

Hertfordshire High Street Recovery

Briefing note for St Albans High Street Recovery Project Board

<u>DATE:</u>	October 2023
<u>REPORT TITLE:</u>	St Albans: High Street Recovery Final Project Evaluation
Accompanying documents	Business Survey Analysis Emergency Services Recent Communications & Statements Footfall & Dwell Report (next review December 2023) Public Consultation Survey Report (next review May 2024) Air Quality Report (next review December 2023) Traffic Data Analysis (next review March 2024)

1. Introduction

This briefing note provides the summary findings of the St Albans 'High Street Recovery Project' to enable the St Albans Project Board to comment and agree a position on how to progress the project. Focus reports provide additional detail. These will be updated on a periodic basis. Monitoring and evaluation is ongoing.

2. Background Information

As part of Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) COVID-19 response, in collaboration with St Albans District Council (SADC), changes were made in St Albans to make social distancing and queuing outside city centre shops easier and safer. When social distancing rules were lifted, we recognised that some of the measures could have potential benefits in supporting high street and business recovery, and creating a safer, cleaner, and more welcoming environment for people to enjoy when visiting the town centre and enabling people to walk, wheel and cycle more.

After consideration of the feedback received during the summer 2021 engagement period, in December 2021 the Project Board decided that a trial of the project should commence. The trial was to be reviewed following data collection activities that assessed the impacts of the project against its objectives.

3. Project Overview

The St Albans High Street Recovery Project Board (hereafter the Project Board) was set up in 2021 to enable HCC, SADC and St Albans Business Improvement District (BID) to consider the impacts of the changes implemented in response to COVID-19. This included reviewing feedback and engagement outcomes and making recommendations on the future of the High Street Recovery project. The Project Board recommended that a formal trial to include modifications to access and parking layout be taken forward.

Initially there were three phases to the trial, in which we are presently in Phase 2. Phase 3 as originally intended will now not take place:

- Phase 1: Market Place timed closure to traffic 7 days a week; High Street and George Street open to traffic
- Phase 2: Market Place and George Street timed closure to traffic 7 days a week; High Street closed to traffic at weekends only
- Phase 3: Market Place, George Street and High Street timed closure to traffic 7 days a week

Phase 2 of the trial was proposed to run over an 11-month period, trialling a different highway arrangement as outlined in the indicative plan in Appendix 1.

Phase 2 consisted of:

- Closing High Street to through traffic on Friday evenings at 6pm until Monday mornings at 7am. Access available on Saturday and Sundays for loading between 7am and 11am each day.
- Closing George Street to through traffic for 7 days per week with access available for loading between 7am and 11am each day.

- Maintaining the Market Place closure to through traffic for 7 days per week with access available for loading between 7am and 11am each day.
- Creating additional loading bays at Romeland Hill and Verulam Road to support town centre businesses when the roads are closed to traffic.
- Creating a one-way arrangement in a westerly direction on George Street to facilitate easier movement of traffic through the space and maximising the potential licencing space available.
- Creating a contraflow cycleway on George Street to enable cycle movements into the city from Romeland Hill.

The trial was enabled by an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) using physical infrastructure such as gates to control access. These gates were operated by St Albans Parking. As part of the trial there was an opportunity for stakeholders and the public to provide feedback and to give an overall view as part of the consultation. This feedback has informed the decision-making process and modifications were made to loading facilities as a result.

Phase 2 will conclude in November 2023. **From the week commencing Monday 6th November, a revised Phase 3 will come into effect.** Phase 3 will compose of a weekend closure to traffic of George Street between 11am Saturday to 7am Monday. During the week, George Street will be accessible to traffic one way in the direction High Street/Verulam Road to Romeland Hill. High Street will reopen to through traffic seven days a week. Market Place will remain closed to traffic excepting the delivery window between 7 and 11am (and to allow access and egress for market vehicles when required). A Permanent Traffic Regulation Order is being drafted for this. Air quality and traffic movements around the city will continue to be monitored. Phase 3 will take the form of a six-month trial and there will be a short engagement period towards the end of the trial.

4. Project Rationale

The purpose of the trial was to further test and monitor the impact of the trial measures to deliver the defined objectives of the projects as agreed by the Project Board. These are outlined in Table 1. Objectives have been marked green where we feel the project has positively met the objective, yellow where it has either partially met or not had a negative effect, and red where we feel there has been a negative effect.

Category ↓	Economic Impacts
Aim ↓	To support retail and hospitality businesses in St Albans City Centre by creating an environment that encourages more people to visit
Objective 1.1	Understand how the number of visitors to the city centre has changed subsequent to scheme delivery
Objective 1.2	Understand whether people are spending more time in the city centre as a result of the scheme
Objective 1.3	Understand whether businesses in the scheme area think that the scheme will or has directly improved their business (either customers or profitability)

Category ↓	Traffic Impacts
Aim ↓	To ensure impacts of displaced traffic are understood and considered before progressing to a permanent scheme

Objective 2.1	To understand changes in journey times following the implementation of the scheme
Objective 2.2	Identify if total traffic levels (AADT) have increased on alternative routes around the intervention areas
Objective 2.3	Identify the percentage of vehicles that re route

Category ↓	Social, Health & Well Being Impacts
Aim ↓	To create an environment that feels safe. To create an environment which feels more welcoming. To create an environment where people feel relaxed. To create an environment where people choose to walk and cycle
Objective 3.1	Engage with users of the High Street to understand whether the scheme has had a positive impact on their health and well-being.
Objective 3.2	Improve the average Healthy Streets score during scheme

Category ↓	Environmental Impacts
Aim ↓	To improve the air quality in the vicinity of the project and ensure that any displaced air quality (NO2) impacts are understood and do not exceed acceptable thresholds.
Objective 4.1	Identify changes in the concentrations of Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate Matter (PM10) in and around the intervention area before scheme delivery, during construction, and after completion

Category ↓	Sustainable Transport
Aim ↓	To encourage more journeys to be made to the High Street/George Street/Market Place using active and sustainable modes of transport. To encourage more journeys to be made to and across the city centre using active and sustainable modes of transport.
Objective 5.1	To identify if users of the High Street / Market Place / George St have changed their mode of travel to access the city centre.

Table 1: Project Objectives

A process map has been defined that summarises the journey High Street Recovery schemes aim to follow.

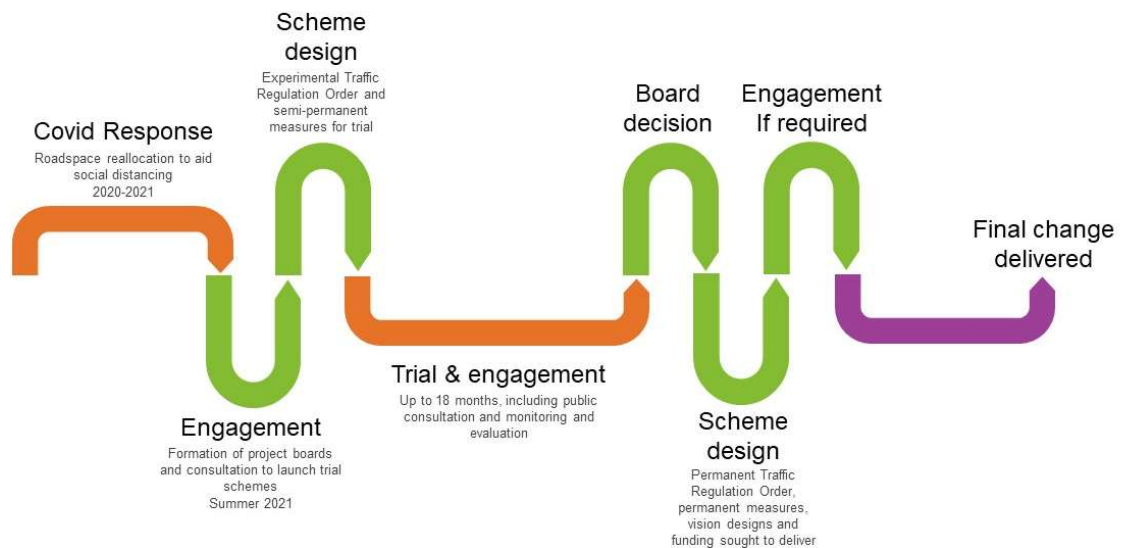


Figure 1: High Street Recovery Process Map

This project aligns with the goals of several SADC and HCC policies. It aims to support more journeys to be made using sustainable and active modes of transport, such as by bus, walking, wheeling or cycling, meeting the objectives of Hertfordshire’s Local Transport Plan (LTP4), and addressing the climate change emergency which both HCC and SADC have declared.

