

Breckland Council Car Parking Charges Consultation Report



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1. BACKGROUND

Each year, Breckland Council allocates approximately £450,000 to maintain its 30 public car parks across five market towns, the cost of which is covered by all taxpayers, regardless of their use of car parks.

The Council is looking to ensure that parking services continue to meet community needs, as well as being financially sustainable.

In July 2024 (at Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Commission – Appendix A) and September 2024 (at Council – Appendix B), Elected Members reviewed Breckland Council's (the 'Council') current approach to car parking services, with proposals to change its policy on car parking.

The suggested change to the policy would see the introduction of a charging model across the council's public car parks, where the end user would pay to park in the relevant car park at the point of use.

In a commitment to transparency and inclusivity, the Council invited views on how a cost recovery model would work which would enable it to maintain and improve parking facilities, whilst protecting all other Council services.

The Council launched a consultation to gather insights on potential updates to its town centres' car parking system, which was proactively promoted. As part of its approach to consultation it commissioned independent support from the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) through its Talent Bank professional consultancy service. EELGA provided an independent view of the consultation process including a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment and analysis of the consultation responses.

This report presents the approach to consultation, findings of the responses gathered during the Council's 'Car Parks' consultation, summary and considerations. The responses to each question are reviewed in turn with key observations and insights highlighted.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The East of England Local Government Authority (EELGA) on behalf of their member council, Breckland Council, were commissioned to support a consultation inviting views to inform the future of car parking in the district. This consultation took place over a six-week period from 4th of November 2024 to the 15th of December.

Consultation is any activity that gives local people a voice and an opportunity to influence important decisions. It involves listening to and learning from local people before decisions are made or priorities are set. A consultation does not have to be statutory; a council may choose to consult to ensure that decisions reflect the views of their community. In this case the consultation was non-statutory. Breckland Council's approach to consultation was in line with the Government's consultation principlesⁱ and best practice as set out in the Local Government Association's Guide to Engagementⁱⁱ.

The approach to consultation provided multiple ways in which people could share their views. To ensure that the consultation reflected the needs of its community, Breckland Council, through EELGA, commissioned an Equality Impact Assessment, as referenced in Appendix 3. An equality impact assessment (EIA) is a tool that helps organizations ensure that their policies and practices are fair and don't discriminate against protected groups. In the case of a consultation, it helps to avoid creating barriers to participation. The overarching finding from the EIA was that the council had employed a variety of consultation methods, including online surveys, telephone consultations, in-person sessions, and focus groups. This diversity of engagement channels demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

Consultation methods were designed to ensure that they provided the opportunity for the full community demographic to respond, and the main methods employed were:

- Online questionnaire hosted on the Council's website.
- Paper copies of the questionnaire available in libraries and at the Council's offices.
- A series of well attended in person drop in events across the district.
- Workshops with those who directly represent communities such as district and parish councillors.

Over the course of the consultation a total of 3,562 responses were received. Although the consultation closed on 15th December, time was given after the closing date to receive late responses or responses delayed by seasonal post. The formal responses received were broken down as follows:

- 3,275 online
- 287 paper

There were a total of 3,562 questionnaires returned. Some paper returns were considered 'spoilt'; these are included in the total number of returned responses.

The total population of Breckland is 142,164 (as at 2021). 16.6% of the population are 15 and underⁱⁱⁱ. This consultation targets the adult population which is approximately 118,565. The consultation responses therefore represent approximately 3% of the district's adult population.

It is worth noting that most of the questionnaires received were completed by people indicating that they were responding as a local Breckland resident. Smaller returns were made by those identifying themselves as businesses or visiting the area.

The Council embarked upon this non-statutory consultation to encourage people to comment on car parking charges to ensure that council services valued by residents and businesses are not negatively impacted by the cost of public car parking provision. The proposal also aimed to increase the churn of parking in town centre car parks to enable greater footfall to support businesses and ensure the car parks are primarily used to support the delivery of Breckland's thriving market towns. The activity follows on from the Council's successful enforcement trials in Attleborough and Swaffham.

In the FAQs provided to support people's understanding of the purpose of the consultation it explained that the Council's budget, which the taxpayer funds, currently pays approximately £450,000 a year for car parks, setting out that this meant car parking had not been free of charge as may have been the current perception. The proposed tariffs currently under consideration in the public consultation were designed at a minimal rate so that the car parks operate on a cost recovery basis only, with money generated by charging for parking covering the operating cost of this service and any up-front enabling works.

Despite this comprehensive explanation, which was reinforced by Council representatives at the face-to-face drop ins and member/parish engagement, a sentiment analysis of the data suggests that those responding felt predominately negative towards the introduction of what they considered to be new charges.

Quantitative data was analysed to offer both an overall count and a geographical distribution of the responses. Qualitative data was examined to assess sentiment, revealing a mix of negative, neutral, and positive feedback and suggestions. In certain open-text response questions, where respondents shared their opinions, the sentiment tended to be more negative, with fewer neutral or positive responses. However, it is important to note that a smaller number of respondents contributed to the open-text questions, making it challenging to determine a definitive sentiment.

The challenges in analysing the data from the consultation are largely linked to the use of the option 'prefer not to say' and areas of free text. Taking into consideration comments by those responding to free text questions, it could be argued in some cases where prefer not to say and negative comments in free text have aligned, that respondents may have used this option and free text as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the possibility of charging for car parking.

The consultation team made significant efforts to make available in depth Frequently Asked Questions on the website and reinforced these at face-to-face drop ins. On

reflection, key messages linked to the existing cost of maintaining and running the district's car parks to the taxpayer could perhaps have formed part of the questionnaire. This may have enabled the respondent the opportunity of information ahead of completion.

Despite those challenges, the consultation provided good data which will support decision making should the project move forward.

The response rate of 3% of the adult population in line with expectations on consultations of a similar nature. Alongside the quantitative data collected, the qualitative data gathered from both the questionnaire responses and the member/parish workshops provides useful insights and suggestions.

From analysis of the data, where there is a clear majority view, respondents have indicated that:

- There is a preference to pay car parking charges by debit/credit card.
- There is a preference for free car parking up to an hour.
- There is a preference for car parking charges of up to a £1 per hour.
- There is clear support for free parking on significant market town days.
- If permits or season tickets were made available, take up may be minimal.
- Car parking for shopping was of greatest importance, with car parking for work and access to health and public services of next importance.
- There is strong support for blue badge holders to having extra time.

There were some notable areas where the data showed no overall preference such as:

- Longer free periods with a higher hourly rate. This was difficult to show as a preference as a quarter of respondents answered that they were 'unsure'.
- Earlier or later times of the day for charging to start.
- Whether long stay or short stay car parks were preferred.

3. CONSULTATION

3.1 Approach to Consultation and Engagement

Breckland Council have adopted best practice to public consultation which can be evidenced through their recent community involvement and engagement approach relating to the Local Plan. The desire to replicate this comprehensive approach to consultation and engagement was evident. The East of England Local Government Authority (EELGA) were commissioned to provide independent support and capacity to this consultation which was to invite views to inform the future of car parking charges and related matters, across the district. This consultation took place over a six-week period from 4th of November 2024 to the 15th of December.

The objective of the consultation was to give local people a voice and an opportunity to influence a car parking charge model. There was a clear intention to listen to and learn from local people before decisions were made about charging, free periods and other considerations and a strong desire to understand the impacts and implications for the community. This was a non-statutory consultation. It was acknowledged that there would need to be a further statutory consultation at a later date. The Council's approach to consultation was in line with the Government's consultation principles and best practice as set out in the Local Government Association's Guide to Engagement referenced in this document's endnotes.

The approach to consultation provided multiple ways in which people could share their views. To ensure that the consultation reflected the needs of its community, Breckland Council, through EELGA, commissioned an Equality Impact Assessment, as referenced in Appendix 3. An equality impact assessment (EIA) is a tool that helps organizations ensure that their policies and practices are fair and don't discriminate against protected groups. In the case of a consultation, it helps to avoid creating barriers to participation. The overarching finding from the EIA was that the council had employed a variety of consultation methods, including online surveys, telephone consultations, in-person sessions, and focus groups. This diversity of engagement channels demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

Consultation methods were designed to ensure that they provided the opportunity for the full community demographic to respond, and the main methods employed were:

- Online questionnaire hosted on the Council's website.
- Paper copies of the questionnaire available in libraries and at the Council's offices.
- Telephone appointments.
- A series of well attended in person drop in events across the district.

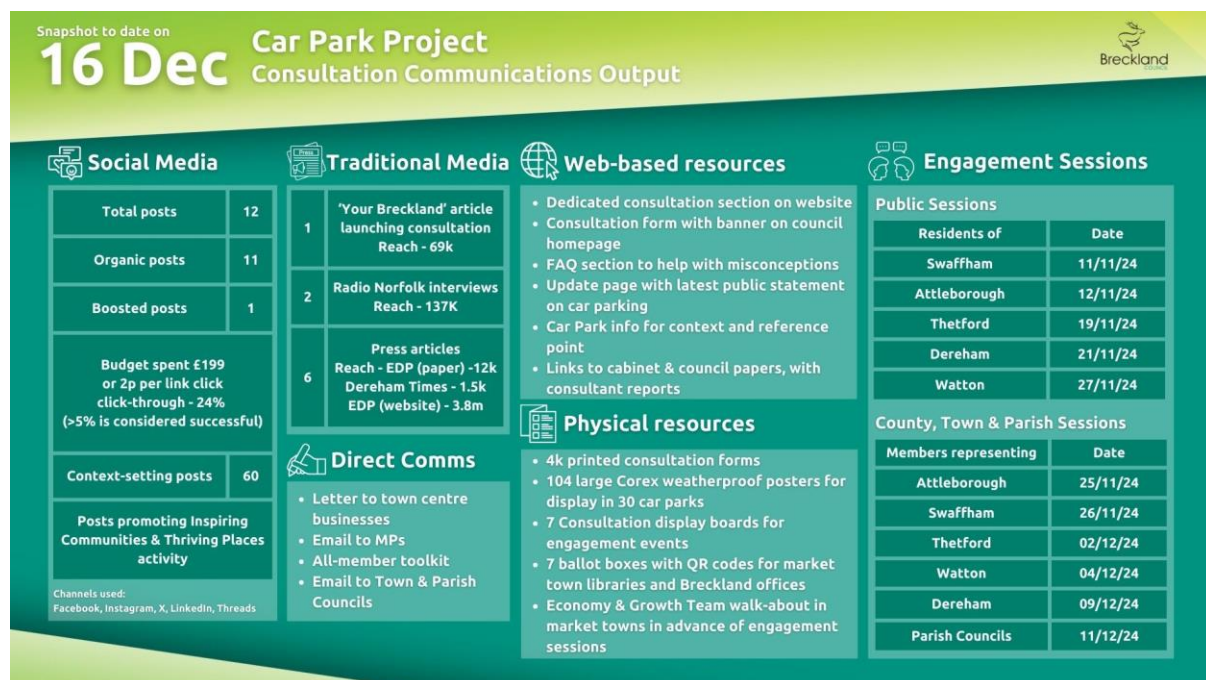
- Workshops with those who directly represent communities such as district and parish councillors across the five Breckland councils of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton as well as with a group of parish members.

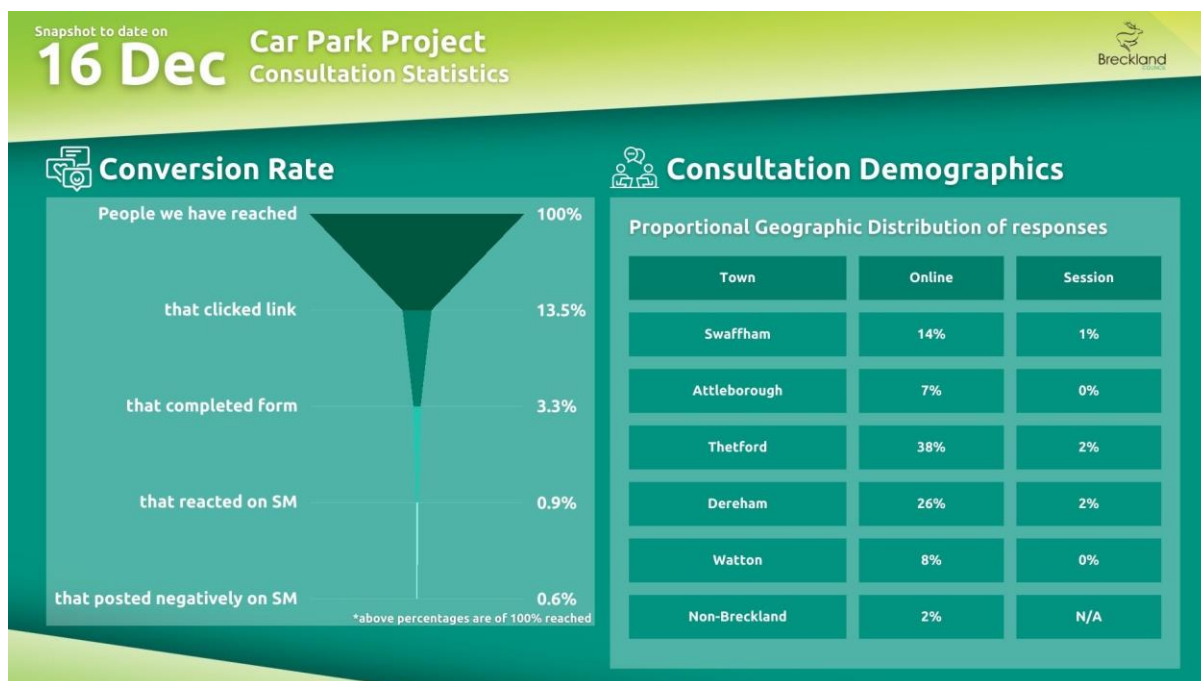
Figure 1. below sets out the earned media coverage, social media and physical promotion undertaken to advertise the consultation across the district. In addition, direct communication was made with town centre businesses, Members of Parliament and town and parish councils to encourage them to support promotion of the consultation and to take part and respond, either online or through submitting a paper copy. In person public sessions were held across the district to support those in more rural locations and harder to reach communities.

