

Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on East Suffolk town centre businesses - Lowestoft



Produced in association with East Suffolk Council and part funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

Prepared by:

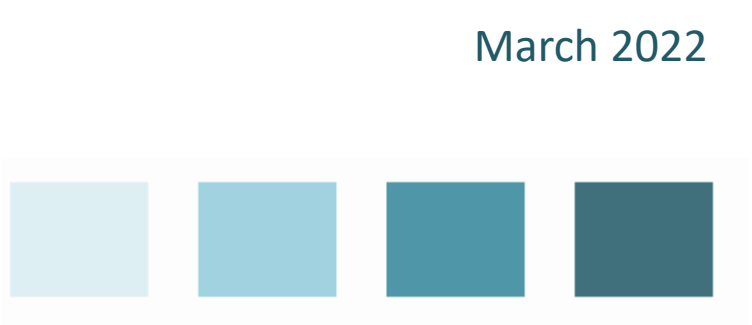


Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on East Suffolk Town Centre businesses

Town Report: Lowestoft

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Introduction, Methodology and Approach

East Suffolk Council was awarded funding through the Welcome Back Fund to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the pandemic.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to survey East Suffolk’s town centre businesses and users across our 12 key towns & villages to understand the impact of Covid-19 on businesses and town centre users to support future intervention plans.

We produced qualitative stakeholder surveys to town centre businesses and users across all 12 of East Suffolk’s towns, including Aldeburgh, Beccles, Bungay, Felixstowe, Framlingham, Halesworth, Leiston, Lowestoft, Saxmundham, Southwold, Woodbridge and Wickham Market.

This report presents the results for **Lowestoft**.

East Suffolk Towns
Aldeburgh
Beccles
Bungay
Felixstowe
Framlingham
Halesworth
Leiston
Lowestoft
Saxmundham
Southwold
Woodbridge
Wickham Market



Introduction, Methodology and Approach

Research methodology

As part of the research plan, we interviewed consumers and businesses using a mixed methodology (face-to-face, online and telephone interviewing). Our surveys (consumer and business) were incentivised with a free prize draw (£100 high street vouchers).

We conducted face-to-face interviews with consumers at each of the twelve town centres. We created QR Code linked to the face-to-face consumer survey. Those wishing to take part in the consultation but unable to do so 'on the spot' were offered a chance to upload the survey onto their phones so that they could submit the responses in their own time.

Businesses were targeted via an online survey. We engaged with town centre businesses by using the existing local business networks and partnerships as well as with the support of the Economic Development and Communications Teams at East Suffolk Council. We then targeted businesses by phone, as an additional resource for targeting specific town centre businesses in order to top up any towns which prove hard to reach using the online method mentioned above.

Overall, the results of the study are based on 1517 interviews with town centre users and 492 interviews with local businesses. This reports is based on a sample of 126 consumer interviews and 42 interviews with local businesses. Interviews were conducted between December 2021 and February 2022.

Sample of interviews		
East Suffolk Towns	Consumers	Businesses
Aldeburgh	126	42
Beccles	136	54
Bungay	121	40
Felixstowe	136	48
Framlingham	119	38
Halesworth	116	36
Leiston	122	40
Lowestoft	162	46
Saxmundham	138	50
Southwold	122	40
Woodbridge	129	44
Wickham Market	89	18
Total	1517	492



