would spend more time and money in the towns if charges were less and over 50% think that car parks are cheaper in other areas.

62% said that weather did not affect their decision to visit, which is surprising. This may have been driven by asking the opinion of those visitors during poor weather.

Business owners

There were 47 responses to this survey with a good split between towns and a good variety of businesses.

Over 50% of business thought there were fewer visitors this year, but 55% felt the trial had a positive impact on trade.

Business owners did feel that weather had an impact on trade with over 70% thinking it had at least some impact.

The survey activity had not closed at the stage of writing the report and further analysis needs to be carried out once it has. We will need to check the context that questions were answered in, and the size of the response in relation to visitor numbers.

The analyses given both for parking data and survey results should be treated as interim only until final data has been received and time has been given to analysing it fully.

2. Legal

- 2.1 On the basis that changes to the tariff for 3 car parks were part of a temporary trial for 3 months (and not a policy or permanent change), with a financial impact of less than £500,000 and were not considered to be significant in terms of effects on communities living or working in the areas the decision was not considered to be a Key Decision. The operational decision by the Cabinet Member for Place Services was taken in accordance with the delegated authority for Cabinet Members set out in Article 6 (and its Annex) within Dorset Council's constitution.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Overall transaction numbers including other nearby car parks have not significantly varied, and the movement to the reduced tariff car parks appears to be at the detriment to other car parks. If it is assumed (until the final trial data is available) there would have been same number of transactions had the tariffs remained at the original summer rate, then the total income reduction is likely to be £263000. If car park usage levels remained the same as 2023, then the budget impact was estimated to be an income reduction of £276000. This was based on the average

customer spend in each of the three reduced car parks being deducted from the income received for the same period in 2023.

- 3.2 Price isn't the only factor that determines car park income. Car parking usage is also variable from one year to the next due to seasonal and weather patterns. A wet spring and poor summer can significantly decrease overall income. Consequently, the actual budget impact has been closely monitored.

It is expected that the 3 car parks affected will be £179,000 down in comparison to last year's income. The actual reduction in income has been £161,000 to the end of September 2024 in the car parks affected with one month left to run.

There are a lot of factors that have affected income in the car parks this year and there is no certainty over what people's behaviour would have been if prices had not been reduced. The actual true loss can only be estimated from the data that we have to date to be between £179000 and £263000.

4. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 4.1 The overall vision of the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) includes creating sustainable travel patterns which involves providing a greater choice of realistic alternatives to the car. There is also a focus on setting parking policies in town centres that consider the impact on local economies, and which encourage long stay commuters to use public transport alternatives.
- 4.2 The aim is to promote sustainable access to visitor attractions and developing transport facilities, such as the Park & Ride in Weymouth and Purbeck (park & train) in Corfe Castle.

5. Well-being and Health Implications

- 5.1 The trial parking charges will help improve health and wellbeing by supporting the reduction of cost pressures for Dorset residents and businesses.

6. Other Implications

None.

7. Risk Assessment

- 7.1 The risk that needs to be assessed is whether a reduction in parking charges will affect Parking Service's ability to cover the Highways costs that have been budgeted for this financial year.

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

8. Equalities Impact Assessment

Not applicable.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Executive Decision Notice
Appendix 2: Financial and transaction tables – Exempt paragraph 3
Appendix 3: Parking trial survey analysis

10. Background Papers

None.

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Date of Decision | 18 June 2024 |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet Member for Place Services |
| Designation | Place commissioned services |
| Decision: | <p>To trial the reduction of charges in three car parks, one in each of the main coastal towns that have tier three charges. The charges will reduce from peak rates to off peak rates, from 1 July through to the 31 October 2024.</p> <p>1st April to 31st October (peak)</p> <p>Up to 30 minutes £1.50 Up to 1 hour £3 Up to 2 hours £4.50 Up to 3 hours £6 Up to 4 hours £7.50 Up to 10 hours £15</p> <p>1st November to 31st March (off peak)</p> <p>Up to 30 minutes £0.80 Up to 1 hour £1.50 Up to 2 hours £2.30 Up to 3 hours £3.30 Up to 4 hours £5.30 Up to 10 hours £9</p> <p>The car park affected are:- Swannery – Weymouth West Bay Road – West Bay Charmouth Road – Lyme Regis</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>To extend the short stay permit in Dorset Council car parks from 2 to 3 hrs. Existing terms and conditions apply.</p> |
| <p>Reasons for the decision</p> | <p>The Council is trialling a reduction in charges following the concerns raised by local communities and businesses. It will help us to understand the impact that the increase in charges in 2023 has made to occupancy and length of stay in car parks. This increase was introduced during the 2023 budget setting process and implemented on 28 April 2023 as part of the fees and charges increases. It will also help make a case for using charging to drive behaviour, moving users from the town centre car parks to ones further out.</p> <p>This decision is taken in accordance with the delegated authority for Cabinet Members set out in Article 6 (and its Annex) within Dorset Council's constitution.</p> <p>The reason for this not being a key decision is that the financial impact is less than £500k for this financial year and it does not have a significant effect on multiple wards.</p> |
| <p>Alternative options considered and rejected</p> | <p>Reducing all tier three car parks to off peak prices – the financial implications of this would be beyond what could be covered in the financial year.</p> <p>Reducing all or some tier three car parks to tier two prices – this would mean a larger change to signs, orders and systems and would not be possible in a timely manner to make an impact on this summer.</p> <p>Reducing tier three car parks to 2022 prices - this would mean a larger change to signs, orders and systems and would not be possible in a timely manner to make an impact on this summer.</p> |

| | <p>The rationale for the trial is to understand the impact through evidence of occupancy, impact on the highway network in addition to the financial impact set out in the budget implications.</p> | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|----------------------|----------|---------|---------------|--------|----------------|--------|--|---------|
| <p>Consultees</p> | <p>Matthew Piles, Corporate Director Economic Growth and Infrastructure</p> <p>Michael Westwood, Service Manager for Parking Services</p> <p>Local ward members for Melcombe Regis, Bridport, Lyme Regis and Charmouth.</p> | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Budget Implications</p> | <p>Decrease in budget estimated to be £276,259.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>From 1st July Change</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Swannery</td> <td>144,133</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Bay Road</td> <td>61,007</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Charmouth Road</td> <td>71,118</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>276,259</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The budgetary impact will be mitigated by savings identified elsewhere (£100k lead member allowances) and with the balance made up from income and operational efficiencies across the Place Directorate.</p> <p><i>Explanatory update: At the meeting of the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 30 July 2024 members considered an item about the trial reduction in car parking. The committee established that the £100,000 saving identified in this decision notice from removing lead member allowances was incorrect and that the saving was £60,000. An assurance was sought by the committee and provided by officers that the correct figure would be published, hence this explanatory update to the decision notice</i></p> | | From 1st July Change | Swannery | 144,133 | West Bay Road | 61,007 | Charmouth Road | 71,118 | | 276,259 |
| | From 1st July Change | | | | | | | | | | |
| Swannery | 144,133 | | | | | | | | | | |
| West Bay Road | 61,007 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Charmouth Road | 71,118 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 276,259 | | | | | | | | | | |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| | This is an operational decision and is not a fundamental change to budget framework. The overall council budget will not be impacted. The decision is for a 'pilot' rather than a permanent change. |
| Legal Implications | N/A |
| Any Conflict of Interest? | N/A |
| Reference Documents | N/A |

