

BERWICK UPON TWEED BOROUGH COUNCIL

Berwick Business Town Centre Questionnaire – 2006



One of the many changes in Berwick-upon-Tweed in 2006. Global Video went into receivership and closed. After several months Café Nero arrived to add to the already successful beginnings of café culture.

The 2006 survey/questionnaire was devised by the Town Centres Manager (Neil Brown) with the help of The Chamber of Trade.

A visual survey of the town centres premises was undertaken in late July 2006 to ascertain vacancy rates and the retailers in the town centre. For the purposes of the survey, generally the businesses within the town walls and Castlegate area were considered to be in the town centre. Other businesses were excluded. 262 town centre businesses (23 premises were vacant) were surveyed over several weeks by the Town Centres Manager (Neil met businesses in person where possible). Results were collected and completed in February 2007.

Survey Results

The results of the questionnaire and initial analysis are as follows -

76 businesses replied to the questionnaire representing 30% of town centre businesses. This is considered an excellent return. Businesses reported that their employees were 327 full time (31hours+); 169 part time (16 to 30 hrs) and 80 under 15 hours. **(Q3)** The figures suggest that perhaps 1500-2000 people are employed by town centre businesses in total. The number of full time employees does not reflect the national trend which is generally lower with more part-time employees. This could be due to owner occupiers and suggests that extended opening hours in the evening or weekend may be problematic. Improved flexibility might be possible via childcare or other help for employees or businesses.

550 employees were local and 26 were not **(Q3b)**. 80% came from Greater Berwick (includes Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal) **(Q3c)** with relatively few employees from any distance. Of these staff only 32 used car parking yet lived within 10 minutes walk **(Q3d)**.

Types of businesses found in the town centre in July 2006 were -

CN	18	6.34%	Convenience
CP	137	48.24%	Comparison
S	36	12.68%	Service#
R	40	14.08%	Pub/restaurant etc
E	4	1.41%	Entertainment
V	23	8.10%	Vacant*
CO	8	2.82%	Office
A	15	5.28%	Accommodation
O	4	1.41%	Other
Total	285	100%	

Total Charity	10	3.52%
Total Hairdresser	12	4.23%

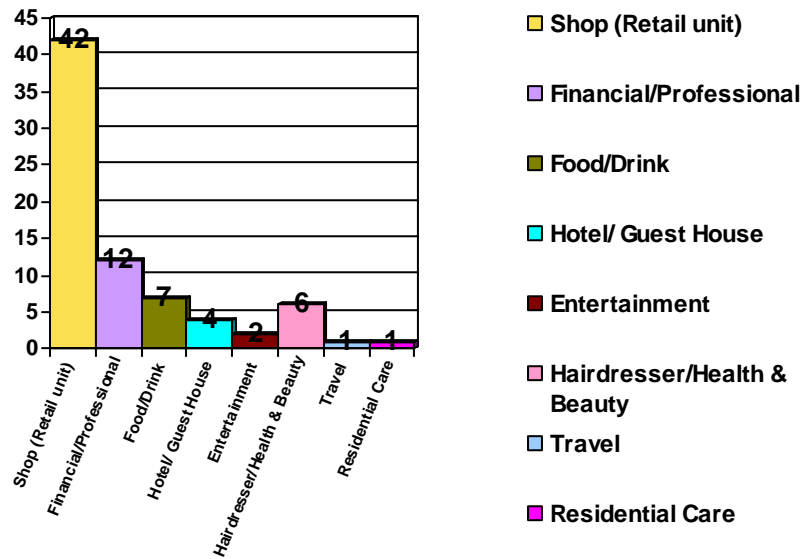
Notes

Convenience is classified as food retail and comparison is all other retail. (both are planning use class A1)

Service includes banks and financial institutions, accountants, Estate agents, betting offices etc (generally planning use class A2)

