



Public Consultation Report

Proposed traffic calming
measures for Fore Street, Totnes

May/June 2022

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Report summary

- Totnes Town Council ran a public consultation into three traffic calming measures proposed by Devon County Council in response to calls to make the high street safer and reduce the volume and speed of traffic. The consultation consisted of a survey and an in-person event and ran between 18 January and 31 March 2022.
- A total of 767 responses were received to the survey and approximately 40 people attended the in-person event. The results showed that 48.6% opposed the measures, 36.2% supported, 13% supported but with amendments, and 2.6% answered 'don't know'.
- Of those who support but with amendments, many actually expressed a preference for entirely different traffic measures. Of those who oppose the measures, 74.4% do not feel that any traffic calming measures are needed in Fore Street at all.
- The business community largely oppose the measures. Residents were more evenly split between supporting and opposing.
- The most common comments received were:
 1. Requests for some degree of pedestrianisation
 2. Opposition to any loss of car parking spaces
 3. Requests for the focus to be on the High Street and the Narrows rather than Fore Street
 4. Requests that signage should be improved first
 5. Requests that the 'access only' restrictions should be better enforced
- There is a question around whether the measures would reduce accessibility on Fore Street as it would effectively remove two existing level crossing points. This requires further clarification.
- The consultation shows that this is a very complex issue with no clear solution that everyone will be satisfied with. There is a widespread feeling of frustration amongst all parties and significant survey fatigue. There is also a lack of a cohesive strategy for the town which needs addressing.
- It is the **officer recommendation** that no action is taken until after an independently facilitated stakeholder meeting has taken place (as requested by Devon County Council); that there are other more cost-effective and less disruptive measures that should be explored first; and that the accessibility issues need addressing.
- **Next steps:** To organise an independently facilitated stakeholder meeting to create a prioritised list of acceptable options for the high street and centre of town. This has been requested by DCC.

1.0 Introduction

Totnes Town Council have produced this report based on the public consultation it ran on proposed traffic calming measures designed by Devon County Council. Devon County Council designed these measures in response to calls to make the road safer and to reduce the amount of traffic using the road. The challenge of balancing the needs of the whole community, including residents and businesses in the high street, within a historic town setting were carefully considered in designs. The Devon County Council proposal to narrow the road in three places aims to deter vehicles from entering Fore Street by slowing down traffic while still maintaining access for shopping, deliveries and servicing. The idea is that this would then also reduce the number of people using the High Street as a cut-through.

Totnes Town Council ran the public consultation as requested by Devon County Council as part of the public engagement process. It ran between 18 January 2022 and 31 March 2022.

2.0 Method

2.1 Consultation process

The consultation initially ran from 18 January to 24 February 2022 but was extended for another four weeks at the request of the Steering Group for the Totnes and District Traffic & Transport Forum to ensure a wider response. The consultation closed fully on 31 March 2022. The proposed designs can be found in Appendix A.

The consultation consisted of a survey, which was available online and in hard copy. It consisted of 8 questions. These can be found in Appendix B. The online survey was run using Google Forms. This platform was used due to its perceived ease of use and cost-effectiveness. 4000 paper versions were circulated to Totnes residents via the Totnes Directory. Copies were also available at Totnes Library and at the Totnes Town Council offices.

As well as the survey, Totnes Town Council held an in-person drop-in event at the Civic Hall in Totnes on the 18 February 2022. This was to allow people to find out more about the plans and to discuss their ideas directly with officers facilitating the consultation. This provided another opportunity to fill in comment cards and to share ideas with others via sticky notes on a whiteboard.

Responses were also received via email and in the post. All responses were collated and coded into categories using the program Nvivo. Overarching themes were then identified.

The consultation was publicised through various methods:

- Totnes Town Council website
- Totnes Town Council and Green Travel Totnes Facebook and Instagram pages
- On various town Facebook pages
- A Facebook and Instagram ad aimed at all residents and businesses in the Totnes area
- Via email to the Totnes Town Council Business community directory
- Via email to schools
- TTC Officer went around to all shops on Fore St

2.2 Limitations

A number of limitations have been identified with the consultation method. First of all, it was highlighted that combining business-owners and workers might produce a skewed view of opinions as the two might have quite different views. However, as can be seen in section 3.2.2, this does not seem to be the case as the vast majority of responses opposed the measures.

Another issue that was raised was the use of Google Forms for the online survey. It was highlighted that it was possible to submit multiple responses and thereby attempt to skew the results. This is a valid point but unfortunately one that other platforms also suffer from. In addition, Totnes Town Council did not wish to create a barrier to people responding, which requiring a sign-in or email address might do. The Council did not wish to collect respondents' email addresses unnecessarily. Other platforms, such as SurveyMonkey, have restrictions on the number of responses that can be collected.

The Council will of course endeavour to learn from this and welcome any other feedback on the process.

3.0 Results

A total of 767 survey responses were received. 632 responses were submitted via the online survey and 135 responses were completed using the paper copy.

Approximately 40 people attended the in-person event with 27 people leaving feedback on comment cards. A few other responses were received via email or in the post.

3.1 In-person event: 18 February 2022

A drop-in event was held at the Civic Hall in Totnes on Saturday 18 February between 10am and 1pm. Approximately 40 people attended this event over the course of the 3 hours with 27 people leaving feedback on comment cards and sticky notes.

Common themes amongst these were:

- Fore Street is not the problem, but rather the High Street and the Narrows
- Pedestrianisation (either fully or partially) as a solution
- Enforce 'access only'
- Improve signage to redirect traffic to alternative routes

3.2 Survey

A total of 767 survey responses were received with 632 responses submitted via the online survey and 135 responses completed using the paper copy. A summary overview of responses to each question can be found in the following section. For the questions with open-ended answers, only the key responses are shown. More detailed feedback can be found in Appendix C.

