

Neighbourhood Plan Business Survey

Stow-on-the-Wold

Ashleigh & David Cox, Colin and Janet Piper 6th October 2020

Introduction

Stow-on-the-Wold is a popular place to live, work and visit. It is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is ideally located for serving locals (shops, banks, chemist, restaurants) and for visiting the North Cotswolds.

A few facts

Stow has a significant imbalance between tourism (accommodation) and retail vs local economic growth, employment and self-employment, creating a reliance on tourism and a narrow range of job opportunities.

Stow businesses who employ staff say they have difficulty recruiting people with the relevant skills, mainly customer service and sales skills. (Business Appraisal 2020)

Other employment challenges include cost of housing and transport. (Business Appraisal 2020)

Business rates and rents in Stow-on-the-Wold are notoriously high (Business Appraisal 2020) and therefore a high business churn is seen with smaller, start-up businesses.

Covid-19 may have compounded business challenges in Stow therefore Covid-19 questions were added to the questionnaire.

We would like YOUR input to help shape and direct the future economy of Stow by means of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Methodology

135 businesses identified in Stow on the Wold.

Paper Survey distributed to circa 110 business owners personally by Colin and Janet Piper and David Cox.

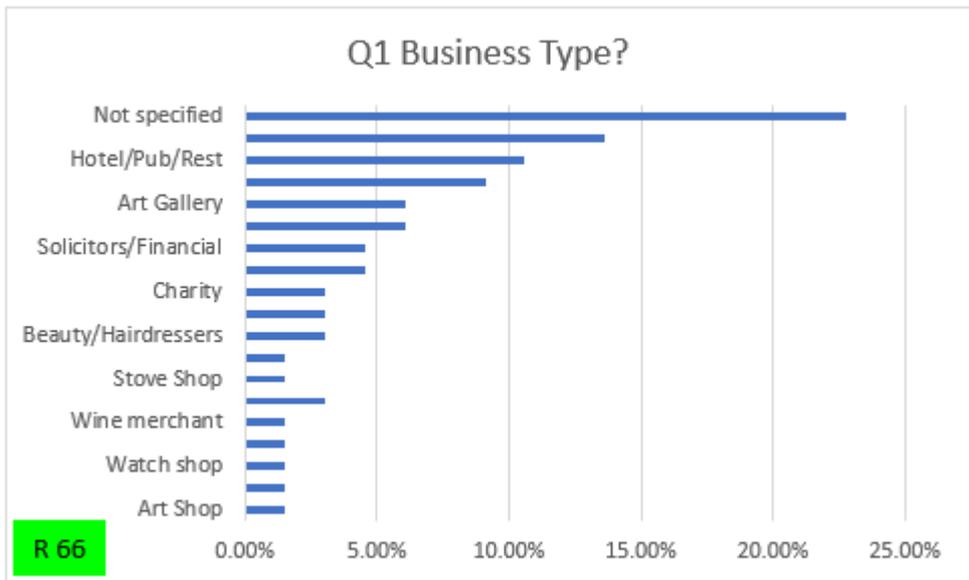
Colin and Janet took the time to talk to many business owners whilst distributing the surveys and collated them a week or so later.

Total 65 respondents, equivalent to 59% of the total surveys delivered, 48% of the 135 businesses identified.

NP = Comments relevant to NP Policy Groups and Policies.

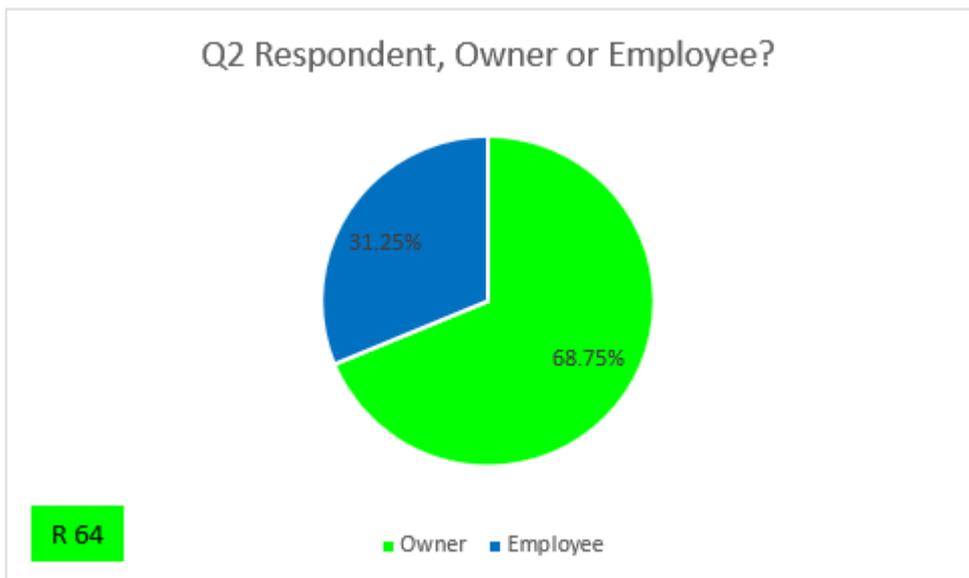
Appendix documents include “open question” responses for survey questions 13, 18, 19, 20 & 21.

Appendix documents include “business voice” summary from Janet and Colin Piper.