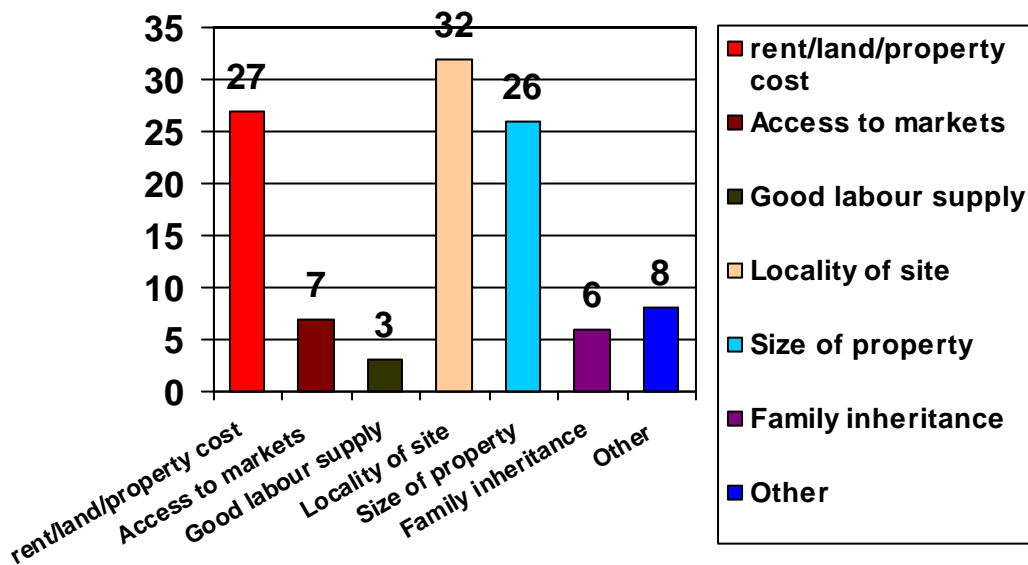
* These figures differ slightly from the GOAD figures as more businesses were surveyed than covered by the GOAD data. GOAD records only 212 premises. On this basis, vacancy rates would be 10.85%. These rates are acceptable. However, vacancies were perceived to be worse than the reality as 4 highly visible retail units on Marygate had been vacant for some time. For a healthy town a vacancy rate of around 3-5% should be aimed for.

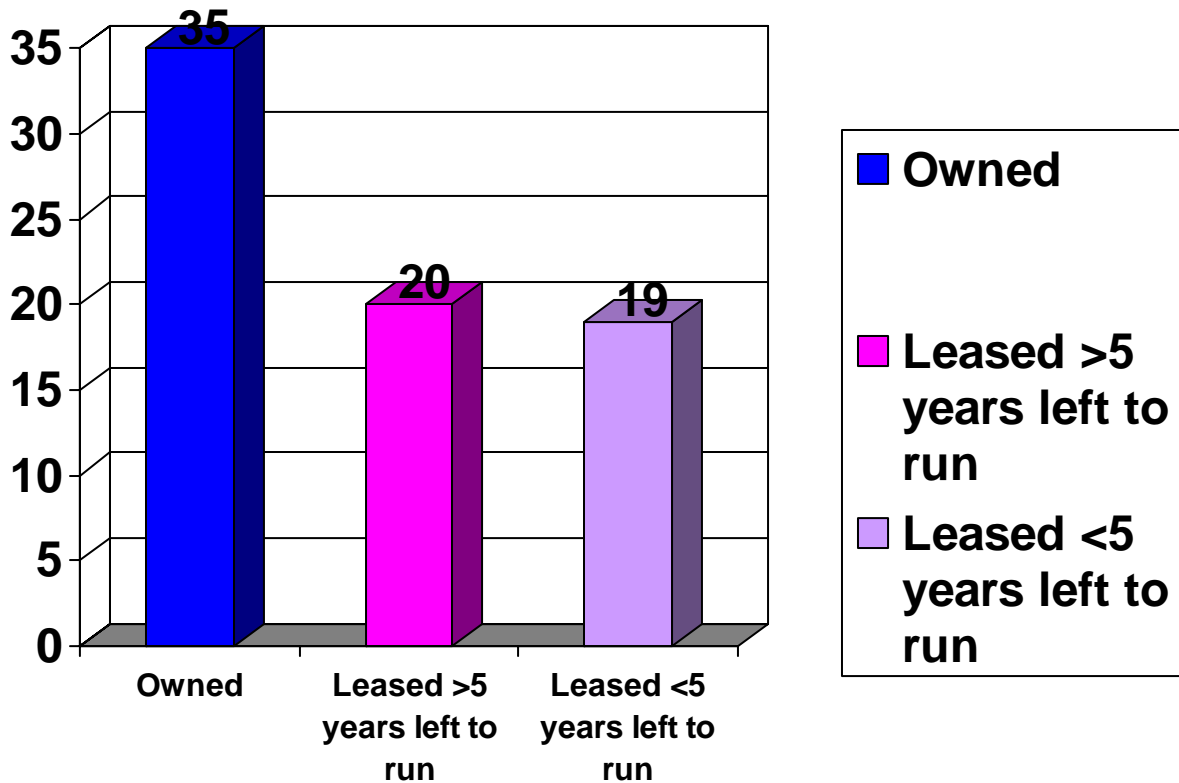
The businesses that responded were **(Q4)** – Retail (57%) (includes travel), Financial/Professional (16%), Food and Drink (9%), Hotel and Guesthouse (5%), Entertainment (3%) and Hairdresser/Beauty (8%). These figures are a reasonable representation of our mix of businesses in Berwick-upon-Tweed.