3.2.1 Question 1: I am a... (please tick all that apply)

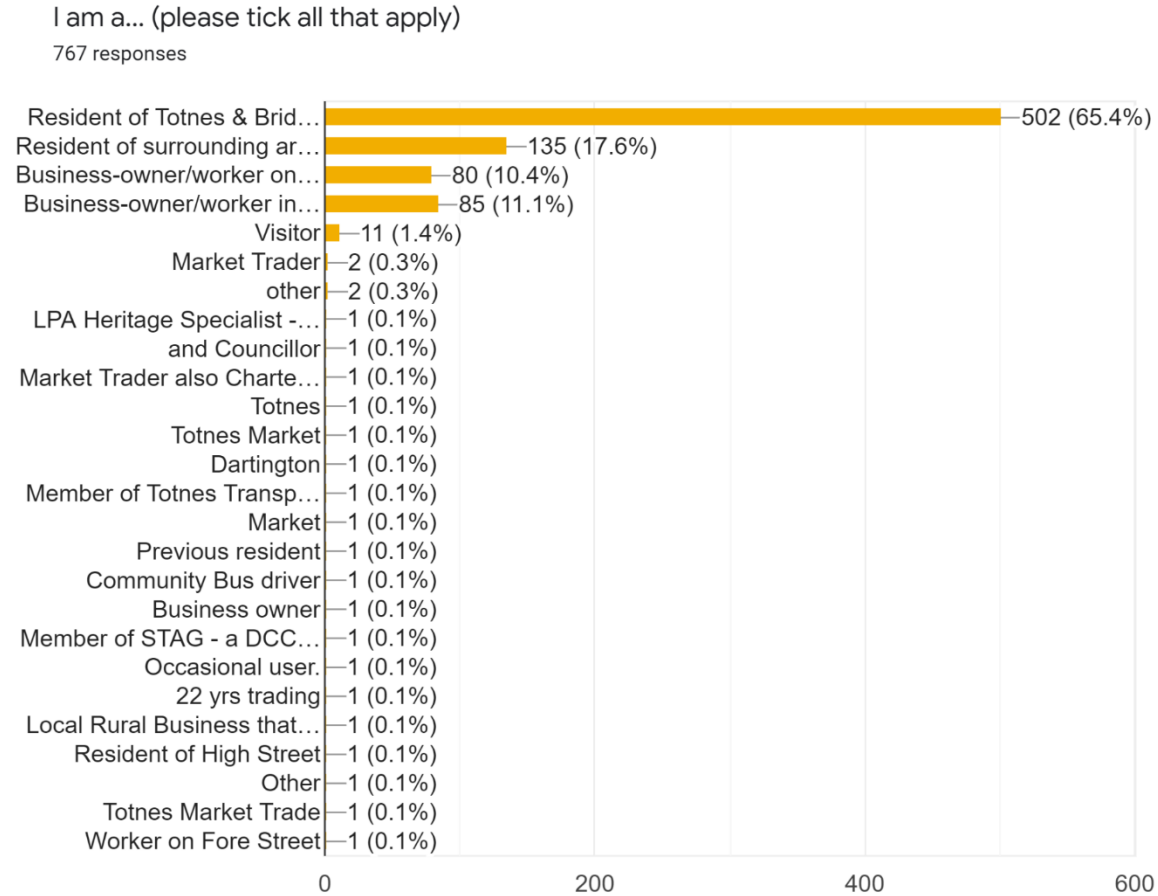


Figure 1: Overview of respondents

As can be seen, 65.4% of respondents were residents of Totnes and Bridgetown. 17.6% were residents of surrounding areas, 10.4% were business-owners/workers on Fore Street, and 11.1% were business-owners/workers in town but not on Fore Street.

3.2.2 Question 2: Do you support the three proposed traffic calming measures on Fore Street?

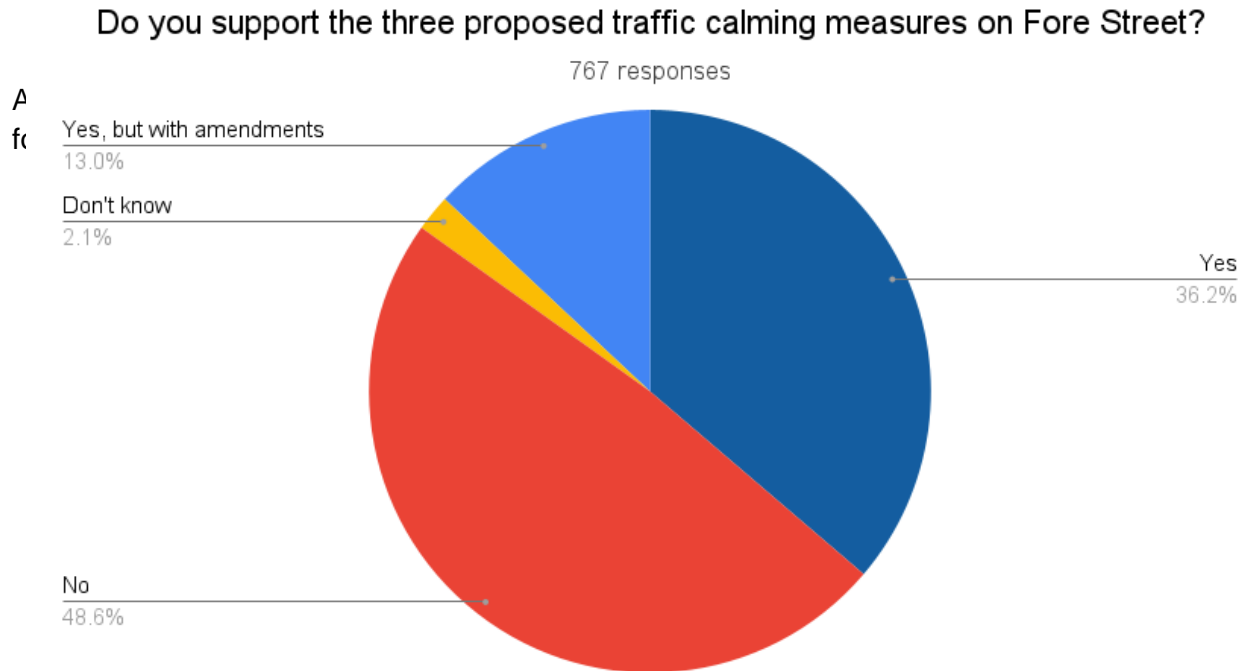


Figure 2: Distribution of answers to question 2: "Do you support the three proposed traffic calming measures on Fore Street?"