Publication date: 18/06/2024

General Survey

Car parking charges trial

<https://consultation.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/c-e/dcd14c64>

This report was created on Wednesday 30 October 2024 at 09:48

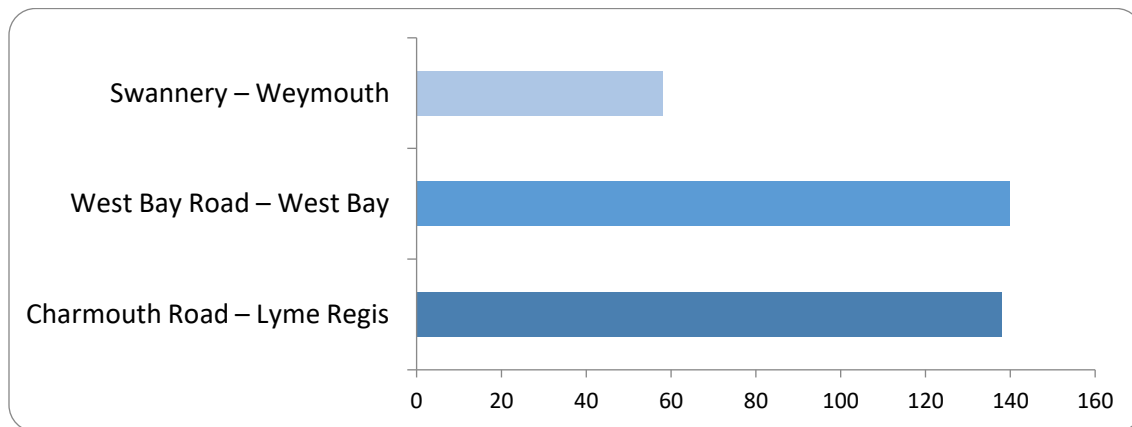
The activity had not yet closed when this report was generated. As such, this report may not accurately reflect the final distribution of responses and should be treated as interim only.

Responses to this survey: **336**

Which car park are you using/did you use today?

Which car park are you using/did you use today?

There were 336 responses to this part of the question.

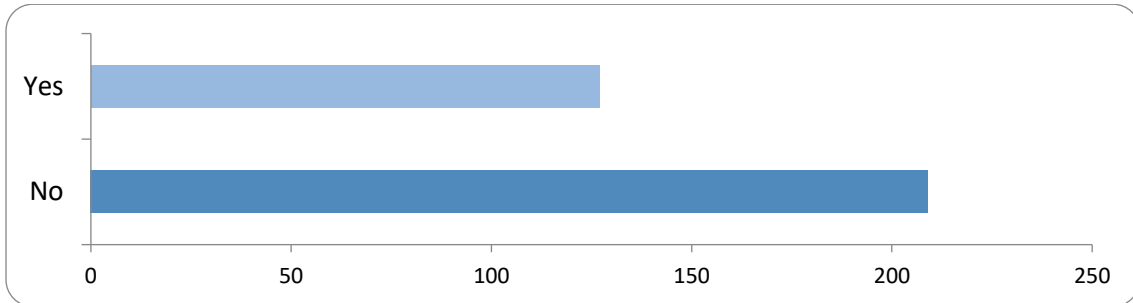


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|
| Swannery – Weymouth | 58 | 17.26% |
| West Bay Road – West Bay | 140 | 41.67% |
| Charmouth Road – Lyme Regis | 138 | 41.07% |

Do you live in the Dorset Council area?

Do you live in the Dorset Council area?

There were 336 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 127 | 37.80% |
| No | 209 | 62.20% |

Which town/village did you travel from?

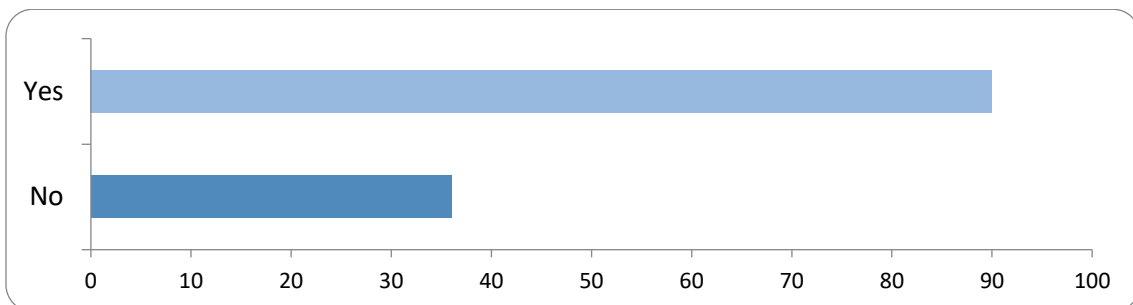
Which town/village did you travel from?

There were 127 responses to this part of the question.

Did you know Dorset Council offers both short and long stay parking permits for residents?

Did you know Dorset Council offers both short and long stay parking permits for residents?

There were 126 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 90 | 71.43% |
| No | 36 | 28.57% |

Where did you travel from?