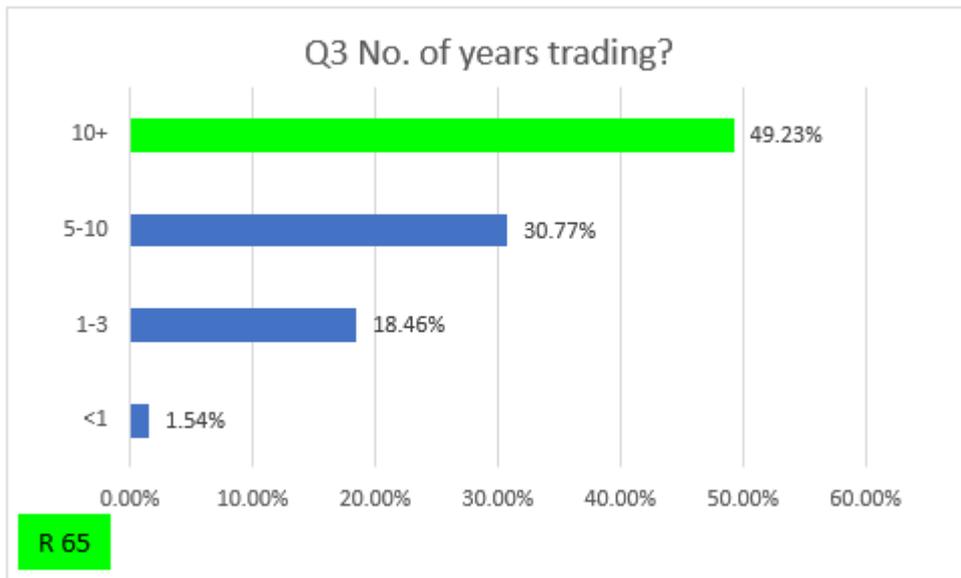


27% of survey respondents chose not to specify or omitted to answer business type.

10.6% of respondents were hotels, pubs or restaurants with a high number of employees. Landlords and managers welcomed both the young persons and the business survey.



68.7% of survey respondents were owners. A good sign that many owners are at the forefront of their businesses and it could therefore be assumed that survey answers were a true reflection of business and trade.



80% of businesses have been trading in Stow for 5 or more years with some trading up to 40 years.

A need for change can sometimes go unseen and may be challenged if successful, long standing traders oppose or are unwilling.

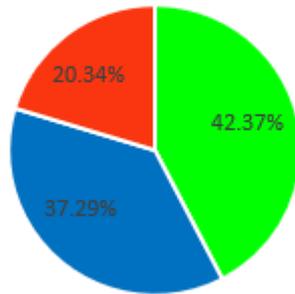
With long standing traders in Stow, further questions should be asked to understand why there is a high churn for some retail outlets. High rents and rates and parking have been highlighted in both the Stow Business survey and the Neighbourhood plan survey as being a challenge. Further insight into closed, unsuccessful retailers would be beneficial. **NP** Low cost, “in keeping” subsidised, start-up retail units and or spaces that can be used as “pop ups” on any new development site would draw new, diverse businesses into the town and potentially drive down the notorious “high rents”.



51% of respondents who employ staff said they had difficulty recruiting employees.

Open comment questions Q18-21 repeatedly refer to Staffing, Employment, Recruitment as key challenges. **NP** Additional housing in Stow will increase the “pool” of local candidates for jobs. **NP** The right type of amenities in appearance and function will draw people to live in Stow. **NP** Suitable pathways and transport links are essential.

Q5 Pre-Covid-19 were you able to recruit new employees from Stow?



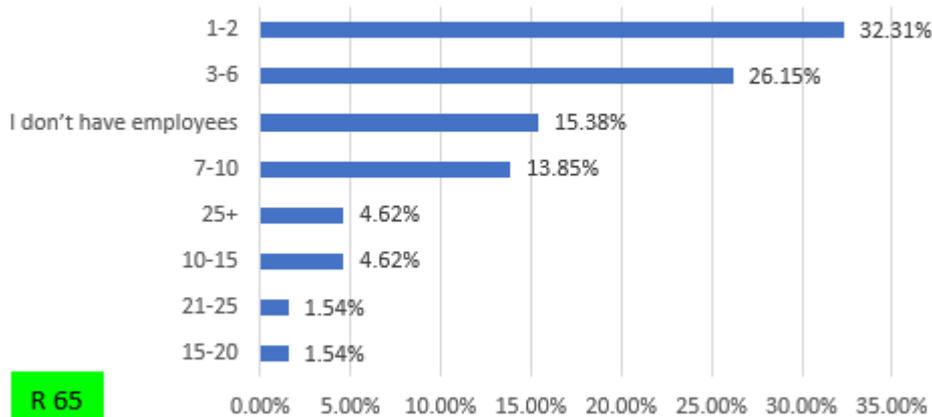
R 59

■ Yes ■ No ■ No Employees

Only 53% of respondents who employ staff said they are able to recruit employees from Stow meaning 47% of employees are travelling in to work.

Responses 8, 9, 10 below are also related to this question. **NP** Suitable “business parking” spaces will need to be included in the NP. **NP** Additional housing in Stow will increase the “pool” of local candidates for jobs. **NP** The right type of amenities in appearance and function will draw people to live in Stow. **NP** Suitable pathways and transport links are essential.