Member/stakeholder workshops were also held across the district, involving those who are elected to represent their communities. Whilst views were captured and considered as part of the consultation, each person attending was encouraged to submit their own individual response either online or by paper copy.

Paper copies and support with the online questionnaire were available in other languages and other formats to support a fully inclusive approach to consultation across the community.

Fig. 1 Consultation approach – dashboard reports





The questionnaire was set out in two sections.

- Section A – mandatory questions
 - Questions A1 to A4 – personal details (specific information/considerations attributable to the individual completing the questionnaire).
- Section B – non-mandatory questions – car parking focussed questions.
 - Questions B1 to B5, B7, B16, B18 to B23 - quantitative questions

- Questions B6, B8, B17 and B24 – qualitative questions

In line with Government guidelines and best practice, the consultation questionnaire was written in plain English. The questions were kept to the minimum required to achieve informed decision-making.

Qualitative questions formed a smaller part of the overall questionnaire but offered people the opportunity to provide specific views or ideas that may not be covered by the quantitative questions.

Spoilt paper copy questionnaires

Paper copy questionnaires were entered into a spreadsheet in the same format of the original online questionnaire. To ensure a consistent approach to data analysis, responses received on paper copy questionnaires were not entered into the worksheet where there is a disparity with the response options available on the online questionnaire.

Such responses have instead been marked as 'spoilt'. It should be noted that this entry has only been made for those individual responses that do not meet the requirements of an individual question, and all other responses have been entered if they meet the response criteria. Examples of responses marked as 'spoilt' include the following:

- Entering more than one response than has been requested.
- Selecting more responses from the options provided than has been requested.
- Entering an answer that is not one of the options offered.
- Where the writing cannot be deciphered

On review of the spoilt papers, the benchmarking for acceptance of a paper is that the respondent must have filled out their name and address (as per the instructions on the questionnaire) to be certain that it is not a duplicated entry.

For all other spoilt questions, they were marked as spoilt, but the rest of the correctly completed questions were counted if question 1A was completed correctly.

Methodology – qualitative response analysis

For qualitative responses in Section B, coding was applied with a line-by-line manual review of all comments to assess and theme sentiment amongst consultees and identify any contextual nuances.

Response data to these questions were categorised by key themes such as desired parking options for example, short-stay, long-stay, car park usage, charging etc.

For some questions, word searches and counts were also undertaken. These were then grouped to highlight key emerging themes.

For questions B8 and B24, words were identified which indicated a positive, neutral or negative sentiment (based on a list of commonly identified words). Phrases within the feedback were sometimes grouped under more than one theme, depending on the context of the word/s and how they were used.

Insights into demographic data were also assessed to identify potential trends in feedback such as location, age groups and usage.

One response that consultees could choose in several questions included, 'Prefer not to say'.

This selection of 'Prefer not to say' often scored highly in response to the following questions:

B8, B10, B12, B15, B18 and B22.

Several consultees indicated in their responses to question B24 ("Is there anything else about the car parking proposals that you feel have not been addressed in this consultation questionnaire?") that they had selected the 'Prefer not to say' option. This can be cross referenced in some cases with qualitative answers where the consultee has negatively commented about the decision to charge for car parking. It is not clear if this was the case for everyone who selected this option.

Therefore, to provide clarity, the results related to 'prefer not to say' have not been included in the analysis. The number of respondents who opted not to respond in each of the relevant questions, has however been included in the commentary for transparency.

Member and parish member workshops

Six workshops were held which provided feedback from parish, town, district and county members. Providing feedback on some of the questions which were included in the consultation questionnaire related to local car parks, members also shared relevant local knowledge. The feedback from each workshop has been reviewed and cross referenced with data collected formally through the completion of a questionnaire.

It should be noted that the workshops were not structured to strictly adhere to the format of the questionnaire. They enabled the gathering of local knowledge which will be invaluable to the Council as it forms potential plans for car parking charges, determination of short/long stay status and free periods.

Insights

The consultation was executed in line with national best practice and current Government guidance. It was informed by an Equality Impact Assessment which

provided useful insights that helped to ensure that this important consultation could be accessed by all.

A full range of methods and channels, reflecting the demographic of the district, was used to promote the consultation. The Council acknowledged the challenges for rural and hard to reach communities and consultation activities included face-to-face sessions to support those who needed additional information, support with the questionnaire or for whom accessing information digitally was challenging.

Breckland Council applied a thorough approach to marketing and communication for this consultation. Notably, no formal complaints were received regarding insufficient local awareness after the consultation. The community was provided with numerous opportunities, methods, and channels to share their views. The data captured provides a valuable overview of opinion and preference.

Considerations

Engaging a meaningful response from a broad demographic can be challenging. While wide promotion and marketing were key to the widespread local awareness of this consultation, it is well established that certain age groups, particularly those between 18 to 25 and 35 to 44, can be more difficult to engage. This may be due to limited time for participation or how the information is delivered.

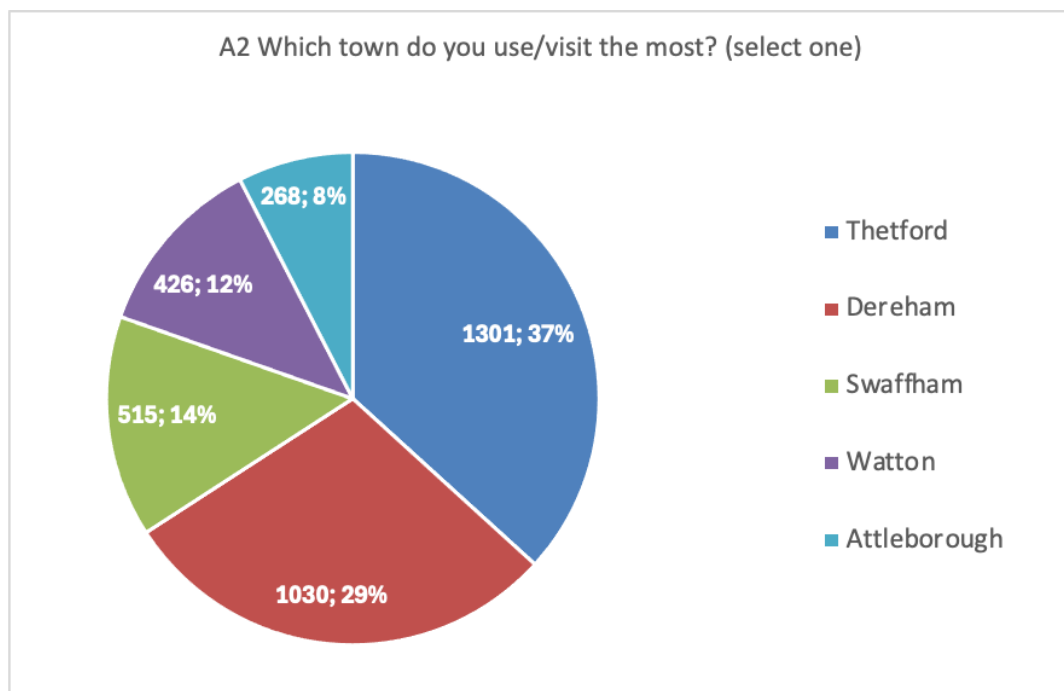
For future consultations, it may be beneficial to explore the use of virtual reality or AI tools, such as virtual engagement rooms, which are accessible 24/7 and leverage gaming technology—an approach that evidence suggests resonates with both age groups. Additionally, virtual and AI-based engagement methods can be especially valuable for engaging members of the community who may find physically attending in person events more challenging but would benefit from the opportunity to access more information or ask questions. However, this approach can be costly, so it would need to be carefully considered in relation to the project budget.

3.2 CONSULTATION RESULTS – analysing the data

SECTION A

A2 TOWN VISITED MOST

Over a third of respondents use/visit Thetford (37%) with Dereham selected by over a quarter of respondents as the town they most used/visited. Attleborough had the fewest mentions at 8%.



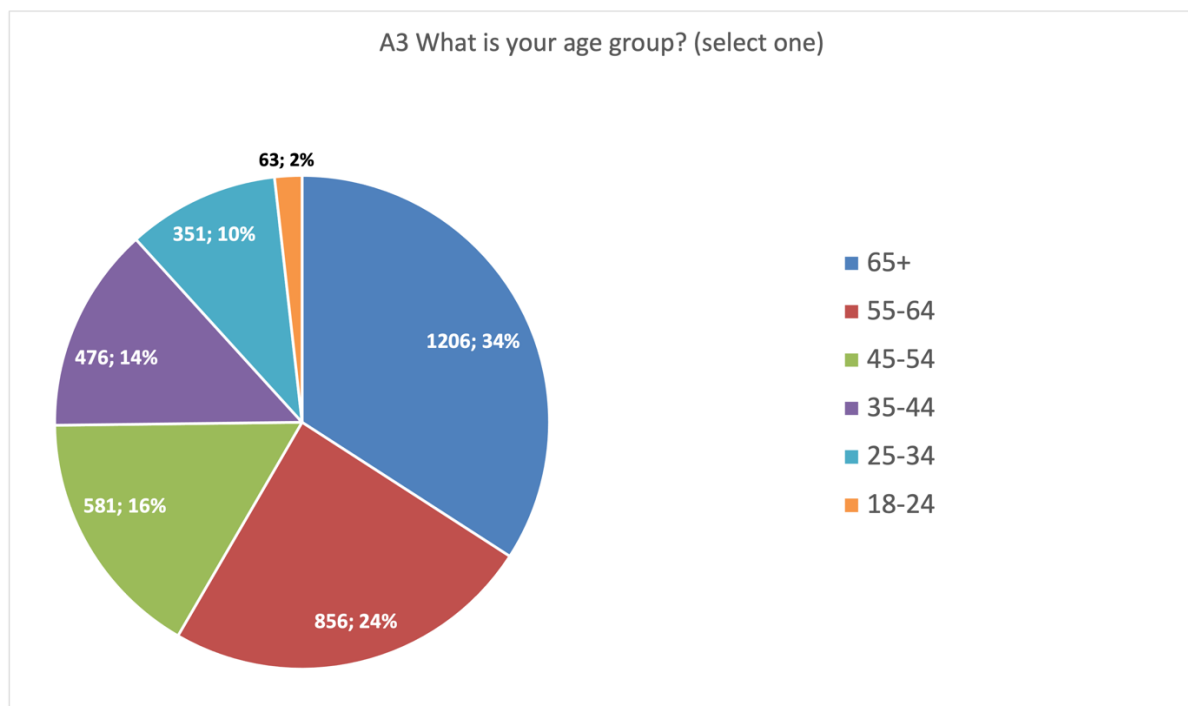
A3 AGE RANGES

Over a third of responses to this question came from the 65+ group. Almost a quarter of respondents were aged between 55-64.

The average age in Breckland (as at 2021) is 46. This age group relates to approximately 16% of the consultation respondents which indicates that the responses are not fully representative of the general population of Breckland.

As previously mentioned in section 3.1 of this report achieving a meaningful response from a broad demographic can be challenging. The consultation was widely promoted and attracted good, earned media coverage and was well publicised across the Council's social media channels. The ages range 18 to 25 and 35 to 44 can be harder to engage and as has been already mentioned, this may be due to their limited time for participation or that information is not available in a format well used by them.

A consideration for future consultations, may be to explore the use of virtual reality or AI tools, such as virtual engagement rooms, which are accessible 24/7 and leverage gaming technology—an approach that evidence suggests resonates with both age groups.