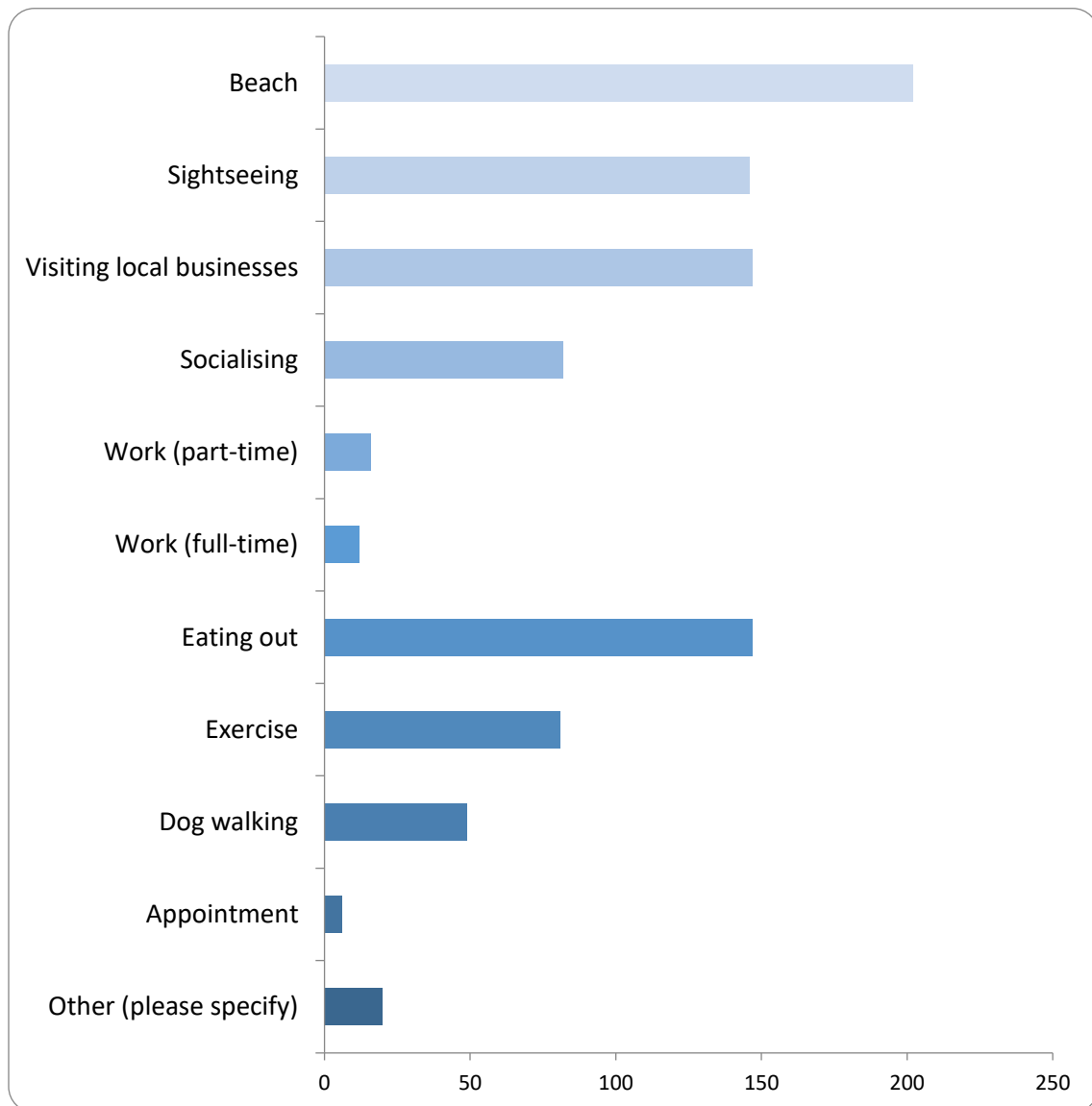
Outside DC - Where did you travel from?

There were 208 responses to this part of the question.

What are/were your plans during your visit today?

What are/were your plans during your visit today?

There were 334 responses to this question, multiple answers could be given.



| Option | Total | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Beach | 202 | |
| Sightseeing | 146 | |
| Visiting local businesses | 147 | |
| Socialising | 82 | |
| Work (part-time) | 16 | |
| Work (full-time) | 12 | |
| Further commute (train/bus) | 0 | |
| Eating out | 147 | |
| Exercise | 81 | |
| Dog walking | 49 | |
| Appointment | 6 | |
| Other (please specify) | 20 | |

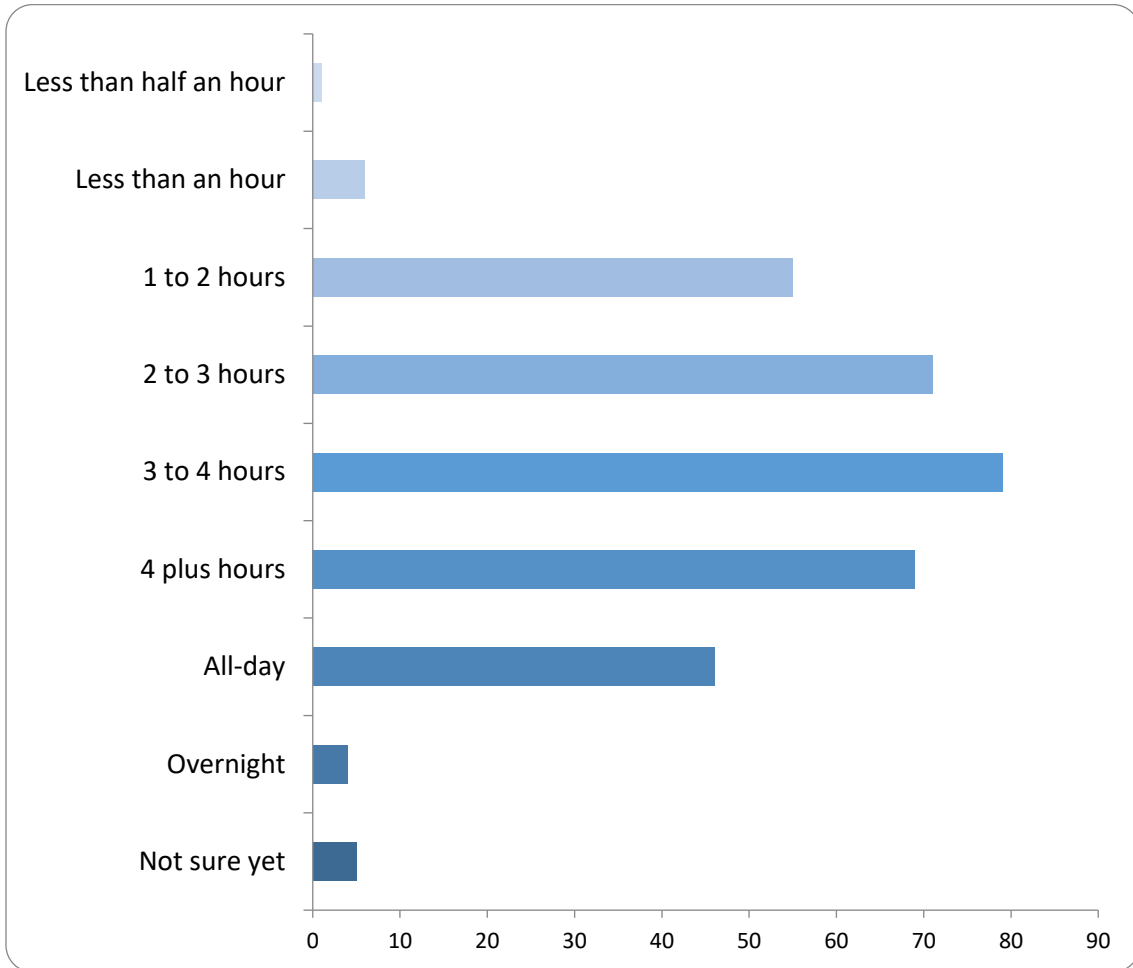
Other - What are/were your plans during your visit today?

There were 20 responses to this part of the question.

How long do/did you plan on parking here today?

How long do/did you plan on parking here today?

There were 336 responses to this part of the question.

