

Fairfield Road Improvements Consultation Response Report

May 2023

<p>What was the consultation about?</p>	<p>This consultation was held to understand the views of residents, organisations and businesses with regard to a proposed improvement scheme on Fairfield Road, Dorchester.</p> <p>The proposal includes creating a footway on Fairfield Road, reducing car parking provision, improved crossings of side roads, removing vehicle accessing from the eastern (Weymouth Avenue) end of the street and the potential for benches, better street lighting and potential space for planting. In addition, a new entry to the car park from the Copper Street junction on Weymouth Avenue was proposed.</p>
<p>What did we find out?</p>	<p>Strong overall support for every part of the proposal was identified, although there was a slightly lower level of support for the vehicle restriction from Weymouth Avenue into Fairfield Road.</p>
<p>Over what period did the consultation run?</p>	<p>The consultation period ran from 16th February 2023 to 17th March 2023.</p>
<p>What consultation methods were used?</p>	<p>The survey was conducted online, with paper copies available in Dorchester Library and County Hall. Emails drawing attention were sent to all addresses within the DT1 and DT2 postcodes where these were known.</p> <p>A-frame highways display boards were placed at either end of Fairfield Road to draw the attention of passers by to the online survey, including a QR code.</p> <p>410 responses were received online, with 5 paper surveys completed.</p> <p>In parallel, meetings were held with some key stakeholder groups, including Dorchester Access Group, the Informal Markets Joint Panel, and Dorchester Town Council. Face to face engagement also took place at Dorchester Market to raise awareness with market traders, many of whom do not live locally.</p>
<p>What happens next?</p>	<p>Further design work will take place based on feedback from the consultation and in discussion with key stakeholders. A planning application will be required for the scheme, which will give an opportunity for further feedback from the public. The aim – subject to planning consent - will be to construct the scheme later in 2023, or early 2024.</p>

Background

The need for improvements on Fairfield Road had been identified through input from stakeholders and assessment by officers.

Fairfield Road is an important route for pedestrians moving around the town. It is the most direct, signposted route between the railway stations and the most direct route between Dorchester South station and the hospital. Despite this strategic role in the local walking network, Fairfield Road has no dedicated pedestrian footway, with walkers and wheelchair-users forced to use the road. Additionally, Fairfield Car Park has almost 600 spaces and generates substantial levels of vehicular and pedestrian traffic to and from the car park.

The proposed footway gives pedestrians – particularly disabled people – a safe route between the car park and town centre amenities.

In addition, in developing the proposal, collision records indicated a problem at the Weymouth Avenue junction. Here three pedestrians had been injured, two seriously, in collision with vehicles turning out of Fairfield Road. Two reasons appear to lie behind this – firstly, many pedestrian cross directly between Dray Horse Yard and Fairfield Road, rather than using the puffin crossing located 25 metres to the north on Weymouth Avenue. Secondly, traffic emerging from Fairfield Road has limited visibility looking south, and may therefore be unlikely to spot pedestrians crossing in this location.

In part to respond to this concern, the proposal included closing the Weymouth Avenue / Fairfield Road junction to motor vehicle access, although some access could still be permitted if needed for maintenance purposes. By restricting access for vehicles, this area could also be re-designed to provide planters, benches and potentially other improvements, such as rain gardens to slow surface water from entering the drains.

There are no formal public access rights along Fairfield Road – historical maps show that the road from Maumbury Road to Weymouth Avenue was gated, presumably linked to the area's function as a livestock market. There is therefore no legal requirement to undertake a statutory consultation on the removal of vehicle access.

Wider stakeholder input

Prior to the launch of the public survey, stakeholder input was obtained from both informal discussions with elected members and through formal meetings both before and during the consultation period. This consisted of the following:

- 09/01/2023 – Dorchester Town Council Planning and Environment Committee - [minutes](#)
- 25/01/2023 - Dorchester Informal Markets Joint Panel – [minutes](#)
- 14/03/2023 – Dorchester Access Group

Face to face awareness raising took place with market traders at Dorchester Wednesday Market, with the scheme explained to fifteen of the market traders and the market manager.

Summary of survey results

A public survey was launched on the Dorset Council Delib consultation platform, starting on 16/2/2023, and advertised to run for one month, ending on 17/3/2023. This was advertised on Dorset Council's website and social media on the following dates:

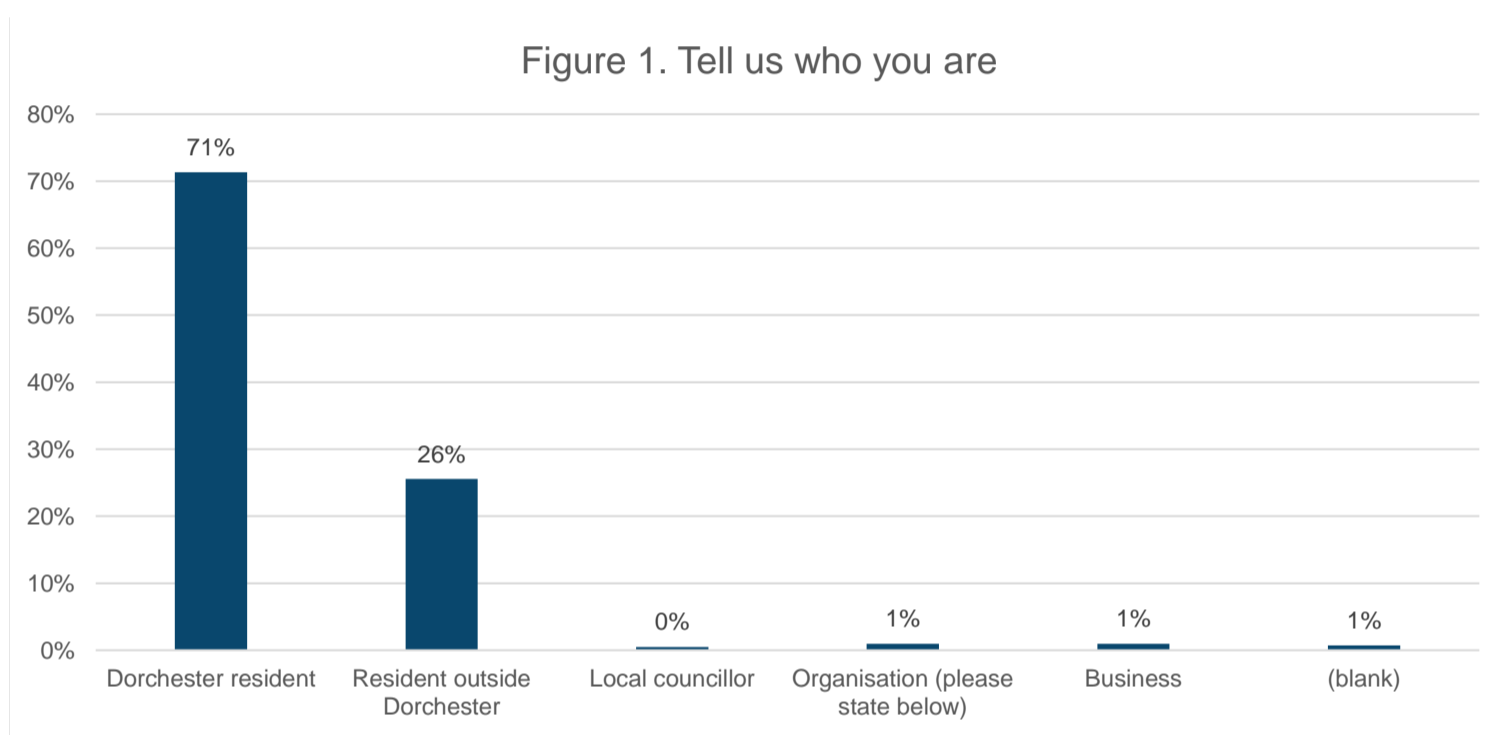
16/2/23: [Views sought on improvements to popular Dorchester route - Dorset Council news](#)

9/3/23: [Fairfield Road proposals - still time to have your say - Dorset Council news](#)

Highway information boards were positioned at either end of the road to draw attention to the proposals, and paper copies of the survey were deposited with Dorset Council customer services at Dorchester Library and County Hall.

