

Tonbridge High Street Post Monitoring Review

To: Tonbridge Joint Transportation Board, 11th June 2018

By: Tim Read – Head of Transportation, Kent County Council

Classification: Unrestricted

Executive Summary

Following completion of the Local Growth Funded High Street Improvement scheme in June 2016 this report outlines the pre and post scheme monitoring that has been undertaken. The scheme has been evaluated against the original objectives of the project, namely to provide an attractive, safer environment, improve access to jobs and public transport, improve air quality and alleviate congestion.

The economic and transport data is promising. Metrics for both pre and post completion have been assessed and traffic flows are reduced, journey times at peak periods in both directions both down and vacancy rates also down. The data suggests that pedestrian movements have decreased steadily since the year 2000 with no post scheme improvement at present and air quality will be measured after 5 years. Personal Injury accidents will need to be compared over a 3 year period so will not be available until 2019.

A short online survey to investigate how businesses and key community stakeholders responded to the scheme was conducted to get an understanding of local thoughts and feelings. Responses on a sliding positive to negative scale were sought and over 1600 responses were received. Specific responses are set out later in this report. The responses should be considered in the context of no 'before scheme' surveys to benchmark the results against. Informal communications prior to the scheme start did suggest that there was some dissatisfaction with the operation and environment of the High Street prior to the scheme commencing.

The most positive responses centred around the attractiveness of the High Street and by far the most unpopular element being the online bus stopping locations followed by the removal of the central controlled crossing point.

A separate report has been produced identifying possible options for further improvements/investigations.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Amey were commissioned by Kent County Council (KCC) to carry out post scheme monitoring and evaluation of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funded Tonbridge High Street regeneration scheme. The scheme predominately consisted of the widening of existing footways and narrowing of the existing carriageway through the lower High Street of Tonbridge, between the Big Bridge to the north and the Vale Road roundabout to the south.
- 1.2 The scheme aimed to provide a more attractive environment for pedestrians by creating more space for pedestrian movement, providing street furniture and opportunities for public events. The speed limit was reduced from 30 mph to 20 mph. The location is shown in 1-1 below.