Town centre users - Contents

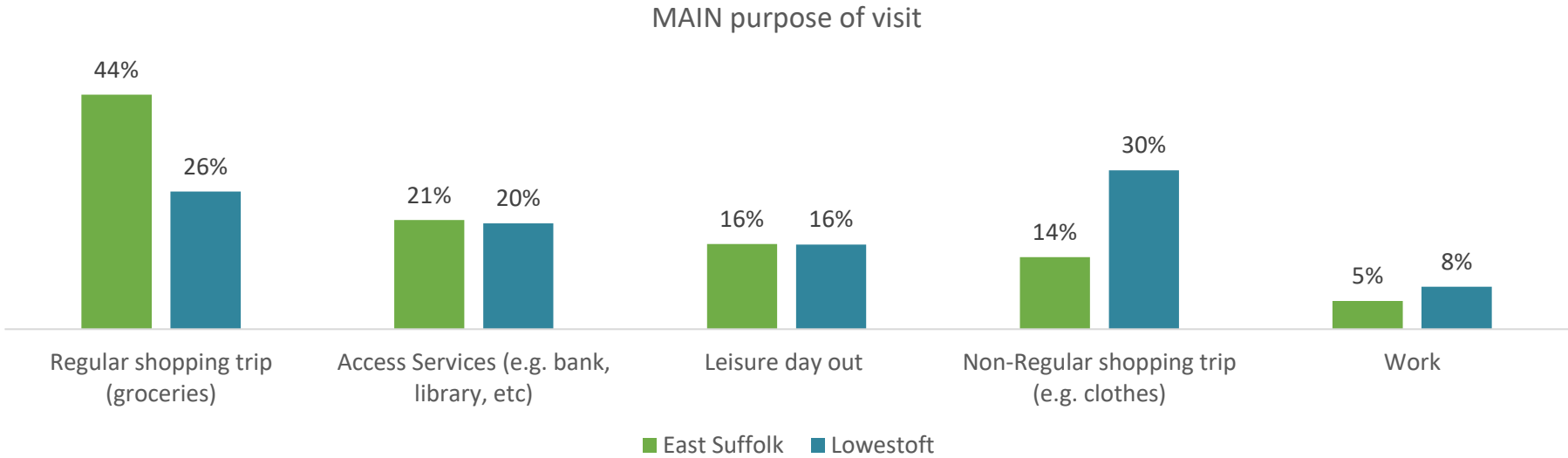
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Town centre users – Trip characteristics

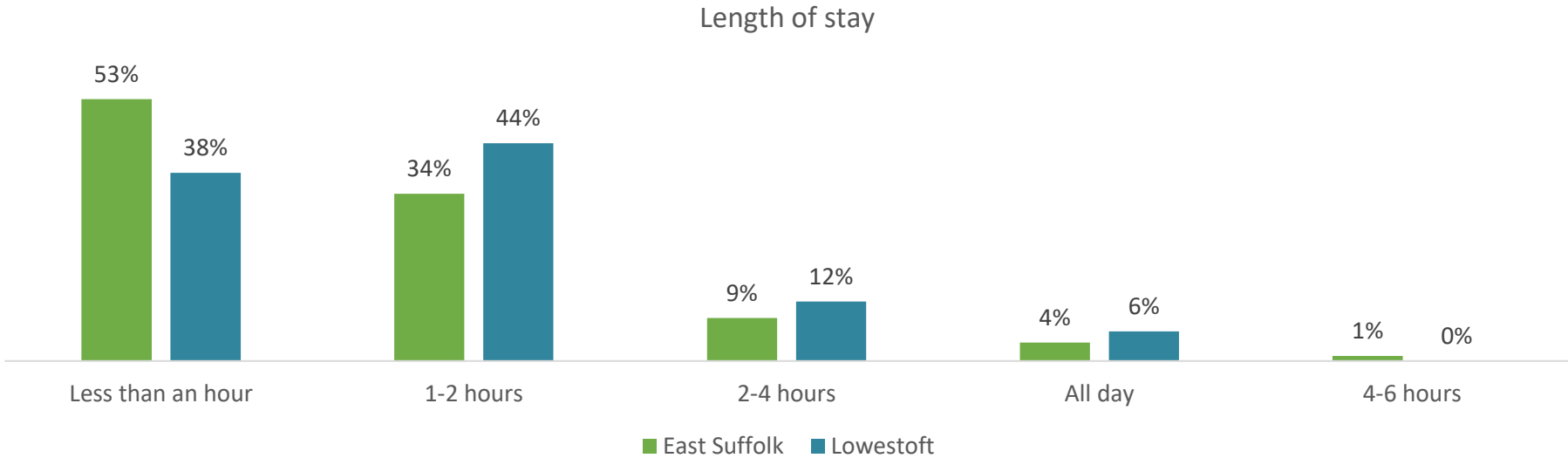
What is the main purpose of your visit to the town centre today?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