32% were sole traders. **(Q6)** 11% of all businesses in the town centre had been trading for under a year and 32% less than 5 years. **(Q8a)**

Of the 76 businesses who replied, 30% had more than one set of premises **(Q5a)**. Nearly half were owned and a quarter had more than 5 years left to run on their lease **(Q5c)**. We intend asking those owned businesses if they had bought in the last ten years as this should give a good indicator of how safe the economy in Berwick-upon-Tweed is perceived. Businesses advised why they set up in the town **(Q5g)**. Like other towns, rent/land cost, locality and size of property is key to attracting businesses. However, figures for Marygate were much lower for rent/land cost suggesting that rents are already at a reasonable high level for the primary shopping area. In comparison cost per square foot for prime retail is £45-55 in Berwick, £30 in Galashiels, and £25 in Alnwick. (source local estate agents/consultants).



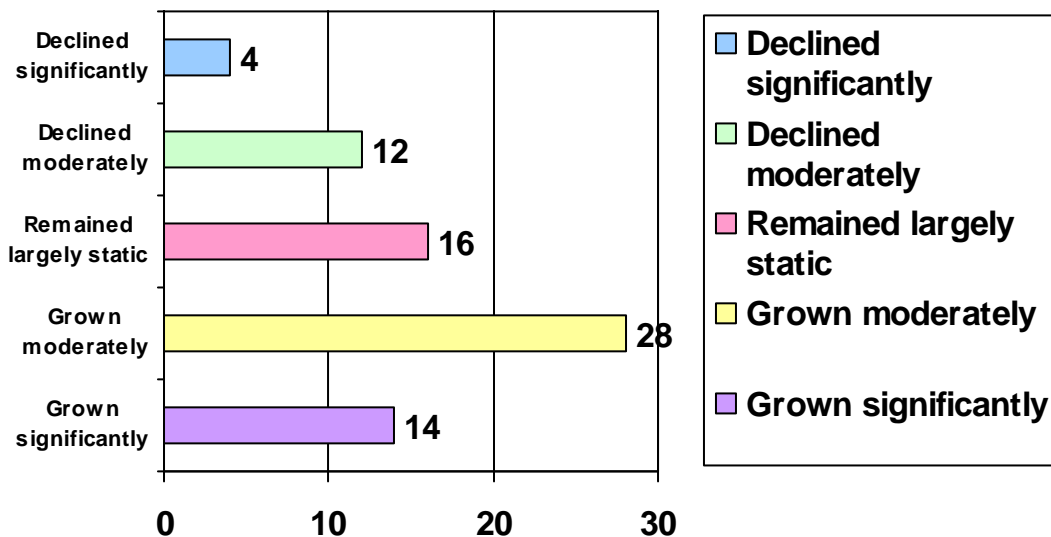


Fewer than 20% of businesses responding indicated that they had plans to refurbish their property. **(Q5e)** Out of the 76 businesses, plans included expanding on the same site (8%), expand and relocate outside town centre (5%), relocating to another town (7%) and closing or selling the business (11%).

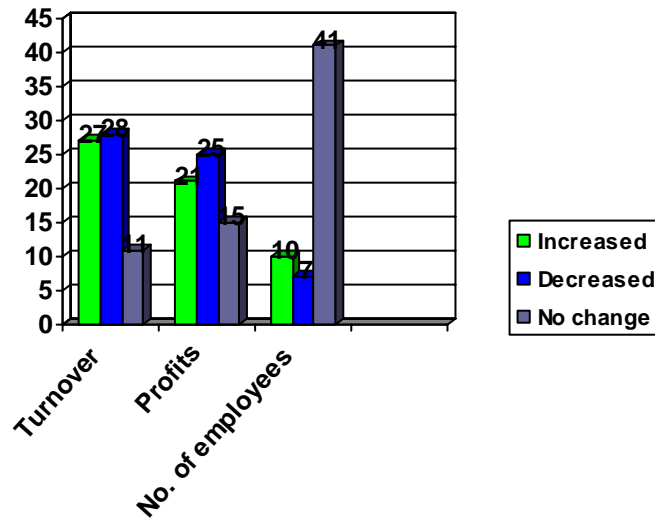
In the upper floors businesses stated that 52% were residential and 27% were either storage or vacant. **(Q5d)** This indicates that there is scope for more people living in the town centre over shops. However we do know that this is compounded by lack of appropriate access to some residential and other premises.

Economy

The businesses that responded provided some insight to their success in the time they had been in business. 22% reported declining over that time and 57% reported growth. **(Q8b)**



In terms of profits and turnover the picture is not overly healthy (Q8c)