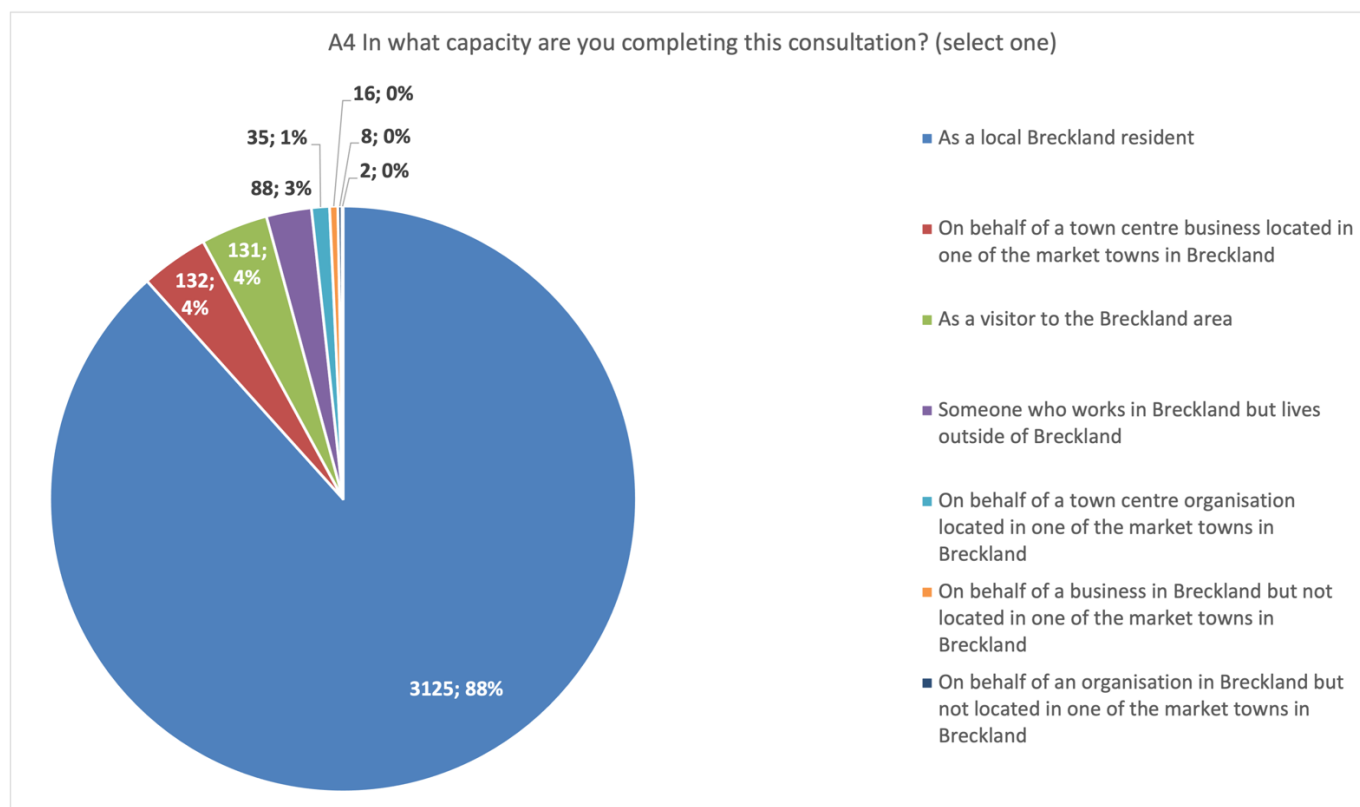


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A4 CAPACITY IN WHICH RESPONDENTS COMPLETED THE CONSULTATION

The largest number of respondents stated that they were completing the consultation in the capacity of a local Breckland resident. The results of the consultation will reflect the views of residents over those of other groups. This is an encouraging result. The data we are analysing is representative of the local community. Only 7% of those who responded lived outside of Breckland and of those, 3% worked in the district.

Those responding on behalf of a town centre business or organisation, totalled approximately 5%.



Further insights

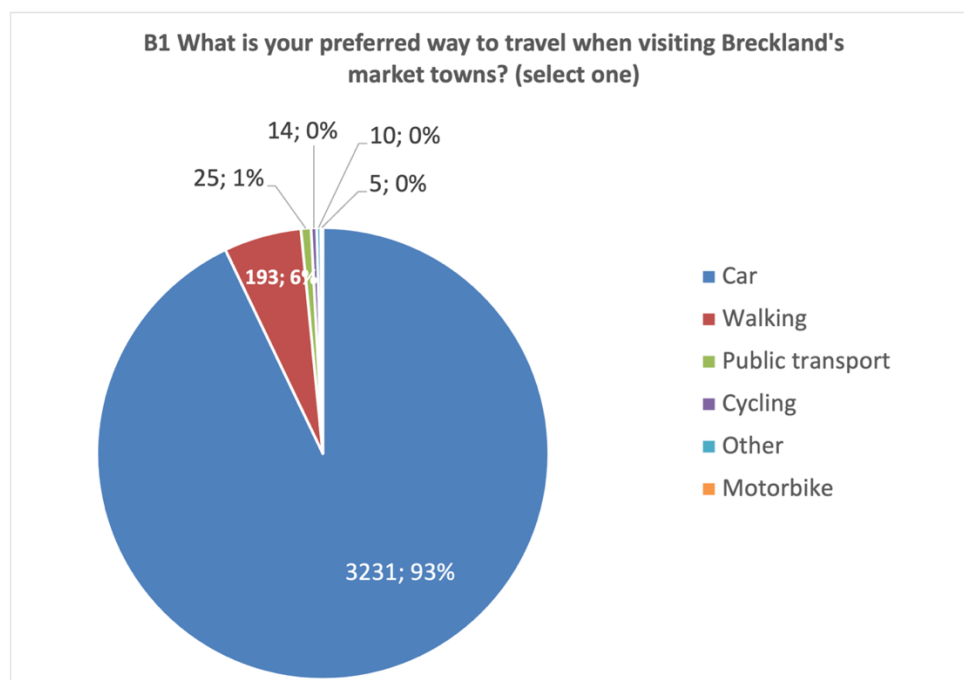
When considering the capacity in which consultees were responding, their respective age groups and the towns they visited most:

- Of those responding on behalf of a town centre business located in one of the market towns in Breckland (regardless of age group), the highest number came from Dereham. The lowest number came from Watton.
- Thetford had the highest number of people responding in the capacity of a visitor to Breckland. Watton had the lowest responses in this category overall.
- Of those who responded in the category of 'Someone who works in Breckland but lives outside of Breckland' the highest number were in Thetford in the 45-54 age group, followed by Dereham, with the highest number in the 55-64 age group.

SECTION B

B1 PREFERRED WAY OF TRAVEL

It is conclusive amongst those responding to the consultation that when visiting Breckland's market towns, the preferred way to travel is by car.

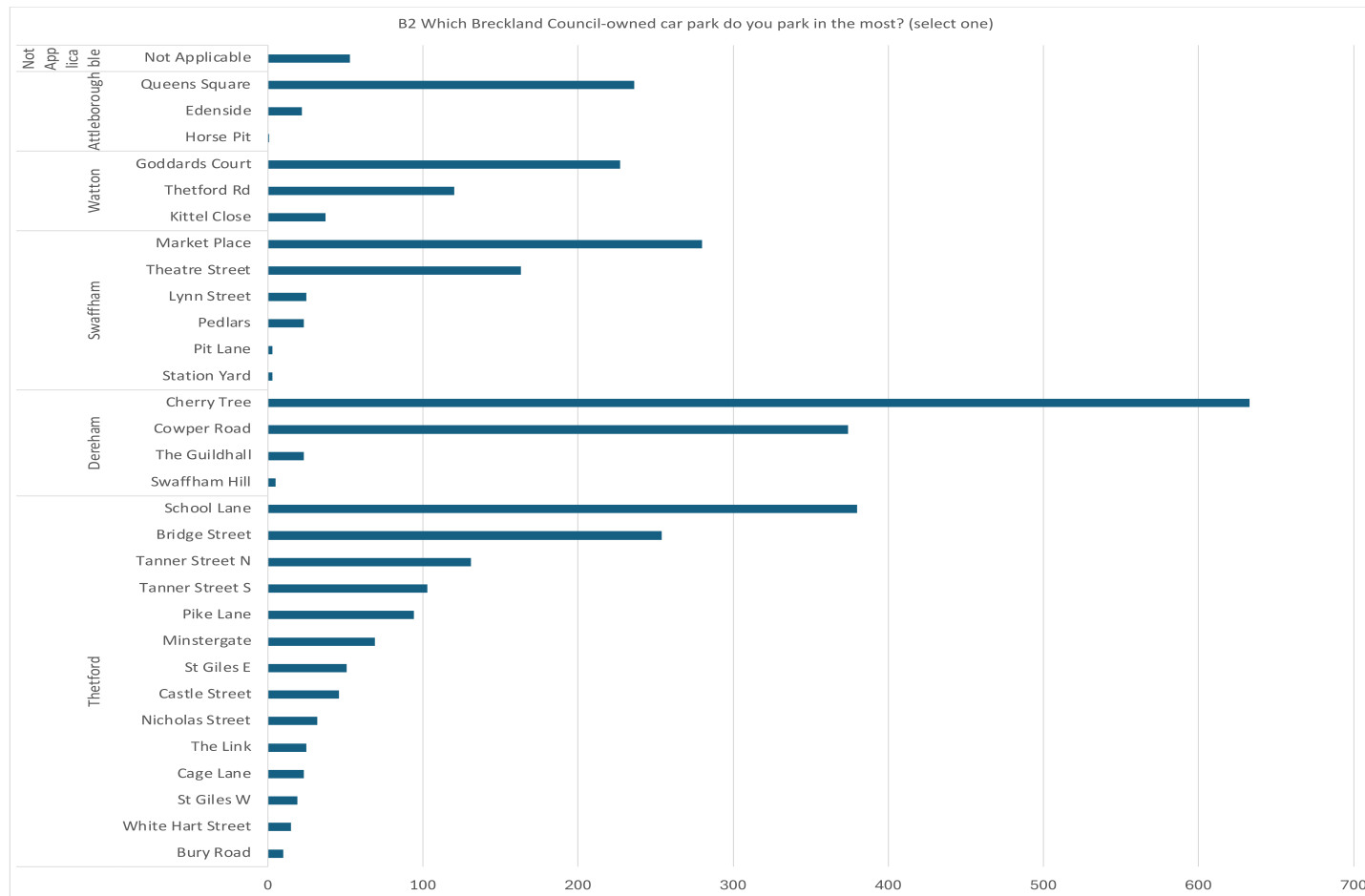


Further insights

When considering those travelling by car in terms of age, and by town, those in the 55-64 age group visited Thetford by car the most. Thetford was again cited by the 18-24 age group as visited most by car, while in the 65+ age group, travelling to Dereham by car was the most popular. When we cross reference this to the parish workshop it provides a noteworthy point to arguably support local parish opinion gathered that Thetford car parks should be long stay. This is then further supported by feedback from the member workshop focusing on Thetford which suggested that all but three of Thetford's car parks should be long stay.

B2 BRECKLAND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARK, PARKED IN THE MOST

Respondents identified preferred car parks in each of the Breckland towns, with a small number stating, 'not applicable'. The preferred car park selections for each town were Queen's Square (Attleborough) Cherry Tree (Dereham), School Lane (Thetford), Market Place, (Swaffham) and Goddards Court (Watton).

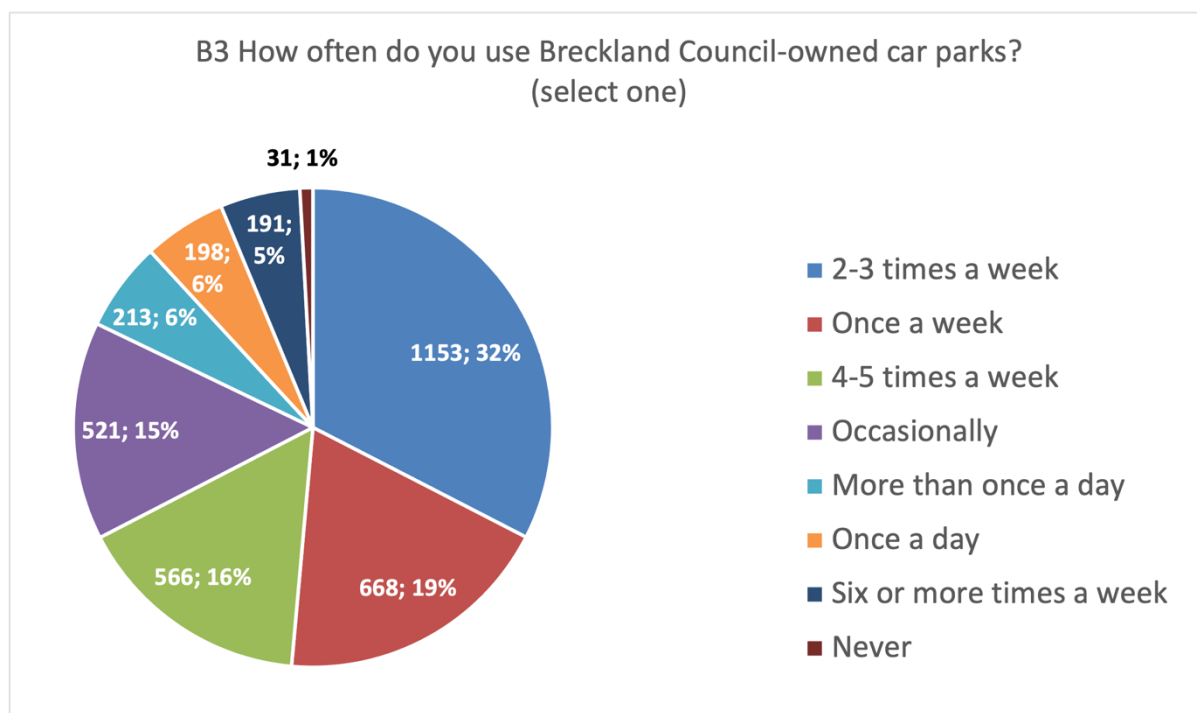


B3 HOW OFTEN BRECKLAND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARKS ARE USED

Over 30% of respondents stated that they use the car parks 2-3 times a week, with once a week being the next selected. Only 31 of the overall respondents indicated that they never use car parks.