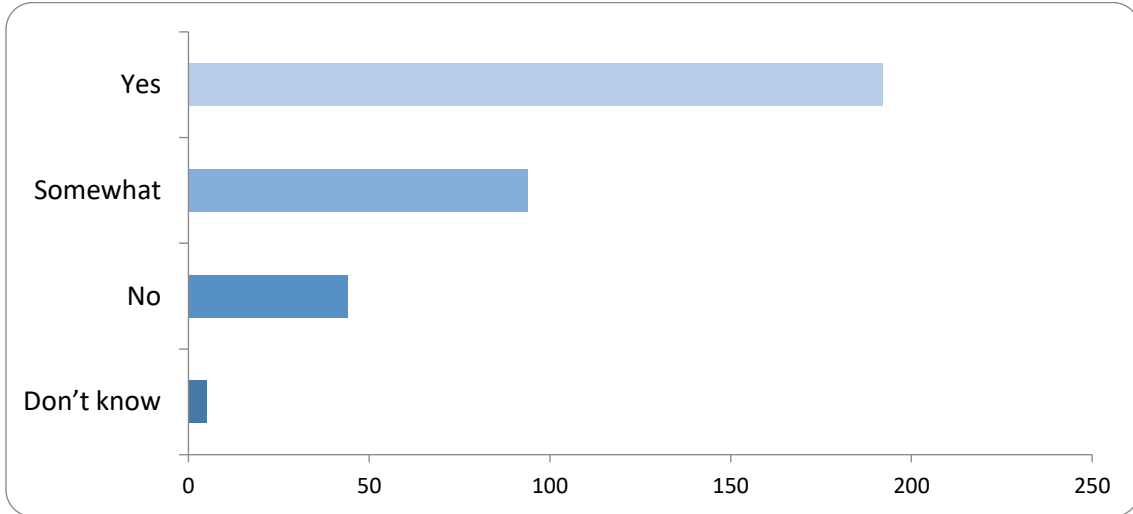


| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------------------|-------|---------|
| Less than half an hour | 1 | 0.30% |
| Less than an hour | 6 | 1.79% |
| 1 to 2 hours | 55 | 16.37% |
| 2 to 3 hours | 71 | 21.13% |
| 3 to 4 hours | 79 | 23.51% |
| 4 plus hours | 69 | 20.54% |
| All-day | 46 | 13.69% |
| Overnight | 4 | 1.19% |
| Not sure yet | 5 | 1.49% |

Did the cost of parking here affect your decision to visit?

Did the cost of parking here affect your decision to visit?

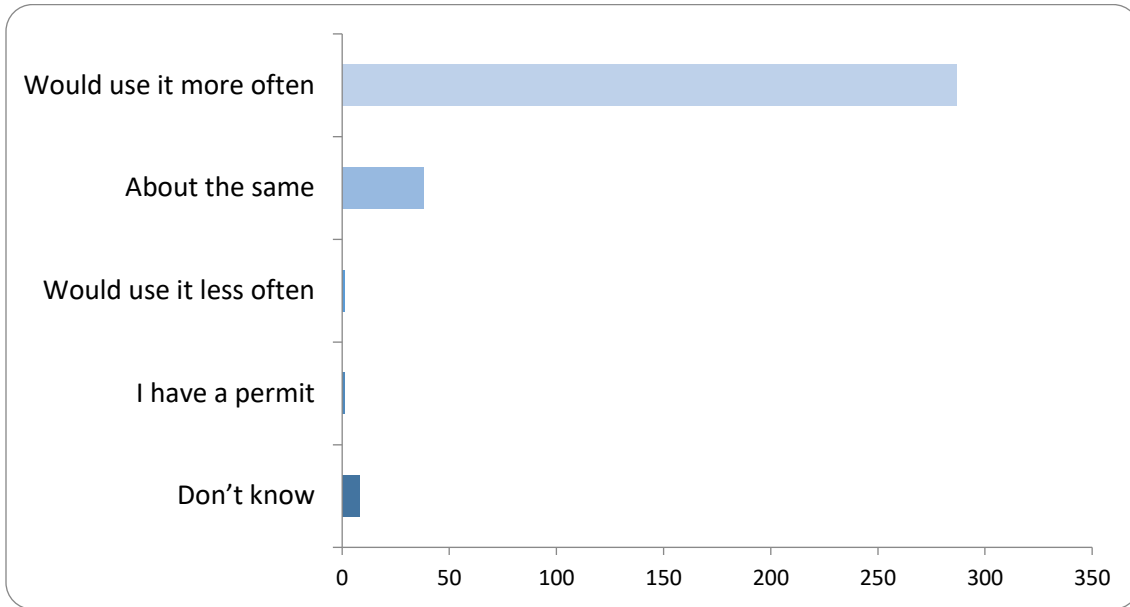
There were 335 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 192 | 57.31% |
| Somewhat | 94 | 28.06% |
| No | 44 | 13.13% |
| Don't know | 5 | 1.49% |

Would the amount you use the car park change if the charges were cheaper?
Would the amount you use the car park change if the charges were cheaper?

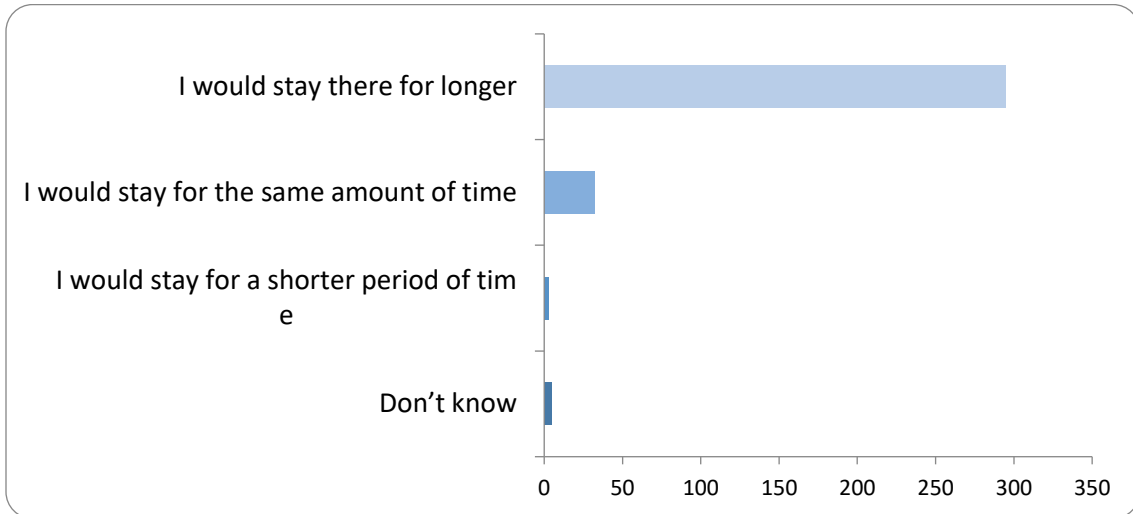
There were 335 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------------|-------|---------|
| Would use it more often | 287 | 85.67% |
| About the same | 38 | 11.34% |
| Would use it less often | 1 | 0.30% |
| I have a permit | 1 | 0.30% |
| Don't know | 8 | 2.39% |

Would the length of your visit change if the parking charges were cheaper?
Would the length of your visit change if the parking charges were cheaper?