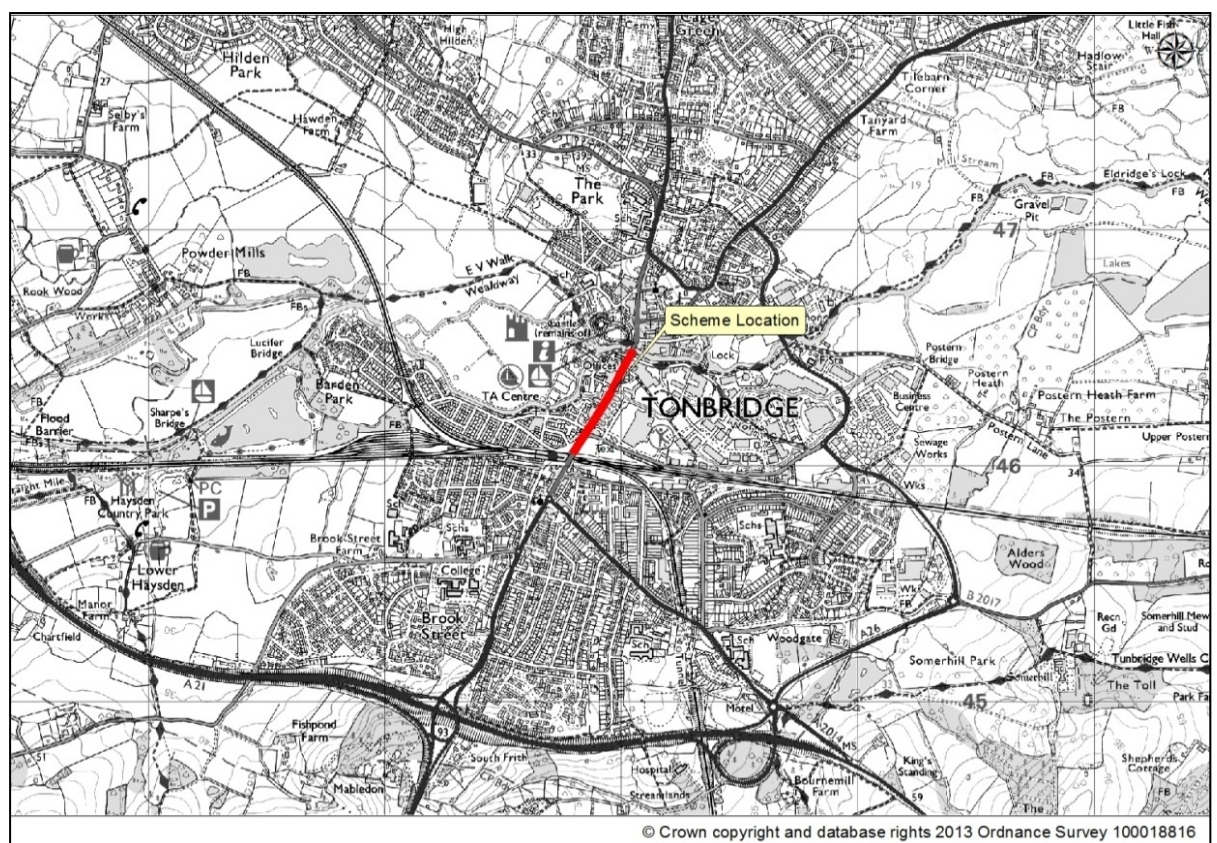


Figure 1-1 Location of Scheme

- 1.3 Site clearance began in August 2015 and the scheme was fully completed by June 2016.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 This report provides analysis of the pre-scheme and post scheme metrics and provides an evaluation of the schemes performance against the aims and objectives as outlined in the business case.

3.0 Scheme Objectives

Figure 3-1 below summarises the scheme objectives and the desired outcomes and provides the measures against which the scheme will be accessed.