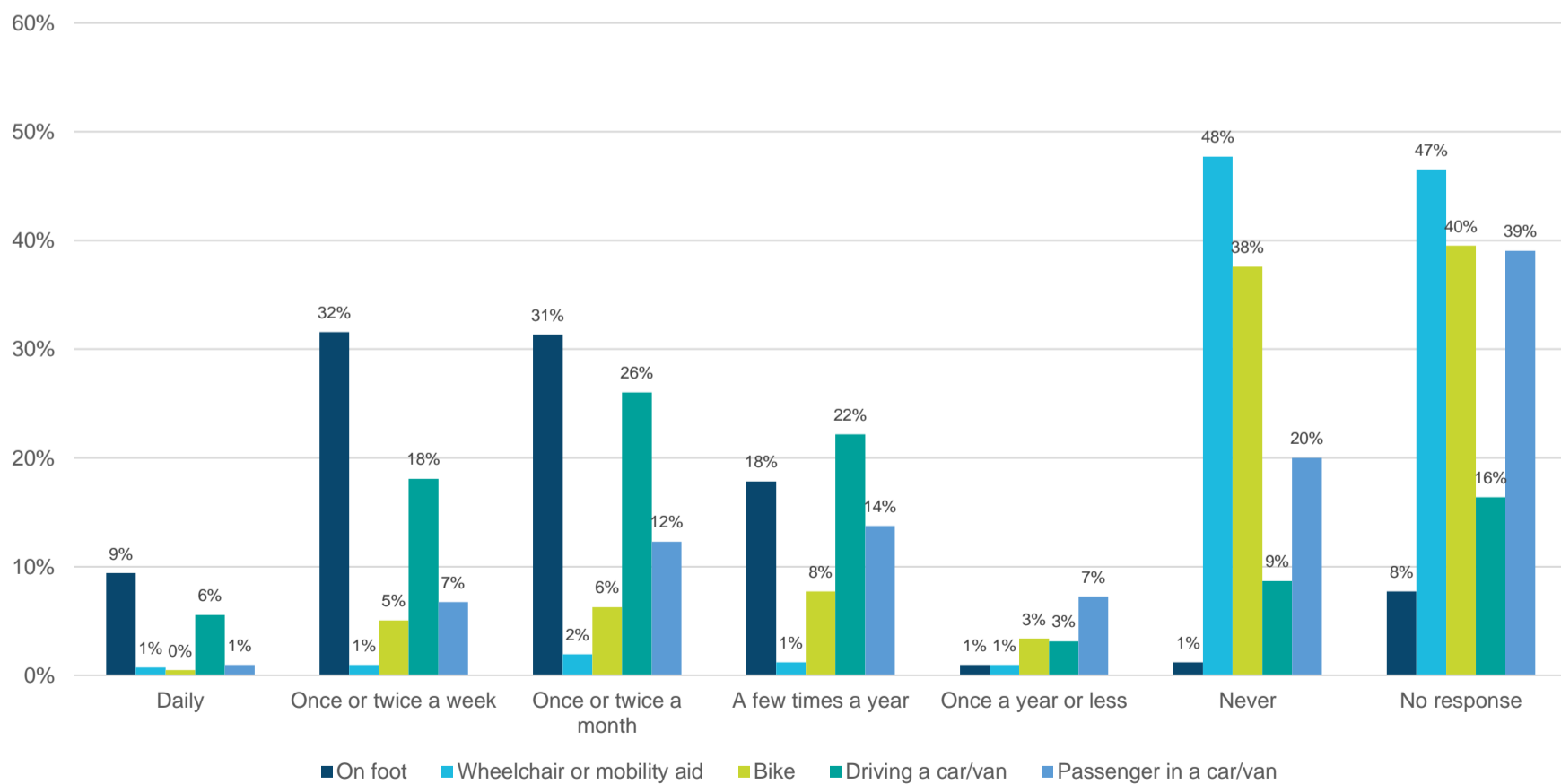
410 responses were received online, with 5 paper surveys completed. In addition, one phone call and several emails were received with more information.

There was support for all aspects of the scheme, from 89% agreeing with the need for a dedicated footway to 65% supporting restricting access to Fairfield Road from Weymouth Avenue.



Most respondents told us that they were residents within Dorchester, with just over a quarter being residents from outside Dorchester. A handful of responses came from businesses, organisations or people who were local elected members (figure 1.)

Figure 2. How do you travel on Fairfield Road at the moment?



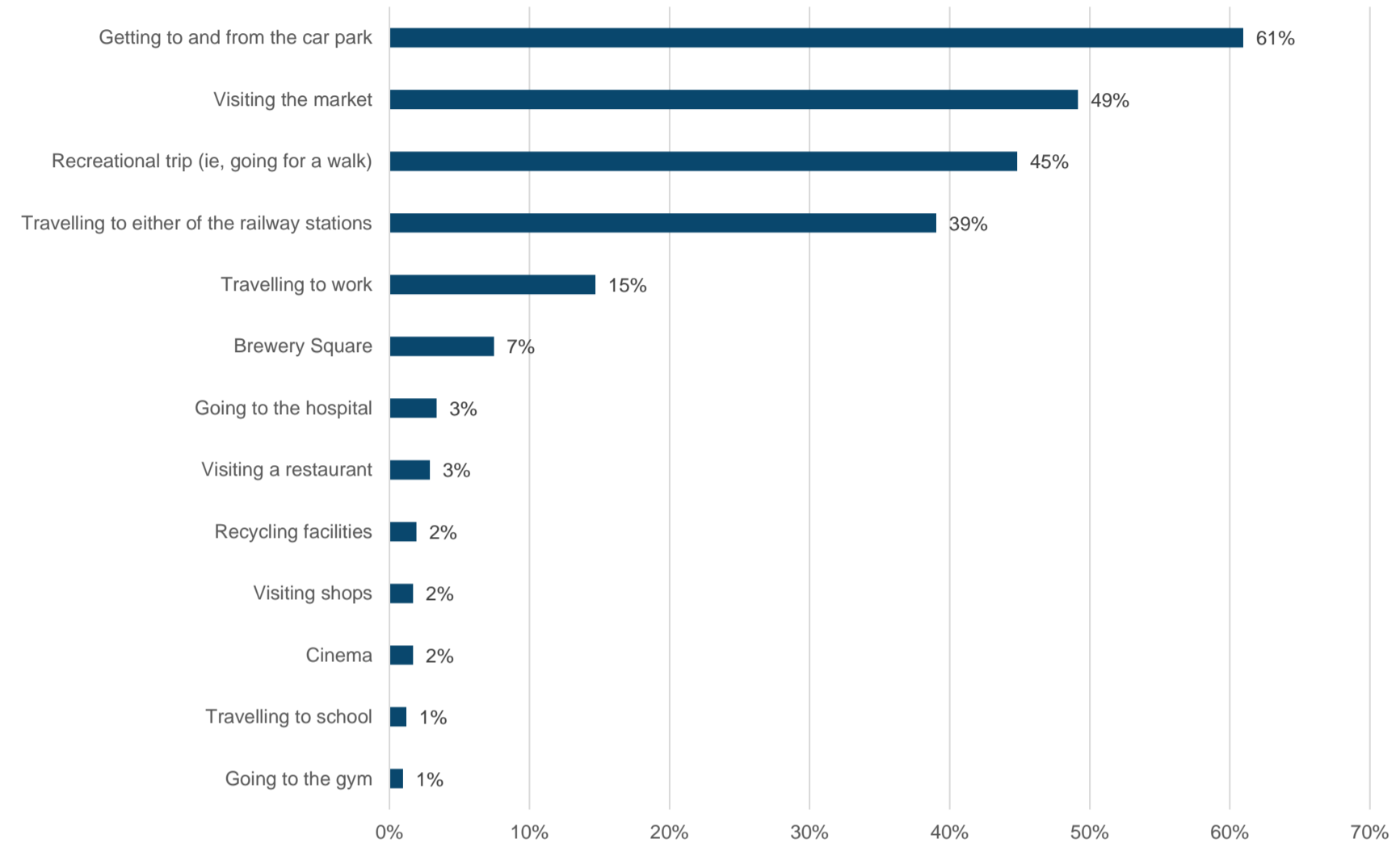
The most common way people used Fairfield Road was on foot, with 72% of respondents using it at least once a month or more, and only 2% saying once a year or never.