As figure 2 shows, there is quite an even split between those who are against the proposed measures (48.6%) and those who fully (36.2%) or partially support the measures (13%) (combined 49.2%). 2.1% answered 'don't know'. The charts below show the distribution between residents and businessowners and workers.

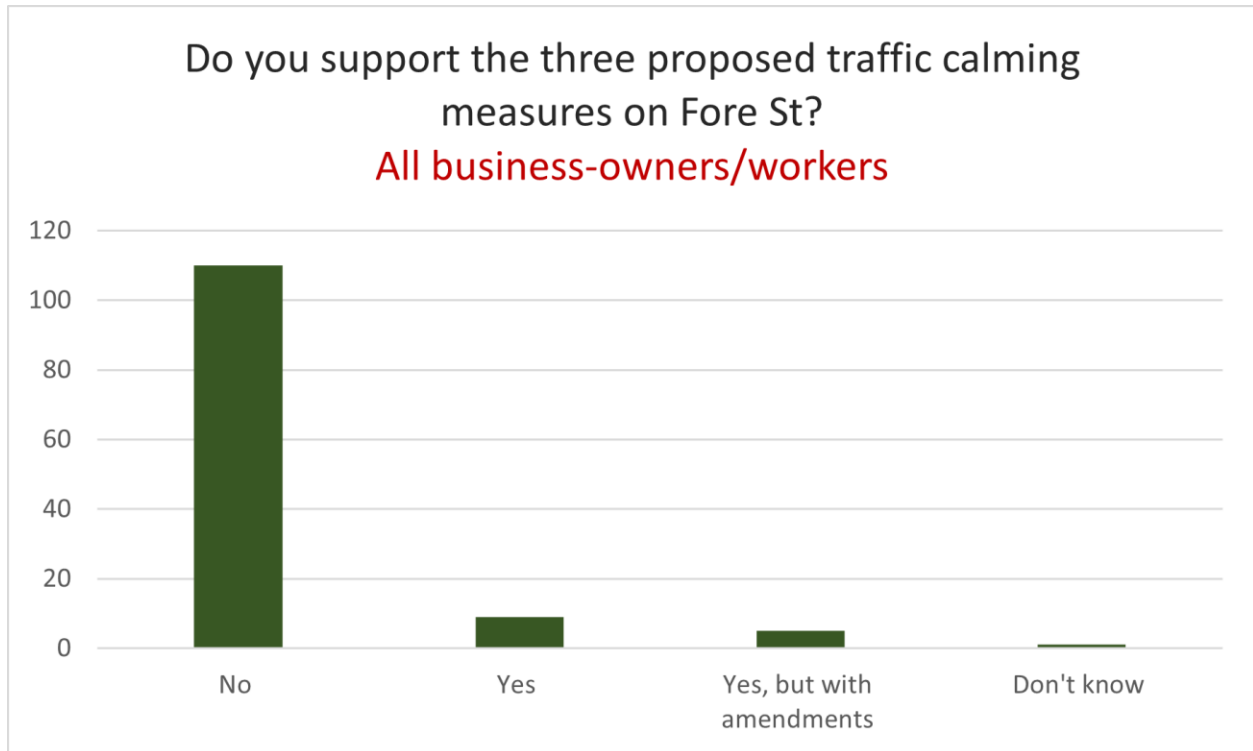


Figure 3: Opinion distribution of all respondents who identified as business-owners/workers