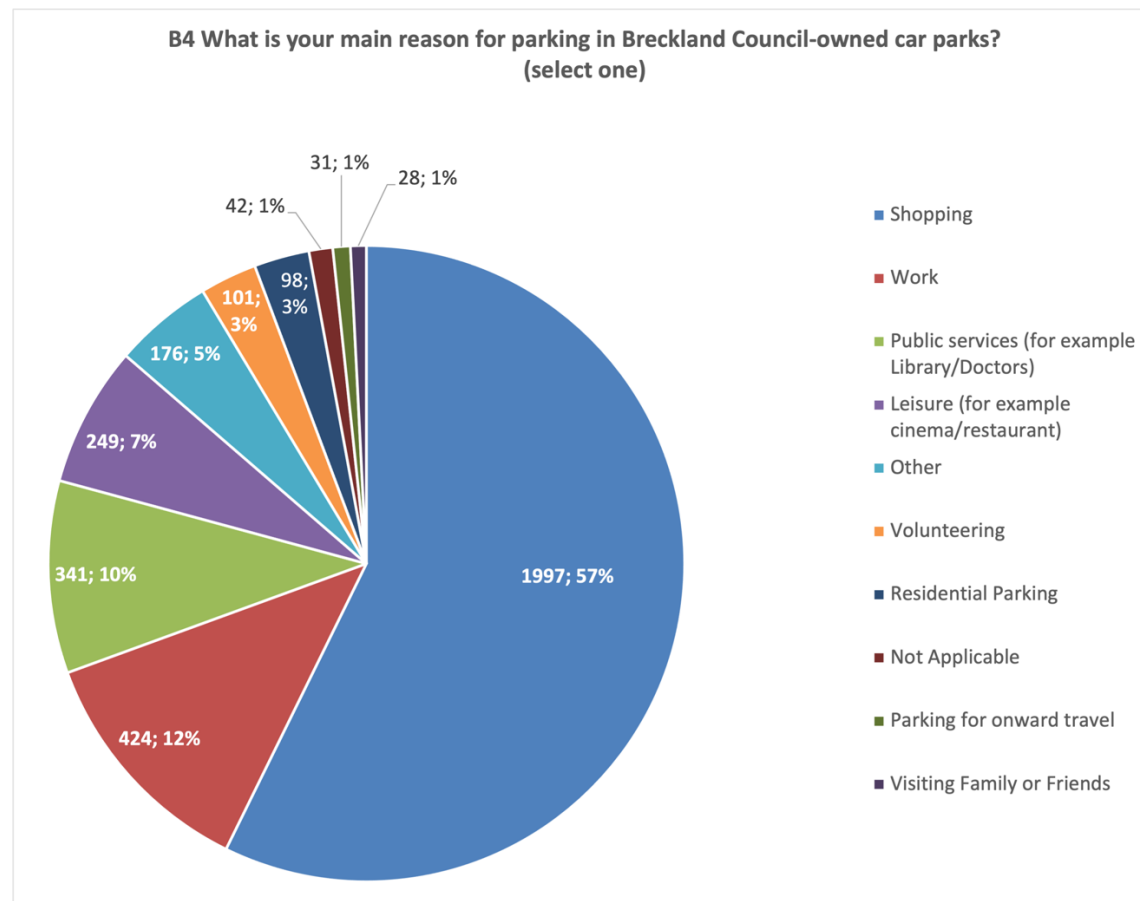
This means that 65% of those who responded use the Council's car parks more than twice a week. Although anecdotal, it is likely that those using the car park more than once a day (6%) are likely to be dropping off or collecting from schools. The 6% who use car parks once a day may be linked to those who work or volunteer daily.

A common theme across the five member/parish workshops was that, for car parks that were close to doctors' surgeries and/or pharmacies and schools a longer free period would be supported.



B4 MAIN REASON FOR USING BRECKLAND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARKS

Most respondents cited shopping as the main reason for using Breckland Council-owned car parks. Work was the second option selected, followed by public services (doctors/library). If this is cross referenced with question B3 and member/parish workshop feedback, there is opinion to support longer free periods where car parking aligns with the use of public services.



Further insights

When reviewing how often people used the car parks together with their main reason for using the car parks and the capacity in which they responded to the consultation, the following can be identified:

How often using car parks	Capacity responding to consultation	Main reason for using car parks
2-3 times a week	Local resident	Shopping, public services (Library/Doctors), leisure
4-5 times a week	Local resident	Shopping, work, leisure
More than once a day	Local resident	Residential parking, work, shopping
Once a day	Local resident	Work, shopping, other, residential parking
Once a week	Local resident	Shopping, public services (Library/Doctors)
Six or more times a week	Local resident	Shopping, work, leisure

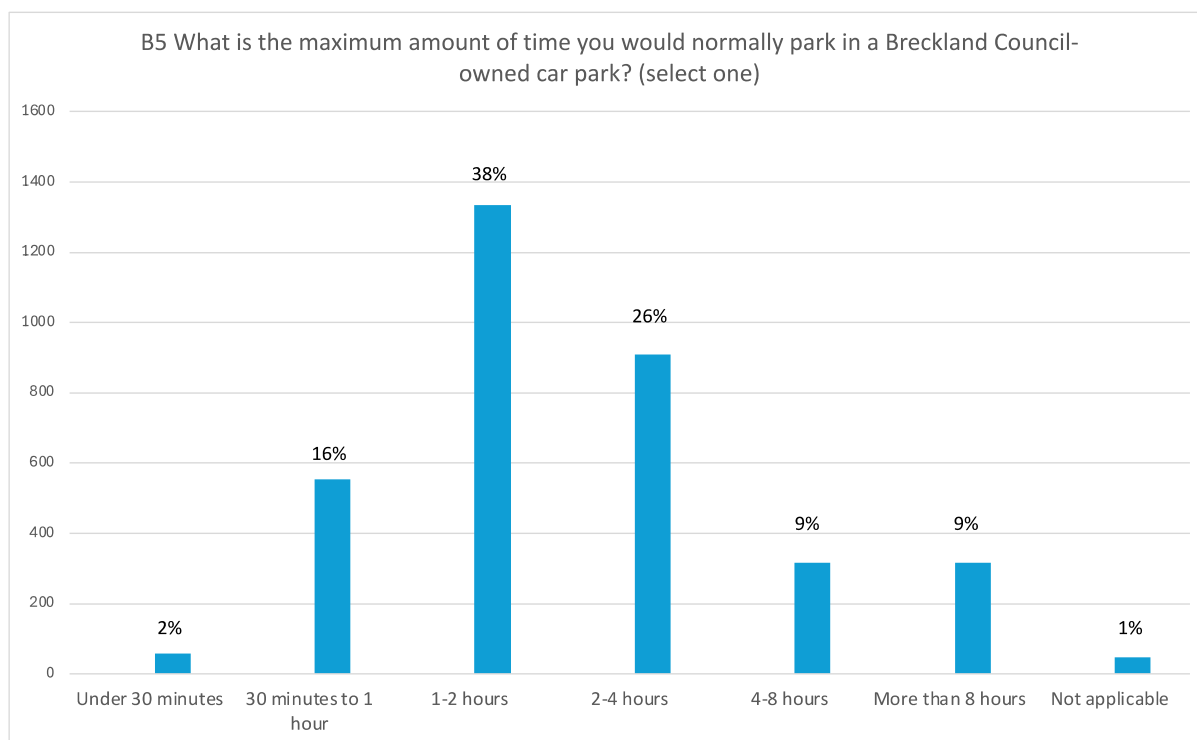
When considering the main reasons cited by consultees for parking in Breckland Council-owned car parks by age group, the 65+ age group were the highest in all categories, including work. Shopping was the most cited reason for using car parks across all age groups. What is more challenging to identify and where a reasonable assumption would need to be made, is those using car parking for school drop offs. This is likely to fall in the category of ‘more than once a day’.

All 3562 respondents completed this question. The majority of those completing the questionnaire did so as a ‘resident of Breckland’. This accounted for 3125 (88%). Only 93 (3%) of those responding use car parks for residential car parking. This provides a useful insight

into the order of importance placed upon residential parking in question B17 where analysis of the data showed that providing car parking concessions for residents was a lower priority.

B5 MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF TIME NORMALLY PARKED

The typical maximum time parked is 1-2 hours, followed by 2-4 hours.



B6 REASONS FOR CAR PARK CHOICE

This was an open text question. When asked, ‘Based on your answer to B2, why do you choose this car park the most (e.g. safe & well-lit, location, accessibility, EV charging)?’ the following were the most common five response themes across all car parks, in order of priority:

Priority	Main reason for using car parks
1	Location, closeness and proximity to facilities and town centres etc
2	Accessible and convenient, easy to access, use and reach
3	Spaces and availability of parking spaces
4	Safe, well-lit, mentions of CCTV cameras and security
5	Free to use

When responding with an open text answer to this question, there were a variety of reasons given as to why specific car parks were selected.

Specific locations mentioned access to town centres, gyms, doctor surgeries, schools and shops from the car park selected.

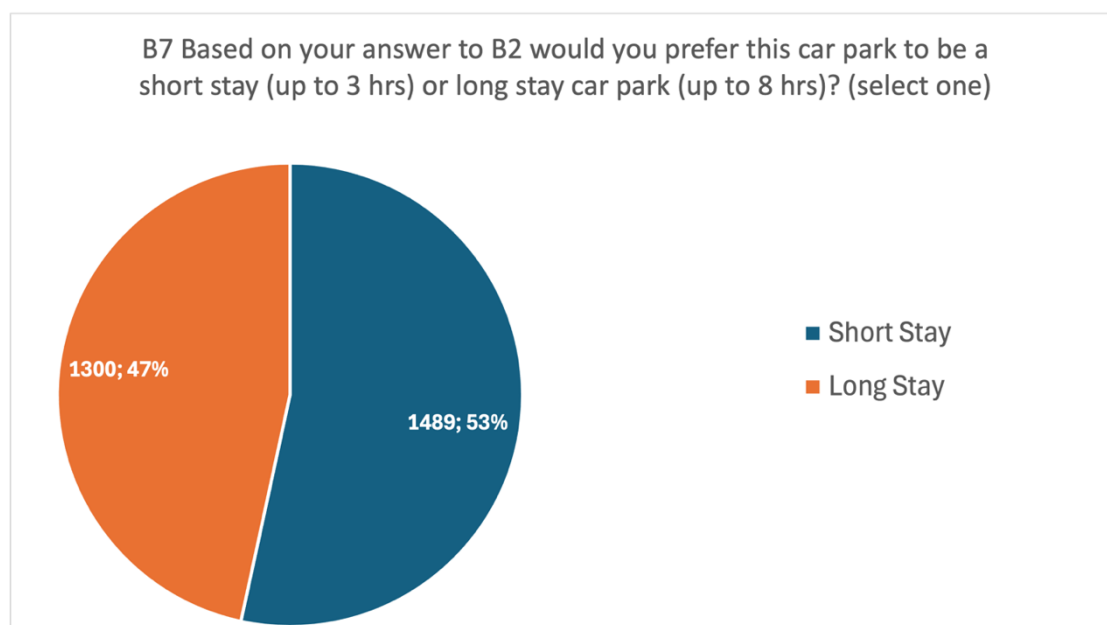
Residents and those working in locations close to car parks, also mentioned these as reasons for their choice of car park.

Of those responding, the least important reason for car parking choice is that car parking was provided free of charge. Reasons 1 to 4 are weighted of higher importance, with 'location, closeness and proximity to facilities and town centres etc' being of greatest importance.

B7 PREFERENCES ON SHORT-STAY OR LONG-STAY CAR PARKING

In response to this question, there was no significant preference either way between those selecting short and long-stay.

619 consultees also cited 'don't know' in their response to this question.



When comparing this with question B2, the five car parks identified as preferred by town, were:

- Cherry Tree, Dereham
- School Lane, Thetford
- Queens Square, Attleborough
- Market Place, Swaffham
- Goddard's Court, Watton

All were selected with the preference of short stay. Most of the preferences expressed correlate with those from the member/parish workshops. Where views differ is a suggestion that Cherry Tree, Dereham may benefit from a combination of short and long stay parking slot allocation, like the model operated in other market towns such as Bury St Edmunds. It was also suggested that Queens Square Attleborough may benefit from being a long-stay car park.

B8 IN ORDER TO PROTECT COUNCIL SERVICES, THE COUNCIL IS THINKING OF ADOPTING A CHARGING MODEL; WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THIS?

This was an open text question. When asked specifically for their views on the idea of a charging model for the district, the sentiment of feedback from consultees was generally negative in tone. Currently car parking in Breckland Council owned car parks is provided free of charge. It could be reasonably argued then that a consultation seeking views on potential charging for a previously free service is likely to attract a more negative response.

Sentiment	% response
Positive	4.5
Neutral/positive	8.5
Negative	76
Other	11

The range of themes arising from this feedback are as follows:

Key areas

Priority	Themes
1	Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none">- To towns/businesses/jobs- People not visiting.- Not paying for parking-
2	Should be free. <ul style="list-style-type: none">- People can't afford to pay.- Charges will impact workers and volunteers.-
3	Concessions <ul style="list-style-type: none">- If parking charges were to be implemented, ideas given e.g. free parking/permits
4	Displacement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Impacts to residential roads, displacement parking and general congestion (including outside schools)-

Further insights

Where comments to support negative responses have been offered, these have been summarised as follows.

Impact to residents, town centre workers and volunteers

Some people park and work in Breckland market towns (including volunteers) and they – along with residents – raised concerns that this will increase their costs and potentially drive more parking in residential areas. There were also mention of visits to amenities like the GP surgery or pharmacies, which were also raised in response to question B24 (see later in this report).

Displacement

Displacement parking – where people may park elsewhere, including on residential streets – was mentioned by several respondents as was a concern for the need for residents to pay to park. The potential for more people to park on roads was raised as potentially impacting safety in some towns - school pick-ups and drop offs were specifically mentioned.

References to public transport

Some respondents highlighted the need to drive into town centres, including those in rural areas. A few also mentioned that people park in town centres to travel by public transport to other places like Norwich.

Comments of a more neutral and positive tone are summarised as follows.

Those consultees who provided more **neutral** or **positive** responses to this question covered areas such as ideas for where funding for car parking could be drawn from, or how parking/permits might be managed (**if** a charge were to be implemented).

Those consultees who responded with a more positive sentiment, indicated an acknowledgement of a potential need to pay, but with some still raising logistical or operational concerns, and shared views on how these might be addressed.

In contrast, feedback from the member/parish stakeholder meetings was of a predominately neutral sentiment, with some positive sentiment around the practical details of how free periods and categorising of car parks (short or long stay) might benefit the community and visitors.

Overall, the responses to Question B8 highlight a general trend of negative and neutral sentiment across a larger percentage of consultation responses. However, where the question allowed for opportunity to provide ideas or solutions the response was more positive/neutral.