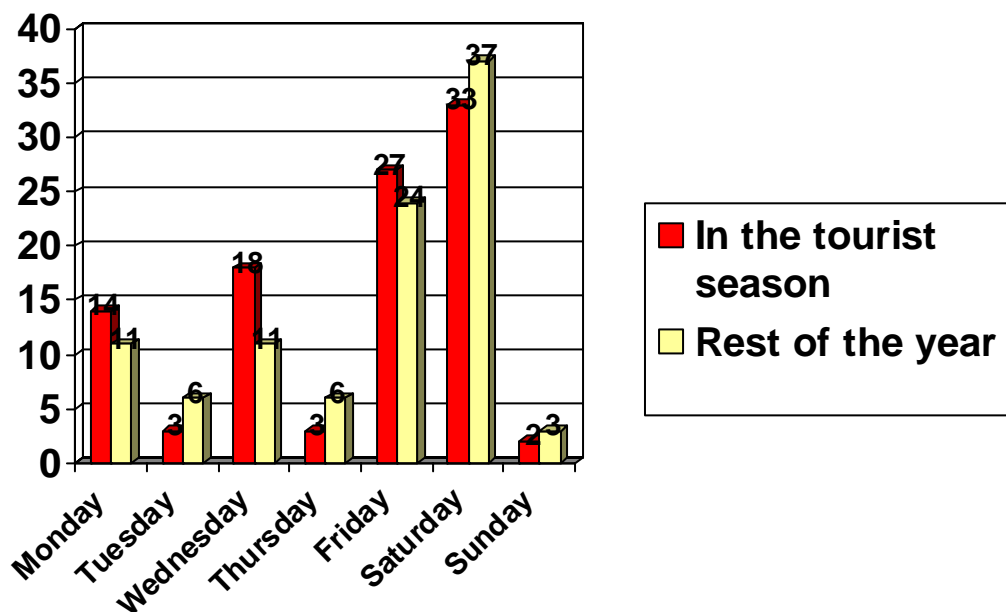
However expectations are generally quite positive with a third of businesses expecting turnover to improve and 19% expecting it to decrease. (Q8d)

Threats

The main threat was seen as the internet and supermarkets (52%); retaining staff featured at 11% and 7% parking. 9% of businesses found it difficult to recruit staff although it wasn't seen as a major threat. (Q8e) 8% perceived that they had no competition. (Q8f)

Busiest times

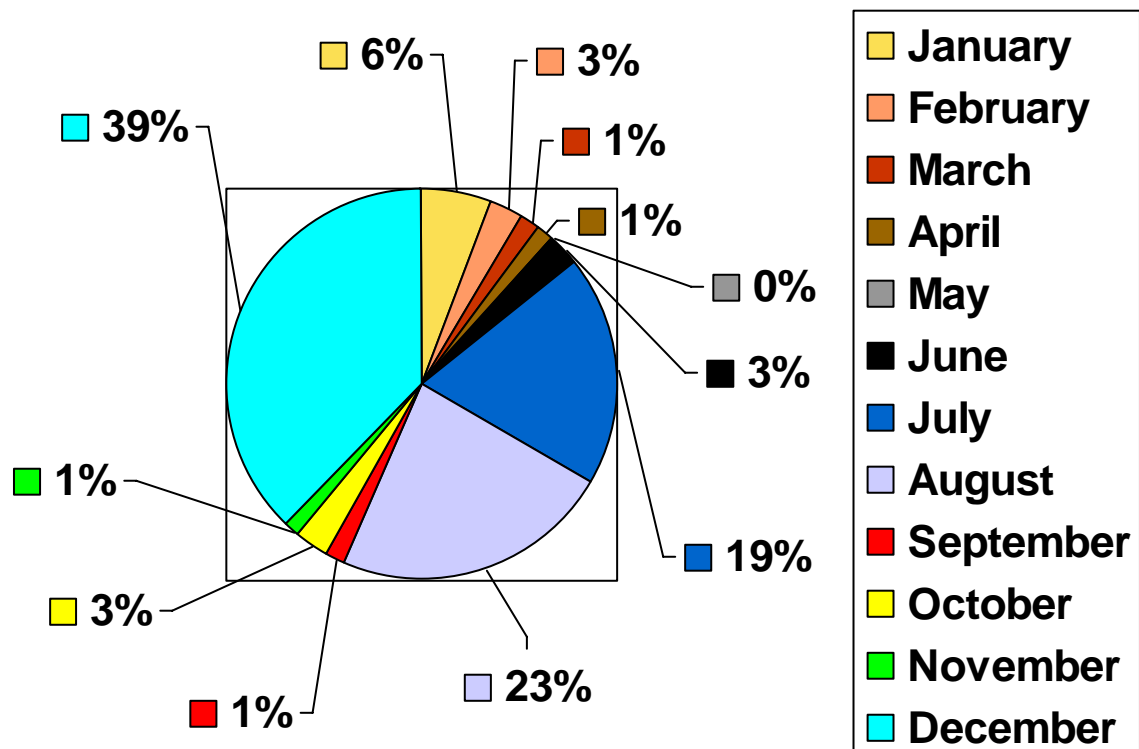
Days (Q9)



Without doubt the busiest days for businesses were Friday and Saturday both in the tourist season and rest of the year. Wednesday was good in the tourist

season yet not very good off-season. This may highlight the impact of the market in summer and the lack of market stalls during the off-season. Thursday is still traditionally half day closing in the borough and many businesses close on this day. We don't know why Tuesdays are not popular although this may have something to do with arrival and departure days for our holiday park tourists.