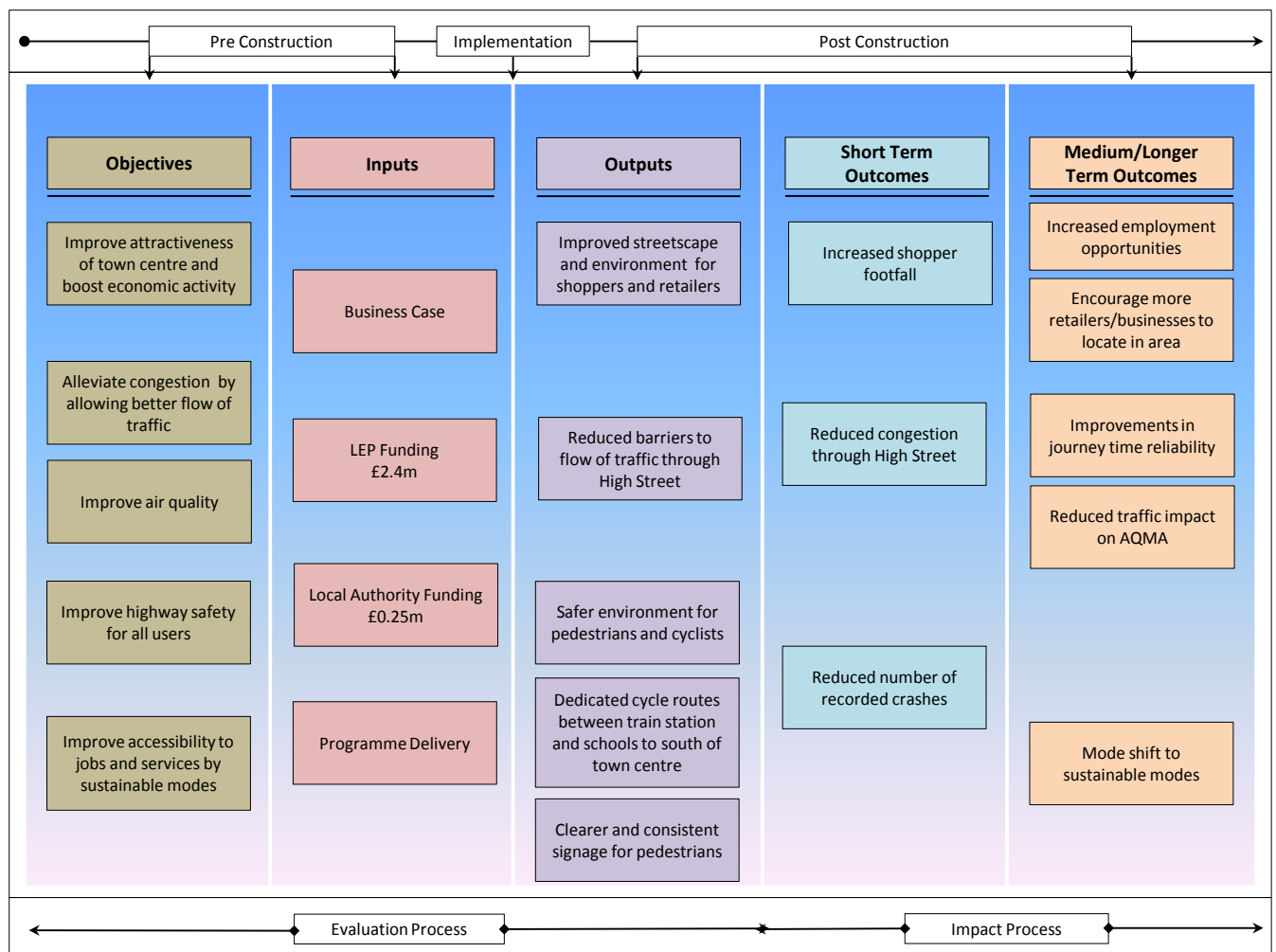


Figure 3-1 Scheme Logic Map

3.1 The desired outcomes from each objective have been considered and are shown in Table 3-1.

Objective	Desired Outcome
Improve the attractiveness of town centre and boost economic activity	Encourage new retailers/retail expenditure within Tonbridge Increased local employment opportunities
Alleviate congestion by allowing better flow of traffic	Improved car journey time reliability
Improve air quality	Reduced nitrogen dioxide emissions
Improve safety for all road users	Reduced number of recorded crashes within scheme
Improve accessibility to jobs and services by sustainable modes	Increased pedestrian and cyclist modal split

Table 3-1 Outcomes and Impacts

4.0 Monitoring Requirements

4.1 The following metrics have been identified to evidence the effectiveness of the Tonbridge High Street scheme;

- Average daily, peak & non-peak traffic flows;
- Journey Time Data;
- Pedestrians crossing counts;
- Footfalls;
- Personal Injury Accident records;
- Air Quality, nitrogen dioxide emissions;
- Town Centre vacancies.

5.0 Summary of Monitoring Requirements

5.1 Summary of average daily, peak & non-peak flows:

5.2 The data suggests that post scheme implementation the traffic using the High Street has reduced by approximately 1100 vehicles per day south of the High Street and 1900 vehicles north of the High Street. Traffic flows have been shown to have reduced uniformly throughout the day. 85th Percentile traffic speeds have also been shown to have decreased marginally across the scheme area.

5.3 Summary of journey time data:

5.3.1 The data shows that peak journey times post construction have reduced from pre-scheme with the largest changes seen in the AM peak. Northbound PM peak journey times show a minor increase post scheme construction, which appears slightly at odds with the data but may be associated with the changes to road layout.

5.3.2 To quantify these differences the northbound AM peak data shows a decrease in the average journey time for the route of 36 seconds, when comparing pre-construction and post-construction journey times. The northbound PM peak shows an increase of 18 seconds.

5.3.3 AM peak southbound values, show a reduction in average journey time of 40 seconds and PM peak southbound values show a reduction of 9 seconds.

5.4 Summary of pedestrian count data:

5.4.1 Figure 5-1 presents the pedestrian count data for the last 17 years. As can be seen, pedestrian movements have decreased steadily throughout the town centre since 2000. In total, there are shown to be approximately 2000 fewer pedestrian movements recorded in 2017 as compared to those recorded in 2000.