5. Related Projects

The St Albans Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

Aims to unlock the potential for active trips throughout the district and city by identifying primary walking and cycling routes, required infrastructure changes and a prioritised programme of changes. The focus of the LCWIP is to enable people to walk and cycle short utility trips and first- or last-mile parts of longer journeys, such as to schools, town centres, jobs and the railway station. The LCWIP prioritises connections to key destinations to enable more sustainable journeys. More than 70 prioritised routes have been identified within the LCWIP, alongside the identification of a network of additional primary and secondary routes aimed at providing further connections throughout St Albans and the surrounding villages and settlements.

Marlborough Road Cycleway Project

As part of Active Travel England’s tranche 4 of the Active Travel Fund, plans are progressing to deliver a cycle route along Marlborough and Upper Marlborough Road. This will include new crossing points at London Road and Victoria Road, making it easier, safer and more convenient to walk, wheel and cycle in the area. A trial arrangement will be continuing until the summer holidays 2023 with data analysis being collected regarding traffic volume and queue lengths. Should the trial outcomes be acceptable, construction is due to commence early in 2024.

St Albans 20mph Projects

Hertfordshire County Council has, over the last few months, been preparing, consulting and delivering 20mph projects across the county and St Albans is no exception. Design work has been undertaken and consultations are due to progress shortly. Should consultations be successful then the St Albans 20mph areas are due to be delivered in the next financial year.

6. Initial Engagement

Through summer and autumn 2021, public and stakeholder engagement took place to seek feedback on the temporary COVID-19 measures and gauge opinion for a possible trial.

The principle of a trial was supported by:

- 60% of respondents (Market Place).
- 55% of respondents (High Street).

62% of respondents (George Street).

St Albans BID (Business Improvement District – BID) indicated they would be supportive of proceeding to a formal trial.

7. ETRO Consultation – from November 2022

The ETRO came into effect on 17 October 2022 and phase 2 of the trial commenced on 31 October 2022. A formal consultation on the ETRO began in November 2022. This gave consultees an opportunity to comment on the proposal.

From November 2022 to May 2023, an official 6-month objection period took place during which the project team received nine objections. The TRO team reported that they also received two further responses that they classified as comments. The objections are still in the process of being analysed, but a brief summary can be provided here. A number of comments relate to displaced traffic supposedly caused by the weekend High Street element of the trial. These may be resolved with removal of this element. As the trial moves towards a weekend closure of George Street, there may be more work required to resolve objections from three respondents. These relate to deliveries access to George Street and anti-social parking around the gates when these are closed.

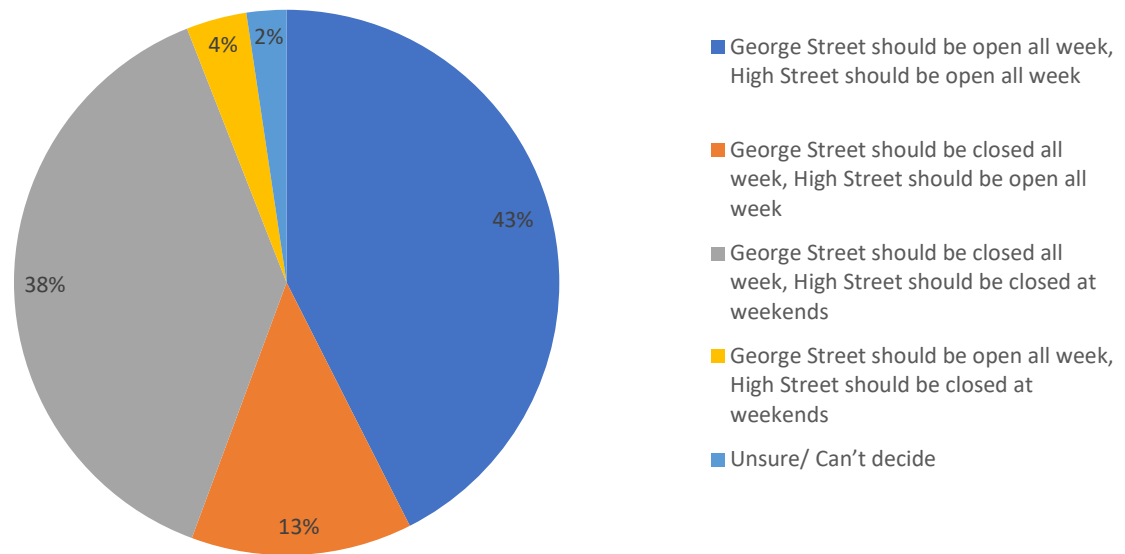
8. Public Engagement Survey (please see accompanying Public Consultation Survey Report) REVISED

The project's online feedback survey was available between November 2022 and 10 September 2023. 1,173 responses were received. 196 repeat responses with 102 duplications were identified. When these were de-duped, we were left with 1,071 validated responses. While for a Highways consultation this is considered a very good result, this sample size would be regarded as statistically insignificant to produce an accurate opinion for the population of St Albans overall. More detail can be found in the Public Consultation Survey Report (being revised).

The feedback received via public engagement is divided. 38% favoured the current Phase 2 arrangements. 43% would like to have the George Street and High Street to be reopened to motor traffic. Looking at George Street specifically, 51% of people would prefer the road closed all week (Chart 1). Since the decision at the last Board meeting to move to revised Phase 3 measures, there has been a movement towards support of the trial measures. A majority of pedestrians and cyclists felt their journeys had improved and were supportive of the trials. Most drivers felt their journeys had been made worse and wanted the roads reopened to traffic (Chart 2). The main reason of opposition is negatively impacted journeys, perceived worsening of congestion and possible rat-running in residential streets.

Most walkers and cyclists report to feeling much safer when travelling around the area.

Overall Keep or Remove



George Street should be open all week, High Street should be open all week	451
George Street should be closed all week, High Street should be open all week	139
George Street should be closed all week, High Street should be closed at weekends	407
George Street should be open all week, High Street should be closed at weekends	38
Unsure/ Can't decide	25

Chart 1 – Q. How do you feel about the changes?

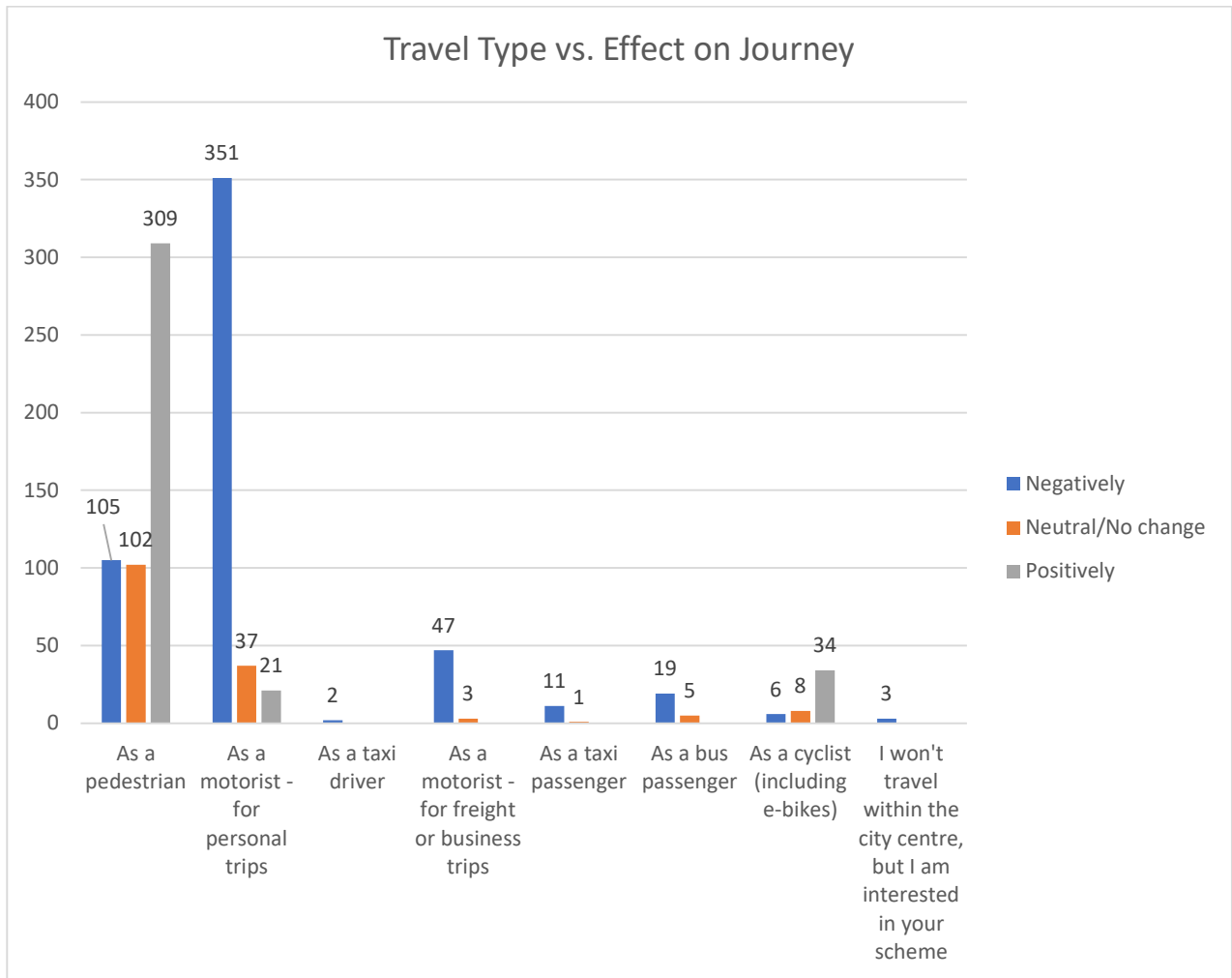


Chart 2: Travel Choice and Effect on Journey

Charts 3a-d shows how support for three main options:

1. Phase 2 measures
2. High Street open; George Street closed
3. George Street and High Street open

Has changed as the consultation progressed. There was a large initial response favouring option 3 and a return to the roads being open to traffic again during the early weeks of the consultation. In the following months, there was a smaller response, but an increasingly more favourable outlook towards the Phase 2 measures. Once the decision was announced on the planned Phase 3 measures, there was increasing numbers and an increasing proportion responding in support of the Phase 2 measures. Consistently there has been an increase over the charted period in the idea of George Street being closed to traffic all week (combining blue and orange sectors in Charts 3a-d).

[OBJ*OBJ*OBJ*OBJ]

- George Street should be closed all week, High Street should be closed at weekends
- George Street should be closed all week, High Street should be open all week
- George Street should be open all week, High Street should be open all week

Chart 3a-d: Support for three main options by quarter

9. On Street Public Opinion Survey (NEW)

An on-street survey was carried out on 14 September 2023. 186 people were approached, 107 of which agreed to an interview. 53% were not aware of the trials, so would probably not be the kind of person responding to the engagement survey. The modal age was 35-44 so younger than for the engagement survey. The majority had walked to the location, though 88% have access to a car. 68% felt the trials were of benefit to the area (Chart 4). 63% felt they were more likely to spend time in the area and 43% felt they would be more likely to use non-car modes. A similar survey was carried out prior to the Phase 2 trial implementation on 7 June 2022. On this occasion, 62 people agreed to an interview and 50% of the respondents felt the trial measures would benefit the area. (At this time, 71% of respondents were not aware of the trial measures.)

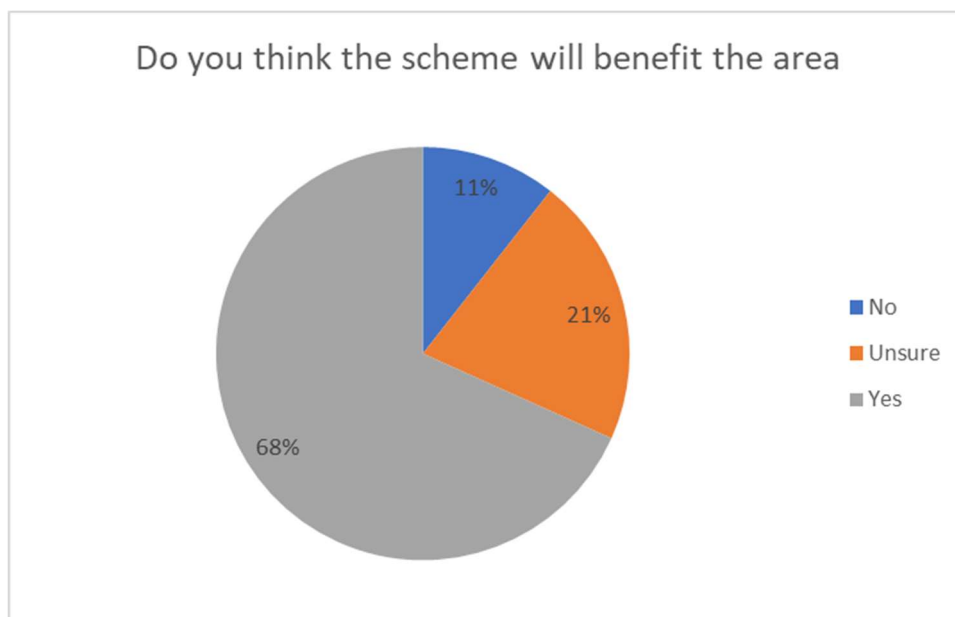


Chart 4: On-Street Survey: Trial Benefits

10. Emergency Services Engagement

48 survey respondents specifically commented on reports that emergency services had been delayed or inconvenienced in responding to incidents as part of the trial. This includes suggestions that response vehicles have not been able to gain access through the gates. Emergency services have been engaged in this project since the initial deployment of emergency measures and having worked with them extensively they have not indicated any negative opinion on the project stating that their needs are being met when travelling to and through the city. Combination codes are shared with emergency services and these are subsequently distributed to crews. Some respondents commented that the need to retain a suitable corridor for emergency access had limited activation opportunities (see accompanying Emergency Services Recent Comms circular).

11. Parking Services Engagement (NEW)

St Albans City & District Parking Services have reported the following issues:

- Significant drain on staff resource, particularly on Weds and Sat market days, (officers required to open gates at 05:00, normal operations start at 07:00)
- Safety concerns on High Street during Friday's closure with drivers not realising the gates are shut and performing three-point turns, either in front of the gates on Verulam Rd or on the keep clear in front of George Street gates.
- Unauthorised vehicles entering at the bottom of Market Place or via the pavement on Upper Dagnall Street.
- Motor scooters using the cycle gaps in High Street and George Street.
- Cyclists frequently chaining cycles to gates preventing closure
- Events (pilgrimage) generate additional drain on resource.

- Frequent vehicle collisions with gates, often prevent scheduled closure/opening.

There are some minor issues with regards to gates being struck and illegal parking at the Romeland Hill gate. Should the project be made permanent then the necessary gate movements will be implemented. Parking enforcement was apparently a minority concern in the public opinion survey, brought up in comments on only three occasions. However, this was a concern in some TRO objections, particularly concerning illegal parking around the gates. They also expressed the view that HCC should not be expectant on SADC's parking enforcement to resolve these issues themselves.

12. Business Survey (please see Business Survey Report)

The High Street Recovery trials have failed to gain the support of businesses in St Albans and initial expectations that some businesses may have held for the trials have not been met. The trials have not proved popular in their current format with St Albans businesses and have even led to some disappointment of some George Street traders who had higher expectations of the scheme. The perceived lack of activation of space created by the closure of the roads to traffic is a key concern. As a preference, the largest proportion of responding businesses would like to see George Street closed to traffic at weekends (Saturday and Sunday only) and High Street only closed for special events. A sizable proportion though want all streets reopened except for special events. (Chart 5)