Months – Busiest (Q10)



Although we expected December to be a good month we didn't expect it to beat July and August. In fact December is by far the best month of the year for most businesses, nearly better than July and August combined. January sales obviously play a part in January being a good month for some businesses. There may be scope to help improve November through the run up to Christmas and September/October by extending the season.

Months – Quietest (Q11)

49% of businesses stated February as their quietest month. January accounted for 24%. 10% of businesses had their quietest month in December and 6% in November. Apart from the odd business April to September was recorded as not a quiet time. Statutory undertakers and others undertaking work should be made aware of these times of least disruption to the economy.

If there was one thing to improve trading what would it be? (Q12)

We did not provide any potential answers. Businesses were allowed to write in their own answer. What was not in doubt was that parking or traffic management would feature. Of the business who responded to the question **59%** said that easier/cheaper parking would improve trading the most even though earlier, businesses said they did not consider parking a major threat. The only other major considerations, apart from more customers, were to have an attraction in the town centre (7%), improve the look of the town (5%), better shops (3%) and a bus park (3%).

Where customers come from (Q13)

39% of businesses who responded said that over 50% of their customers come from Berwick; 55% of businesses reported that 20-50% of their customers came from Berwick. Only 13% said that less than 20% of their customers came from Berwick. 71% of businesses said that customers coming from the outlying area amounted to between 20-50 % of their customers. Tourists did not appear to feature as much as expected with nearly 50% of businesses saying that less than 20% of their customers were tourists. Only 16% of businesses relied on tourists for over half of their customers.

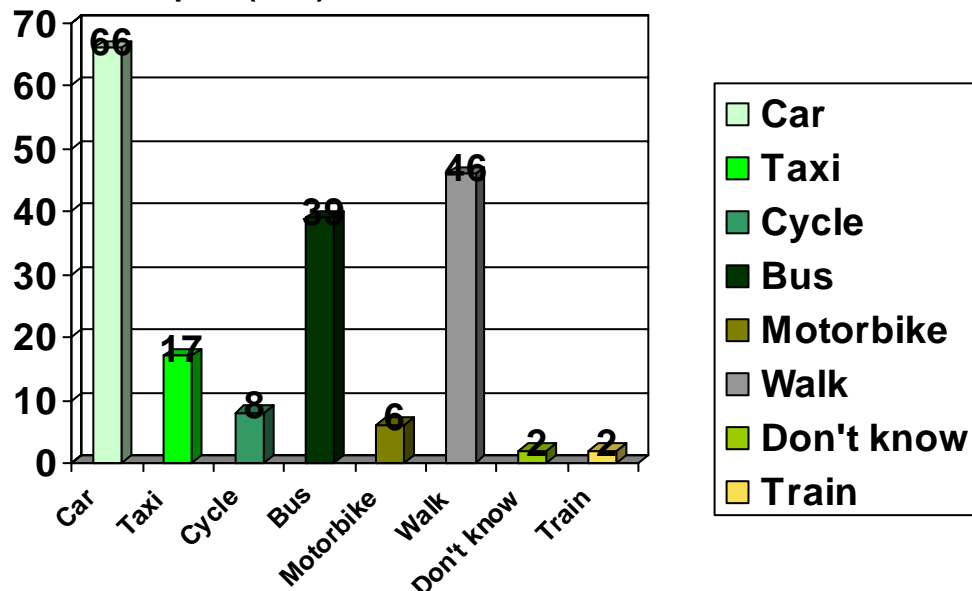
Advice (Q14)

Around half of all the businesses responding said that advice on financial, marketing and business planning issues would definitely or probably be beneficial to their business.

Staff Training (Q15)

65% invest in staff training; 35% do not invest in staff training. The overwhelming majority (97%) of those investing said training had been positive. There was a vast array of training requested (**Q16**) although 56% didn't wish to have any additional training for staff. We will be contacting those interested in training to see if we can help.

Customers Transport (Q17)

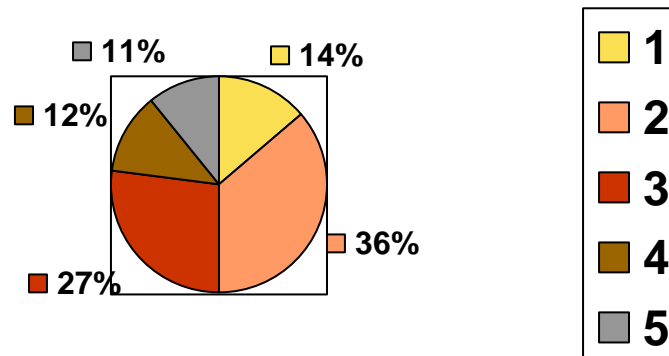


We asked businesses how their customers arrived in the town centre. However we didn't ask what percentage of customers used these methods and therefore the figures may not accurately reflect how customers visit. What is clear is that train use is very limited or unknown and that many customers don't use a car to visit Berwick. If we took the figures as face value car usage only amounts to 36% of the ways customers travel to the town centre; 9% came by taxi; 4% cycled; 21% by bus; 3% by motorbike; 25% walked and only 1% came by train. A further survey of how people arrive in the town centre would be sensible.