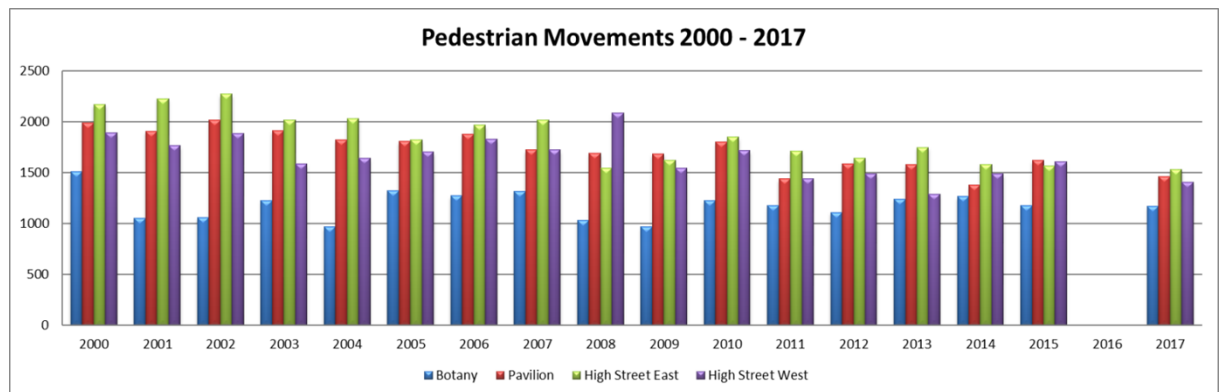


Figure 5-1 Pedestrian movements 2000 to 2017

5.5 Summary of Air Quality

5.5.1 The lower High Street was designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in June 2005. This air quality issue was deemed to have been caused by significant levels of vehicular traffic, the stop-start nature of traffic, and the ‘canyon’ effect caused by high buildings either side of the carriageway. Improving air quality was an objective of the scheme, although it was agreed that there will be very little measurable change in the short term and this should not be formerly monitored until the 5 year review.

5.6 Summary of Economic Data

5.6.1 The economic impacts of the scheme have been assessed in two ways. Tonbridge and Malling Borough council have supplied details of vacancy rates within the town centre since 1997. In addition, a survey was carried out to canvas public opinion with regard to the success of the scheme. The economic results suggest a positive impact as a result of the scheme.

5.7 Vacancy rates

5.7.1 Vacancy rates have been provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council between 1997 and 2017. Vacancies are provided separately for Upper and Lower High Street.

5.7.2 % Vacancy Rates - Upper and Lower High Street

5.7.3 Table 5-2 gives an overview of vacancy rates along the High Street for the period between August 1997 and February 2017. In general terms, the following can be derived:

The upper end of the High Street had a vacancy rate of 5.42% in February 2017 – the lowest it had been over the past 10 years;

The lower end of the High Street had a vacancy rate of 5.12% in February 2017 – the lowest it had been since January 2012;

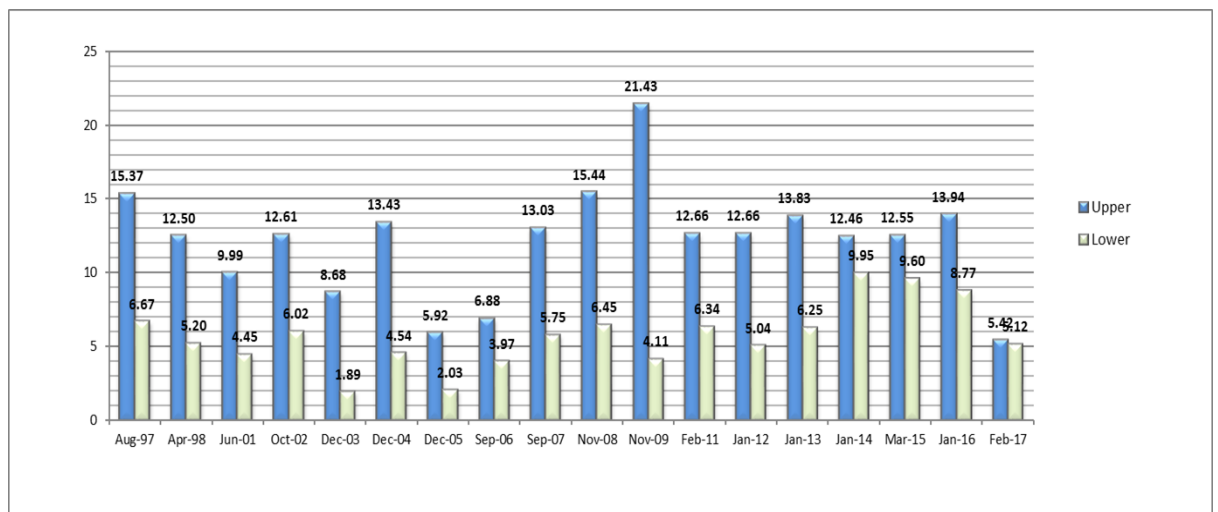


Table 5-2 Vacancy rates for Tonbridge show a positive downward trend post scheme opening with several businesses new to the area utilising vacant High Street properties.