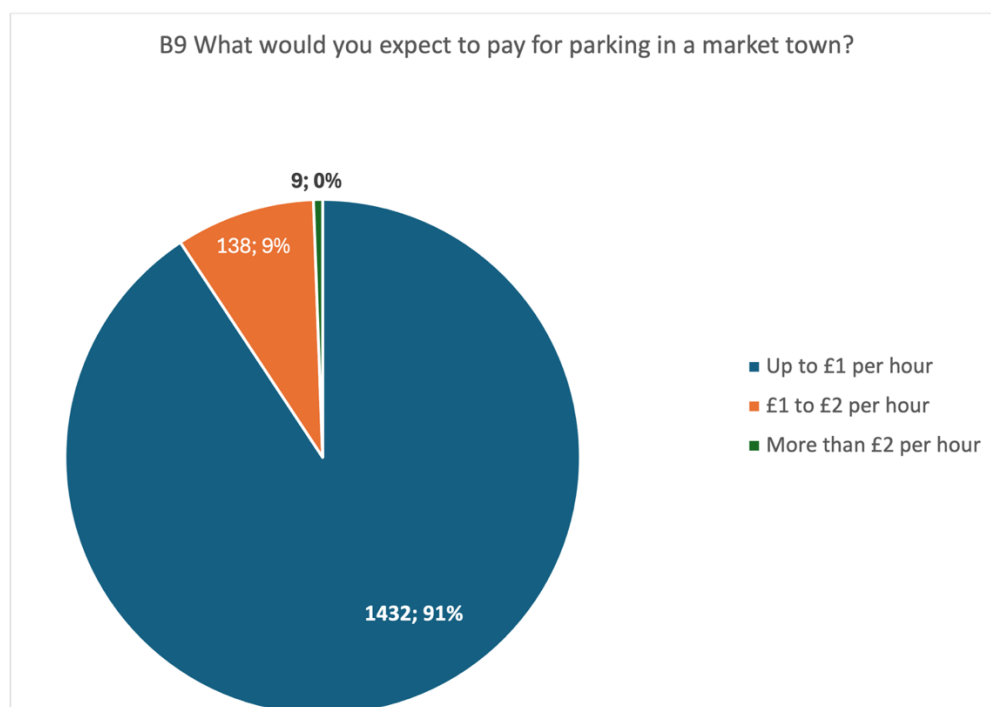
For questions B9, B10, B12, B14, B15 and B16 a large proportion of people have chosen the option of ‘prefer not to say’. These questions require the respondent to give definite

views on the charging model. The data provides no insight into why people have chosen this option as a response. However, if we refer to the position of negative/neutral sentiment expressed in answer to question B8 (whether the Council should charge for car parking) there may be some correlation between not supporting charging and preferring not to express an opinion on the charging model.

B9 WHAT RESPONDENTS EXPECT TO PAY FOR PARKING IN A MARKET TOWN

There were 1,768 respondents who chose to respond to this question with 'prefer not to say'. Of those who did prefer to respond, over 90% selected the option to pay up to £1 per hour.

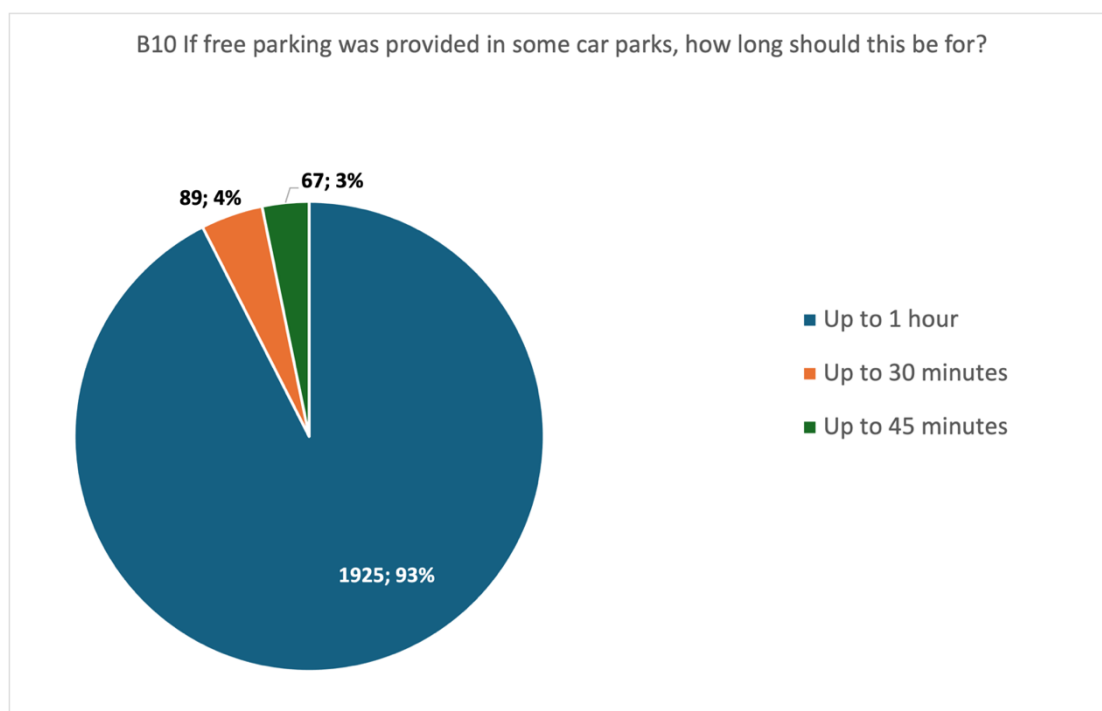
As the proportion of those responding as 'prefer not to say' is greater than 50% of the total number of consultation responses (3,562) it could be said that the data gathered is inconclusive in this case.



B10 LENGTH OF FREE PARKING PERIOD

Just over 1,300 respondents preferred not to respond to this question.

Out of 3,562 respondents, 2,081 shared their preferences. With 93% of those expressing a preference supporting the free one-hour parking option, this offers the Council a strong mandate.



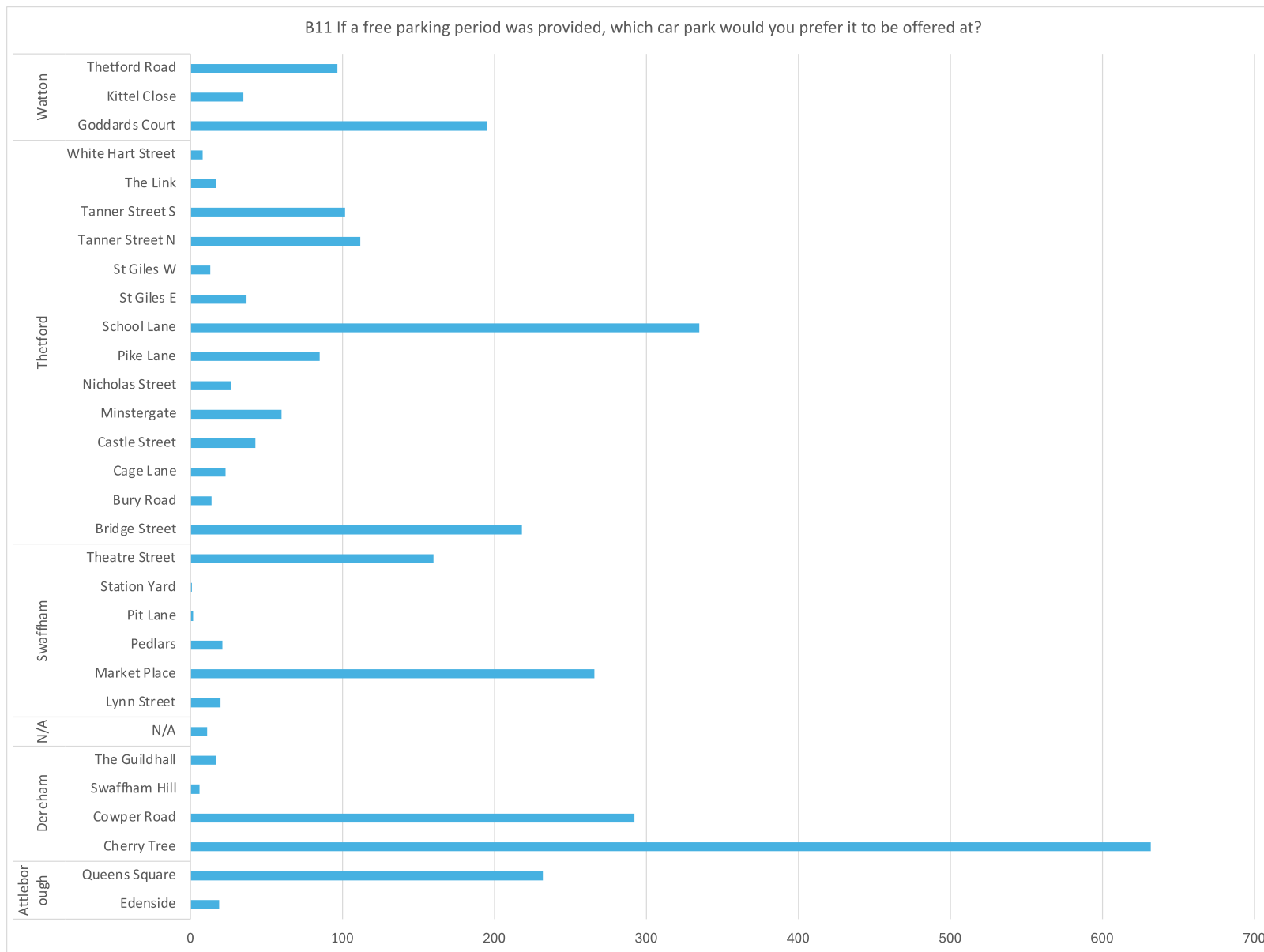
B11 IF A FREE PARKING PERIOD WAS PROVIDED, WHICH CAR PARK TO BE OFFERED AT?

The most favoured car parks, by town, were:

- Cherry Tree (Dereham)
- School Lane (Thetford)
- Goddards Court (Watton)
- Queens Square (Attleborough)
- Market Place (Swaffham)

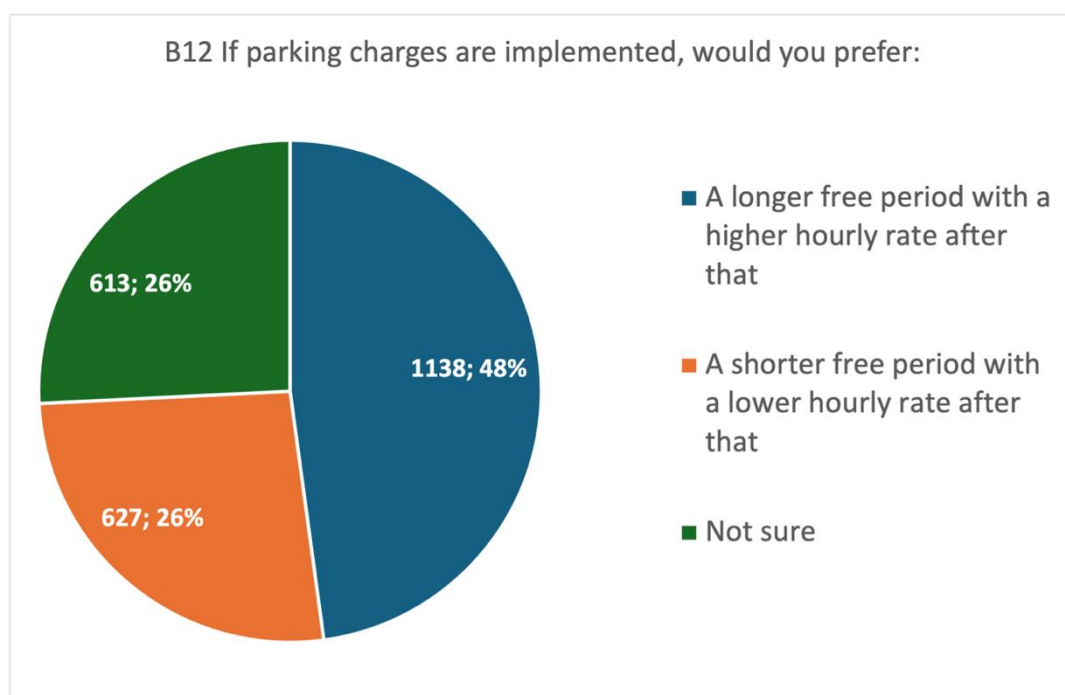
It is worth noting that the most favoured car parks are both the largest in the district and are also close to health care providers/public services such as doctors and pharmacies. When comparing this to the responses in question B2 (which car park is used the most) there is a slight variation with Cowper Road not appearing on the list for B11 responses.

Referring to the member/parish workshops, there was a collective wish across all five workshops to make the charging model, including free parking period, uniform across the district. It was strongly felt that a uniform model would be less confusing. The preference for free parking most common across the five workshops was for two hours, but with an hour being the next most preferred option.