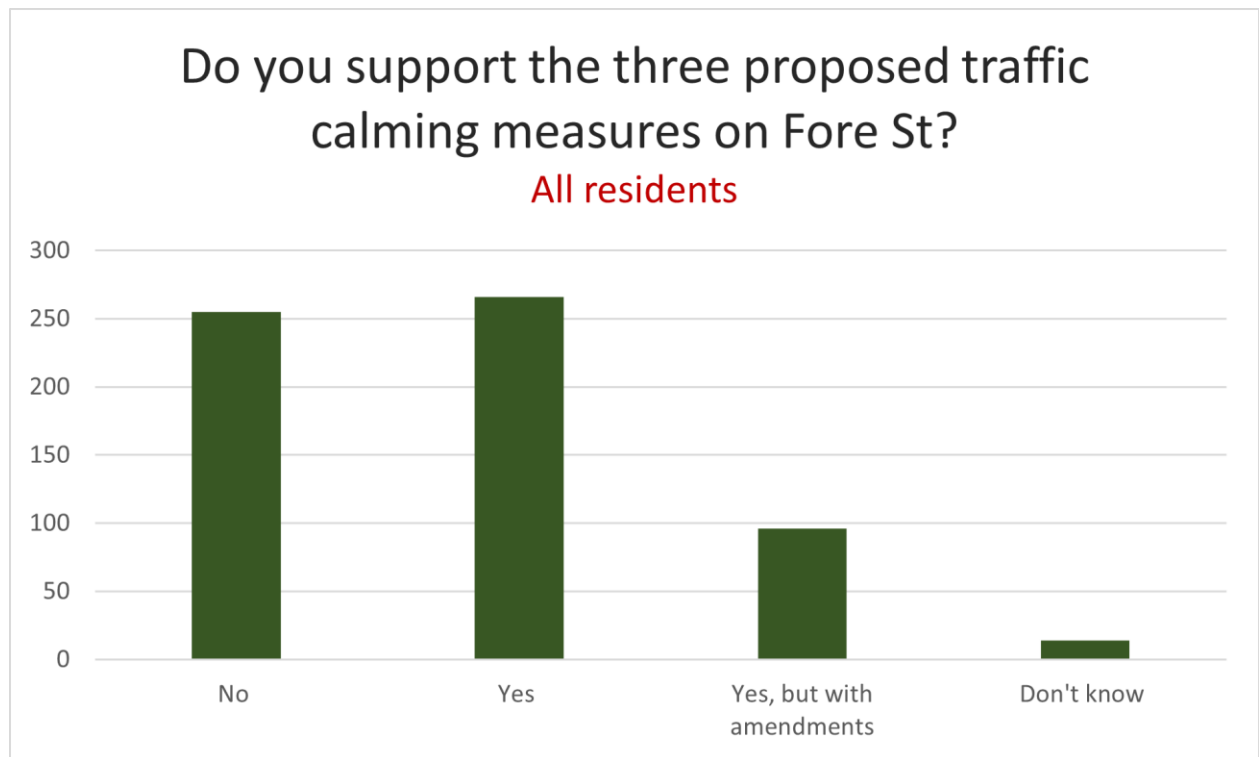


Figure 4: Opinion distribution of all respondents who identified as residents

3.2.3 Question 3: If you answered 'yes, with amendments', what amendments would you like to see?

13% of respondents answered in Question 1 that they supported the proposal but with amendments. A total of 119 people (15%) responded to Question 3 which asked them to explain what amendments they would like to see.

The responses have been collated and grouped into themes. The five most popular response themes can be seen in figure 5 below. *Please note that the percentages are of the people who responded to this specific question, not of all survey respondents.* Further detail on responses can be found in Appendix C.

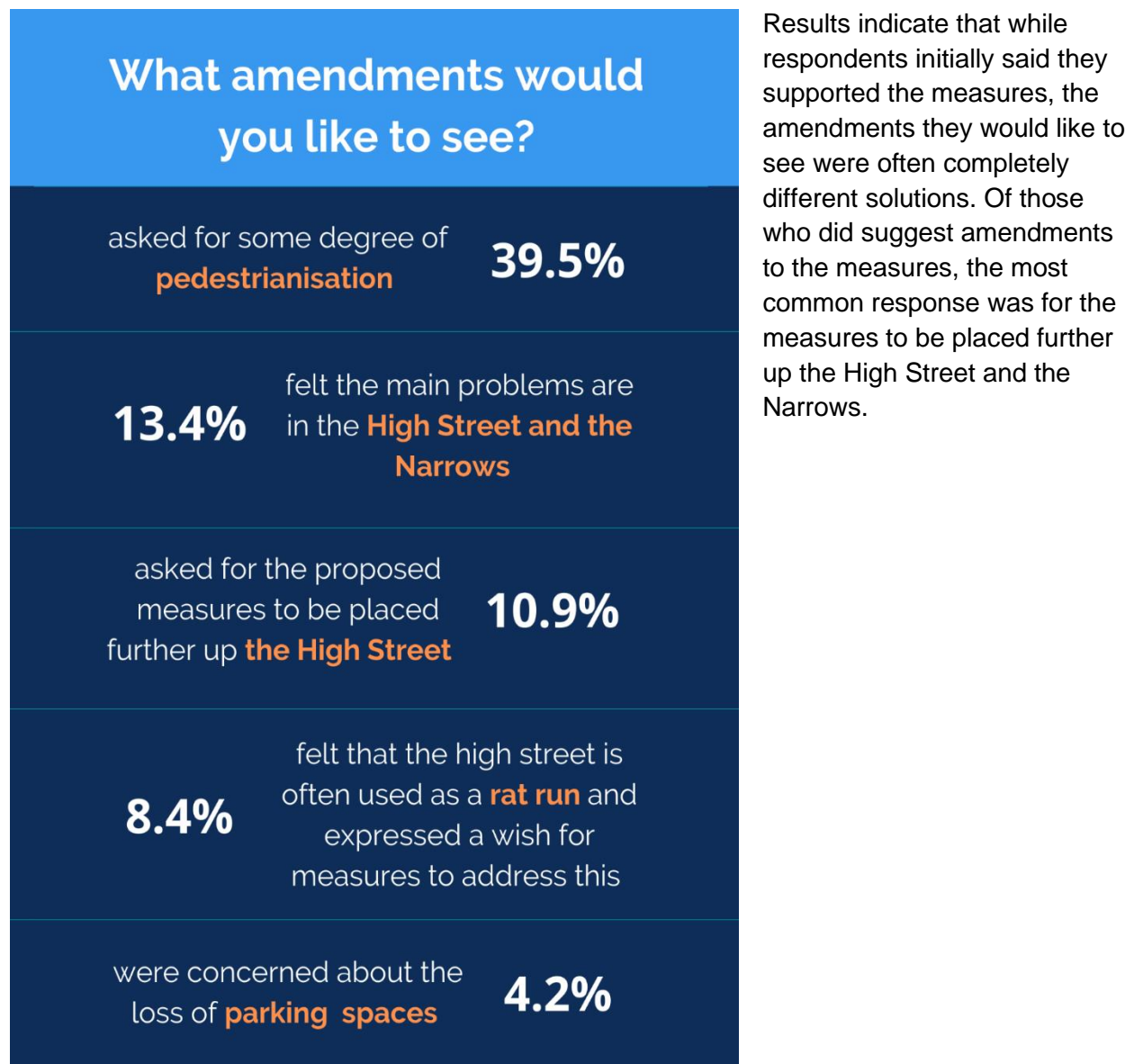


Figure 5: Most common responses to Question 3, 'If you answered 'yes, with amendments', what amendments would you like to see?'

3.2.4 Question 4: If you answered 'no' to Question 2, do you believe that traffic calming measures are needed on Fore Street in general?

If you answered 'no' to Question 2, do you believe that traffic calming measures are needed on Fore Street in general?
425 responses

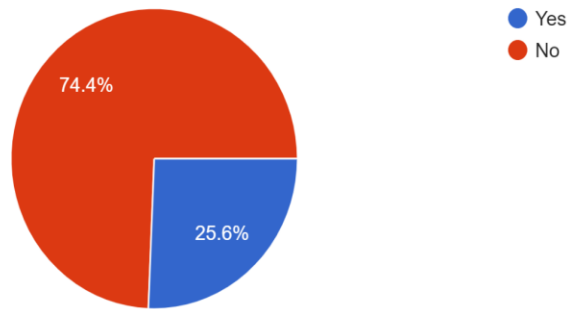


Figure 6: Responses to question 4, 'do you believe traffic calming measures are needed on Fore St in general?'