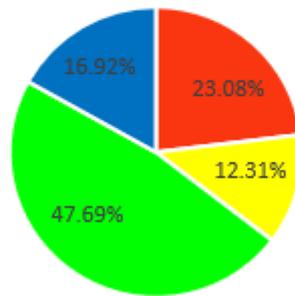
Q6 How many people did you employ pre Covid?



R 65

47.7% of businesses employ 1-2 employees or do not have employees indicating a high number of small businesses in Stow.

Q7 Have you lost or gained employees post Covid-19?

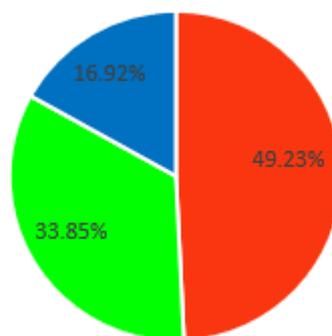


R 65

■ Lost ■ Gained ■ Stayed the same ■ I don't have employees

72% of businesses who employ staff have either maintained or increased staffing levels during Covid-19. Maintaining levels could be attributed to the government job retention scheme. However, 15% of businesses with employees have increased the number of employees post Covid-19. It could be assumed that business in Stow post lock down has been prosperous.

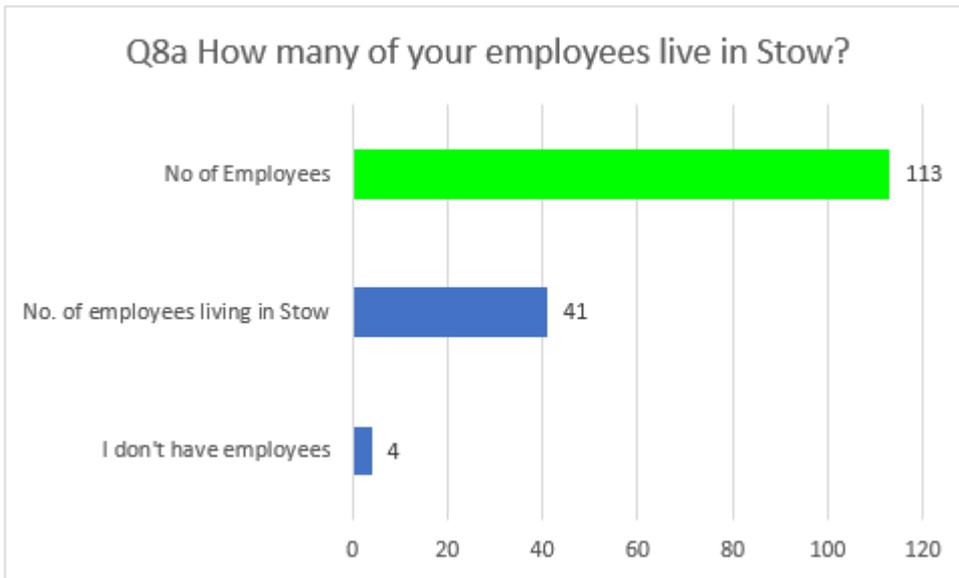
Q8 Do your employees live in Stow?



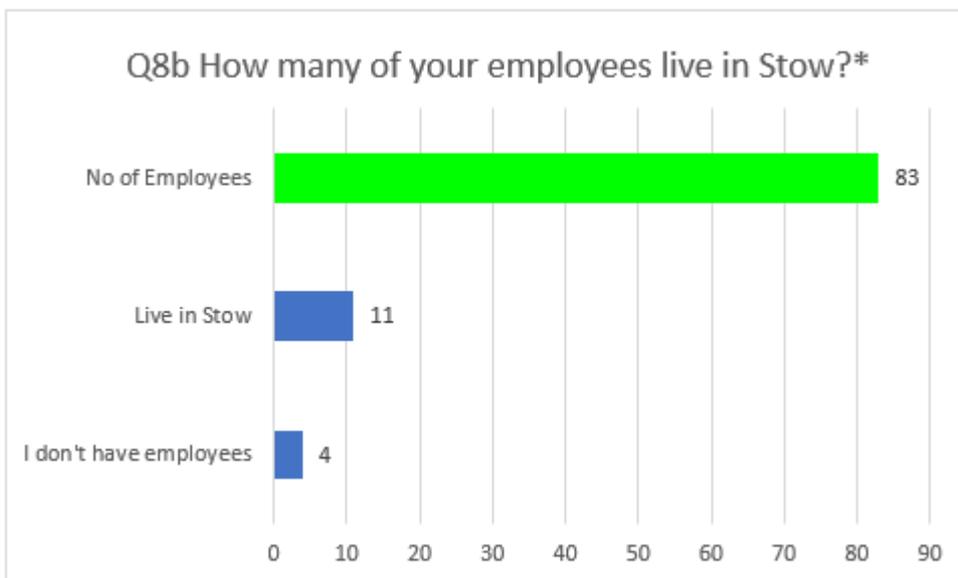
R 65

■ None ■ Some ■ I don't have employees

33.85% of businesses confirmed that "some" of their staff live in Stow

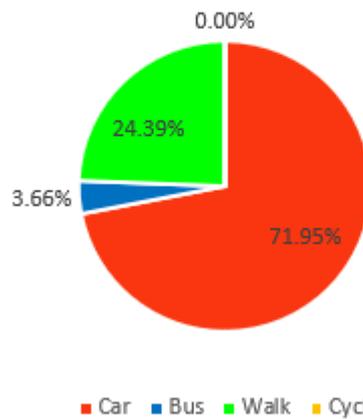


When asked “How many employees live in Stow?” Respondents with employees said 36% of staff live in Stow. This number is slightly skewed by the high number of live in pub/hotel staff. Chart 8b below depicts the data minus the live in staff.