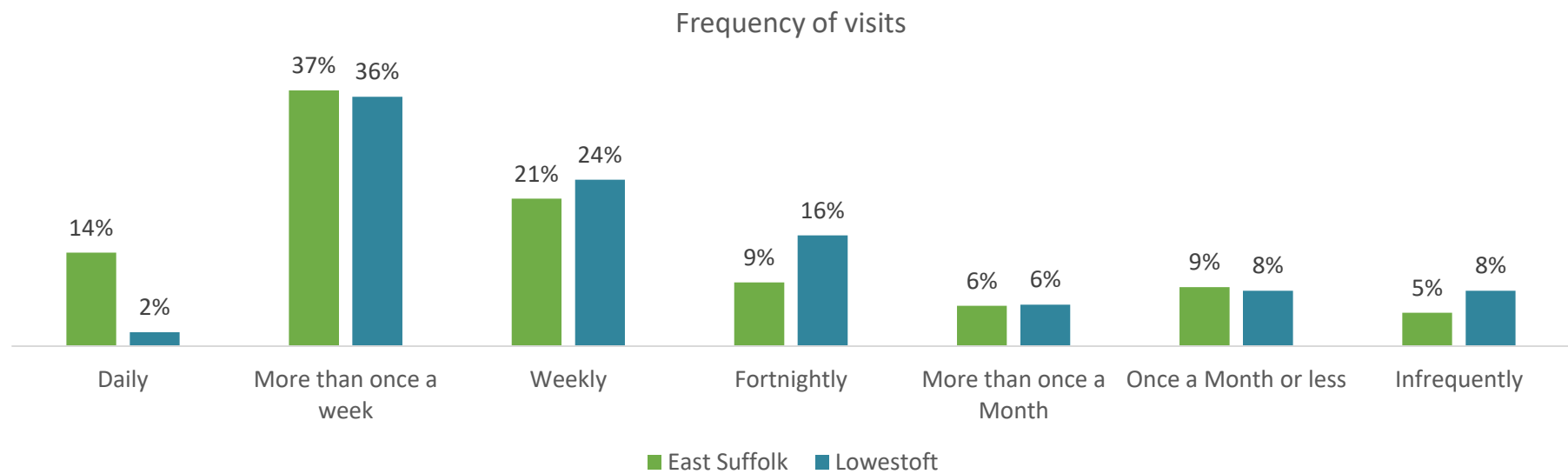
How long do you intend to stay on this visit to the town centre?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

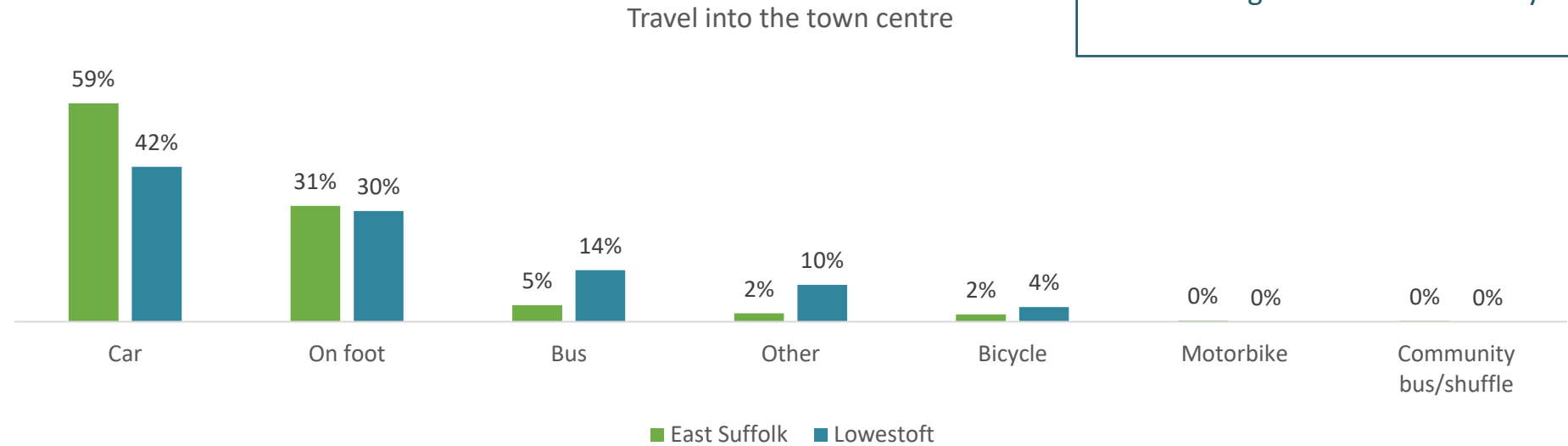
How often do you visit the town centre?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

How did you travel into the town centre today?