There were 335 responses to this part of the question.

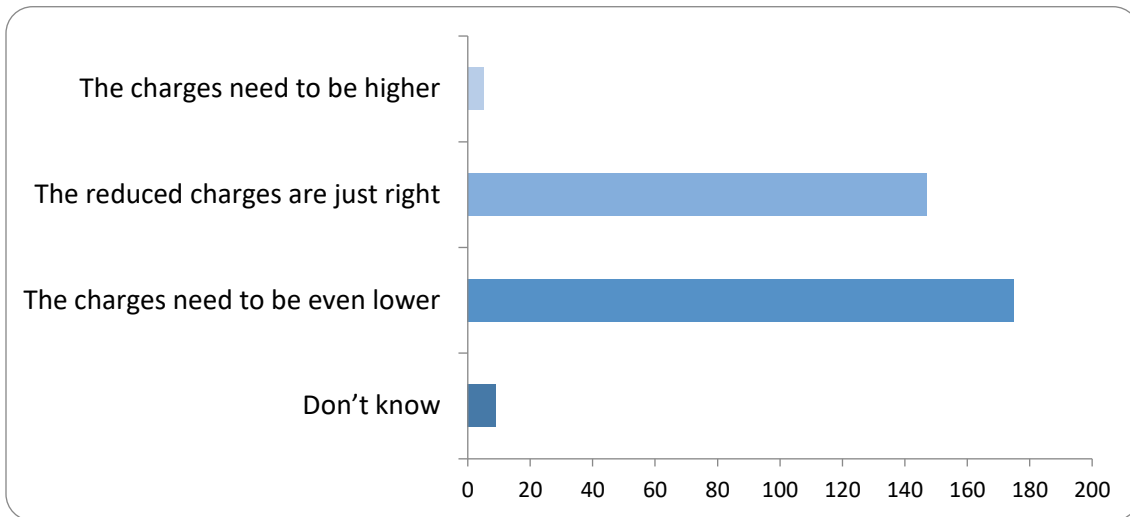


| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| I would stay there for longer | 295 | 88.06% |
| I would stay for the same amount of time | 32 | 9.55% |
| I would stay for a shorter period of time | 3 | 0.90% |
| I have a permit | 0 | 0.00% |
| Don't know | 5 | 1.49% |

The charges for the trial car parks have been reduced in the summer to match the winter charges. To what extent do you agree with the new reduced summer cost?

To what extent do you agree with the new reduced summer cost of car parking charges?

There were 336 responses to this part of the question.

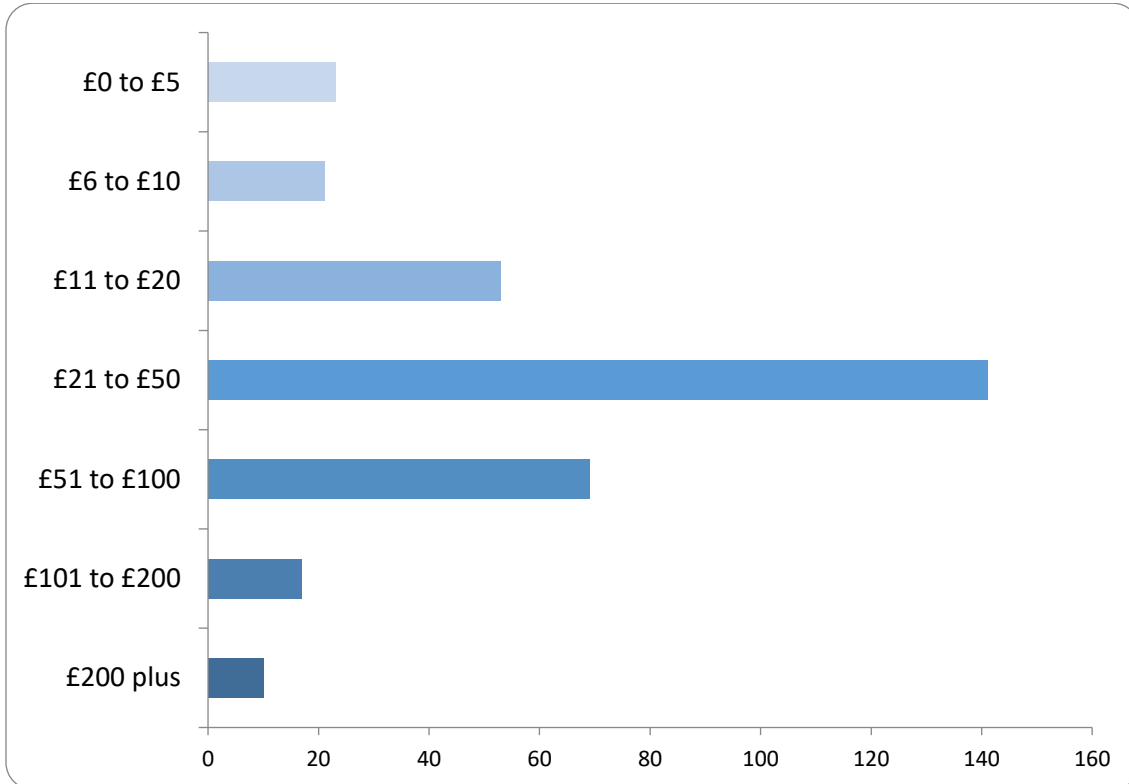


| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| The charges need to be higher | 5 | 1.49% |
| The reduced charges are just right | 147 | 43.75% |
| The charges need to be even lower | 175 | 52.08% |
| Don't know | 9 | 2.68% |

In the past, on average, how much have you generally spent in town on each visit?

In the past, on average, how much did you generally spend in town on each visit?

There were 334 responses to this part of the question.