50% of respondents drove a car once a month or more, while 9% never drove.

By contrast, 4% of respondents ever used a wheelchair or mobility aid, 12% used a bike once a month or more, and 20% travelled as a passenger in a car once a month or more (figure 2).

These figures are replicated in the evidence from traffic counts for the area, which suggest large numbers of pedestrians crossing Weymouth Avenue, with only limited amounts of vehicular traffic using Fairfield Road as a through route.

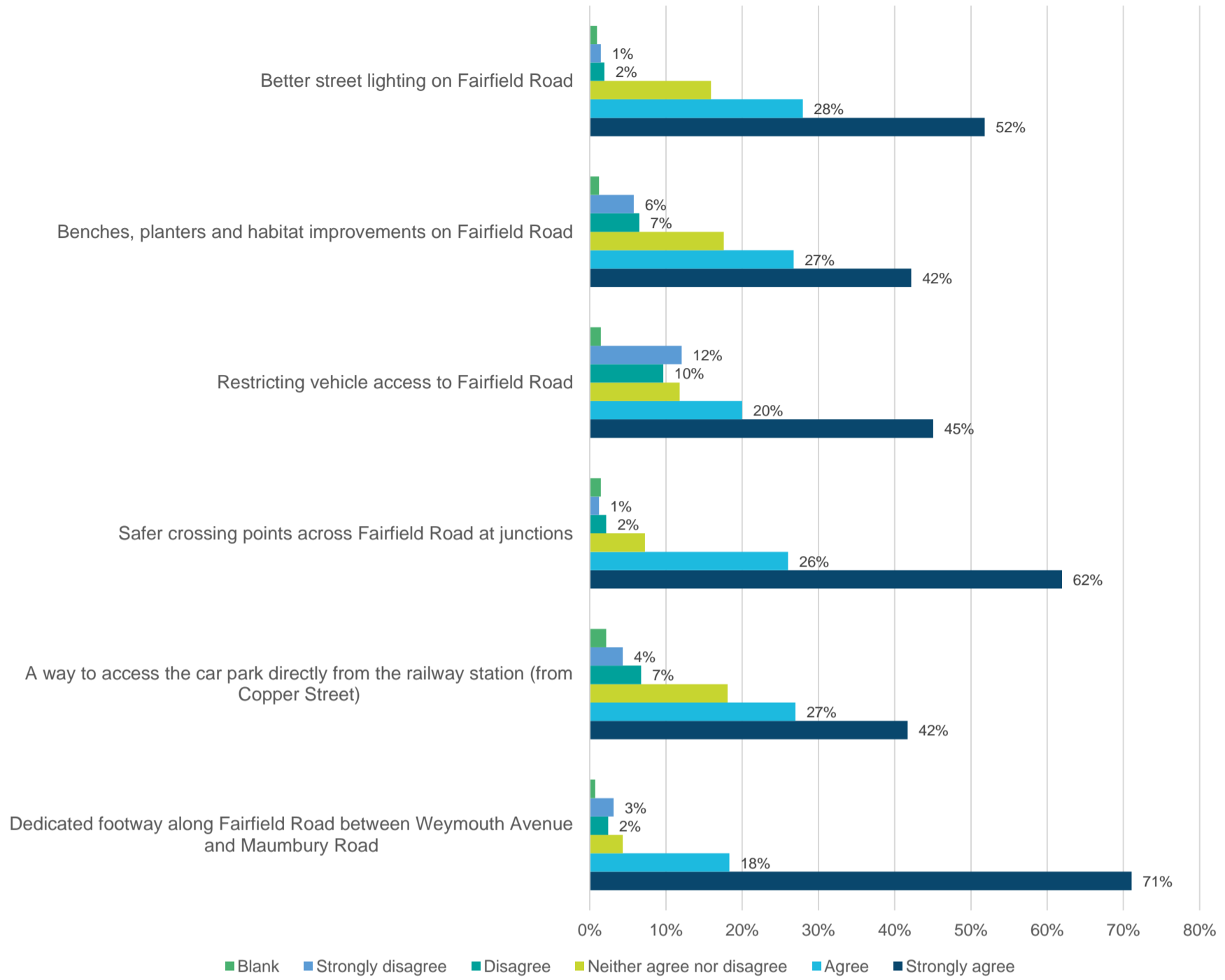
Figure 3. When you use Fairfield Road, what are you doing?