6.0 Questionnaire

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 A short survey was conducted to get an understanding of local thoughts and feelings on the recent improvements in the High Street, Tonbridge. The original scope of the project was to investigate how businesses and key community stakeholders responded to the project, however this was extended to include the wider community. It should be noted that in general we have no 'before scheme' surveys to benchmark the results against. Informal communications prior to the scheme started did suggest that there was some dissatisfaction with the operation and environment prior to the scheme commencing.

6.1.2 The aim of the survey was to first investigate the positive or negative outcomes of specific criteria and then to lead the respondents to highlight their specific positives and negatives of the project and to gather constructive feedback. Respondents were also asked to offer their solutions and comment further on the project.

6.2 Survey Design

6.2.1 When designing the survey, analysis of past feedback was taken into consideration, the survey was designed to build from this initial feedback and flesh out those ideas and responses that had been recorded previously. It was also key to create a survey which would be engaging, to keep respondents interested and increase potential response rate. Using Survey Monkeys design tools, this could be tested and a response rate could be generated from its draft analysis. The survey that was designed achieved an 80% response rating, ranked 'good' by the survey monkey tool kit.

6.3 Survey Questions

6.3.1 *How do you feel overall about the project?*

This question is based on a 5-point scoring system from Very Negative, Negative, Indifferent, Positive to Very Positive.

6.3.2 ***How successful do you feel the scheme has been at improving the following?***

This question is based on a matrix score. The following criteria were tested on this matrix; The pedestrian environment, Ease of road crossing, Access to High Street businesses, Goods delivery arrangements for businesses, Public Transport access on the High Street and Traffic Flow. The responses options given are; Very Unsuccessful, Unsuccessful, No Change, Successful, Very Successful.

6.3.3 ***Has there been a change in trade following the project? (if you aren't a business please select N/A)***

6.3.4 This question was designed to work out which respondents are businesses, an answer in both criteria, Turnover and Customers, would signify a business response.

6.3.5 The criteria range from Large Decline, Decline, No change, Increase and Large Increase. There is also the option to respond with N/A if they are not a business respondent.

6.3.6 ***How has the vibrancy of the retail centre changed since the scheme was implemented?***

6.3.7 The criteria for this question ranges from Large Decrease, Decrease, The Same, Increase to Large Increase.

6.3.8 ***How has the environment changed since regeneration?***

6.3.9 This question is another matrix response. The Categories for response are; Aesthetically, Litter, Lighting, Road Crossing, Safety, Seating areas, Cycling facilities and Overall feeling.

This again follows a similar grading from Much Worse, Worse, The same, Better to Much Better.

6.3.10 ***What issues (if any) have arisen from the regeneration?***

6.3.11 This is an open question looking for any problems the project may have caused.

6.3.12 ***What could have been done differently?***

6.3.13 This is another open question, building from the first. It invites the respondent to give any constructive thoughts they may have in regards to the project

6.3.14 ***What was done well?***

6.3.15 This open question invites the respondent to reflect the benefits they have seen since the project was implemented

6.3.16 ***Are there any improvements you could suggest moving forward?***

6.3.17 This question is also open. The question looks for the respondent to draw on their experience of the project as a whole, and suggest ideas that could improve the area in future.

6.3.18 ***Any further comments?***

6.3.19 This open question allows any extra points that respondents would like to communicate to be collected.

6.4 Responses

6.4.1 Overall there were 1,634 responses, this was much greater than the original project scope that was looking at around 200-300 responses. Of these there were 110 responses that could be confirmed as business responses. It is suspected that the negative business responses may be focussed on the construction period and the amount of inconvenience caused throughout the scheme build. It is of course understandable that the disruption would not be well received by the business community.