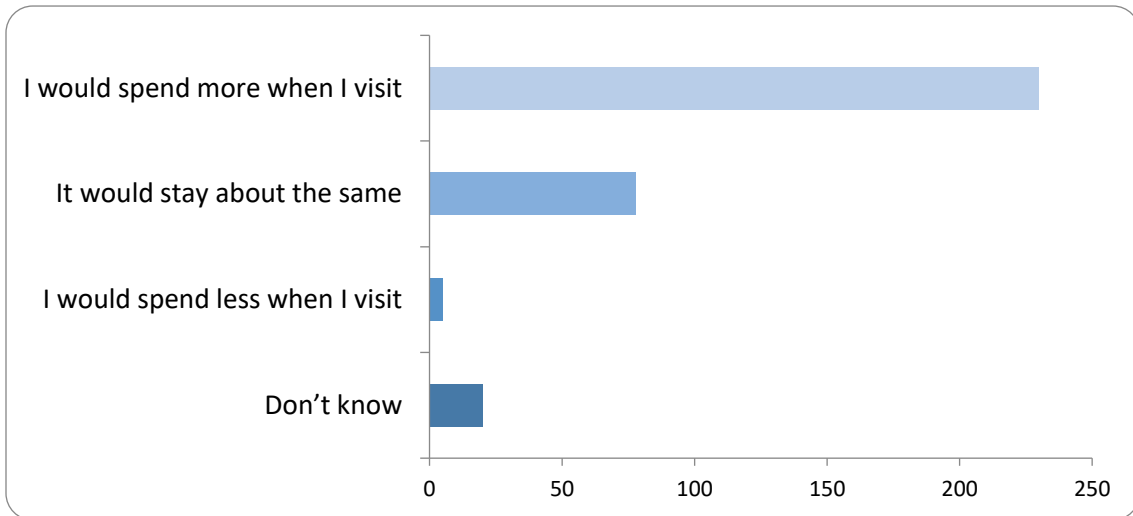


| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| £0 to £5 | 23 | 6.89% |
| £6 to £10 | 21 | 6.29% |
| £11 to £20 | 53 | 15.87% |
| £21 to £50 | 141 | 42.22% |
| £51 to £100 | 69 | 20.66% |
| £101 to £200 | 17 | 5.09% |
| £200 plus | 10 | 2.99% |

Would the amount you spend at businesses change if you paid lower parking charges?

Would the amount you spend at businesses change if you paid lower parking charges?

There were 333 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-------|---------|
| I would spend more when I visit | 230 | 69.07% |
| It would stay about the same | 78 | 23.42% |
| I would spend less when I visit | 5 | 1.50% |
| Don't know | 20 | 6.01% |

Why did you choose this car park instead of others in the area?

Why did you choose this car park instead of others in the area? Multiple answers could be given for this question

There were 330 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|--|
| Closest distance to where I'm headed | 107 | |
| First car park I came across | 44 | |
| Convenience | 88 | |
| Availability of spaces | 117 | |
| Accessibility | 26 | |
| Price of parking | 118 | |
| Length of stay | 43 | |
| Other (please specify) | 12 | |

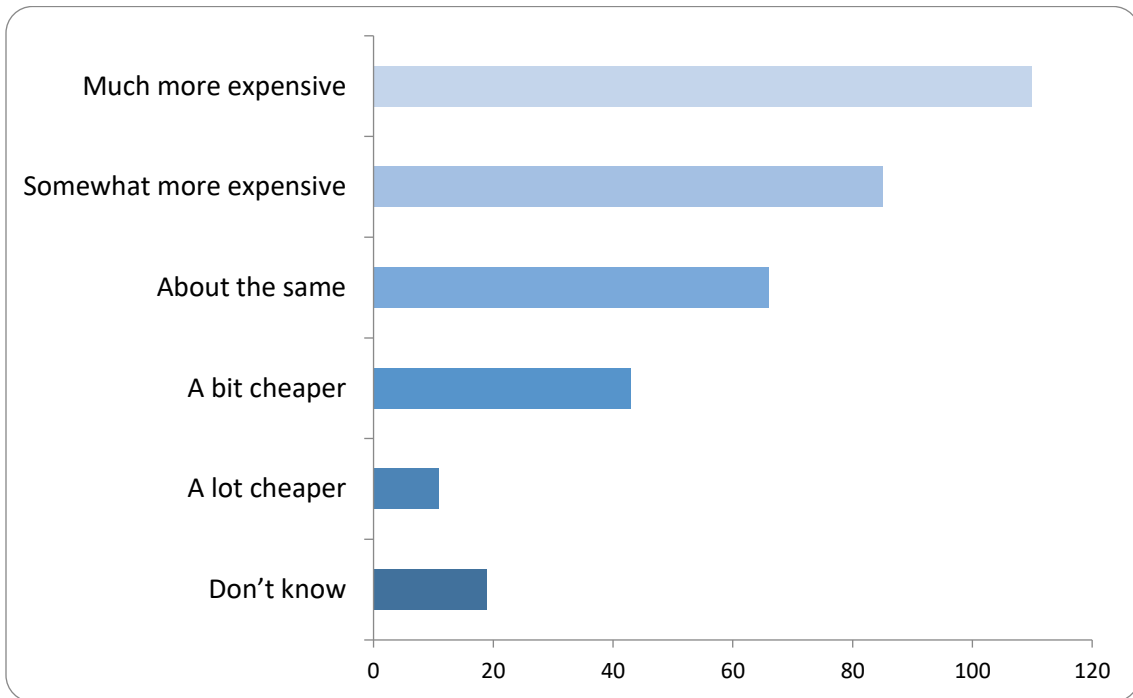
Other - Why did you choose this car park instead of others in the area?

There were 12 responses to this part of the question.

How do you think the cost of parking here compares to other coastal places you have visited?

How do you think the cost of parking here compares to other coastal places you have visited?

There were 334 responses to this part of the question.

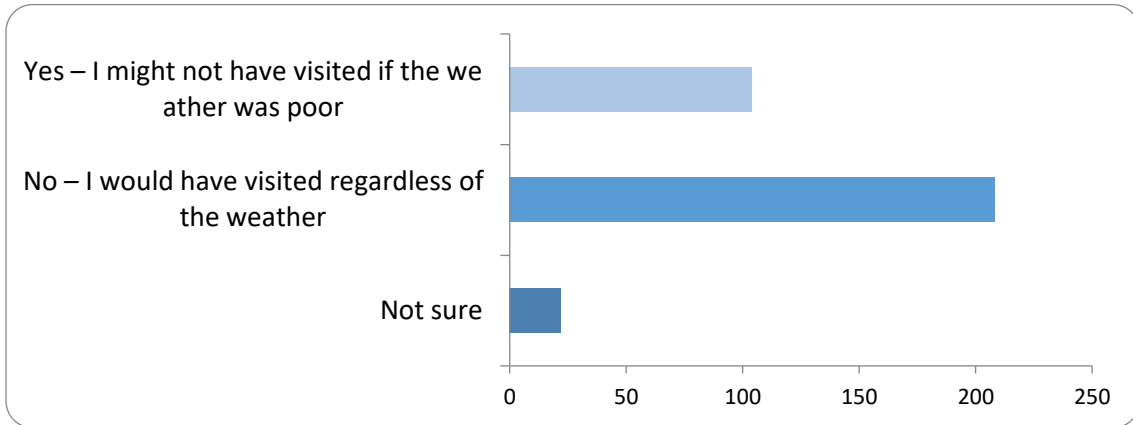


| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Much more expensive | 110 | 32.93% |
| Somewhat more expensive | 85 | 25.45% |
| About the same | 66 | 19.76% |
| A bit cheaper | 43 | 12.87% |
| A lot cheaper | 11 | 3.29% |
| Don't know | 19 | 5.69% |

Has the weather affected your decision to visit this location today?

Has the weather affected your decision to visit this location today?