B12 PREFERRED APPROACH TO CAR PARKING CHARGES

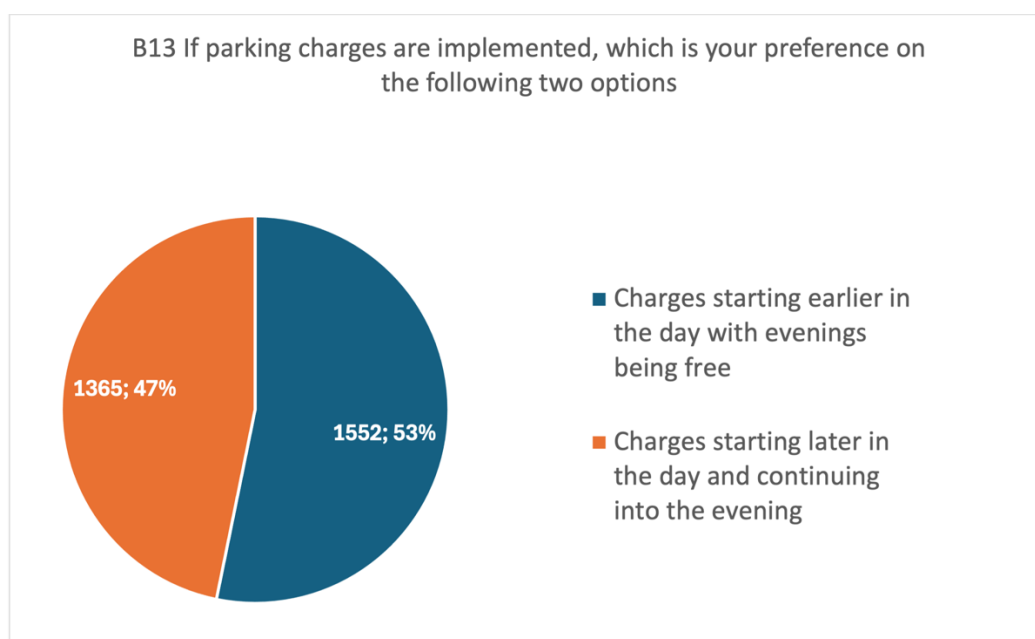
Just over 1,000 respondents preferred not to respond to this question. Almost 50% more respondents opted for a longer period with a higher hourly rate after that, than those selecting the shorter free period with a lower hourly rate. Almost as many then said they were unsure of a preference.



Although the member/parish workshops didn't focus on this question specifically, the preference for a longer free period resonates with preferences expressed across the five workshops. However, there was strong support for free periods where car parks serve doctors' surgeries, schools and pharmacies.

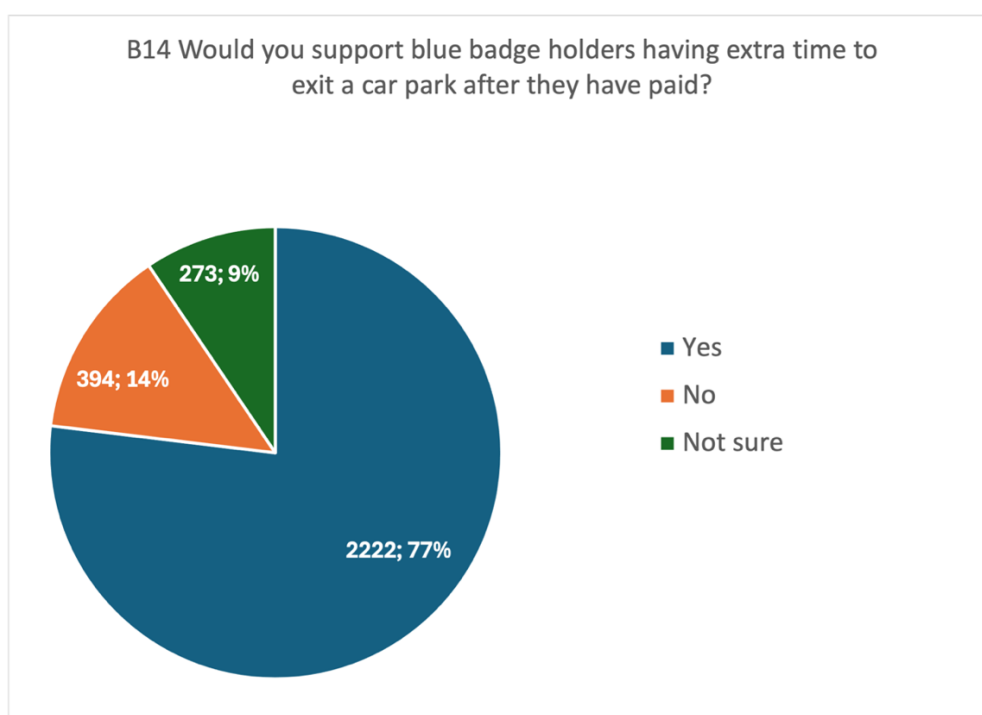
B13 IF PARKING CHARGES ARE IMPLEMENTED, PREFERENCES ON TIMES OF DAY FOR CHARGING TO START

There is a slightly greater preference for charges to be implemented earlier in the day with evenings being free. This is not a significant difference.



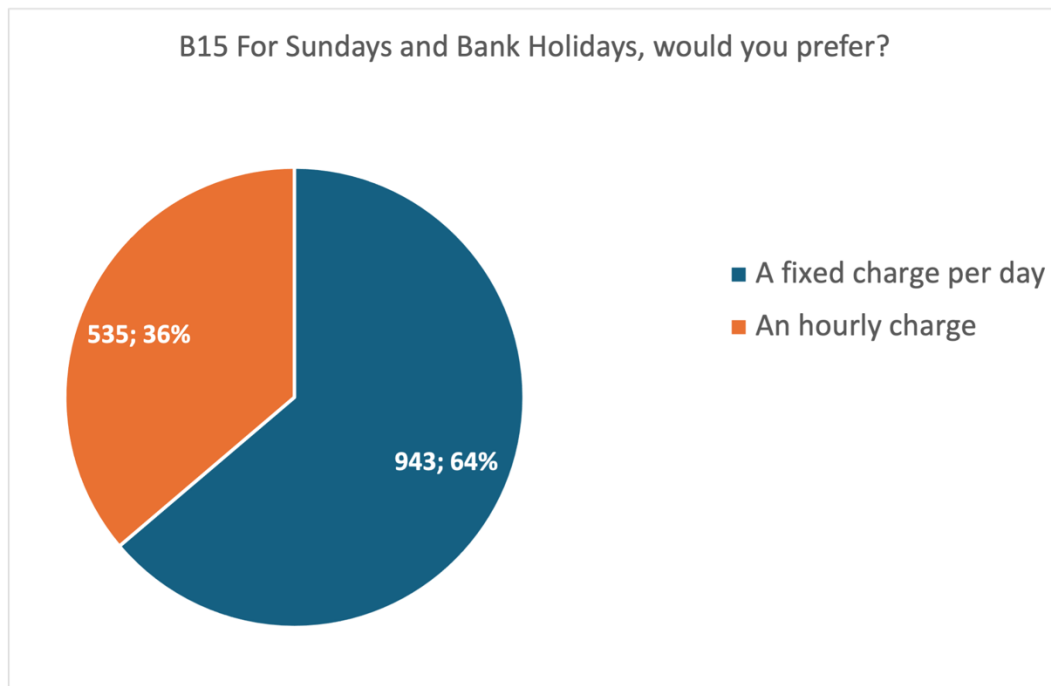
B14 SUPPORT FOR BLUE BADGE HOLDERS HAVING EXTRA TIME

558 consultees preferred not to respond to this question. Of those who did respond, over three-quarters agreed that blue badge holders should have extra time to exit a car park after they have paid.



B15 CHARGING PREFERENCES FOR SUNDAYS AND BANK HOLIDAYS

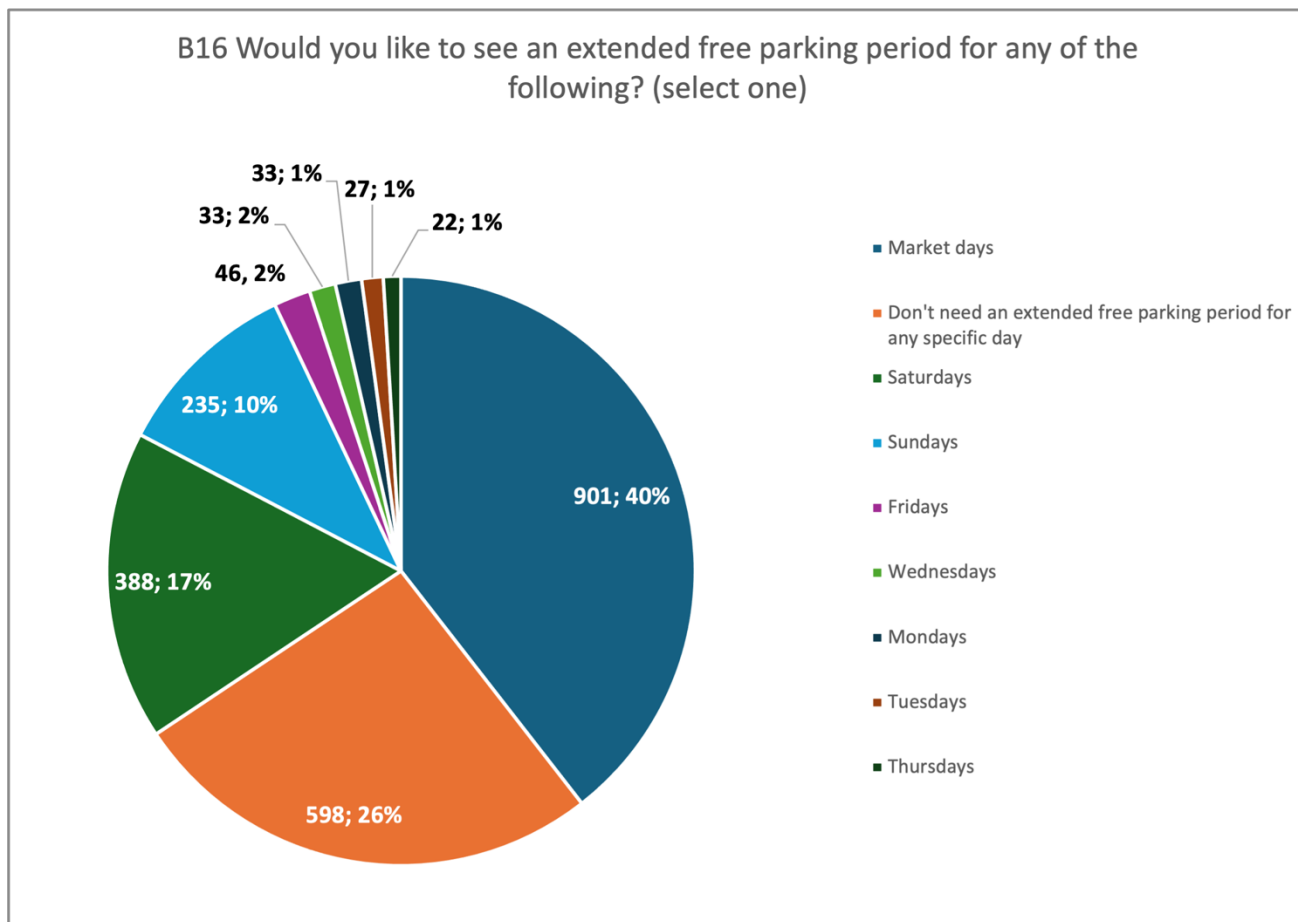
1,800 respondents preferred not to give a response to this question. Of those who did respond, over 60% opted for a fixed charge per day for Sundays and Bank Holidays.



The member/parish workshops did not address this question directly. However, feedback from those that attended the Attleborough workshop in particular, suggested a charging period from 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, with a fixed rate for Sunday.

B16 EXTENDED FREE PARKING FOR SPECIFIC DAYS

Just over 1,000 respondents preferred not to give a response to this question. Of those who did respond, market days was the favoured response, with 26% opting for the response, 'Don't need an extended free parking period for any specific day.' This agrees with sentiment at some of the member/parish workshops and in particular Attleborough who felt that there should be no specific free periods for market days.



B17, WOULD YOU SUPPORT A PARKING CONCESSION FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS (SUCH AS VOLUNTEERS, AND HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE WORKERS) USING BRECKLAND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARKS?

This was an open text question. When asked if they would support car park concessions for specific groups (such as volunteers, and health and social care workers), the following were the top five groups identified by respondents:

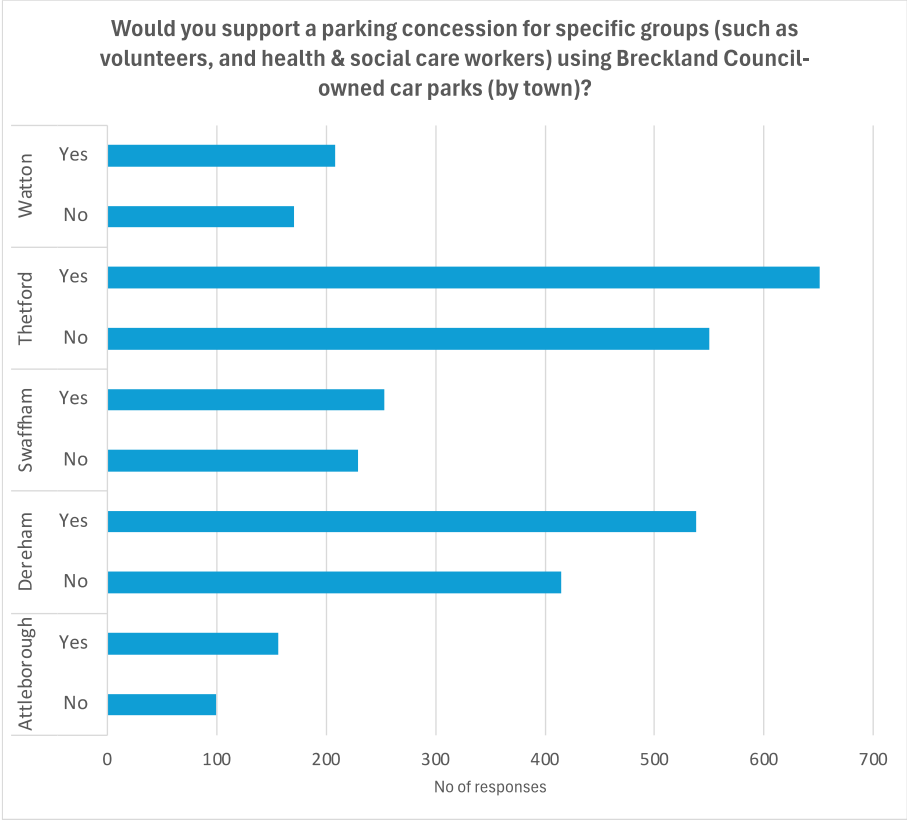
Priority	Groups
1	Health and social care workers, including NHS, emergency, key medical and support workers.
2	Volunteers, charity
3	Blue badge and disabled.
4	Local business workers
5	Local residents

When considering the response to question B14 ('Would you support blue badge holders having extra time to exit a car park after they have paid, to support with accessible needs'), 77% stated that they would support this. This aligns with the responses received to question B17. Across the member/parish workshops there was also a positive response, and, in some cases, concern expressed about the need for support for those with additional needs; including those who are elderly and need additional time to shop, visit doctors and complete chores.