6.5 Results

6.5.1 *How do you feel overall about the project?*

Project Feedback		
	All	Business
Very Negative	19%	33%
Negative	40%	34%
Indifferent	19%	14%
Positive	20%	16%
Very Positive	2%	4%

Table 6-1 Project feedback

6.5.2 *How successful do you feel the scheme has been at improving the following?*

Project Impact on Ease of Road Crossing		
	All	Business
Very Unsuccessful	30%	37%
Unsuccessful	33%	31%
No Change	26%	19%
Successful	9%	11%
Very Successful	2%	3%

Table 6-2 Project Impact on Ease of Road Crossing

Project Impact on Access to High Street Business		
	All	Business
Very Unsuccessful	8%	25%
Unsuccessful	16%	19%
No Change	58%	39%
Successful	16%	12%
Very Successful	2%	5%

Table 6-3 Project Impact on Access to High Street Business

Project Impact on Goods Delivery		
	All	Business
Very Unsuccessful	15%	32%
Unsuccessful	21%	17%
No Change	29%	22%
Successful	32%	24%
Very Successful	3%	5%

Table 6-4 Project Impact on Goods Delivery

Project Impact on Public Transport		
	All	Business
Very Unsuccessful	34%	47%
Unsuccessful	23%	22%
No Change	34%	24%
Successful	8%	7%
Very Successful	1%	0%

Table 6-5 Project Impact on Public Transport

Project Impact on Traffic Flow		
	All	Business
Very Unsuccessful	66%	70%
Unsuccessful	19%	19%
No Change	11%	9%
Successful	3%	2%
Very Successful	1%	0%

Table 6-6 Project Impact on Traffic Flow

6.5.3 Has there been a change in trade following the project? (if you aren't a business please select N/A)

6.5.4 In this section, we are mainly looking for the responses of Business owners, however several non-business respondents answered the customer numbers criteria. It should be noted that this overall is not representative of the entire response level as not all of the non-business respondents answered this question, it was not mandatory for them to complete. This proves that the negative responses are impacting the overall results since the question is not even relevant to them.

Project Impact on Business Turnover		
	All	Business
Large Decline	20%	21%
Decline	27%	28%
No Change	48%	47%
Increase	4%	3%
Large Increase	1%	1%
N/A		

Table 6-7 Project Impact on Business Turnover

Project Impact on Customer Numbers		
	All	Business
Large Decline	15%	23%
Decline	26%	32%
No Change	57%	41%
Increase	2%	5%
Large Increase	0%	0%
N/A		

Table 6-8 Project Impact on Customer Numbers

6.5.5 It should be noted that there are likely to be several factors that may have influenced the above results. It would be unfair for all of the negative associations with the decline of high street spending to be attributed to the scheme. The rise of 'out of town' shopping opportunities is likely to have been a key factor.

6.5.6 ***How has the vibrancy of the retail centre changed since the scheme was implemented?***

6.5.7 The responses for this section again show a difference between public and business perception.

6.5.8 It is a relatively neutral response for all respondents compared to earlier results, with responses recording a small decrease in vibrancy. By examining business results more closely it can be seen that, vibrancy is reported to have declined. Table 9 shows that 56% of business responses saw a decrease or worse with only 13% believing vibrancy had increased.

Project Impact on Vibrancy		
	All	Business
Large Decrease	7%	25%
Decrease	20%	31%
The Same	62%	32%
Increase	10%	13%
Large Increase	1%	0%

Table 6-9 Project Impact on Vibrancy

6.5.9 **How has the environment changed since regeneration?**

6.5.10 There are some really positive results in response to the questions around regeneration. Responses vary between overall public and business respondents.

Project Impact on Aesthetic		
	All	Business
Much Worse	8%	20%
Worse	16%	23%
The Same	34%	22%
Better	37%	31%
Much Better	5%	5%

Table 6-10 Project Impact on Aesthetic

Project Impact on Litter		
	All	Business
Much Worse	4%	17%
Worse	11%	17%
The Same	71%	51%
Better	14%	15%
Much Better	1%	1%

Table 6-11 Project Impact on Litter

Project Impact on Road Crossing		
	All	Business
Much Worse	32%	35%
Worse	33%	34%
The Same	27%	19%
Better	7%	10%
Much Better	1%	2%

Table 6-12 Project Impact on Road Crossing

Project Impact on Safety		
	All	Business
Much Worse	33%	39%
Worse	35%	35%
The Same	21%	17%
Better	10%	7%
Much Better	1%	2%