When looking at the data excluding live in pub/hotel staff only 13% of employees live in Stow. **NP** Additional housing in Stow will increase the “pool” of local candidates for jobs. **NP** The right type of amenities in appearance and function will draw people to live in Stow. **NP** Suitable pathways and transport links are essential.

Q9 What method of transport do your employees use to get to work?

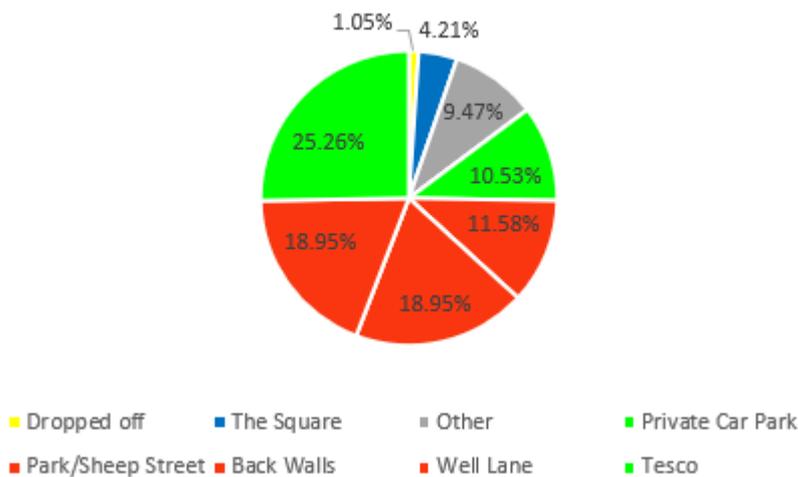


R 65

More than one response to this question was allowed. 71.95% of respondents said their employees travelled by car to work! This high number will compound the parking and traffic challenges in the town.

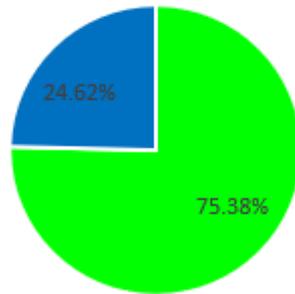
Open comment questions Q18-21 repeatedly refer to **NP** Parking and Traffic as key challenges. As in Q4, additional housing in Stow will increase the “pool” of local candidates for jobs. **NP** The right type of amenities in appearance and function will draw people to live in Stow. Suitable pathways and transport links are essential.

Q10 If by car, where do they park?



More than one response to this question was allowed. 49.57% of responses said employees parked on “The streets around Stow” with only 25.26% parking at Tesco. This high number of on street parking will compound the parking and traffic challenges in the town. **NP** A dedicated “Business Parking” area and potential “Residents” parking permits* (*highlighted in the young persons survey) would improve the on street parking situation in the town.

Q11 Does lack of available parking in the square deter customers in your view?

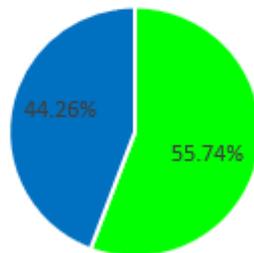


R 65

■ Yes ■ No

75.38% of businesses believed that lack of available parking in the square deterred customers. NP Suitable parking to facilitate and not deter customers will help to increase footfall in the town.

Q12 Would you favour more pedestrian areas in Stow centre, if suitable alternative parking could be organised?



R 61

■ Yes ■ No

55.74% of the 61 businesses who responded to Q12 would be in favour of more pedestrian areas in Stow if suitable alternative parking could be organised. NP Suitable parking to facilitate and not deter customers will help to increase footfall in the town. Given the small lead in terms of support for pedestrian areas in Stow, potential further customer specific insight could be obtained to generate relevant "back up data" when trying to positively influence the respondents who answered "No" and reduce the potential opposing of alternative customer parking in the square.

Q13 We know that rent and rates are a key challenge (Business Survey 2020). What do you think could be done to help?

This question was an "Open" question, please see all answers in Appendix.

There is an overall feeling that rent and rates are exceptionally high for business premises in Stow. It is felt that a few landlords/premises owners "control" the rents between them keeping the values high. The rateable value of a property is partially based on the rentable value therefore rates are also subject to being high as a knock on effect to the higher rents.