There were 334 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Yes – I might not have visited if the weather was poor | 104 | 31.14% |
| No – I would have visited regardless of the weather | 208 | 62.28% |
| Not sure | 22 | 6.59% |

Business Survey

Car parking charges trial - Businesses

<https://consultation.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/c-e/60e7afc6>

This report was created on Wednesday 30 October 2024 at 09:49

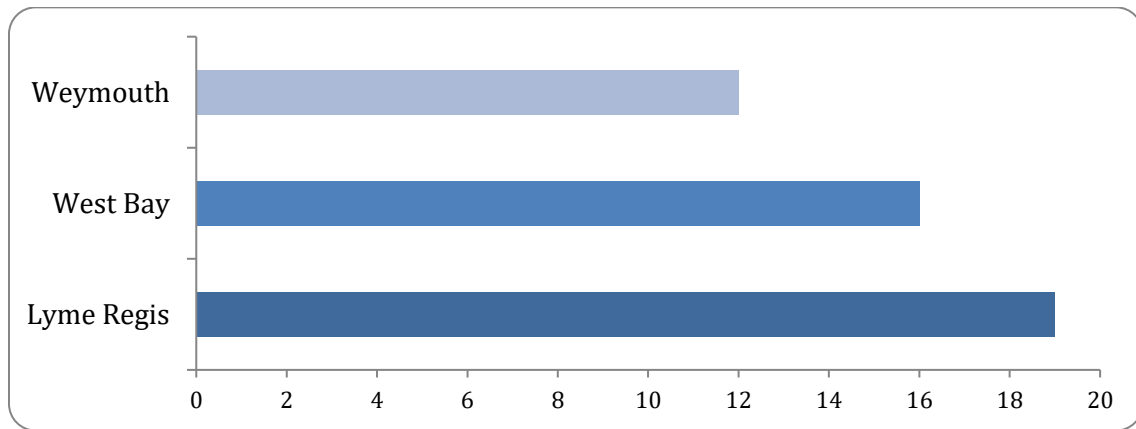
The activity had not yet closed when this report was generated. As such, this report may not accurately reflect the final distribution of responses, and should be treated as interim only.

Responses to this survey: **47**

1: Where is your business based?

Where is your business based?

There were 47 responses to this part of the question.

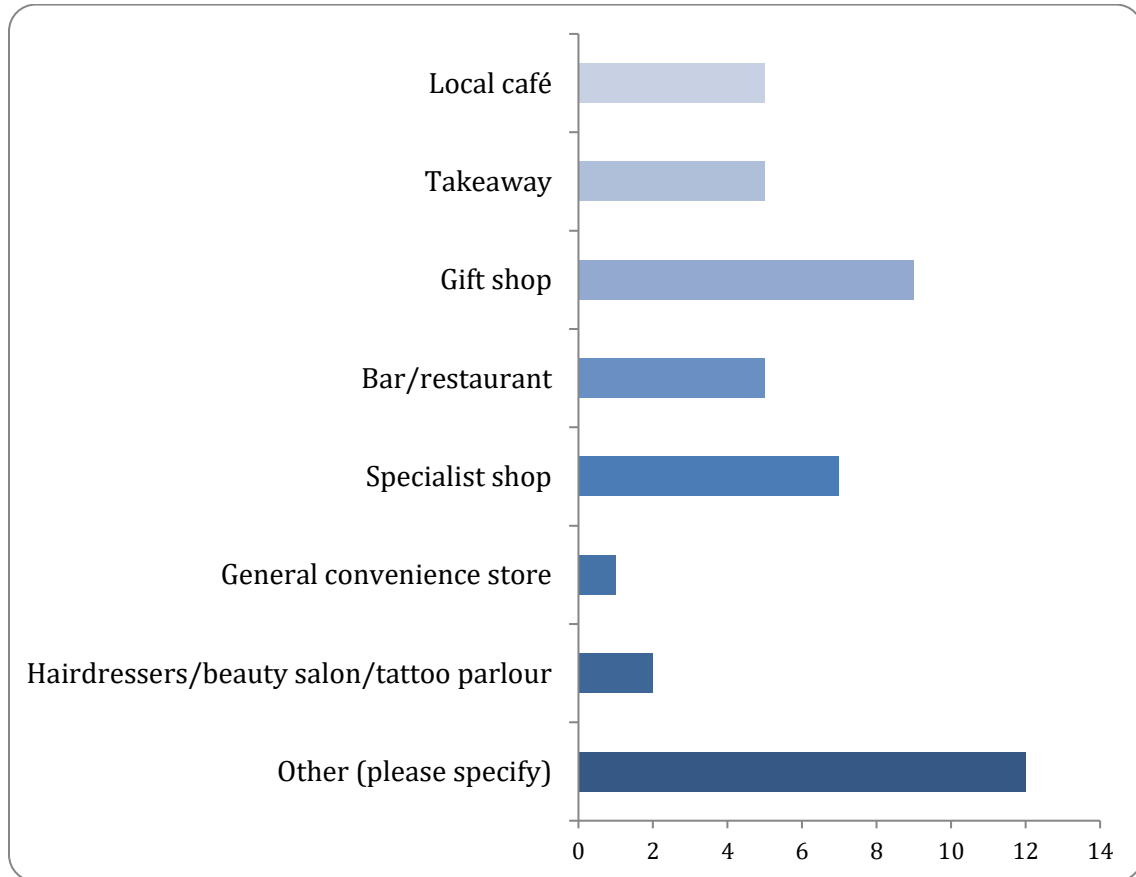


| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------|-------|---------|
| Weymouth | 12 | 25.53% |
| West Bay | 16 | 34.04% |
| Lyme Regis | 19 | 40.43% |

2: What type of business do you run?

What type of business do you run?

There were 46 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| Local café | 5 | 10.87% |
| Food stand (could be a truck or outdoor facility) | 0 | 0.00% |
| Takeaway | 5 | 10.87% |
| Gift shop | 9 | 19.57% |
| Bar/restaurant | 5 | 10.87% |
| Entertainment/amusements | 0 | 0.00% |
| Charity shop | 0 | 0.00% |
| Specialist shop | 7 | 15.22% |
| General convenience store | 1 | 2.17% |
| Bakery/cake shop | 0 | 0.00% |
| Hairdressers/beauty salon/tattoo parlour | 2 | 4.35% |
| Other (please specify) | 12 | 26.09% |