Table 6-13 Project Impact on Safety

Project Impact on Seating Areas		
	All	Business
Much Worse	4%	11%
Worse	8%	16%
The Same	53%	37%
Better	33%	34%
Much Better	3%	3%

Table 6-14 Project Impact on Seating Areas

Project Impact on Cycling Facilities		
	All	Business
Much Worse	6%	12%
Worse	11%	21%
The Same	65%	47%
Better	16%	19%
Much Better	1%	1%

Table 6-15 Project Impact on Cycling Facilities

Overall Project Impact		
	All	Business
Much Worse	23%	39%
Worse	34%	27%
The Same	21%	15%
Better	18%	15%
Much Better	3%	4%

Table 6-16 Overall Project Impact

6.5.11 The following section looks at the analysis of open-ended questions. Due to the number of responses, the analysis for this has been carried out for the 110 business responses but not for responses from the general-public at present. Information has been summarised into subjects and data given on the frequency with which each topic was raised.

6.5.12 ***What issues (if any) have arisen from the regeneration?***

6.5.13 This question commanded 24 different response subjects (23 that were effective and an 'other' category for responses that didn't fit the question)

6.5.14 The five biggest issues that have arisen are;

- 56% of respondents highlighted that there were no bus pull ins along the High Street following the project, this has had an impact on the traffic through the area which respondents feel has led to further issues;
- 35% specifically referred to traffic congestion along the High Street, stating that the project had made conditions worse for traffic attempting to pass through;
- 30% of respondents referred to the reduction in pedestrian crossings causing an impact to safety and causing pedestrians to cross in unusual or unsafe points along the High Street. Some responses called for the crossings to be put back in as before;
- 21% of the respondents indicated safety as a concern but in a more generalised manner, with comments on crossing and on the choices of paving at the crossings; and
- 11% of respondents raised concern regarding the lack of facilities within the High Street for the elderly and disabled. This included parking.

6.5.15 Unfortunately it appears that all of these responses are rather biased towards driver responses, not those walking and spending time and money on the high street. This is something that can be considered when drafting future questionnaires.

6.5.16 ***What could have been done differently?***

6.5.17 This question commanded 26 unique response types (25 that were effective and an 'other' category for responses that didn't fit the question)

6.5.18 Only three of these responses had a common theme;

- 57% suggested that at implementation of the project, the bus stops should have been placed off line. Some of the ideas were to put a bus stop in one of the goods delivery lay-bys or to create a new pull in for buses in the wide pavement area;
- 26% indicated for the pedestrian crossings to either be put back in or to revert to their original positions, returning the crossing to the middle of the High Street; and
- 8% of the respondents talked about fully pedestrianising the High Street and removing/reducing traffic flow throughout.

6.5.19 ***What was done well?***

6.5.20 15 response categories were given for this question, including an 'other' category.

6.5.21 The most positive aspect of the project has been the widening of the pavements and the look of it now, 34% of responses recorded that they liked the new paving.

27% of respondents said nothing in the project was done well.

11% of respondents said that the area had been successful in improving its aesthetics.

6.5.22 ***Are there any improvements you could suggest moving forward?***

6.5.23 27 categories were generated for this question with 33% suggesting that a bus pull in be adopted for the bus stop along the High Street. 14% suggested that further pedestrian crossings should be placed along the High Street.

6.5.24 ***Any further comments?***

6.5.25 The final question allowed respondents to voice any other concerns, most left the section blank. Of the responses, which were recorded 6% used this area to call again for bus pull-ins, 3% called for further public consultation and 4% called for business rates to be lowered to decrease unoccupied premises.

6.5.26 Summary of 6.5.1 to 6.5.25

The project has come across in a negative manner based upon the feedback from the survey and there have been limited positives taken by the local community and businesses in terms of their opinions of the project. Generally, businesses have seen the project overall as more negative than the general respondents however the difference between the two is minimal.

6.5.27 From the local businesses point of view, a key issue is that buses should be given stops offline, so that they cause little disruption to traffic flow. Secondly that the formal pedestrian crossing provision is an issue and that more crossings are needed. The general consideration for full pedestrianisation also remains a factor.