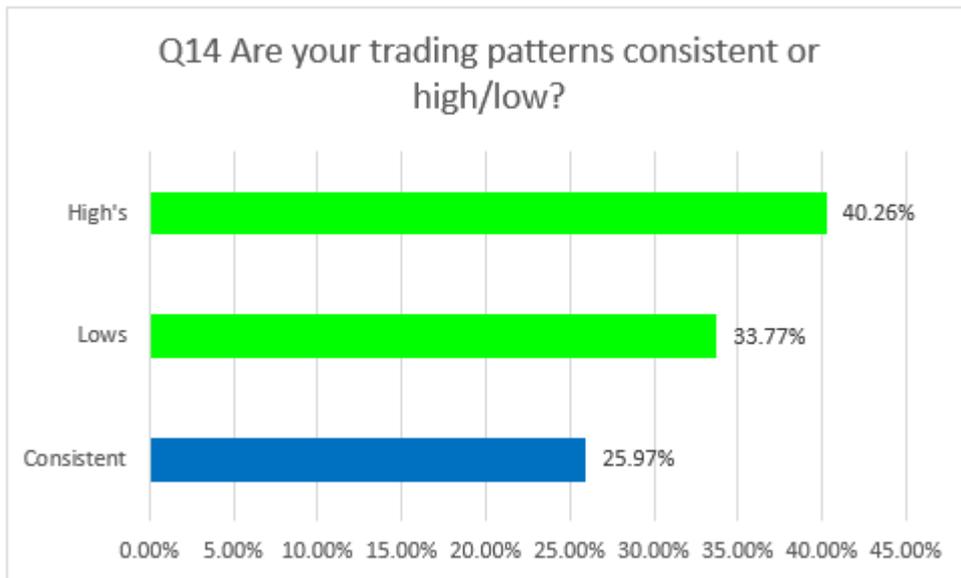
NP Alternative low cost, "in keeping" subsidised, start-up retail units and or spaces that can be used as "pop ups" on any new development site would draw new, diverse businesses into the town, create competition and potentially drive down the notorious "high rents".

NP Planning support should be available for new businesses in existing premises in particular business categories that are deemed to be desirable to the town.

NP Post Covid-19 Planning support to allow for additional "sympathetic to surroundings, customer space" within and outside business premises should be considered.

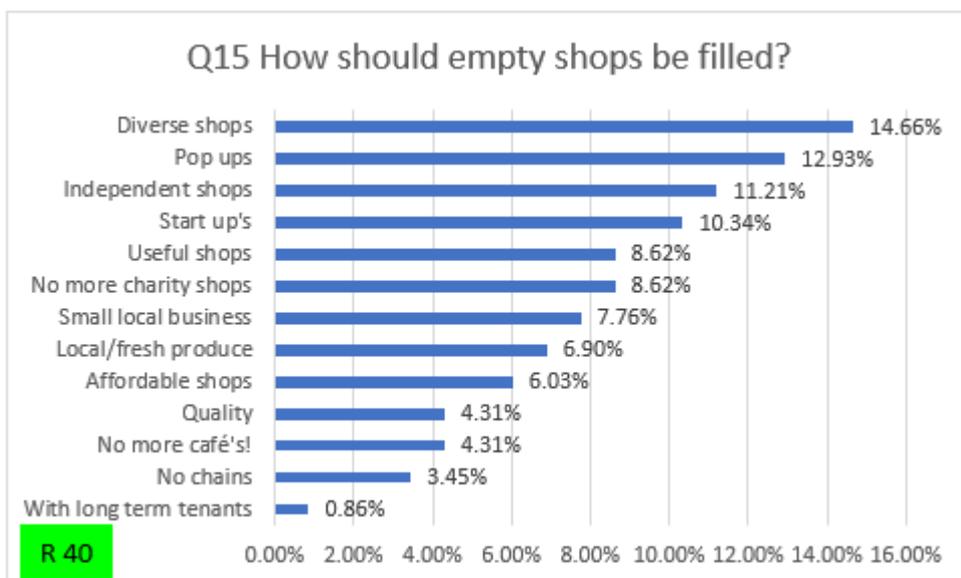
Outside of the Neighbourhood Plan remit it is apparent that there is a clear requirement for additional localised Covid-19 support in terms of reduced rents and rates as well as subsidies for particular business categories that are deemed to be desirable to the town.

It is also evident that the town would benefit from a business association whereby the businesses can connect with each other and bring forward a co-ordinated "voice" and an element of creative lobbying to the town's landlords and premises owners. It is felt that the landlords don't care about the wellbeing and prosperity of the town. An inclusive business association would be instrumental in building more favourable trading conditions, driving a cohesive plan to grow the town's economy and make Stow an even better place to live and visit.



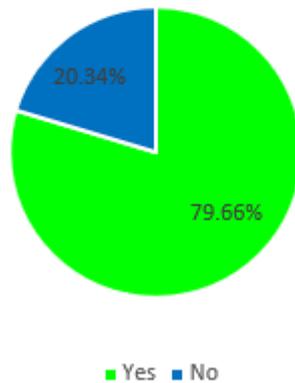
74% of survey respondents highlighted that business in Stow is seasonal and subject to highs and lows. A rebalance of tourism and locals would benefit traders and the town. **NP** A rebalance in terms of local customers vs tourism mix will drive additional business for existing and new businesses in Stow.

Open comments on the paper survey show seasonality Summer, Winter, School Holidays a mix of high and low depending on business.