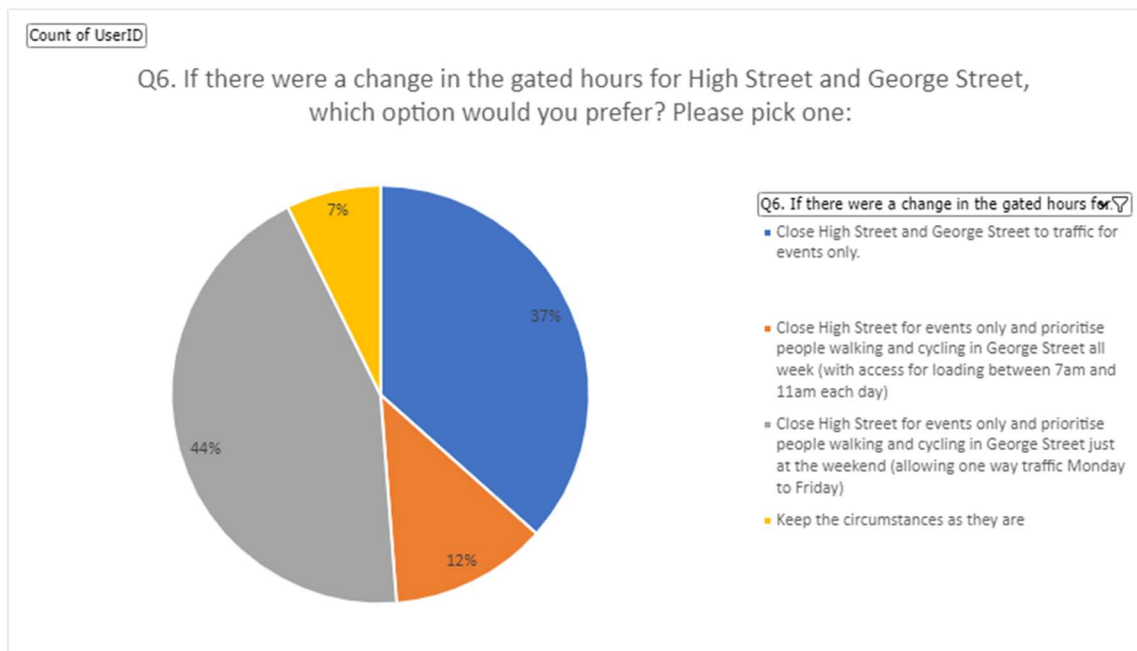


Chart 5: Business Survey Preferred Option

13. Traffic Data (please see Traffic Data Report Summary Analysis) **REVISED**

Most flows on all road types in St Albans are still lower than pre COVID on a weekday (4 out of 7 sites) and weekend (5 out of 7 sites). Flows have generally increased comparing before trial data with during data on a weekday (4 out of 5 sites) and on the weekend (3 out of 5 sites); and have increased during the partial (Phase 1: Market Place only) scheme compared with during (Phase 2) scheme on weekday (6 out of 9 sites) and weekend (6 out of 9 sites). (see Table 2 and Table 3).

It still needs to be highlighted that there is no certain way to attribute any of these trends to the scheme trial in part or in full, due to the various other factors contributing to these trends. However, there is nothing significant in the data to suggest the scheme is having an adverse impact on traffic flows, and the most likely argument is that flows are still reacting and bouncing back from the impact of COVID.

	Weekday Mon - Fri							
	Before Covid	Before scheme	Partial during scheme	During / After				
	Mon-Fri Traffic Flow Avera	Mon-Fri Traffic Flow Avera	Mon-Fri Traffic Flow Avera	Mon-Fri Traffic Flow Avera		Before COVID vs During Sc	Before scheme vs during sc	Partial vs during scheme
Waverley Rd (Near Palfrey Close)		1523.8						
Waverley Rd 2 (Near Pegasus Place)		3037.4	2497.3	3053.6		↑ 0.5%		↑ 22.3%
Waverley Rd 3 (outside hosp)			3490	4823				↑ 38.2%
Grange St				1645.8				
Old London Rd	1975.4		4617	2270		↑ 14.9%		↓ -50.8%
Old London Rd2								
Carlisle Ave		1684						
Carlisle Ave2		1597.4						
Carlisle Ave3	2764.2	1684						
Townsend Drive		1773						
Townsend Drive2		1351.4						
Lattimore Road		4069.2	4190.6					
Folly Lane / Catherine St	10566		10872.8					
Folly Lane / Catherine St 2			10936	11483.4				↑ 5.0%
Hatfield Road								
Hatfield Road 2								
Hatfield Road 3			12525.45	13124.4				↑ 4.8%
King Harry Lane	18179.4	17434.8		18346.2		↑ 0.9%	↑ 5.2%	
King Harry Lane2	15503.4		15913.2	16684.8		↑ 7.6%		↑ 4.8%
Holywell Hill	14806			6505		↓ -56.1%		
Holywell Hill2	15052.4		17536	10687.2		↓ -29.0%		↓ -39.1%
Verulam Road			5968					
Verulam Road2	7799.4			6587.6		↓ -15.5%		
Batchwood Drive	17496	15728		16326		↓ -6.7%	↑ 3.8%	
St Peter Street (A5183)								
London Road (A1081)		8135						
Victoria Street (B691)		4424	3965	4038			↓ -8.7%	↑ 1.8%
St Stephens Hill (A5183)		20201	22132	21275			↑ 5.3%	↓ -3.9%
George Street			#VALUE!					
High Street			#VALUE!					
Market Place			#VALUE!					

Table 2: Traffic Data (Mon-Fri)

	Saturday Traffic Flow Average							
	Before Covid	Before scheme	Partial during scheme	During / After				
	Saturday Traffic Flow Average	Saturday Traffic Flow Average	Saturday Traffic Flow Average	Saturday Traffic Flow Average				
Waverley Rd (Near Palfrey Close)		1044						
Waverley Rd 2 (Near Pegasus Place)		2379	1801	2220		↓ -6.7%	↑ 23.3%	
Waverley Rd 3 (outside hosp)			3432	3173			↓ -7.5%	
Grange St				1268				
Old London Rd	1800		4498	1575		↓ -12.5%	↓ -65.0%	
Old London Rd2								
Carlisle Ave		1475						
Carlisle Ave2		1504						
Carlisle Ave3	1891	1475						
Townsend Drive		1245						
Townsend Drive2		628						
Lattimore Road		3957	4503					
Folly Lane / Catherine St	9978		10208					
Folly Lane / Catherine St 2			9822	12636			↑ 28.6%	
Hatfield Road								
Hatfield Road 2								
Hatfield Road 3			11438	12626			↑ 10.4%	
King Harry Lane	16361	16278		17594		↑ 7.5%	↑ 8.1%	
King Harry Lane2	14031		14272	16096		↑ 14.7%	↑ 12.8%	
Holywell Hill	14967			3656		↓ -75.6%		
Holywell Hill2	14967		16628	10751		↓ -28.2%	↓ -35.3%	
Verulam Road			6268					
Verulam Road2	9196			5999		↓ -34.8%		
Batchwood Drive	14508	13162		14142		↓ -2.5%	↑ 7.4%	
St Peter Street (A5183)								
London Road (A1081)		8559						
Victoria Street (B691)		4888	4495	4569		↓ -6.5%	↑ 1.6%	
St Stephens Hill (A5183)		20338	20510	23877		↑ 17.4%	↑ 16.4%	
George Street								
High Street								
Market Place								

Table 3: Traffic Data (Saturday)

Traffic volume comparisons for Folly Lane through the day shown in Chart 6a-b. This shows the degree of potential traffic displacement on Saturday and Sunday with High Street closed to traffic. On Saturday 9th July 2022, the peak was 776 at 1pm. On Saturday 8th July 2023, the peak was 968 at 2pm, a 25% uplift. However, this is only 3% greater than the 2022 peak hour volume of 939 on Monday 4th July 2023 at 5pm and is 2.5% lower than the peak hour volume of 993 on Thursday 6th July 2023.

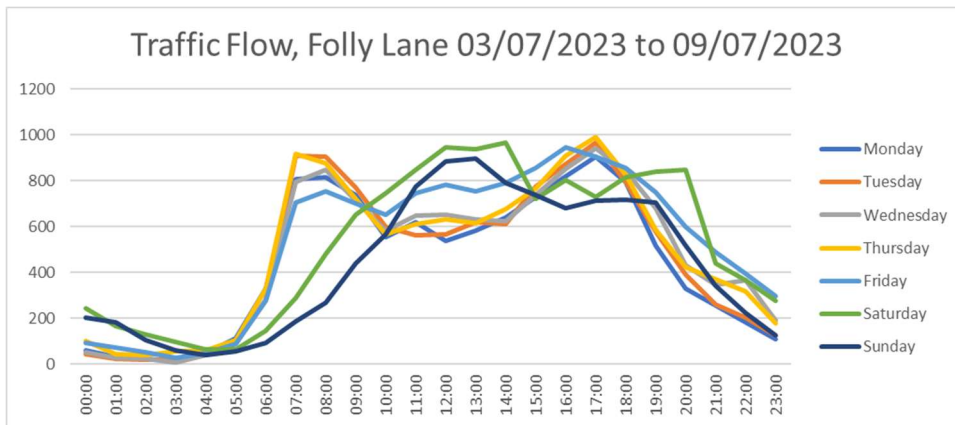
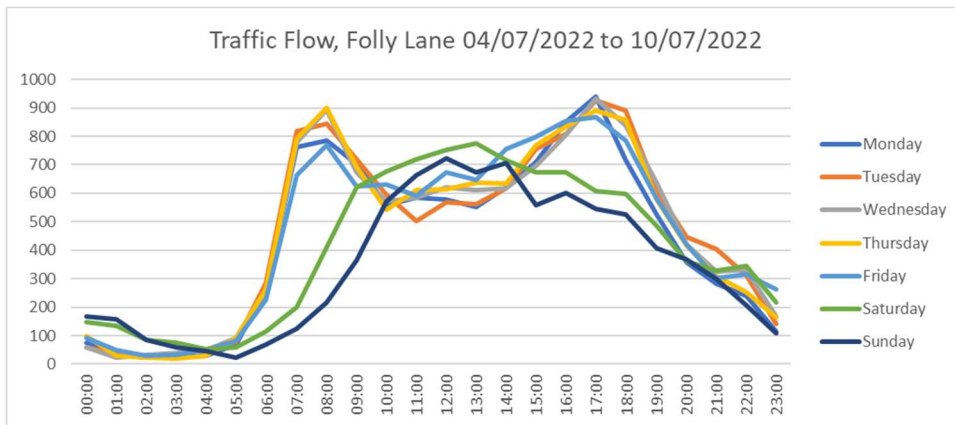


Chart 6a-b: traffic flow through the day Monday to Sunday for comparative weeks in 2022 and 2023

Analysis of the 85th percentile speed along Folly Lane suggests flow is unchanged on a Saturday comparing 2022 and 2023 at just under 30mph (Chart 7).