A total of 425 responses were received for this question. Of those who answered that they did not support the three proposed traffic calming measures, the vast majority also do not believe that traffic calming measures are needed on Fore Street in general.

3.2.5 Question 5: If you agree traffic calming measures are needed, why do you not support the current proposal?

A total of 139 responses were received for this question. The responses were very varied with different reasons given for not supporting the measures. The top responses are shown in figure 7 below. Further detail on these and additional responses can be found in Appendix C. *Please note that the percentages are of the people who responded to this specific question, not of all survey respondents.*



Figure 7: Most common responses to Question 5, 'If you agree traffic calming measures are needed, why do you not support the current proposal?'

3.2.6 Question 6: Do you agree with the proposed placement of the three narrowings?

Do you agree with the proposed placement of the three narrowings?

728 responses

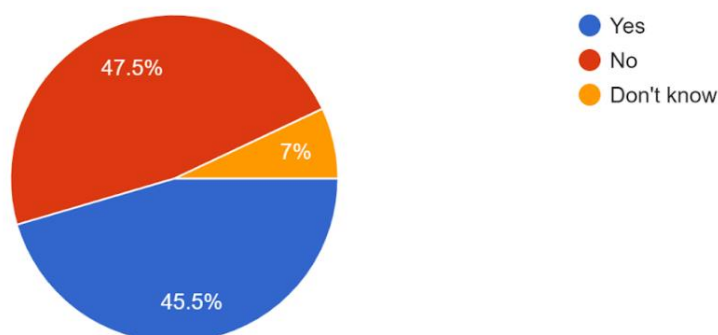


Figure 8: Responses to question 6, 'Do you agree with the proposed placement of the three narrowings?'

A total of 728 responses were received for this question. It is evident from the responses to question 7 that this question was phrased too ambiguously. Many people understood it to be asking whether they agreed with the measures in general. However, the question was in fact asking whether they agreed with the three proposed locations by the Seven Stars Hotel and at the two existing raised crossings.

3.2.7 Question 7: If you disagree with the placement of the measures, could you explain why?

A total of 313 responses were received for this question.

As mentioned above, it became clear that a significant number of respondents had understood this question to be asking why they do not support the proposed measures. However, the question referred to where the measures were located rather than whether the measures should be placed at all. The comments therefore could be unreliable and are predominantly not to do with the specific locations. The main responses can be found in figure 9 below. *Please note that the percentages are of the people who responded to this specific question, not of all survey respondents.* Additional details can be found in Appendix C.

Of the 5 people who did express an opinion on the location, different suggestions were made: one person expressed a preference for design #1; one person suggested removing the middle location and placing it outside St Mary's Church; one person suggested not having the middle one; and one person wanted them moved to different locations where they would not cause the loss of any parking.