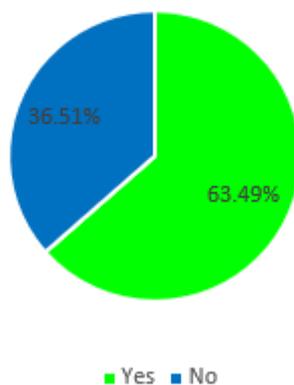
More than one answer was allowed for Q15, a total of 162 responses were collated. 38.7% of responses highlighted the desire for diverse, pop ups, independent and start up shops when asked how they would like to see empty shops filled. Independent shops were also highlighted as a top answer from the Younger Persons survey. There were also strong voices requesting that no more charity shops should be permitted followed closely by no more cafe's or chains. **NP** Planning support should be available for new businesses in existing premises in particular business categories that are deemed to be desirable to the town. Diverse views regarding the need for quality and shops of distinction vs less luxury. Restaurants not linked to pubs were also mentioned.

Q16 Would you support organised evening opening events?



79.6% Overwhelming support for organised open evenings at special times of the year.

Q17 Do you close your business during the Gypsy fair? If so for how long and why?



63.5% of respondents who say they close for Gypsy fair do so for between 1-3 days with one respondent stating a week.

Main reasons for closing are concern regarding shoplifting, threat, risk, security and lack of trade/footfall with some businesses saying it is a good time to refurb or catch up.

Q18 What challenges do you feel your business may have post Covid-19?

These questions were “Open” questions, please see all answers in Appendix.

There is an overall feeling that lack of footfall both locals and overseas is going to have a challenging impact on the town and business.

NP Planning support should be available for new businesses in existing premises in particular business categories that are deemed to be desirable to the town.

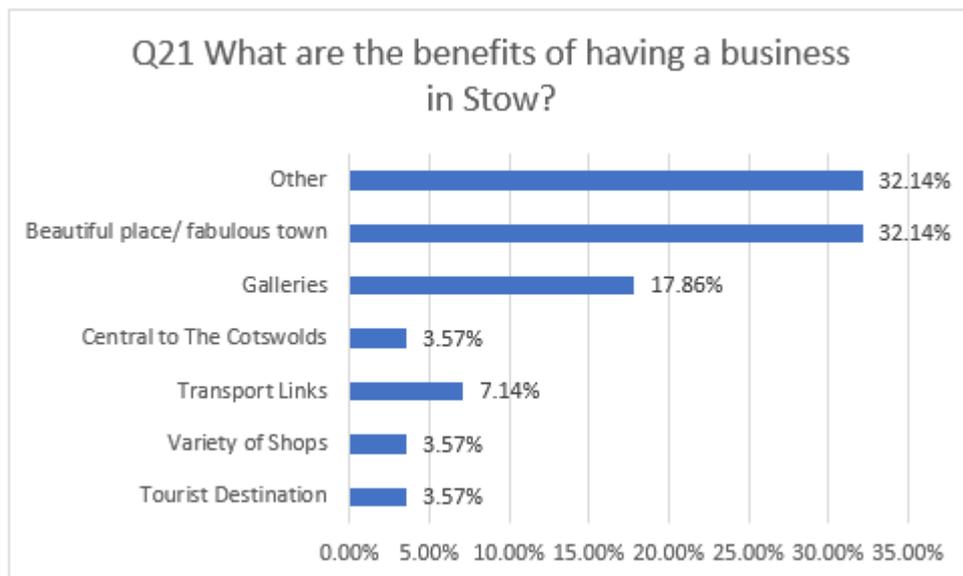
NP Post Covid-19 Planning support to allow for additional “sympathetic to surroundings, customer space” within and outside business premises should be considered.

Q19 What other challenges do you have?

Q20 What do you need to help your business grow?

Questions 19 & 20 were “Open” questions, please see all answers in Appendix.

Parking and traffic were the prominent responses in terms of “other challenges”. Footfall was also a key concern. However, the non- Parking and Transport responses are relevant to the entire policy team.



Question 21 was also an “Open” question asking for the “other” comments, please see all answers in Appendix.

The overriding benefit of having a business in Stow was the link to Stow itself being a beautiful place/fabulous town.

Appendix

Q13 Rents and Rates

Lower rent and rates

N/A Covid has removed rates

Legislation to introduce a rent cap based on market forces post Covid-19, continued support with rates for small businesses.

Charge for parking to offset business costs, Tourism Tax for Hotels

Rents are very high, perhaps unrealistic, landlords should realise this for the good of the town

A general rent reduction for 2 years across the board to encourage trade and businesses into empty premises

Reduce them

Rates always go up - Any help welcome

Lobby owners

?

Reduction in rates for 1st 2 years for start up businesses

No answer

Reduce rents to make businesses more sustainable

No answer

No answer

Rates holiday for 2021 to try to help businesses thrive post Covid lockdown. Council can't do anything about high rent.

Both rents and rates are too high for independent business. Also very high rents with no building maintenance.

No answer

Lower rent and rates to fill shops that are left empty

Going forward, a reduction in line with capacity i.e. 50% reduction in rates and rent

No rates and less charity shops please

The whole business rates system needs to be overhauled

Affordable rents and rates would mean less empty shops and possible shops that sell less "luxury" items, affordable items for local people and tourists

Persuading CDC to reduce business rates in the town. Rents are more difficult to control

Rent should be affordable for longer terms, rather than increasing after a short period. This will hopefully keep some of the businesses in the town longer.