61% of respondents reported that they were getting to and from the car park, 49% were visiting the market, 45% were using it for recreational purposes and 39% were travelling to and from the railway stations. 15% were travelling to work.

Respondents could also enter other activities, and 119 of the 415 respondents chose to do so. Of these the most popular was visiting Brewery Square (7% of all respondents). Many of the other specific items, such as visiting the cinema, restaurant, or gym, also involve access to Brewery Square (figure 3).

Figure 4. How do you feel about the individual aspects of the proposal?



Six aspects of the proposal were put forward for comments, with respondents invited to respond on a five-point scale, ranging from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'.

For all of the aspects, a high level of support was evident, ranging from 89% for the provision of a footway, to 65% to the proposal to restrict vehicle access at the eastern end at Weymouth Avenue. In every case, those expressing disagreement was low, from 22% disagreeing with the vehicle restriction to 3% disagreeing with improved street lighting or safer crossing points of the road at junctions (figure 4).

Further analysis of attitudes to the different elements and how it differs between different demographic groups will be discussed below.

Analysis of comments and Dorset Council response

Respondents were offered an opportunity to provide comments in addition to any disagreement offered.

163 respondents offered comments. The comments are published in Appendix 1.

Substantive issues raised by these comments and in discussions with stakeholders are outlined below.