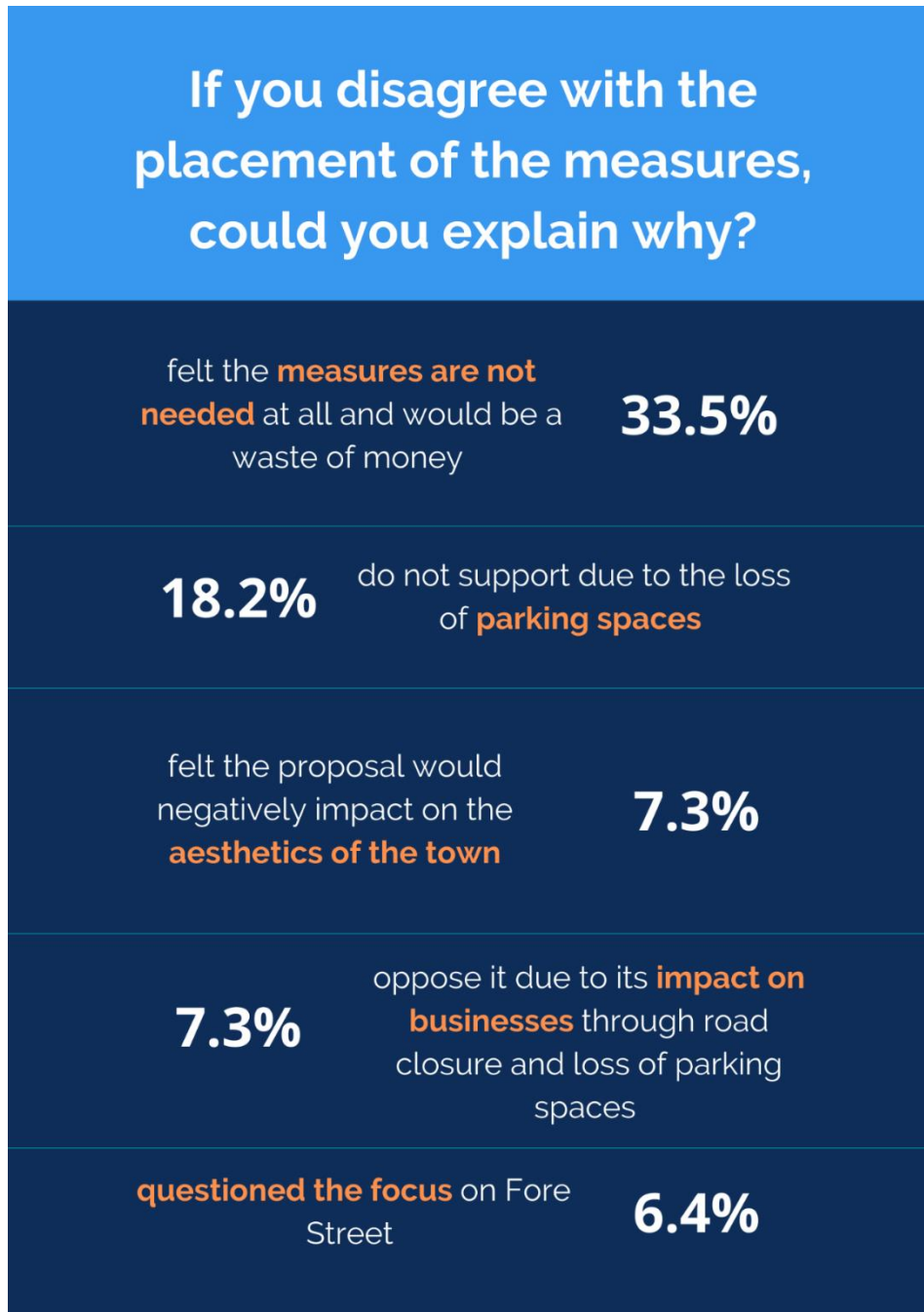


Figure 9: Most common responses to Question 7, 'If you disagree with the placement of the measures, could you explain why?'.

Percentages are of the people who responded to this specific question, not of all survey respondents.

3.2.8 Question 8: If you have any other comments or suggestions regarding priorities or wider measures to address traffic, pedestrian safety and accessibility in town, then please share them below.

A total of 317 responses were received for this question.

These have been grouped into themes with the most common ones shown in figure 10. Please see Appendix C for further details.

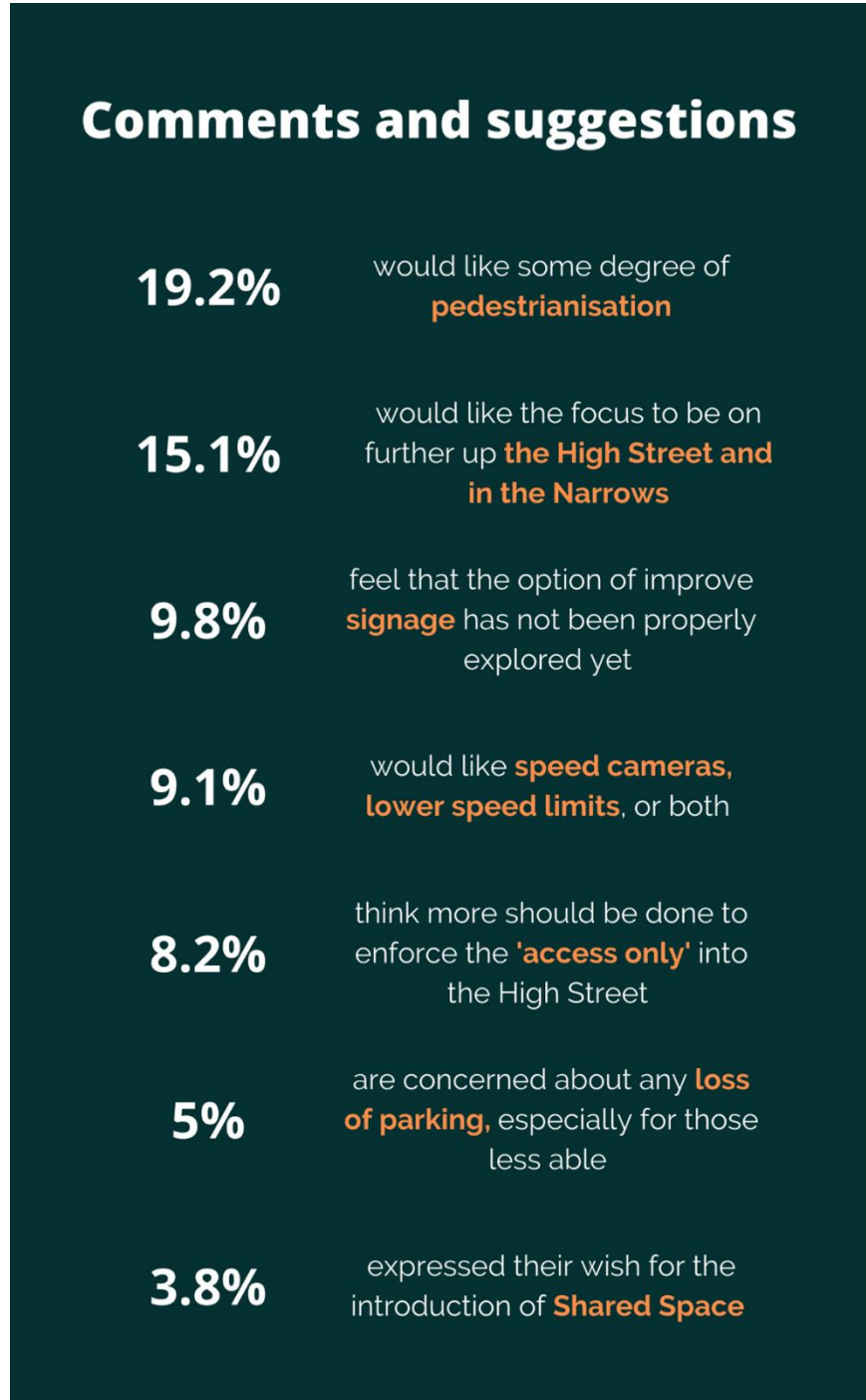


Figure 10: Most common responses to Question 8, any other comments or suggestions

3.3 Accessibility

A few key accessibility issues have been raised. The main points are outlined below:

- How will the proposed measures impact on accessibility? Two of the proposed measures are located at existing raised crossing points. Will this proposal retain crossing access for those less able, particularly wheelchair users and those with buggies? A number of respondents highlighted that there are already accessibility issues in the whole high street with few dropped kerbs and often narrow, sloped or uneven pavements.
- One respondent stated that ramps can be a real problem for people with certain neurological conditions due to the noise, vibration and judder when inside the vehicle. This would possibly be an issue for those using Bob the Bus and wider personal vehicles.
- Loss of parking was raised as posing issues to accessibility as less able-bodied people rely on vehicular access to the town. This is especially the case for those accessing the post office, pharmacy and bank, as well as further up where the road is very steep. The recent loss of the Budgens car park exacerbates this issue.