Referring to question A4, 88% (3125) of people completing the questionnaire stated that they were responding as a Breckland resident. It is of note that concessions for free parking for residents was a lesser priority for those completing the questionnaire.

Further insights

When considering the number of responses given by town, the largest differences between those selecting yes or no were from Attleborough. Those with the smallest difference between yes and no to this question were from Swaffham.

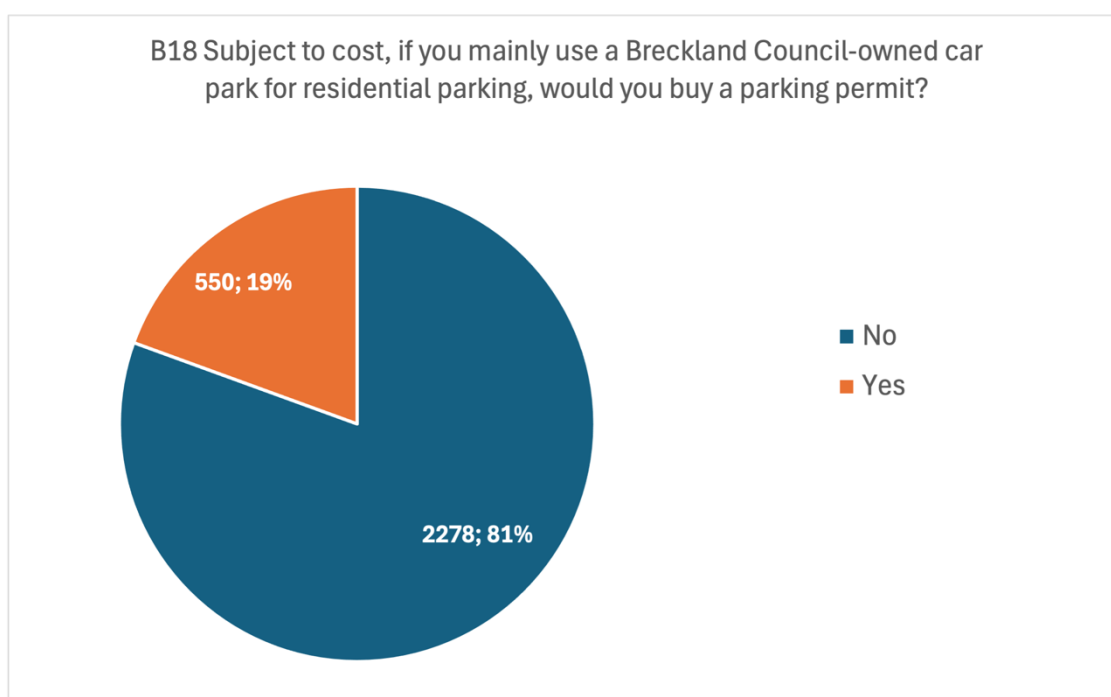


B18 BUYING A RESIDENTIAL PARKING PERMIT

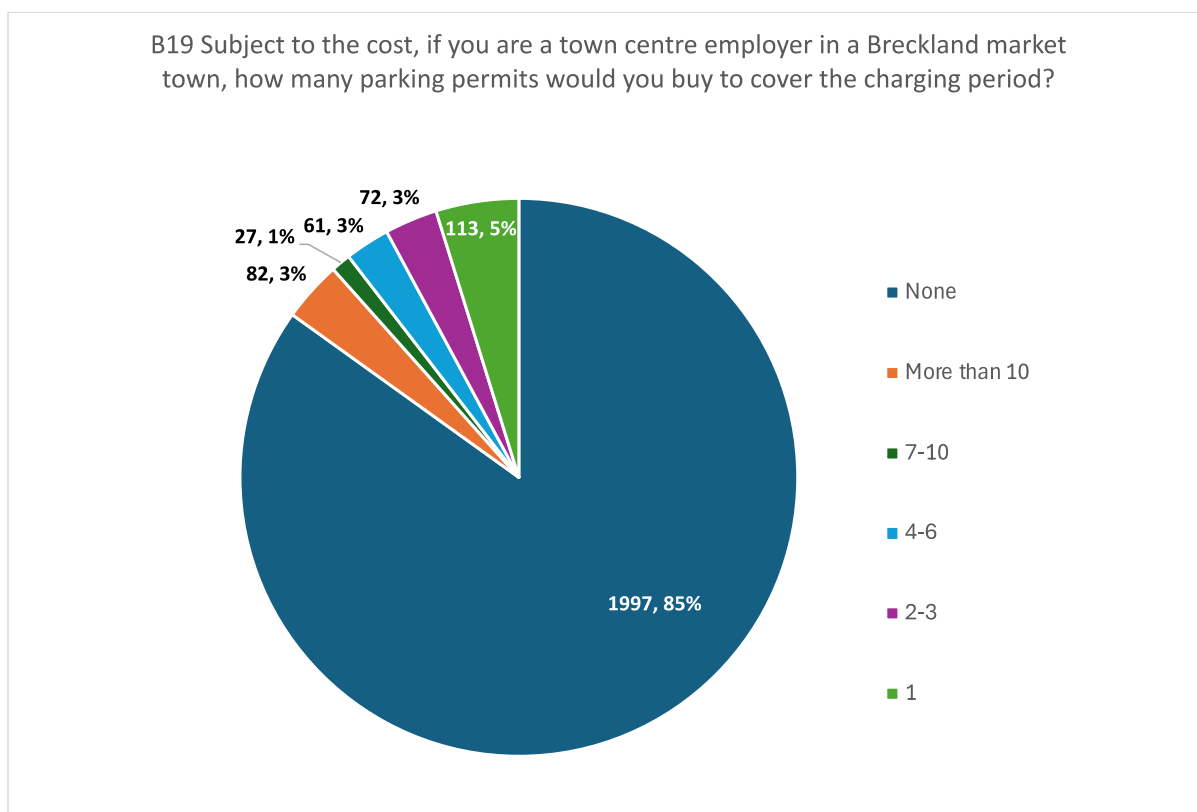
Respondents were asked, if they mainly used a car park for residential parking, if they would consider buying a parking permit. Just over 80% stated they would not.

However, when considering these responses in comparison to question A4 ('In what capacity are you completing this consultation?'), only 3% of consultees stated that they were using car parks for residential parking.

The response to question B18 of 81% is therefore not fully representative of those who would be eligible to purchase a residential parking permit.



B19 TOWN CENTRE EMPLOYER PURCHASING OF PARKING PERMITS



Question B19 relates to a small number of respondents who would be eligible to purchase parking permits.

When considering these responses in comparison to question A4 ('In what capacity are you completing this consultation?'), approximately 5% of consultees stated they were responding in the capacity of either a town centre business located in one of the market towns in Breckland or on behalf of a town centre organisation located in one of the market towns in Breckland.

The response to question B19 of 85% selecting 'none' is therefore not fully representative of those who would be eligible to purchase a permit. From the responses to this question and that of question A4 it could be seen that, should the Council offer the opportunity to purchase permits, this data shows that the take up is likely to be low.

B20 INTEREST IN BUYING SEASON TICKETS IN BUYING SEASON TICKETS IN ONE AND/OR FIVE TOWNS

In various response formats to this question, most respondents stated that they would not want to buy a season ticket, with smaller numbers choosing some of the options offered.

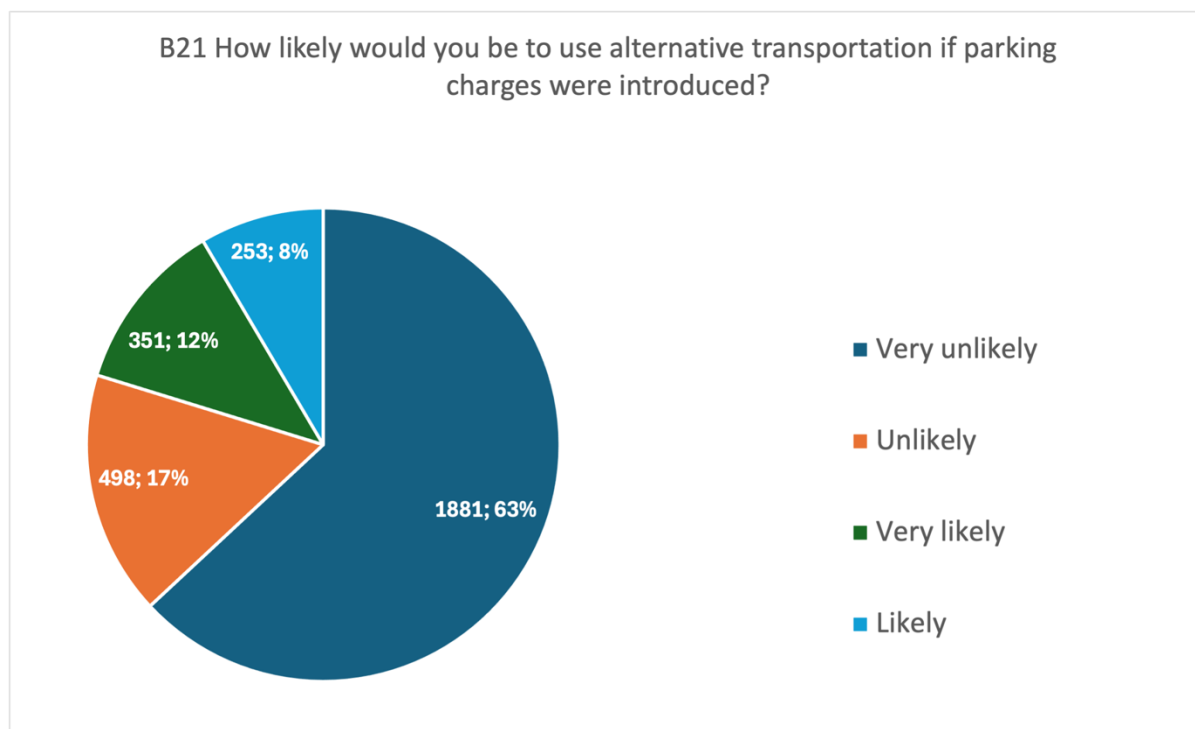


Almost three-quarters of respondents said they would not be interested in buying a season ticket, with 11% respondent of respondents saying yes to one town and 10% saying yes to all five towns. Referring to the feedback from member and parish workshops, it was suggested that residents may want seasonal permits (tickets) that would enable them to use all the district car parks for a specific period. It was also suggested there could be separate tickets for the morning or afternoon usage. Based on the responses received, it could be seen that should the Council decide to introduce season tickets, the take up may be minimal.

B21 LIKELIHOOD OF SWITCHING TO ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT IF CHARGES INTRODUCED

A total of over 430 respondents opted for 'Prefer not to say' when answering this question.

Of those who did respond, when combining those who were very unlikely and unlikely, 80% of respondents stated that they were unlikely to use alternative forms of transport.

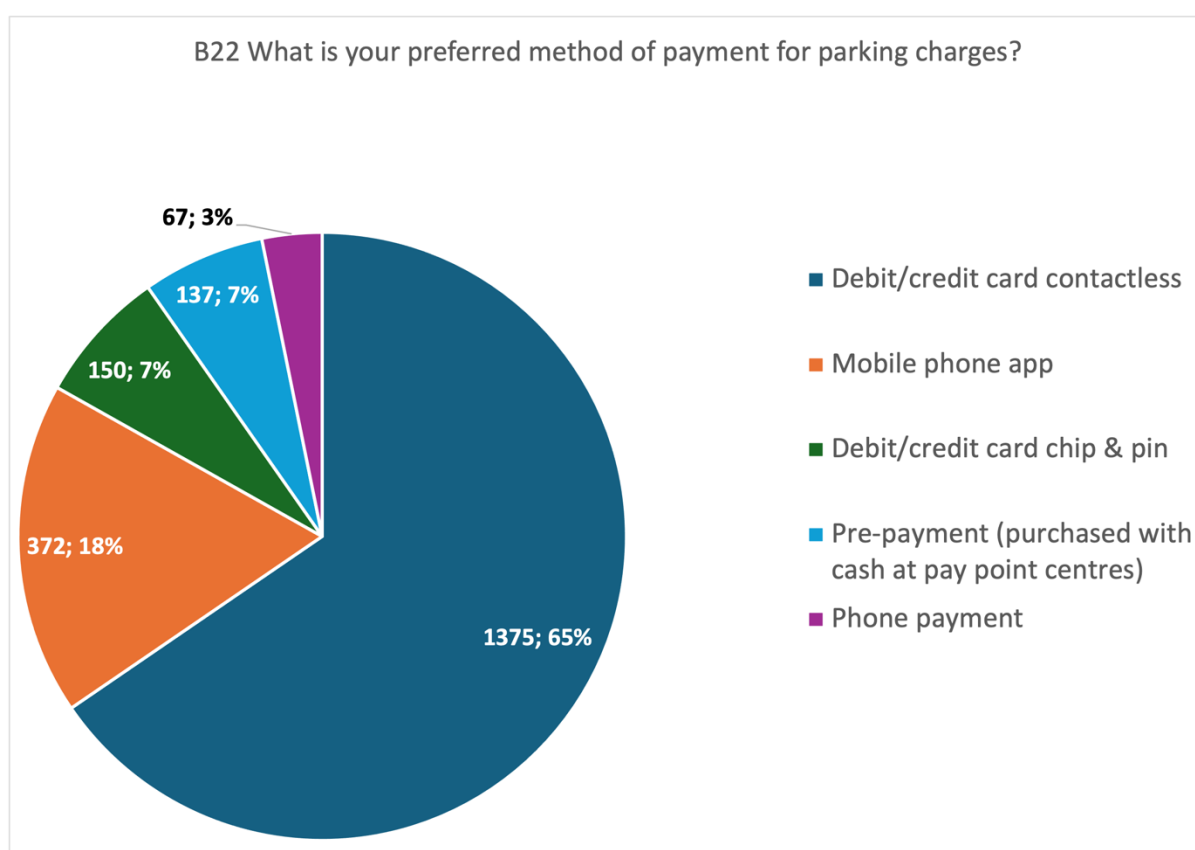


In question B1 93% of respondents expressed that travelling by car is their preference. The response to B21 would suggest, taking into consideration those who preferred not to say, that some respondents may choose to travel by alternative forms of transport should charging be introduced.