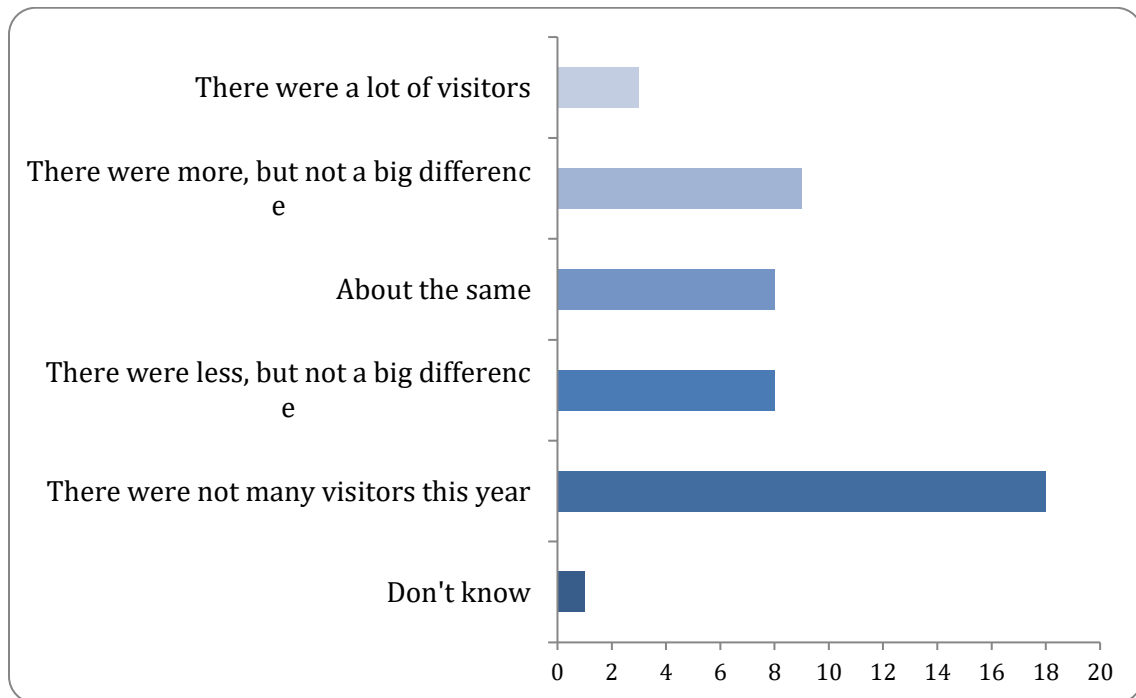
Other - type of business

There were 16 responses to this part of the question.

3: Has the number of visitors to the area changed compared to last year?

Has the number of visitors to the area changed compared to last year?

There were 47 responses to this part of the question.

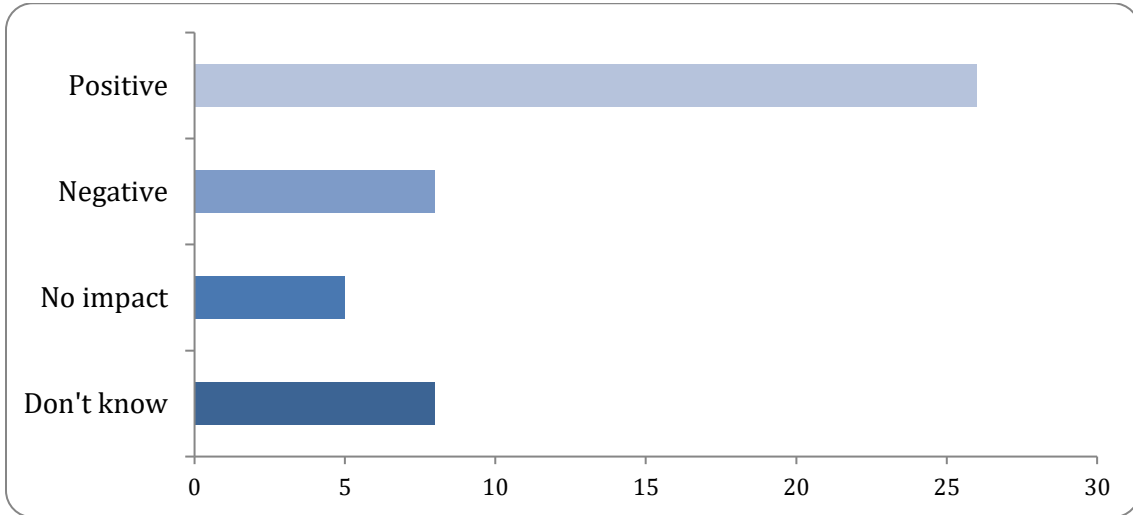


| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| There were a lot of visitors | 3 | 6.38% |
| There were more, but not a big difference | 9 | 19.15% |
| About the same | 8 | 17.02% |
| There were less, but not a big difference | 8 | 17.02% |
| There were not many visitors this year | 18 | 38.30% |
| Don't know | 1 | 2.13% |

4: What impact, if any, has the parking trial made on your trade across the summer?

What impact, if any, has the parking trial made on your trade across the summer?

There were 47 responses to this part of the question.

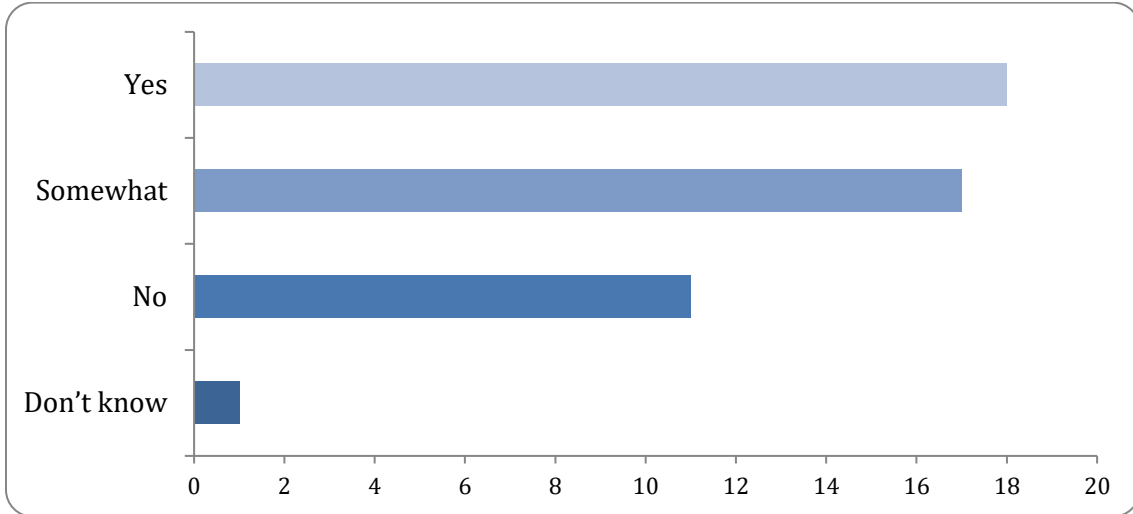


| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------|-------|---------|
| Positive | 26 | 55.32% |
| Negative | 8 | 17.02% |
| No impact | 5 | 10.64% |
| Don't know | 8 | 17.02% |

5: Do you feel the weather affects the number of customers you receive?

Do you feel the weather affects the number of customers you receive?

There were 47 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 18 | 38.30% |
| Somewhat | 17 | 36.17% |
| No | 11 | 23.40% |
| Don't know | 1 | 2.13% |