“

As a local Taxi driver I'd also like to point out how important it is to keep fore street and the High street open for vehicular access. So visiting and resident disabled people can enjoy everything our wonderful town has to offer also.

The town is situated on a very steep hill and we are often called upon to take elderly and disabled from the bottom to the top.

”

“

My health issues are spinal, therefore to shop whilst walking, the goods I can carry have to be light and manageable whilst using a walking stick. I may have to return to my car a few times to complete my shopping. Therefore I need to park close to where I am shopping.

My current car width including mirrors is 2034mm, not too far from the proposed 2200mm width restriction. It would be a problem for me to fold the car mirrors in to manoeuvre through the bollards, as climbing in/out of my car is very time consuming.

Disabled resident

”

3.4 Inclusive Totnes

The key points raised by Inclusive Totnes are outlined below. The full response can be found in Appendix D.

- Inclusive Totnes do not support the current proposal as they do not have any confidence that it will have any discernible impact on the serious pedestrian access and safety problems that Totnes has in the High Street and the Narrows.
 - They state that the dangerous combination of heavy traffic flow and lack of pavements in the town's main shopping areas presents particular dangers, barriers and disadvantage for people with disabilities (including sensory disabilities), older people and children, and that a much more comprehensive set of measures are needed.
- One reason that they do not support these measures is that they believe their focus is misplaced. The problems that Totnes has with pedestrian safety / access is not in Fore Street but higher up in the High Street and the Narrows.
 - Their own traffic surveys have shown that the majority of vehicles passing up through the High Street (over 75%) are not stopping or attempting to stop for any reason, but instead use it as a rat-run. They argue that these proposed narrowings and their placement will not help address this problem.
- They highlight that there is broad support for making the shared space that we already have in practice (particularly in the Narrows where there are sections with no pavements) into a safer shared space.
- They also suggest improving the signage coming into town from Bridgetown Hill and the Old Bridge to clearly direct traffic away from the High street and towards the main car parks (e.g. 'all routes'), changing the signage at the King William / entrance into the High Street, as the 'access only' sign is not recognised by drivers and is completely ignored by most
- They also suggest changing the arrangement of parking spaces in Fore Street to create a slalom between parked cars on either side (which has been confirmed by a local fireman as acceptable to the fire service, and would also not reduce the number of parking spaces but simply add a further deterrent to drivers approaching Fore Street)

3.5 Chamber of Commerce

The key points raised by the Chamber of Commerce (CoC) are outlined below. Their full response can be found in Appendix E.

The CoC conducted two surveys separately from the one run by Totnes Town Council. The first was with all businesses in Fore Street that would be directly impacted by the works and long-term loss of parking. The second survey was conducted to directly extrapolate evidence from business owners, as they felt the Totnes Town Council survey did not adequately distinguish between employees and owners. This second survey was circulated amongst all businesses in and around Fore Street and High Street. A total of 57 responses were received, out of approximately 225 total business along the entire high street.

Their report states the following:

- 85% of businesses did not think there are any issues with traffic where they trade. The 5% that did identify issues are based in the Narrows. The 10% that were undecided commented that if there were issues, they were higher up the street rather than in Fore Street.
- 87.5% of businesses stated that any works would impact their ability to trade in the short and medium term. 7.5% were not sure of the impact on trade – all these businesses are new to town. 5% of businesses did not think this would impact them at all – either because they are based much higher up the street or they service their customers remotely.
- 87.5% did not think the works would improve the pedestrian experience. 5% believed it would and 7.5% were unsure.
- 92.5% of businesses did not think the costs to the TTC would be worth the results. 5% thought it would be worth it – the rest undecided.
- 92.5% of businesses were extremely concerned about any loss of parking. 5% were not concerned as they service customers remotely and 2.5% were unsure.

The Chamber state that they will continue to object to these proposals based on the irreparable damage they feel it will do to businesses in the area. Their reasons for their objection are as follows:

- It disrupts access for Bob the Bus
- It reduces parking bays
- It creates access issues for Blue Badge holders and those with any access issues
- It will cause lengthy disruption during works
- It will cause numerous/ lengthy periods of road closures
- It will act as a barrier to access/ trade for customers/deliveries
- The measures are costly with negative impacts and with no justification (no data at all to support Fore Street unsafe)
- Impactful on Conservation area
- Prejudices business's ability to operate

3.6 Bob the Bus response

The key points raised by the community transport provider, Bob the Bus, are outlined below.

- Buses run the entire length of Fore Street/High Street every 15 minutes (Monday to Friday), so our drivers are very aware of traffic issues in the town. We aim to drop/pick up passengers without trying to pull into the left side of the road, and to limit speed to around 5 mph – this is in itself a traffic-calming measure, and occasionally attracts irritation from drivers of following vehicles.
- We already have to negotiate several quite severe speed ramps around Totnes (e.g. Follaton House and Leatside surgery), and these do cause discomfort to passengers and long-term wear and tear to suspension. We assume the proposed Fore Street ramp design will be less severe, and in any case our speeds are very low.
- However, regarding road narrowings, the devil is in the detail. Our buses have a width of 2.3 m, which is very close to the 2.2 m indicated on the drawings. This means that we face a higher risk of damage to tyre side walls, which is a very significant operating cost for us. We would appreciate full consultation before any measures are imposed.

4.0 Key themes

Fundamentally there is a division between those who feel that the high street as a whole needs traffic calming measures, and those who do not feel that there are any problems. This is evidenced by the almost 50/50 split between those who oppose the measures and those who support them (to some degree or another).

As evidenced in section 3.2.2, the business community is generally opposed to these measures. Residents are generally more in favour although the distribution here is not quite as clear as amongst businesses.