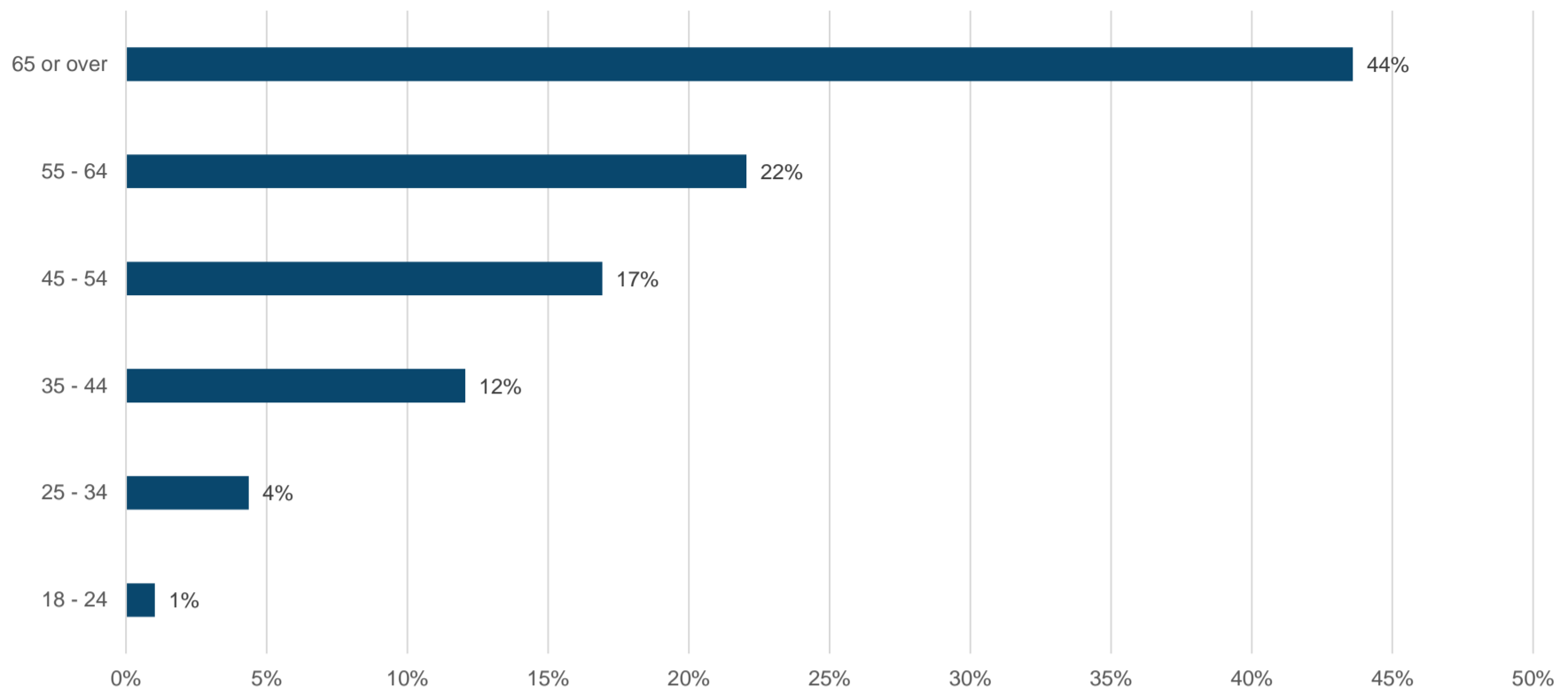
Issue raised	Response from Dorset Council
Impact of removal of vehicle access on wider road network, particularly Great Western Road	<p>Currently, two-thirds of traffic using Fairfield Road enters or exits the car parks.</p> <p>A few hundred vehicles a day use Fairfield Road as a through route, when the road is open, but since this is not part of the highway network, it cannot be considered as a viable permanent route.</p> <p>These drivers would need to find an alternative route - likely either Great Western Road or Upper Fairfield Road. The small volume of traffic currently using the road as a through route is unlikely to have a discernible impact on the alternative routes.</p>
Safety concerns on Upper Fairfield Road	<p>Linked to the point raised above, there was a concern that more traffic using Upper Fairfield Road (UFR) either to access the car park or use UFR as a through route. UFR is a much less strategic pedestrian route, with very few people using this as the most direct route. The location of the junction between the Maumbury Cross junction and the Copper Street junction means that there will often be gaps in traffic which would enable safe egress from this point.</p>
Difficulties with turning right out of Fairfield Road onto Maumbury Road	<p>If all vehicles have to use either UFR or Maumbury Road, some respondents suggest that this would be a difficult manoeuvre to make, particularly to make a right turn from Fairfield Road. A 'KEEP CLEAR' marking could be installed at the junction here to ensure that drivers aiming to turn right out of Fairfield Road are able to find room when traffic is queuing at the Great Western Road junction.</p>
Planters and benches are unnecessary / considered a waste of resources or inappropriate	<p>The proposals for a public realm improvement would be subject to further work and requires additional external funding. Responsibility for maintenance of any additional materials would require further agreements with third parties. Benches are considered valuable as a means of improving accessibility, as for disabled people and other protected characteristics groups, the presence of places to stop and rest is important.</p>

Other demographic information

Respondents were invited to submit more detailed demographic information about themselves. This helps understand whether the proposal has any specific impact on groups with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, including locally specific groups with protected characteristics.

48% of respondents were women, 44% were men, with the remainder not responding, or preferring not to say. Women were slightly less likely to support the vehicle restrictions than men, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing, against 75% of men. 50% of those who 'prefer not to say' disagreed or strongly disagreed, although this was a small proportion of the overall total.