Of those responding to this question, 8% have indicated that they would use alternative transport should there be car parking charges introduced. Breckland District Council has publicly committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035, outlining a sustainability strategy focused on reducing their own environmental impact, influencing community behaviour change through regulations, and empowering residents to take environmental action themselves. A modest move by residents to use alternative transport, as demonstrated by the responses to this questionnaire, could support this commitment.

B22 PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD FOR PARKING CHARGES

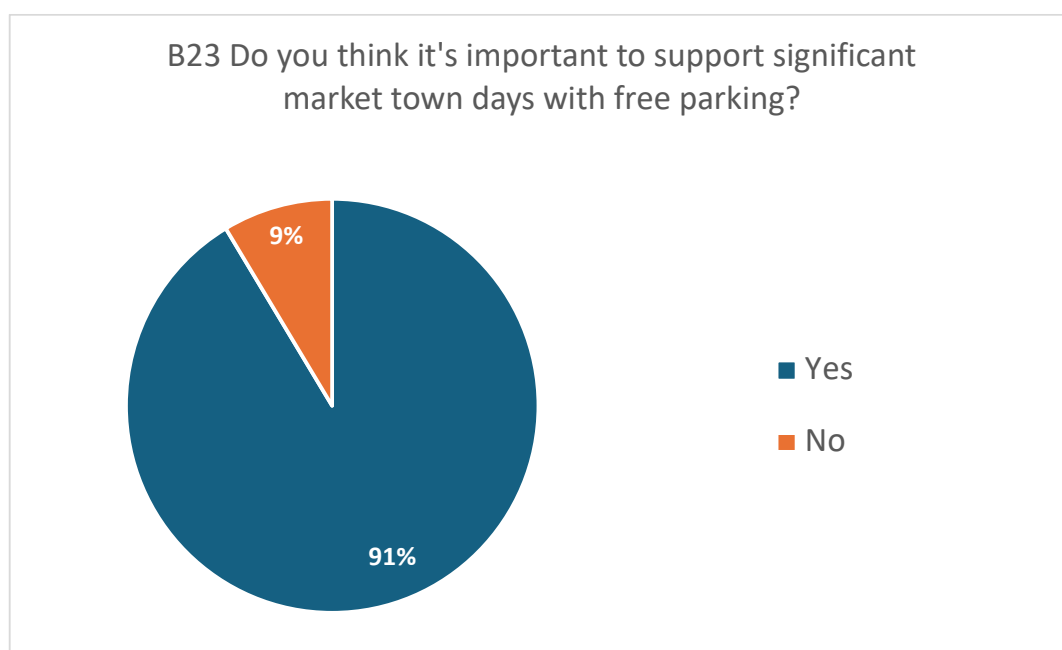
Over 1,200 consultees opted for a 'prefer not to say' response to this question. Of the remainder who responded, contactless debit cards were most favoured at 65%, with a mobile phone app following at 16%. Payment by phone was the least preferred option. Overall, taking into consideration both chip and pin and contactless, the majority of those responding to this question (72%) would prefer to pay by debit/credit card. This correlates with information contained in the UK Payments Market Summary 2024^{iv} which stated that 'the overall majority of the population (over 97%) now hold a debit card'.



B23 SUPPORTING SIGNIFICANT MARKET TOWN EVENT DAYS WITH FREE PARKING

When asked if they thought it important to support significant event days with free parking, over 90% of respondents agreed.

When considering the responses to this question with those given to B16 ('Would you like to see an extended free parking period for any of the following...'), 40% of consultees opted for market days for free parking. This indicates some correlation between the responses to questions B16 and B23.



There are some comments from the member/parish workshops in support of free parking on market days but greater support for a uniform approach to parking charges and free periods across the district.

B24 ANYTHING ELSE THAT HASN'T BEEN ADDRESSED IN THIS CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE?

Overview (% of responses to this question) without member responses*

Sentiment	% responses
Positive	0.2
Neutral/negative	13
Negative	79.5
Other	7

* These do not include consideration of responses given during the member workshops.

Consultees responded to this question by sharing their overall thoughts about the idea of a charging model.

As a result, the analysis of this quantitative question revealed a predominantly negative tone when taking into consideration the feedback from consultees, with statements indicating negative sentiments overall.

Some respondents cited that they used the option of 'Prefer not to say' in their responses, with the rationale being that there was no option for them to say that car parking should not be chargeable. As these statements are relatively few, it is unclear if this is the rationale for all respondents who selected the 'Prefer not to say' option.

Overview of response themes in priority order

Sentiment	Themes
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on towns/businesses/employees (incl. cost of living) • Consultation approach • Council-directed objections • Public transport/impact on roads and rural areas • Impacts on residents/vulnerable/older/disabled/families (incl. cost of living)
Neutral/negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charging or free period/permit preferences • Cash payment options. • Council tax

Suggestions for improvements

Some of the neutral and positive responses to question B24 included suggestions for improvements in different areas of different towns. These ranged from ideas for including mum and baby car parking spaces in Thetford, to encouraging family parking at one car park in Thetford for school pick-ups as well as ensuring that surgery patients have access to car parking for a free period as a minimum and a suggestion to offer a free dial a ride for those working and elderly residents. There were also numerous suggestions from the member workshops on permit preferences.

Other points of note from responses to question B24

Aside from the responses to question B4 where public services were the third most common response for the reason why people visited the town, references to schools, doctors/surgery and dentist appeared throughout questionnaire responses. For example, in the responses to question B24:

Theme	Number of mentions
Doctor/surgery/medical	77
School/schools	46
Dentist	11

- In the responses to question B24, there were mentions of the need for the availability of cash payment machines as some people can't use cards or a phone app.
- Some of the comments from the member workshops included statements around consistency across all areas (in terms of charging approaches), keeping confusion down and improving communications around parking. There were strong views expressed about the need for uniformity and good communications. Keeping it simple to understand for the community and looking at flat rates.
- Consideration of maintenance and enforcement – the words 'maintain', and 'maintenance' were mentioned in some responses to question B24. Although not significant, their mentions do indicate that car park maintenance is and could be a consideration. For example, higher expectations of improved maintenance if charges were to be introduced. This was also true of enforcement – could enforcement costs increase if parking charges were introduced?

4. SUMMARY

Through this consultation, respondents provided insights into current car park use as well as indications of potential options should a decision be made to introduce car parking charges in Breckland. This included feedback on:

- Maximum time usually parked in Breckland Council-owned car parks.
- Expectations of car parking fees
- Preferred car parks for free parking
- Longer free periods with a higher hourly rate after that and charges to start earlier in the day with evenings being free.

Taking into consideration key points raised at the member/parish workshops these included:

- Uniformity of approach to charging and free periods
- Simple communications
- Consistent, simple tariffs
- Considerations of 'churn' when allocating short and long-stay status
- Ensuring reasonable free periods close to doctors' surgeries, schools and pharmacies.

The key points raised at the workshops provides a broadly consistent view with the preferences expressed by those formally responding to the consultation on practical elements of the introduction of charging for car parks such as free periods, allocation of short and long stay car parks and tariffs.

When respondents had the opportunity to provide open text comments on the idea of car parking charges or offering thoughts on anything not already covered in the consultation, sentiment was generally negative/neutral. There were mentions of potential impacts on businesses, towns and the people in them as well as cost of living impacts. There were several mentions of the potential negative effects that charging may have on the elderly, vulnerable and those with mobility challenges too. This may be addressed with longer free periods of parking, allowing access for short and regular shopping trips and for medical appointments.

As set out in both section 2 (Executive Summary) and section 3.1 (Approach to Consultation) Breckland Council have adopted best practice to public consultation. The desire to engage and involve the community in this important project was evident. They set out to deliver a comprehensive consultation. The Council took steps to ensure that their approach was inclusive, undertaking an independent Equality Impact Assessment review of their approach.

The Council's objective was to give local people a voice and an opportunity to influence a car parking charge model. There was a clear intention to listen to and learn from local people before decisions were made about charging, free periods and other considerations and a strong desire to understand the impacts and implications for the

community. The Council's approach to consultation was in line with the Government's consultation principles and best practice as set out in the Local Government Association's Guide to Engagement referenced in this document's endnotes.

A variety of methods were used to enable people to respond to the consultation including online digital questionnaires, paper copies available in key locations, face to face drop-in meetings and member/parish workshops. Marketing and promotion of the consultation was extensive as is evidenced in section 3,1 figure 1.

The response rate of 3% of the adult population in line with expectations on consultations of a similar nature. Alongside the quantitative data collected, the qualitative data gathered from both the questionnaire responses and the member/parish workshops provides useful insights and suggestions.

From analysis of the data, where there is a clear majority view, respondents have indicated that:

- There is a preference to pay car parking charges by debit/credit card.
- There is a preference for free car parking up to an hour.
- There is a preference for car parking charges of up to a £1 per hour.
- There is clear support for free parking on significant market town days.
- If permits or season tickets were made available, take up may be minimal.
- Car parking for shopping was of greatest importance, with car parking for work and access to health and public services of next importance.
- There is strong support for blue badge holders to having extra time.

There were some notable areas where the data showed no overall preference such as:

- Longer free periods with a higher hourly rate. This was difficult to show as a preference as a quarter of respondents answered that they were 'unsure'.
- Earlier or later times of the day for charging to start.
- Whether long stay or short stay car parks were preferred.

The majority age range for those responding to the consultation was between 55 and 64. It is recommended that, for future consultations, additional tools such as virtual reality/AI engagement rooms and tools are considered to increase the age demographic of respondents.

The challenges in analysing the data from the consultation are largely linked to the use of the option 'prefer not to say' and areas of free text. These have been used by some respondents to express their dissatisfaction with the possibility of charging for car parking. The consultation team made significant efforts to make available in depth Frequently Asked Questions on the website and reinforced these at face-to-face drop ins. It is possible that key messages linked to the existing cost of maintaining and running the district's car parks to the taxpayer may have been helpful if included in the questionnaire. This could have assisted the respondent by providing additional information ahead of completion. However, as set out earlier in this report,

comprehensive information was provided by the Council on its website and at its face-to-face meetings.

Despite those challenges, the consultation provided good data which will support decision making should the project move forward.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Link to July 2024 report to Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Commission

<https://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MId=5221>

Appendix B

Link to car park strategy, 5th September 2024

<https://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/s69443/Final%20Car%20Park%20Strategy%20Report.pdf>

Appendix C

Equality Impact Assessment

https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/22444/Car-Park-Consultation-Equality-Impact-Assessment/pdf/Car_Park_Public_Consultation_-_Equality_and_Impact_Assessment.pdf?m=1744888178177

6. Glossary of Terms

Earned media – refers to the publicity received from a third party by the Council without direct payment or control over content.

Equality Impact Assessment - An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process that helps organisations ensure their policies, practices, and decisions are fair and don't discriminate against protected groups, promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Non statutory consultation - this refers to public consultation that is not legally required. It's a process where local councils or other public bodies gather input from residents, organisations, and other stakeholders on proposed plans or changes, even if there's no legal requirement to do so.

Plain English - (also referred to as layman's terms) is a mode of writing or speaking the English language intended to be easy to understand regardless of one's familiarity with a

given topic. It usually avoids the use of jargon, acronyms and abbreviations to explain the subject.

Qualitative data - this refers to descriptive, non-numerical information that explores the qualities, characteristics, and meanings associated with the data collected. It provides insights into experiences, opinions, and behaviours.

Quantitative data - this refers to numerical information that can be counted, measured, or given a numerical value. It's data that can be used for mathematical and statistical analysis.

Statutory consultation - this refers to a consultation process that is required by law, meaning a specific requirement to consult with particular individuals or bodies is legally enforced. These consultations often occur in areas like planning, environmental assessments, or significant policy changes, ensuring decisions are not made without considering affected parties.

ⁱ [Microsoft Word - Consultation Principles \(1\).docx](#)

ⁱⁱ [New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement | Local Government Association](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Breckland Demographics | Age, Ethnicity, Religion, Wellbeing](#)

^{iv} [Summary UK Payment Markets 2024.pdf](#)