NA

Reassess the whole business rates system; rates are ludicrously high, particularly post/during the Covid-19 pandemic - how can any small retailer survive?

Reduce them.

Reduce rent and rates

I am exempt from business rates and can cover my rent comfortably.

NA

NA

Keep as low as possible

NA

Business rates need to be got down to a sensible rate, one people can afford.

Reduce - make more accessible for "new business" to start! Rolling contracts not tied into 5 years plus!

Shops will not survive unless Govt. changes the Balance of internet shopping & real shopping. Internet shopping is cheap to provide, stores cannot compete.

NA

Rent - NA to us; Rates: NA this year due to covid

Abolition of rating system. AS new system of taxing businesses fairly needs to be introduced in order to compete with online businesses.

We do not pay rent - rates are high.

We constantly review our rent and rates.

NA

Reduce them

Increase threshold of small business rate relief

Lower the fees

Reducing them!

Lower the rates and make high rent unattractive to landlords ie TAX

Rates are too high. I don't mind the high rents as it filters out the cheap businesses.

It would be helpful to have rent and rates assessed, as unsure when rates/rents were assessed and on what grounds.

NA

NA

Due to current climate rates should be reduced by 60% until we return to something that resembles normal trading

If the "Key" landlords could collectively agree to either lower the rates (rents?) by an agreed % or at least cap the current rates (rents?). Support for Rates Appeals, no relief & believe this to be inconsistent.

In an ideal world these would be reduced in line with other small market towns.

I get rate relief and a small shop and business at the moment but would welcome a rent valuation review whilst we are in Covid 19. This would help going forward.

NA

NA

Not sure what can be done. Rents are too high, but that is down to landlords!

Drop business rates introduce local sales tax

"?"

NA

Don't know enough about rates to comment

Not a problem for this property

Subsidies for particular business categories that are deemed to be desirable to the town

Q18 What challenges do you feel your business may have post Covid-19	Policy Area
Pubs being victimised as hotspots despite stringent Covid-19 policies.	
Lockdown led to an increase in online shopping. Need to encourage local customers to return to the High Street and enjoy going into shops where they get expert and friendly advice.	Economic
Lack of footfall, lack of confidence and still having high rents to pay.	Economic
Consistency of Trade, fears for International and European Travel.	Economic
It depends on how many businesses close post Covid-19	Economic
Recruitment	Economic, Housing, Amenities
Guests feeling unsure to come out	
Economic recession, less selling/buying	Economic
Building consumer confidence after social distancing because of small quirky space.	
Business going well as we are having many UK customers. The challenge will be persuading overseas clients to return (normally 50%)	Economic
Getting stock from suppliers.	
At present business is good. If the housing market slows and the economy is effected, peoples spending power will be affected	Economic
Employing staff,	Economic, Housing, Amenities
Restoring customer confidence	Economic
Less customers, customers refusing to comply with regs, cashless payments.	Economic
Increased business rates	Economic
Charging for parking in the square.	Parking & Traffic
Unknown - Who knows what the future holds.	
Lack of footfall, lack of volunteers due to Covid.	Economic
Downturn	Economic
Too early to say	
Quieter	Economic
Unknown	
Recession, downturn in new work and therefore revenue.	Economic
Not enough parking - too many disabled spaces and yellow lines.	Parking & Traffic
Cash flow	
Low footfall. Customer maximum numbers in shop (Covid restrictions)	Economic
Fewer "walk-ins"	
Keeping up with rushed law changes	
Consumer confidence. Low interest rates help.	Economic
Local lockdowns, school/class closures as staffing would be an issue.	
Communication with customers, helping with their goods, understanding how many people in shop at any given time.	

Turning excess stock into cash - Encouraging isolating local customers to come back and shop.	
No. of people able to physically enter the shop. Customer confidence low. Availability of ingredients and supplies.	
No clients or customers due to unemployment rate rises. Services cut, low cash flow, no tourists if pubs and hotels close.	Economic, Amenities
Day trippers vs more affluent weekenders.....we have to entice the latter back.	Economic, Amenities
Rates!!	Economic
Lack of overseas tourists. General economic decline	Economic, Housing, Amenities
Constant changes/restrictions - loss of earnings for owners.	
Locals do not like coming into town with the visitors	Economic, Housing, Amenities
Not really affected by Covid	
Local lockdowns - Customers income may have been impacted - less money to spend	Economic
Post Covid has provided us with opportunity. I fear we may be an anomaly.	
Further lockdown would be challenging	Economic

Q19 What other challenges do you have?

The amount of traffic on sheep street.	Parking & Traffic
Getting the people to walk from the square into church street.	Parking & Traffic
Restrictions on numbers of clients allowed within a specific time slot - extra time afterward will impact hugely on profit.	
Need more customers	All
Footfall	All
Traffic in Stow is getting worse every year!	Parking & Traffic
Recruitment	All
Parking	Parking & Traffic
People parking outside the shop front and Window.	Parking & Traffic
Parking and terrible traffic congestion	Parking & Traffic
Cost of accommodation for low earning staff members	Housing
Getting our name out there as we are a brand new business.	Economic
Parking Signage	Parking & Traffic
Decent Tourist Info,	
Building maintenance, outside of the building.	
Lack of decent parking, problems with people using pay apps	Parking & Traffic