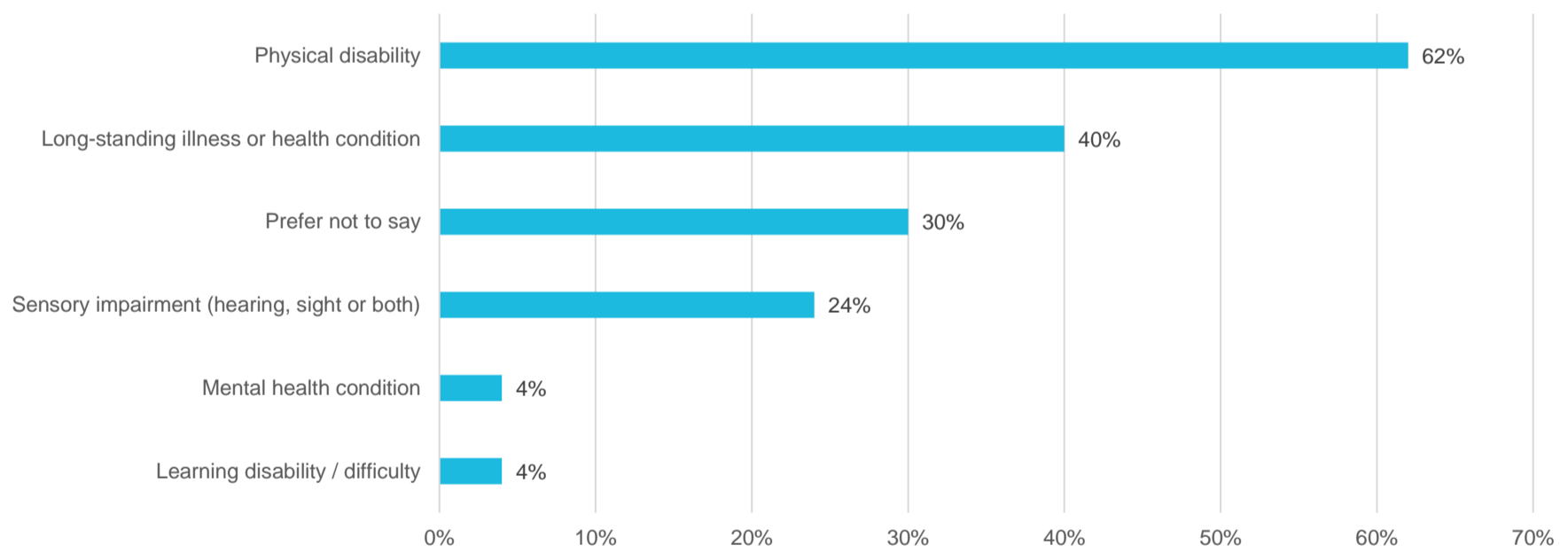
Figure 5. Which age group do you belong to?



44% of respondents were aged 65 or over – see figure 5. This is higher than the average for Dorchester (27.5%) or Dorset Council (29.4% over 65). The views of the different age groups were not markedly different from the overall figure, so no attempt has been made to disaggregate agreement by age.

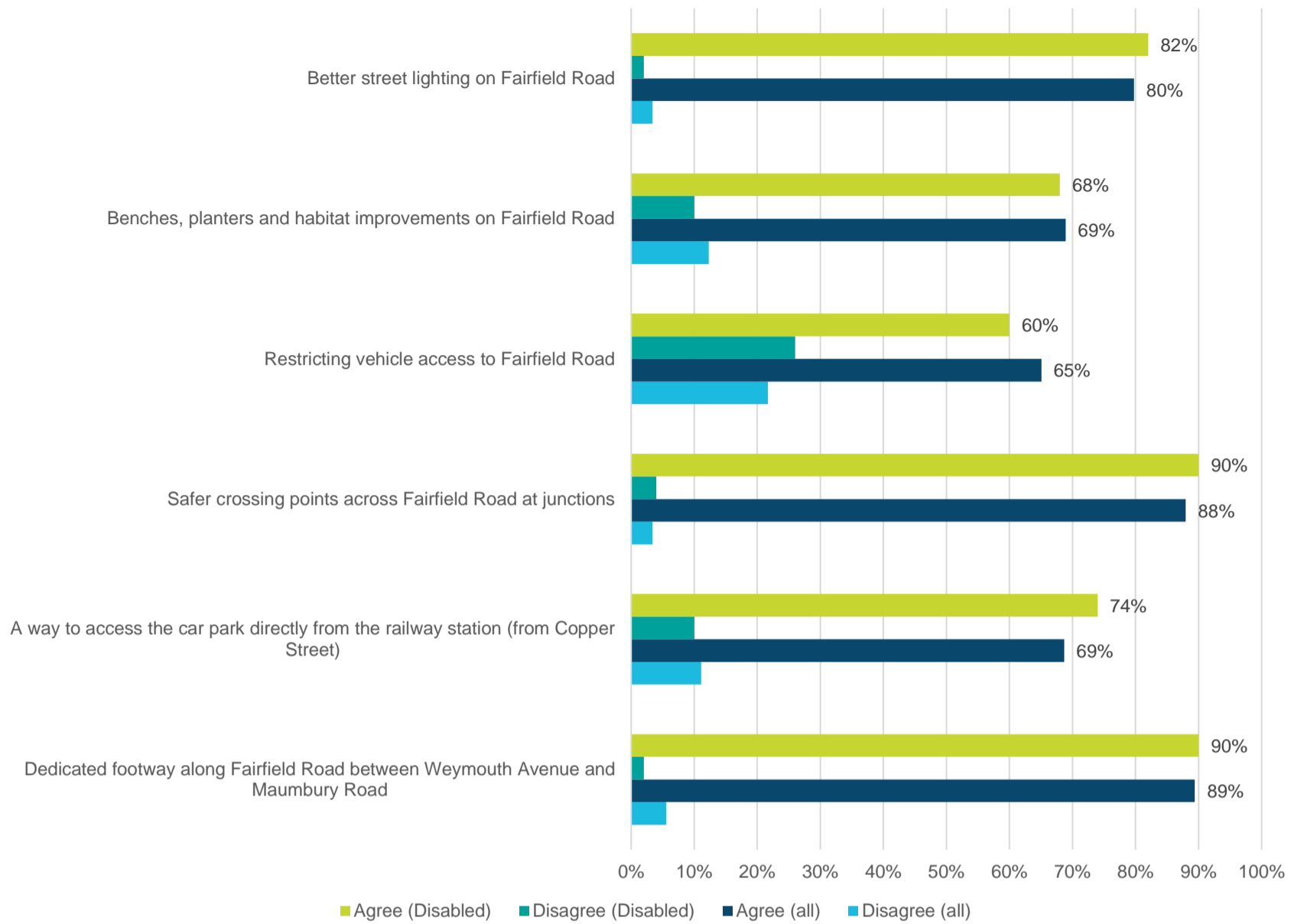
Of the 415 respondents to the survey, 50 (12%) of the total considered themselves to be disabled. This is slightly lower than the Dorset wide figure from the 2021 Census which suggested 17.5% of residents considered themselves disabled under the Equality Act 2010.