Views on Environment (Q18)

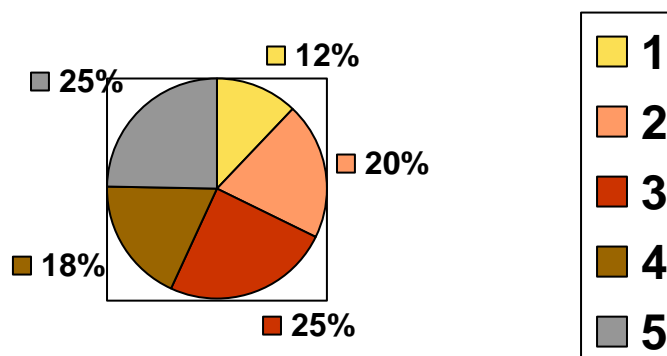
Key (1 Very Good and 5 Very Poor)

Appearance of premises next to their business



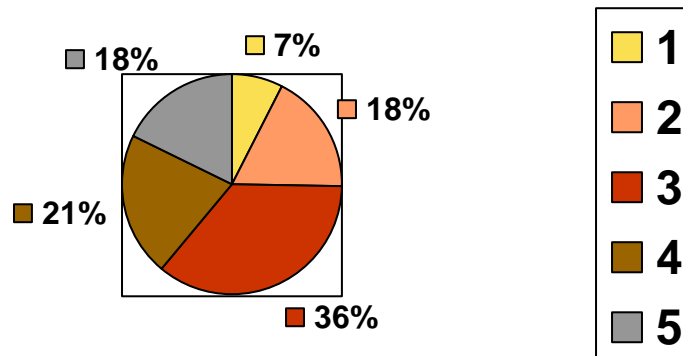
This result contrasted with businesses' own premises, shop fronts, signage etc being 63% very good or good (13% more) and only 3% very poor (8% less). It is likely that the above figures will more accurately reflect reality.

Provision of Seating



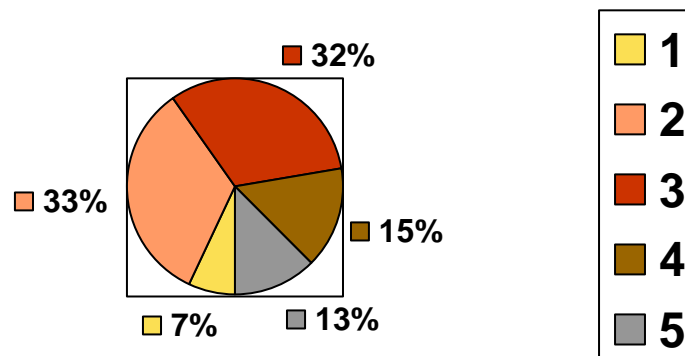
43% thought the provision of seating was poor or very poor. On the other hand 32% thought it was good.

Quality of Street Furniture



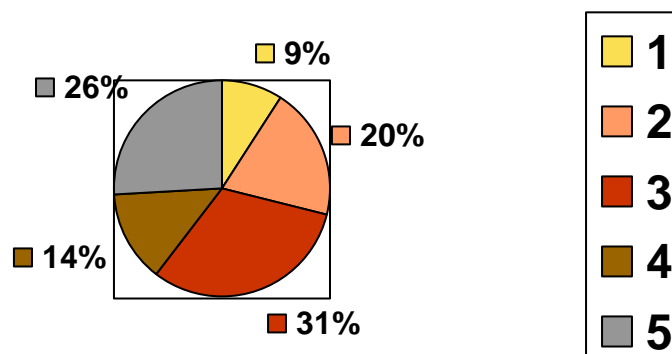
39% felt that the quality of street furniture was poor or very poor. Only 7% thought it very good.

Clean streets



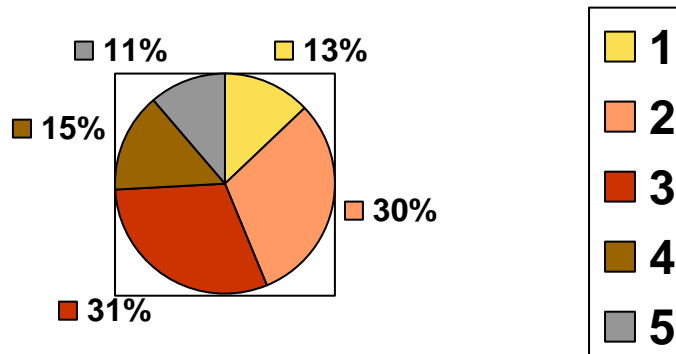
Despite our reputation as being litter free only 7% of businesses thought our streets were kept very clean. 28% thought our streets could be cleaned better and another 32% thought our streets were ok. Please also see results for Q21 below as this provides some insight as to why many businesses thought that Berwick-upon-Tweed's streets were not as clean as they could be.