The key themes from the comments received are outlined in figure 11. Comments generally fell into one of the following themes:

- Statement of support for traffic calming measures
- Statement of opposition to traffic calming measures
- Comments highlighting current issues that have not been addressed
- Comments highlighting specific problems with the current proposal
- Comments suggesting alternative solutions

The most common responses in terms of number of mentions have also been tallied and added up. The five categories that received the highest number of comments can be seen in figure 12. More detail can be found in Appendix C.

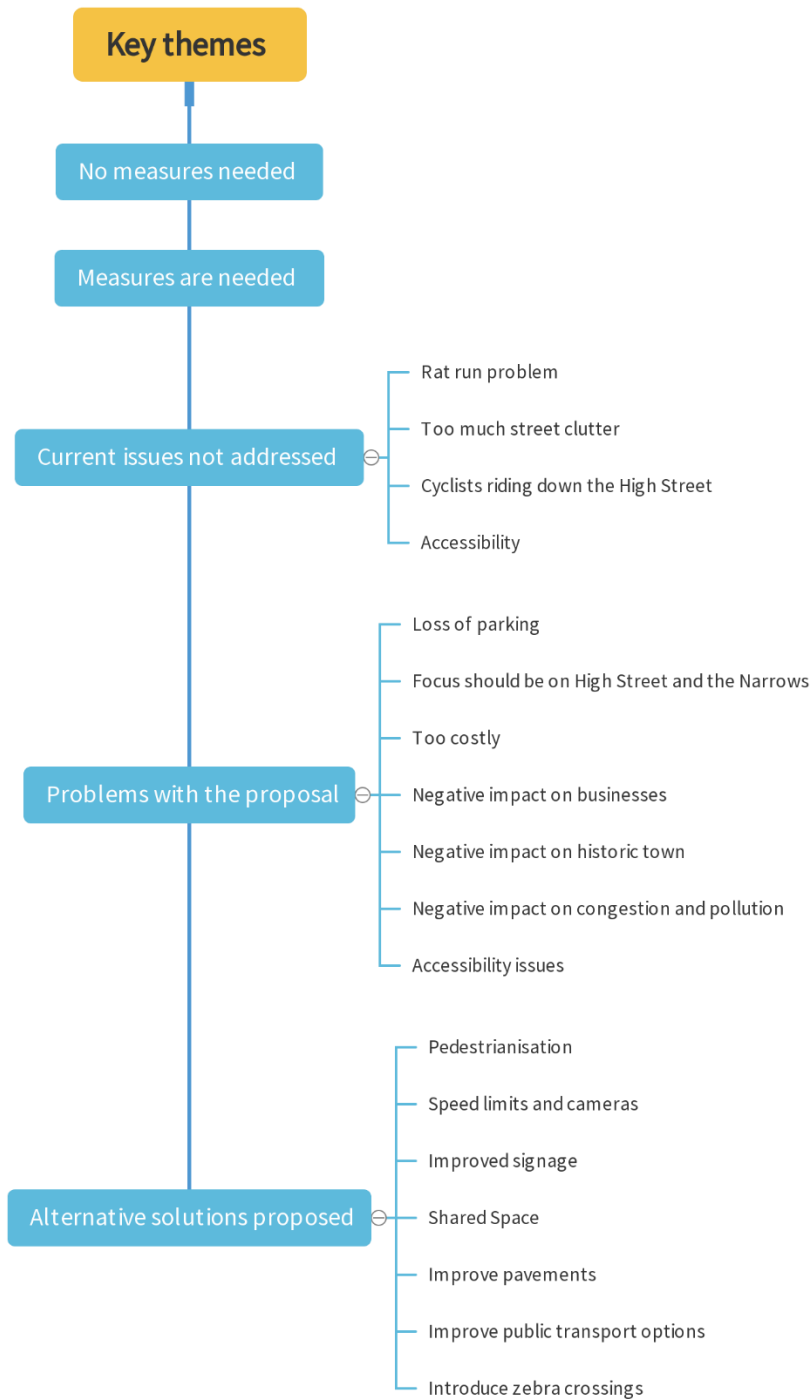


Figure 11: Key themes



Figure 12: The most common responses to the survey

5.0 Discussion and conclusions

The response results show an almost exactly 50/50 split between those in favour of the proposed measures and those against. 48.6% are against the measures, with 74.4% (41% of all respondents) stating that they do not experience the need for traffic calming on Fore Street at all. 49.2% support or support but with amendments. However, when you dig into these numbers it becomes clear that there is less support for the measures than it appears. Only 36.2% fully support the measures with no amendments. The 13% who answered “yes, but with amendments” were in the following question overwhelmingly asking for either completely different solutions or asking for the focus to be on the High Street and Narrows. It can therefore be said that there is no majority support for the proposed measures as they stand.

This is clearly an intensely complex issue which must be handled sensitively. Many people have very strong feelings about the high street and town traffic in general. There is a rich history of discussion and previous work carried out by different community groups. Some of this work has led to changes and some has not. It has also become clear, through conversations and through survey responses, that there is a strong feeling of frustration which appears to be felt by all parties. Those who are in favour of radical changes feel frustrated by the lack of action. Those who oppose changes to the high street feel frustrated that the subject is constantly revisited.

There is no single solution that will please everyone and no matter what decision is taken, some people will be dissatisfied.

6.0 Officer recommendations

Any changes to the high street should form part of a cohesive plan for the town. It is not entirely clear at this stage how the proposed measures would fit into such a plan. Given that there is not overwhelming support for the proposed measures, it is the officer's recommendation that:

- No action is taken until an independently facilitated stakeholder meeting has been held to create a prioritised list of options. This has been requested by DCC. This can feed into a more strategic and cohesive plan for the town that key stakeholders are on board with.
- That other more affordable and less drastic options are considered first. There are various options, including improved signage, clearer road markings, better enforcement of 'access only', and improving active travel infrastructure.
- That further clarity is gained on the possible impacts on accessibility. The current proposal would appear to reduce accessibility by altering two existing raised crossing points. There are also concerns that reducing parking will limit accessibility for less able-bodied people.