Figure 6. Type of impairment



Of the 50 respondents who stated they were disabled, the majority had a physical disability (60%), with 40% having a long-standing illness or health concern. Around a quarter had a sensory impairment (figure 6).

Figure 7. How do you feel about the individual aspects of the proposal? - all (415) vs disabled people (50)



To understand whether any of the changes might have a specific impact on disabled people, the attitudes of the 50 respondents who stated that they were disabled were analysed against the overall total for attitudes towards the changes. This showed similar levels of support, though with marginally lower levels of overall support for restricting vehicle access to Fairfield Road at the Weymouth Avenue junction (60% support from disabled people against 65% for all people – figure 7).

70% of respondents reported that they were heterosexual, with 27% either preferring not to say, or not responding. The remaining 3% reported that they were bisexual, gay/lesbian or used another term to describe their sexuality.

41% of respondents declared their religion as Christian, 35% had 'No religion' and 22% either preferred not to say, or did not respond. 2% gave another religion.

Organisational responses

- **Dorchester Town Council Planning and Environment Committee – Minutes of the meeting of 9/1/23**

- 1) That the scheme be supported in principle.
- 2) That, subject to further discussion and agreement on the final approved scheme, the Policy Committee be asked to consider a contribution towards additional enhancements if appropriate.

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In further comments to the consultation, Dorchester Town Council indicated its support, and recommended ensuring that the kerb at the Weymouth Avenue end was raised to restrict people from parking / waiting here.

- **South Wessex Community Rail Partnership** – strongly supported the proposal and requested for enhanced wayfinding to aid navigation to and from Dorchester West station.

- **Dorchester Transport Action Group** – supported the scheme and made the following comments:

- *The cycle way should run the full length of Fairfield. This can be achieved by removing the remaining car parking spaces from the South side of Fairfield between the main car park entrance and Maumbury Road and either extending the pavement on the North Side or running the cycle path along the South side of the road.*
- *In the pedestrianised area, it would appear in the schematic that the cycle path is at a lower level than the surrounding walkway/planter area. We are strongly opposed to this on safety grounds for both cyclists and pedestrians. There should be no step between the 2 areas.*
- *The plan does not specify the nature of the material to be used in the walkway/cycle way. It is important both in respect of both surface quality and camber that the new route meets modern standards.*
- *The location of the benches/planters etc should be such that there are clear sight lines and separation for both cyclists and walkers in the pedestrian part of Fairfield.*
- *It is our view that the arrangement with the access to Dukes at the Weymouth Avenue end is very unsatisfactory. Dorset Council should attempt to agree an arrangement with Dukes that this becomes a pedestrian only access. Failure to do this would affect the safety of people entering Fairfield Road from the controlled crossing.*
- *The situation at the Maumbury Road end of Fairfield is also very dangerous for pedestrians. Walking towards Fairfield one is presented with a wide “no man’s land” between the pavements and the market access road. Vehicles tend to sweep round that corner entering Fairfield straight into the path of pedestrians. To resolve this, the pavement on Maumbury road needs building out and the road layout reconfigured to slow traffic going into Fairfield from Maumbury Road. There is also a case to close the market gates to traffic and instead to expect vehicles to use the main market entrance located half way along Fairfield Road.*
- *We assume that the necessary modelling has been done to assess the knock-on traffic impact in the area. We would like your assurance that, any associated increase in traffic on surrounding roads does not introduce new safety risks or unnecessary congestion.*
- *We understand that various private hire coach operators pick up/ set down in Fairfield on non- market days. We trust that Dorset Council are aware of this and have suggested suitable safe alternative locations.*

- **U3A Members** – several individual responses came from members of U3A, as well as a supportive overall comment from U3A. Although in general the individuals were in support, one of the points made by several was that Fairfield Road provides a pick up/set down for coach trips.

- **Dorset Hideaways** (holiday cottage company on Weymouth Avenue) – strongly opposed to both a footway and vehicle restrictions, suggesting that unloading and visits by customers would be impinged by removing vehicle access between Weymouth Avenue and Fairfield Road.