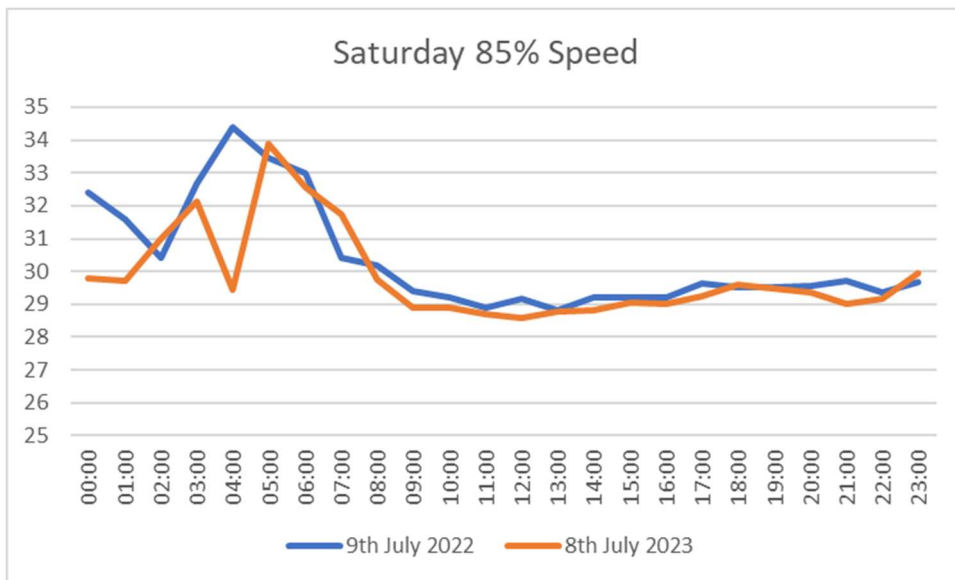


Chart 7: 85th Percentile Speed, Folly Lane

14. Journey Time Data

Comparing before and during the scheme trial, Google data shows that for the vast majority of time the quickest route remains via the appropriate roads (e.g Catherine Street, Folly Lane, St Stephens Hill aka A1081, A1057, A5183). In most cases the potential displacement routes (rat runs) rarely feature as quicker routes. The only exceptions are King Harry Lane, Latimore Road and St Stephens Avenue during trial closures.

When looking at the appropriate roads, in many cases, journey times are quicker on these routes during the scheme when compared to the before data.

It should be noted that Google data shows quickest route from an origin to destination point that is of a significant length.

The data will potentially not show up localised rat running within residential areas. It's therefore quite likely that if other observational data disputes the Google data, then this could be due to more localised rat running, perhaps based on presumption that the main multifunction roads are slower/busier.

Overall, when assessing Google data, it appears that the scheme has not unduly or significantly impacted the city centre, main roads and residential roads identified. Moreover, there are examples of journey times improving during the trial closure.

15. Vivacity Sensors (NEW)

Vivacity provide transport monitoring sensors that collect micromobility (walking and wheeling) data as well as motorised traffic data. There are some questions over accuracy (for example, are people picked up if obscured by other modes and how accurate is it given people don't always move in predictable ways).

There are three months' of pre-scheme data for the sensor at High Street, but the sensor at George Street was installed post-scheme implementation. They will really come into their own as the roads are re-opened and we can observe the impact of this.

The data presented below (Chart 8) is for High Street for the period July 2022 to June 2023, so there are no directly comparable months. Aside from cycle traffic, there has been a reduction in traffic across the board (including pedestrian traffic) when comparing the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 measures. People walking remain the most dominant users of High Street, by a factor of almost three to one over drivers (and yet space allocation remains in favour of motor traffic, even under Phase 2 measures). Car traffic has seen a reduction of 30% and HGV traffic by 39%.

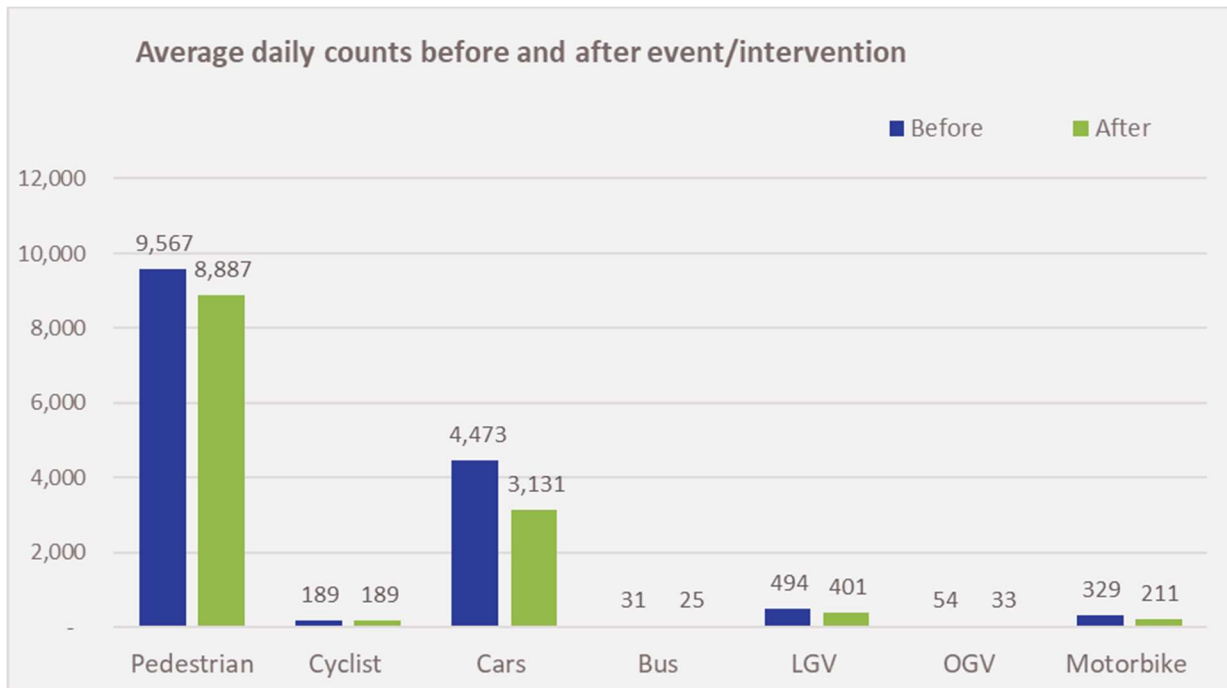
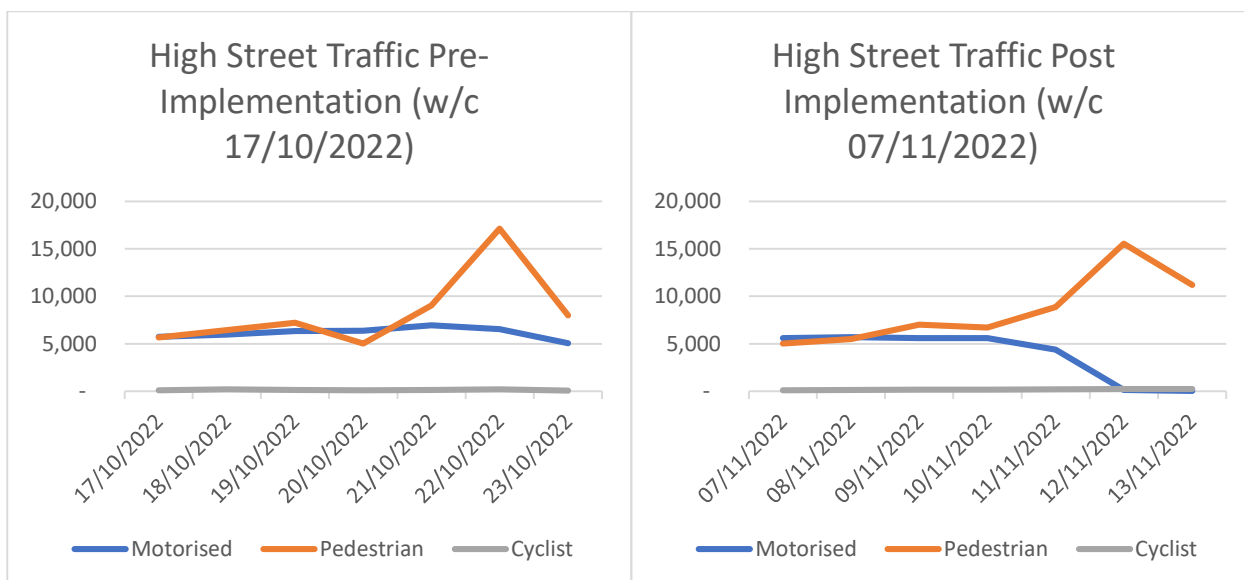