6.6 Scheme Benefits summary

The metrics recorded in the preceding chapters have evidenced the changes which have occurred following the opening of the Tonbridge High Street scheme. The following chapter summarises these changes with regards to the schemes overriding targets and objectives.

6.6.1 *Improve the attractiveness of town centre and boost economic activity*

6.6.2 The upper end of the High Street had a vacancy rate of 5.42% in February 2017 – the lowest it had been over the past 10 years;

6.6.3 The lower end of the High Street had a vacancy rate of 5.12% in February 2017 – the lowest it had been since January 2012;

6.6.4 In total the post scheme pedestrian crossing survey recorded 657 fewer peak hour weekday crossings and 243 fewer Saturday peak crossings.

6.6.5 The pedestrian footfall surveys demonstrate that pedestrian movements have decreased steadily throughout the town centre since 2000, this trend has continued post scheme opening.

6.6.6 The survey indicated that the most positively viewed aspect of the project has been the widening of the pavements and the look of it now, 34% of responses recorded that they liked the new paving.

6.6.7 4% of businesses responding to the survey reported an increase in turnover post scheme opening, and 5% report an increase in customer numbers. In contrast 49% of businesses reported a decline in business turnover and 55% reported a decrease in customer numbers post scheme opening.

6.6.8 ***Alleviate congestion by allowing better flow of traffic***

6.6.9 Traffic flows have been shown to have reduced in the High Street following scheme opening.

6.6.10 85 percentile speeds are shown to have reduced following the scheme opening. Peak time journey times have reduced marginally whilst interpeak journey times have increased post scheme opening.

6.6.11 ***Improve air quality***

6.6.12 As stated above, this will be formerly be measured in the 5 year post scheme review.

6.6.13 ***Improve safety for all road users***

6.6.14 No significant change to personal injury accidents within the scheme area, either positive or negative, has occurred since the scheme was implemented. This should be revisited once a 3-year crash record is available.

6.6.15 ***Improve accessibility to jobs and services by sustainable modes***

6.6.16 The questionnaire results indicate that public opinion does not recognise any improvement to accessibility post scheme opening. This is rather disappointing and surprising since the environmental improvements are notable positive when you visit the High Street. On average 63% of respondents indicated that the project was unsuccessful in improving public transport.

6.6.17 26% called for the pedestrian crossings to either be put in or to revert to their original positions, returning the crossing to the mid High Street.

6.7 General Summary

- 6.7.1 The assessment of the scheme has provided a variety of responses both positive and negative. Most notably the public responses to the questionnaire were rather negative and in many cases contradicted the collated data. It is positive to hear that there are lower vacancy rates, improved average journey times and decreased traffic speeds through the High Street. Unfortunately the business owners within the scheme area in general indicate a decline in business post scheme opening, it is felt that is largely a perception issue since the economic data contradicts this. There is likely to be some outstanding frustration from businesses as a result of the disruption caused by the works.
- 6.7.2 The public response is slightly misleading in some instances, for example journey times through the scheme, the observed data does not tally with that perceived by users of the scheme. Peak hour journey times are shown to be marginally improved despite the reduction in speed limit to 20mph. Interpeak journey times do show a marginal increase with the highest recorded difference between pre scheme and post scheme times being 1 minute 15 seconds.
- 6.7.3 By far the most unpopular element of the scheme has been the online bus stops, with multiple complaints regarding buses slowing travel through the High Street and idling traffic contributing to a poorer air quality. The data recorded does not demonstrate a corresponding decrease in air quality or an increase in peak hour journey times although interpeak times are shown to be marginally slower.

- 6.7.4 The removal of the central crossing point has also proved an unpopular scheme element with a large proportion of questionnaire respondents calling for the crossing to be reinstated. Again, there has been no noticeable increase in accidents within the High Street, however, a decrease in pedestrians within the 65+ age category is indicated by the pedestrian crossing data. It may be that the users of the high street do not fully understand the scheme design, and if more work was done on the public consultation at the outset these results may have differed.
- 6.7.5 It is difficult to separate the schemes perceived outcomes from actual scheme outcomes. Some of the measurable benefits have the potential to be influenced by the lack of confidence locally in the scheme. The scheme has gained a great deal of local attention through online forums and social media. This was demonstrated most clearly by the response to the survey which was shared on social media and gained a great deal of momentum beyond the scope and purpose of its original design.