Public Transport Provision



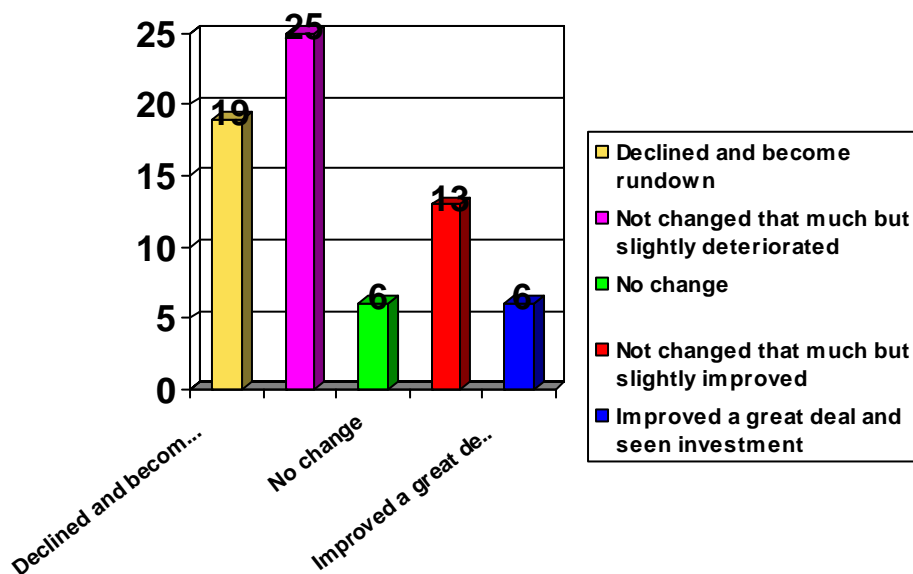
40% did not consider public transport provision satisfactory.

Pedestrian/Cycle Route Provision



43% thought the provision was as good or better.

Change in quality of physical area over the last five years (Q19)



Overwhelmingly the feeling is that quality of the environment had declined (64%) over the last few years, despite recent schemes. Of those reporting improvements, several businesses were from Bridge Street which is much improved.

What should be improved? (Q20)

Improve Signs and links to the town centre **62%** saw this as a high priority and only 10% as a low priority.

Increased Marketing and promotion of the town **84%** considered this a high priority (74% top priority) and only 4% as a low priority.

Provide more car parking We specifically did not ask about town centre parking and this question should relate to providing more overall parking in the town. **84%** saw this as a high priority (72% a top priority) and only 8% saw it as a low priority.

Improve vehicular access into the town centre. **68%** considered this a priority and 10% saw it as a low priority.

Public Transport and bus stop/taxi rank locations. **57%** wish to see improvement as a priority and 17% believe it a low priority.

Increase shrubbery, trees or provide hanging baskets. **64%** see this as a priority and 13% believe it a low priority.

Brighten the high street by improving shop fronts. **65%** see this as a priority and 12% a low priority.

Improve or increase street lighting. 37% see this as a priority and 24% as a low priority.

More space for pedestrians. Only 22% see this as a priority. 43% see this as a low priority.

Removing unnecessary clutter (excessive street furniture). 15% see this as a high priority. 43% see it as a low priority. Only 5% of the replies from Marygate saw this as a high priority. Perhaps this reply indicated that most businesses feel that we don't have enough street furniture.

Safety (day) 32% see this as a priority to improve, 37% see it as a low priority.

Safety (evening/night). This changes as the night takes off. **55%** see this as a priority and only 17% see it as a low priority. Perhaps a further questionnaire on what the particular issues are is required.

Pedestrian movement easier across roads. **55%** see this as a high priority. This indicates that pelican crossings, despite their often unsightly nature are perhaps needed in the high street.

Introduce more evening activities. 47% see this as a priority, 25% as a low priority.

Hold more events in the town centre. A massive **67%** see this as a priority and only 14% as a low priority.

More leisure facilities in town centre. **66%** see this as a high priority and 14% as a low priority.

Easier to get round shops in wheelchair/pushchairs. 48% see this as a priority and 13% a low priority.

Introduce awards for good service or shop displays. 42% see this as a priority and 25% as a low priority.

Create more activities for young people. **60%** see this as a priority and 22% as a low priority.

Provision of an A-Z shopping guide. 47% see this as a priority and 23% as a low priority.

Create more opportunities for people to live in/near centre. **53%** see this as a priority and 19% as a low priority.