Chart 8: Vivacity sensor data July-October 2022 (blue) and November 2022-June 2023 (green)

Taking a week pre- and post-implementation of Phase 2 measures, it is possible to see the impact on traffic movements on Saturday and Sunday in High Street (12-13/11/2023). Note also that there was in this instance an uplift in cycle traffic, particularly on a Sunday (Chart 9a-b).



	Motorised	Pedestrian	Cyclist
17/10/2022	5,748	5,655	111
18/10/2022	5,977	6,439	204
19/10/2022	6,350	7,212	134
20/10/2022	6,377	5,029	107
21/10/2022	6,976	9,027	132
22/10/2022	6,524	17,145	214
23/10/2022	5,085	7,988	84

	Motorised	Pedestrian	Cyclist
07/11/2022	5,613	5,043	112
08/11/2022	5,714	5,503	144
09/11/2022	5,581	7,022	151
10/11/2022	5,610	6,700	158
11/11/2022	4,385	8,873	216
12/11/2022	147	15,565	265
13/11/2022	52	11,198	241

Chart 9a-b: Vivacity data: week in October (pre-implementation) and week in November (post-implementation) High Street Monday to Sunday

Chart 10a-b shows comparative modal usage by month along High Street for weekdays and weekends. Some criticism was received via the public survey arguing that High Street was not used by people and “looks empty”. Chart 10b shows that at various times, over 15,000 people are using the High Street on foot (the chart is showing average), which is three times the amount of motor traffic using the space when it was open. For example, on 17/12/22, 21,123 people passed through the location where the Vivacity sensor is located.

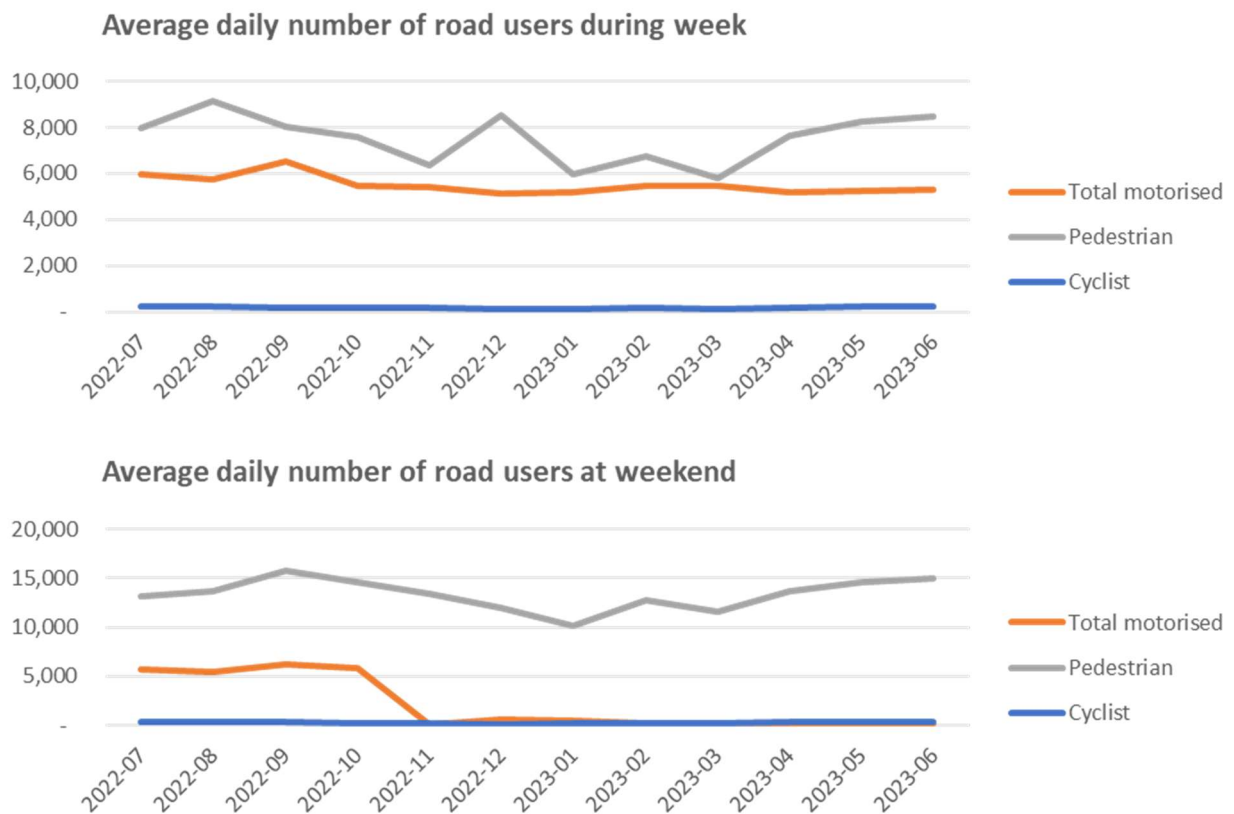


Chart 10a-b: Vivacity data by month comparing a. weekday and b. weekend

Comparing daily cycle traffic along High Street, there has been an exaggerated increase towards the summer of cycling along High Street at weekends (Chart 11).

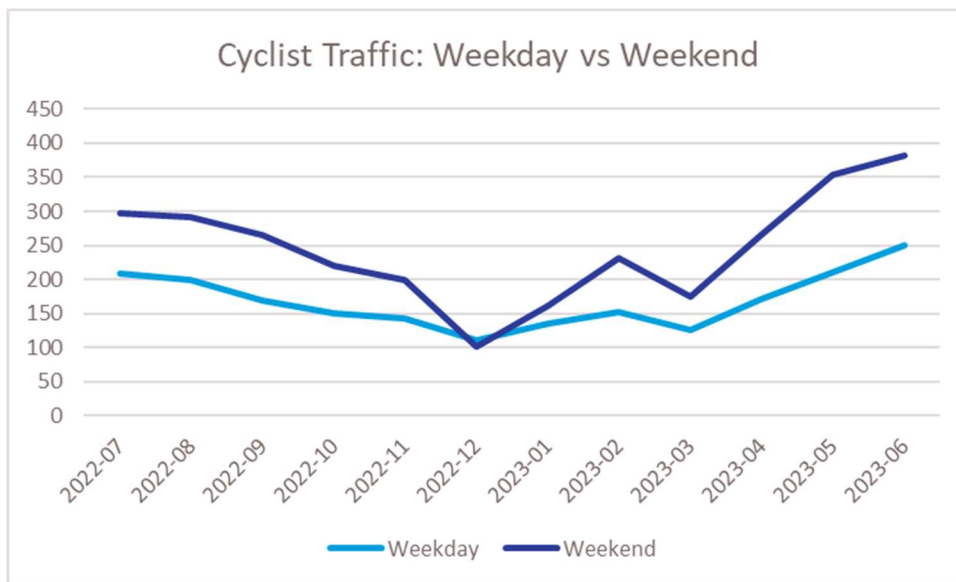


Chart 11: Cycle traffic: weekday vs weekend

There has been some criticism of motorbike traffic still using the High Street while the gates have been closed. Chart 12 shows that motorbike traffic has decreased significantly along High Street at the weekend and the majority of motorcyclists are adhering to the signage. There is a minority (in the 10s) that are continuing to access the High Street at weekends.