Staffing	All
Staffing - No one wants to work. The ones that do want to work have no motivation.	All
	All
Closures of the Square (Funfair), Summer Festivals Etc, Roadworks announced at short notice. Fair is very impactful on bedrooms.	Parking & Traffic
Inflexibility of landlords with regards to rent during Covid-19 downturn.	Economic
Upkeep of an old building	
Managing guest willingness to follow the new rules	
Staffing	All
No challenges	
Maintaining high standards as much as possible.	
None	
Seems coach tripper numbers have depleted post lockdown.	
Trying to find an affordable "shop front" - preferably in/around the square.	Economic
People keeping social distance	
Parking issues always.	Parking & Traffic
Technology - I've been trying to develop a website but it requires more investment both of time and money,	
Parking	Parking & Traffic
Because we are a beauty business and store, we couldn't do all our treatments for a number of weeks as came under close contact services. This took a lot of our revenue.	
Old age	
Competition - lots of other coffee shops in Stow. But we're all pretty friendly. It's just a case of having enough visitors for us all.	
Internet	Economic
The Cotswolds is an expensive area so our customer base is quite narrow, middle aged, wealthy and land owning mainly.	All
Costs of products have increased	
Finding housekeeping staff	All

Q20 What do you need to help your business grow?

Effort as always	
Increasing the quality of visitors in Stow, Better parking for customers.	Leisure & Amenities/Economic Parking & Traffic
Lower taxation	
Nothing I can't do	
Safe guidelines in Stow. Parking spaces, traffic lights adjusting (or similar) to tackle the congestion in Sheep Street - less noise so close, Fair rent.	Parking & Traffic
Footfall	Leisure & Amenities/Economic
Help with gaining more customers	Leisure & Amenities/Economic

Bring in a younger generation, I make no money from the over 70's	Housing, Leisure & Amenities/Economic
More parking, less gridlocked traffic	Parking & Traffic
Make Stow a destination with lots of FREE, easy parking to deal with demand.	Parking & Traffic
Its growing well at the moment	
More town community spirit and organised events not jusy arranged by a select few.	Leisure & Amenities
More younger customers and customers in general	Leisure & Amenities/Economic, Housing
No business rates, more advertising, parking	Economic, Parking & Traffic
Social media platforms and other businesses supporting the barber shop.	Economic
Parking, sorting out the traffic lights to stop endless traffic jams on the Fosse Way.	Parking & Traffic
Customers?	Economic, Leisure & Amenities, Housing, Parking & Traffic
More volunteers	
More business brought in to give more people jobs.	Economic
Need expert Tourist Information	Leisure & Amenities
A good business incentive package so upmarket independent shops will want to open in this town.	Economic
Car parking facilities is essential, maintained in the square to get customers into the gallery.	Parking & Traffic
More visitors to Stow Buses being able to drop off in the square.	Parking & Traffic
Better rates,	Economic
Negotiation with council on local events and business impact. We often feel overlooked.	Leisure & Amenities
Better pool of staff to recruit from.	Economic, Housing
Staffing	Economic, Housing
Not a lot, our business has grown year on year over the last 8 years.	
More properties for sale	Housing
The ability to be able to hang a sign outside my office. The process is prohibitive.	Economic
Make Digbeth street like Church Street, stop lorries and coaches using it.	Parking & Traffic
More parking	Parking & Traffic
Advertising support - technology support	Economic
Customers and access	All
Extra grant funding would really help.	
Visitors!	All
Lower rates.	Economic
Reasons for people to visit Stow - Events etc.	All
Local trade	All
More affordable housing to bring younger families to the area	Housing
More free parking	Parking & Traffic
Access to good staff	Economic, Housing

Additional comments for business survey 25 9 2020 Janet and Colin Piper.

A few other questions might have been added to the survey, as we received many spoken comments, when collecting the surveys.

1 The funfair in the square

A number of people independently mentioned their frustration about the disruption to trade (in addition to the gypsy fair weeks) that is caused by the arrival of the funfair. Complaints ranged from the severe reduction of car parking spaces, through annoyance that it functioned principally in the evening, while deterring daytime custom in the shops. Several people suggested that local fields (cricket ground/King George's field) would be a much more appropriate location.

2 A local trade association

There was a widespread welcome of the invitation to give the views of local businesses. Several people mentioned the need for a coordinated voice for business in the town and one business owner indicated that with other traders' support, he would be prepared to chair a Stow Traders' Association. (He has previous experience of this in Moreton. He said that they would need funds, and that an annual contribution from members (£100?) would be needed, though he has experienced reluctance of association members to contribute in the past!).

3 Part-time staff

One survey contributor commented on the difficulty of getting part time staff to work in the evenings. Another suggested a register of people willing to work for more than one Stow business. A perfect job for the Trade Association to organise!

Our impressions

Alongside the issues above, a few dominating issues have emerged. Most prominently, the lack of available car parking. One business complained bitterly about the hotels (The Sheep, which has reduced its rear car park to extend their outside dining area) and The

Porch House, both of which have inadequate parking for their guests, so filling the available street parking early each day. Others resent the use of available space by builders' vehicles parking in Maughersbury car park when working on the Chamberlyne House project and in town on the Brio houses.

Another repeated complaint was the over-representation of charity shops in the town.

The high cost of the unfair rating system was another bitter complaint by shop owners.