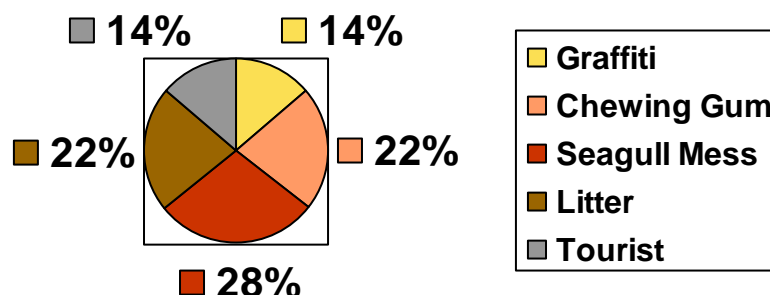
Encourage more affluent tourists/visitors to come. **84%** consider this a high priority and 9% as a low priority.

Improve routes into town. **66%** see this as a high priority and 11% as a low priority.

Impose tighter restrictions on out of town centre shopping. **63%** see this as a high priority and 23% as a low priority.

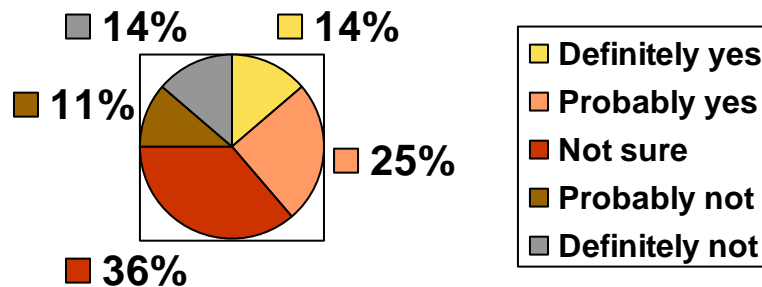
In addition to parking, marketing and promotion was seen as a very high priority amongst businesses. We should target any marketing to attract more affluent tourists/visitors.

The biggest factor responsible for untidiness in the centre (Q21)



Tourists are very important to our economy. However many business earlier reported that most of their customers are local not tourists so many do not feel the benefit of the substantial numbers visiting Berwick, partly perhaps because many summer tourists spend more in pubs, clubs and supermarkets than shops in the town centre. Seagull mess is considered the factor most responsible for mess in the town centre, followed by chewing gum and litter.

Would businesses vote for BIDS (an increase on their rates bill to pay for improvements)? (Q22)



39% appear to be in favour, 36% undecided and 25% against. To enable a BID scheme to go forward lots of preparation work is required (18 months by a dedicated person and up to £50,000 initial funding) so it is promising that without any preparation so many town centre businesses are already in favour.

Other Comments (Q23)

The comments provided by businesses are detailed in full in no particular order.

- The principal issue to be addressed is the economic prosperities of the town rather than short term minor and insufficient window dressing.
- Free or cheaper parking is major factor in us moving to Kelso.
- Let Tesco in and the town will die as a good retail centre.
- A free bus could run bringing shoppers into town.
- Berwick town centre is no longer seen as a 'day out' destination.
- A survey by the federation of small businesses – of the English bids that have commenced to date is that many of the improvements have been things that the L.A. should have provided in the first place.
- I feel that the rates are overly high considering I get very little in return by way of services.
- The town needs to oppose out of town or edge of town development until the town centre is 100% efficient or until we have increased the population by a figure that is capable of supporting more retail.
- What about a Park & Ride?
- Re BIDS: It's like the Christmas lights, everything for Marygate and no-one else matters.
- Berwick is a great town for older people not so for the young, but out of town shopping has spoiled the high street. It was much better with local shops years ago.
- We have a beautiful town with much to offer. We undersell our 'product', we must work on improvements and be more dynamic and forward thinking in our approach.
- More signposting for Castlegate.

- Empty shops look uninviting and seem to remain so for years.
- Ignored in Castlegate.
- The town needs to attract quality businesses.
- Reduce parking charges to encourage shoppers and long stayers.
- Encourage owners to smarten properties.
- Bids – This is good, subject to suitable safeguards to ensure ring fencing of cash and not cash substituting for other funds.
- Illegal parking a problem
- Local support from councillors and awareness from other large employers.
- Council and others need to work to build a sense of community.
- Too many hairdressers.
- More customers required (local and tourists)
- Re visit Marygate parking times
- Missed opportunity with the old bus station, could have had a multi storey car park
- Get Marina project up and running
- Rents & rates make it very hard for small private shopkeepers and the properties are too small for big national companies so we end up with what we have (in shopping terms) boring, dull, uninteresting that sums up the town centre as it is today
- This form is nonsense, give Berwick toilets and parking and the town will come back to life. The high street is an absolute disgrace.
- We have 2 business premises next door to each other and as such do not qualify for small business rate relief. This does not encourage people to expand businesses.

Conclusion

The questionnaire provides us with a good baseline of economic information as well as the priorities suggested by businesses. Follow up work is planned.

It is planned to repeat the questionnaire in 2007 to compare with 2006 data.

For further information on the survey please contact Neil Brown, Town Centres and Inward Investment Manager, Council Offices, Wallace Green, Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 1ED. Tel: 01289 301767 Fax: 01289 330540
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