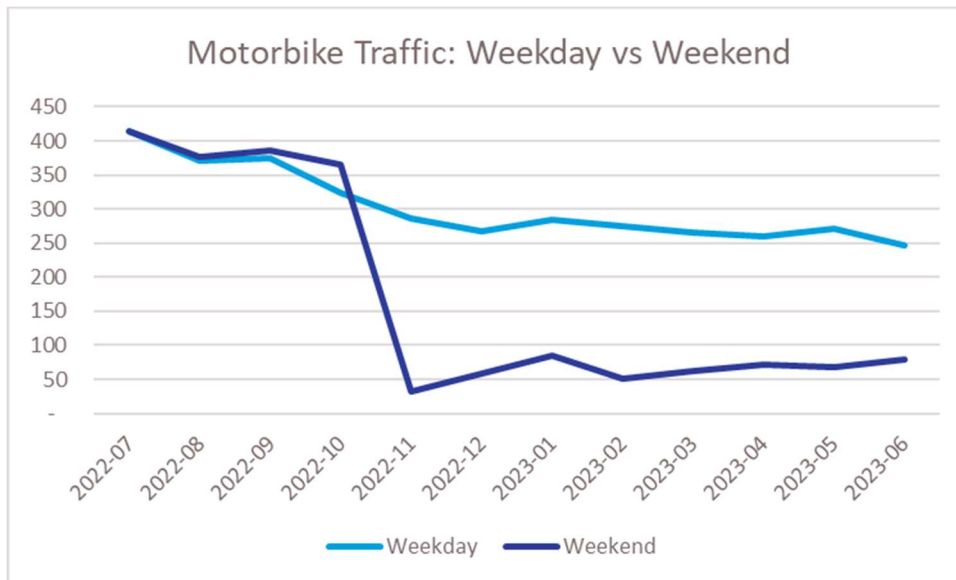


Chart 12: Motorcycle traffic: weekday vs weekend

16. Air Quality Monitoring (please see accompanying Air Quality Report)

Air quality in the centre of St Albans has been improving since 2019, with a 16% NO₂ reduction, to a position where NO₂ levels are now below the 40 µg/m³ annual mean threshold for acceptable air quality in the UK (Chart 13). There is no evidence that the High Street trials have had a negative impact on air quality, including on potential displacement routes along Folly Lane and Catherine Street. There is some evidence that the road closures may have improved air quality at the Peahen Junction and for the St Albans AQMA, but further data is required to confirm this.

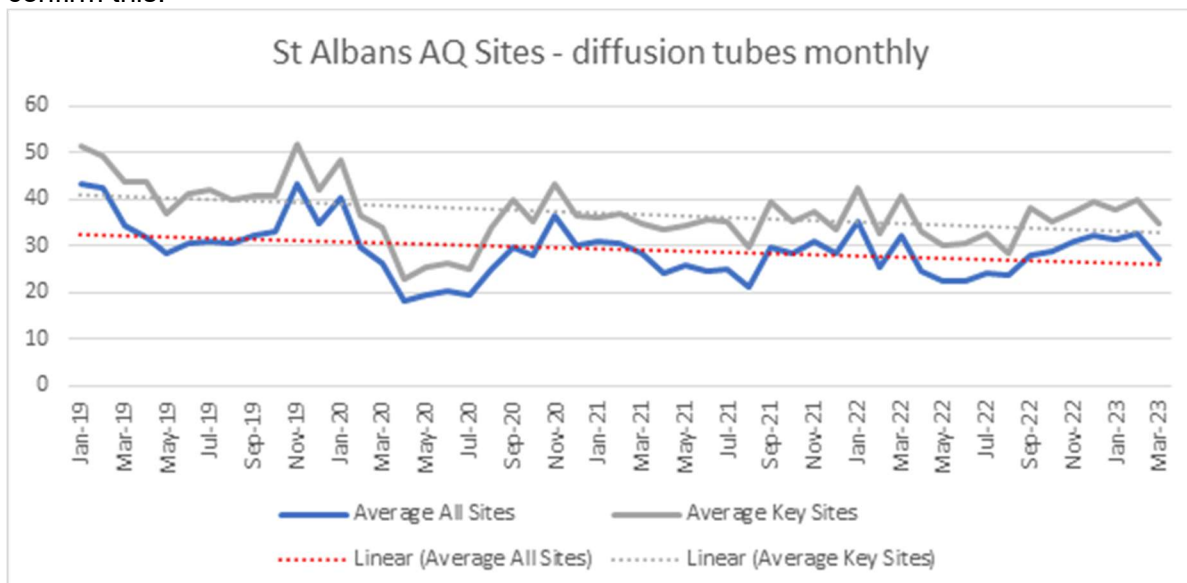


Chart 13 – Average NO₂ recorded in the St Albans diffusion tube collection network

17. Footfall, Dwell Time & Spend Analysis (please see HUQ Footfall & Dwell Time Report) [REVISED – SPEND DATA ADDED](#)

Footfall and dwell times have not rebounded back to pre-pandemic 2019 levels but have been increasing since 2021 (Chart 14). There is no evidence that the current trial has negatively impacted footfall or dwell time. The trials have not led to an increase in evening footfall on Friday or Saturday, however more people may have been encouraged to visit the city on Sundays though spending less time in the area).

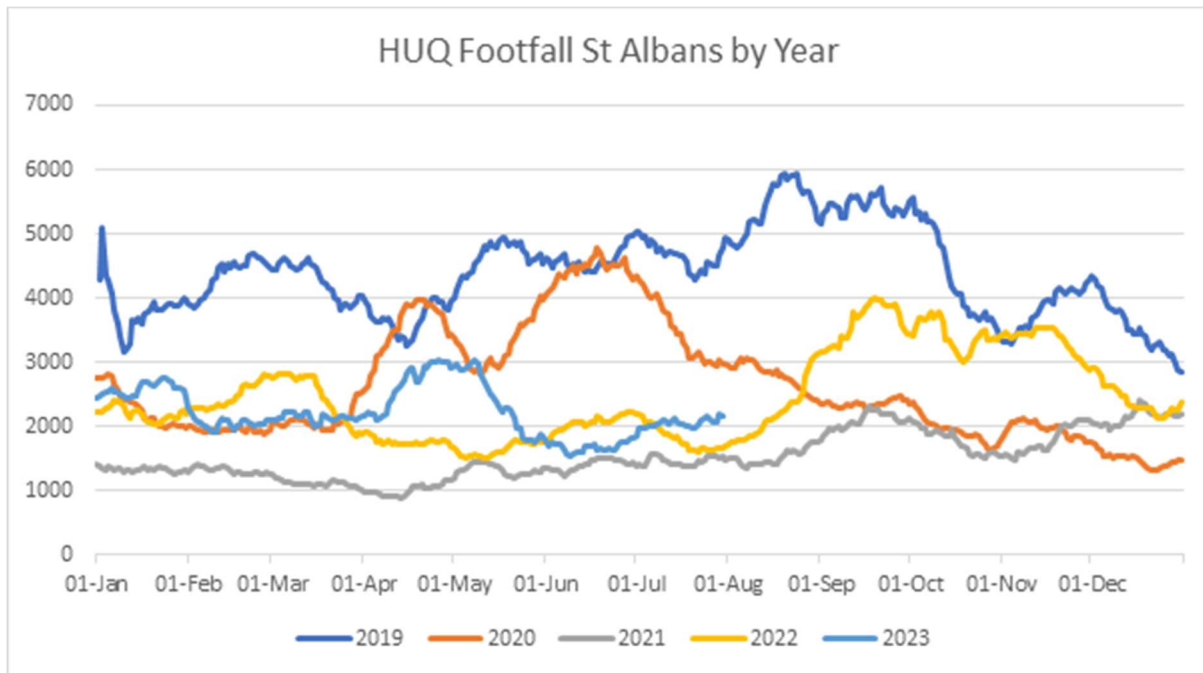


Chart 14 – Footfall in St Albans by year (2019 to July 2023)

To minimise the impact of outside factors and season variations, data has been compared over the course of 6 months.

Compared to pre COVID footfall levels St Albans has seen a 2% increase during the scheme trial but a 22% reduction in dwell time. Comparing this to the two control areas, St Albans is performing slightly worse than both Potters Bar and Baldock. However, when comparing the before data for footfall and dwell time St Albans is outperforming both control areas, apart from footfall in Baldock (who have seen a large increase in on street dining and trading since the pandemic).

Looking at St Albans in isolation, footfall and dwell times are generally better during the scheme time which suggests that whilst it's difficult to attribute the increase to the scheme per se, it does highlight that there are no notable adverse impacts occurring (Table 4).

	St Albans		Potters Bar		Baldock	
	Footfall	Dwell Time	Footfall	Dwell Time	Footfall	Dwell Time
Oct-19	3372	172	1929	134	1393	151
Nov-19	4328	172	2205	136	1208	139
Dec-19	2852	172	1894	137	1319	144
Jan-20	1974	161	1151	141	1193	134
Feb-20	2029	161	1208	134	1060	130
Mar-20	2533	161	1772	132	1298	120
Average	2848	166	1693	135	1245	136
Oct-21	1773	129	1934	142	1093	145
Nov-21	1777	129	1934	144	1436	148
Dec-21	2139	129	1934	142	1876	149
Jan-22	2198	131	1808	128	1148	142
Feb-22	2459	132	1811	125	926	143
Mar-22	2470	131	1504	124	1233	136
Average	2136	130	1821	134	1285	144
Oct-22	3618	141	1999	116	1927	129
Nov-22	3421	138	1887	118	2176	133
Dec-22	3350	133	2010	125	2289	130
Jan-23	2413	134	1923	125	1600	134
Feb-23	2578	133	1582	121	1781	133
Mar-23	2049	138	1846	116	1474	139
Average	2905	136	1874	120	1875	133

	St Albans		Potters Bar		Baldock	
	Footfall	Dwell Time	Footfall	Dwell Time	Footfall	Dwell Time
% Change During vs Pre Covid	2%	-22.1%	10%	-13%	34%	-3%
% Change During vs Before scheme	26%	4.3%	3%	-12%	31%	-8%

**Table 4 – Footfall and Dwell Time Comparisons
(October to March, 2019-20/2021-22/2022-23, St Albans, Potters Bar, Baldock)**

We are collaborating with a data company who provide consumer transaction data and we are working with them to produce useable information for Albans and other places around the county. This will help us monitor the impact of our projects on the local community and the project is in its infancy at the moment. Chart 15 shows spend by credit and debit card since July 2019. While there is a clear dip around the Covid lockdowns, there is a steady increase through to July 2023. This does not provide information on total card spend in the city centre but it does show the average spend per card. Other considerations are that since Covid People are increasingly more likely to spend using cards than cash, inflation will have had an effect and cost of living has increased.

The chart below shows the average spend per card for residents within the St Albans city postcode area, and visitors from outside the city.

We are working with the data company to establish the total revenue from cards used in the city and which sector people are money spending in.

There is no evidence that the trials have had a negative influence on spend per card.

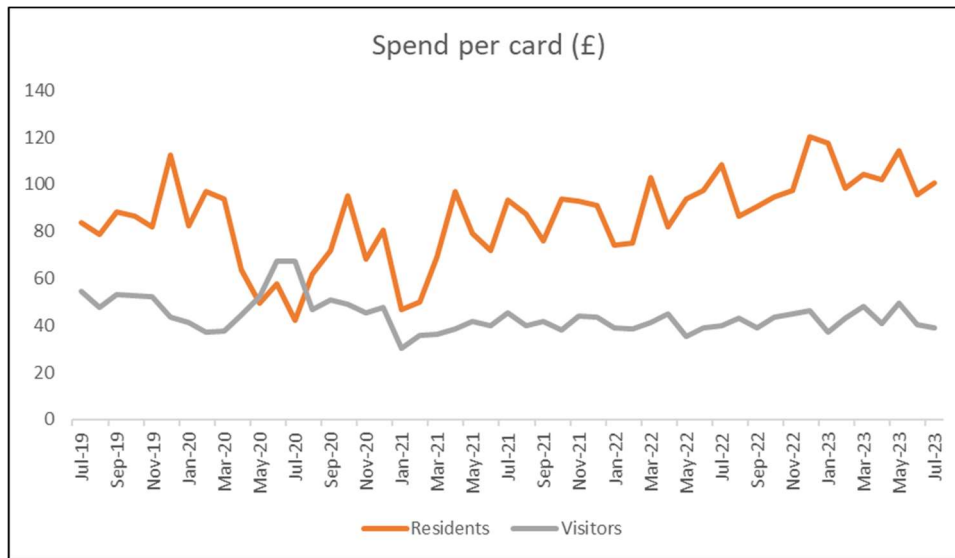


Chart 15 – Spend per card (July 2019 to July 2023)

18. Healthy Streets

Healthy Streets is a human-centred framework for embedding public health in transport, public realm and planning. The 10 Healthy Streets Indicators focus on the human experience needed on all streets, everywhere, for everyone. It is likely that Healthy Streets will be an integral component of HCC’s LTP5. George Street, High Street and Market Place are undergoing an audit.

19. EQIA (planned update for February 2024)

The Equality Impact Assessment assesses the impact of the trials and considers whether it discriminates based on 9 protected characteristics. The document concludes that trials open up space and makes roads easier to cross, though it does concede that some of the heritage surfacing and level differences between footway and carriageway do not provide easy transitions, particularly for anyone with limited mobility. This is exasperated sometimes by the presence of A-boards and other obstructions placed on the footways. This document is currently in review following feedback from the public engagement survey and will be shared at a later date.

20. Longer Term Potential

Visualisations demonstrating potential permanent public realm improvements to George Street have been created (Figure 2). It is likely that securing funding for a permanent project will be more challenging if road space is reallocated back to vehicle movement.



Figure 2: George Street Visualisation

Should a decision be taken to eventually make the project permanent, further design work may be undertaken. The project team would look for funding opportunities to complete the following:

- Potential to replace the gates with automated alternatives.
- Lower George Street gate to be moved to prevent obstructive parking.
- George Street and Market Place urban realm and accessibility improvement projects including new paving, street greening and other in keeping aesthetic enhancements.
- Investigate Part 6 powers to automate traffic enforcement (not parking) within the project area when these powers become widely available
- Evaluate cycle parking and potentially provide extra facility.
- Investigate areas for further street trees and places to stop and rest.

Future development of ideas in and around the trial area should be aligned with a wider strategy for St Albans that links to SADC's and St Albans BID's ambitions. This will be led by Emma Turner – the Strategy and Programme Manager for the area.

21. Conclusions & Recommendation

Section 17 of this report (and the accompanying detailed report) suggests that footfall in St Albans is recovering to pre-pandemic levels and has been steadily increasing since 2021.

Section 10 and 11 this report (and the accompanying detailed report) shows a majority of public and business respondents are not in favour of the Phase 2 interventions. 38% of respondents to the public engagement survey were supportive of the current arrangements and 51% were in favour of George Street being closed to traffic during the week and at weekends. 43% favoured reopening of both streets to traffic, but this is only 44 individuals more than those supportive of Phase 2 measures. On-street surveys suggest levels of satisfaction with the arrangements that don't appear to have been picked up in the public consultation survey. Though given the numbers surveyed, neither can be treated as statistically significant nor representative. The majority of people who walk or cycle into St Albans expressed support and survey respondents were in favour of maintaining Phase 2 measures. The largest proportion of business survey respondents favour George Street to be closed to traffic at weekends only and High Street to be reopened to traffic for special events.

The trial has achieved the objective of supporting growth in footfall since October 2022. There is some evidence that traffic flow has reduced and air quality improved at Holywell Hill/ Peahen Junction (and the St Albans AQMA). Vivacity data shows the extent to which High Street is used by people on foot. At the weekend, this is on occasion over three times those who potentially would use it in a car. HCC has commissioned further traffic volume surveys to fill in some gaps and establish the extent of rat-running on key residential streets. Monitoring and evaluation will continue until at least March 2024.

It is the project team's belief that returning High Street and George Street to an area trafficked by motor vehicles would encourage vehicles circulating through the city centre. Increasing space available for vehicles would promote more traffic volume, congestion, pollution and risk to pedestrians using the space. It may suppress footfall gains.

Should the decision be made to continue the project to a permanent solution, the project team will work with the St Albans Parking Team, designers, and the BID to address any unresolved parking issues arising from the experiment.

The trial overall has failed to achieve buy-in via the public engagement survey or from business community respondents. A lack of on-street space activation has been frustrating for all parties. Road space reallocation is becoming increasingly political. Those opposed to the trials on the basis that they feel it disrupts car journeys may be emboldened.

Following on from the decision taken in the Project Board Meeting on 27/06/2023, The Project Team are implementing a six-month trial which will allow for the weekend closure of George Street from Saturday at 11am to Monday at 7am only and for the closure of both George Street and High Street for special events. This will be a revised Phase 3. Flexibility will be maintained so that trial elements could potentially be considered for reintroduction if there is a desire to do so. The decision has been passed through committee stages by SADC and now needs final ratification by the Project Board. ETRO amendments are underway and it is anticipated that Phase 3 will commence during the week starting Monday 6th November.

Based on all the evidence to date there appears to be little to support many of the concerns raised in the public and business surveys and we believe the trials have been a success and benefit the area, as supported by this analysis.