What, if anything, would make you use public transport / use it more often?

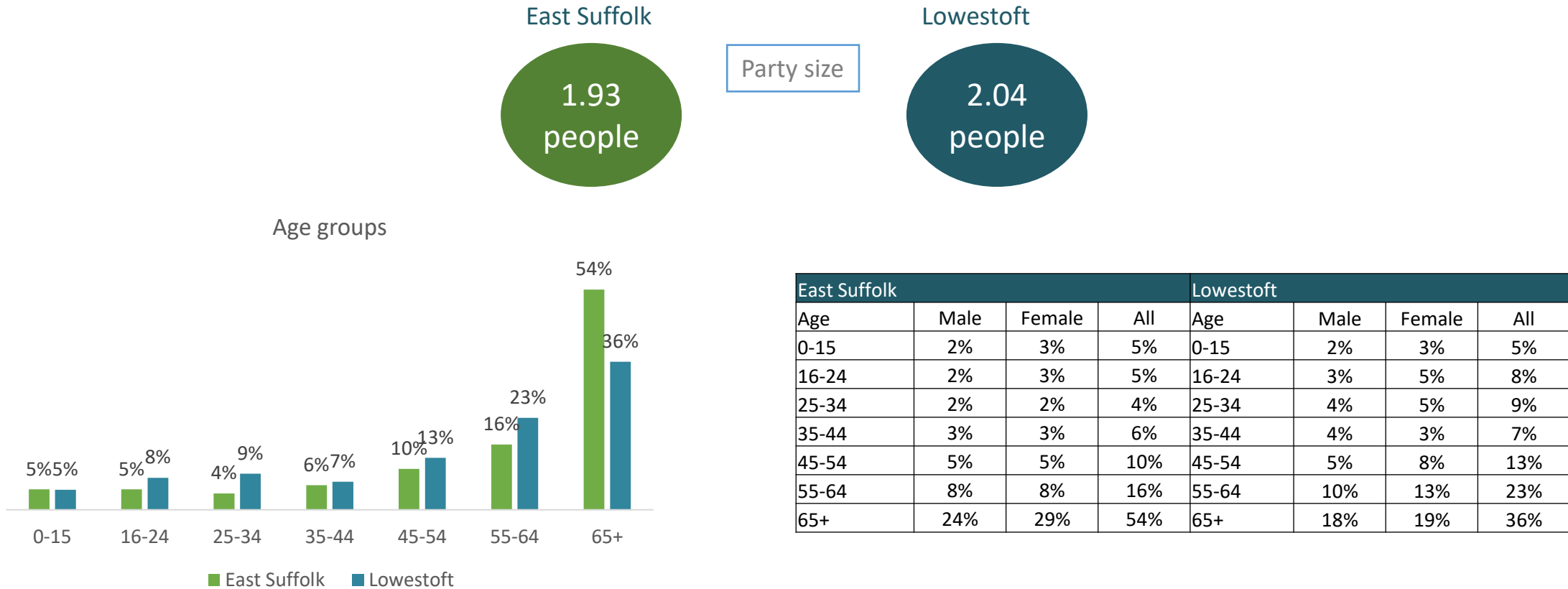
Responses have been summarised into main themes

- Better bus times and locations
- buses after 8 at night
- Better access to bus stops
- Reduced ticket fares / a bus pass
- More regular service to nearby villages (e.g. Pakefield)



Town centre users – Trip characteristics

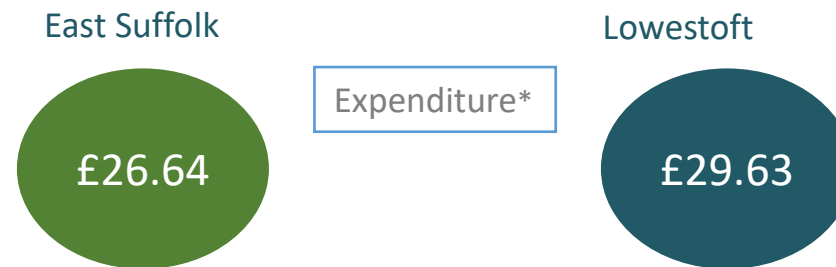
Including yourself, how many people in your party are male and female, and which of these age groups do they fall into?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

Thinking about today as a whole, how much do you expect that you and your immediate party will have spent on your visit to the town centre?

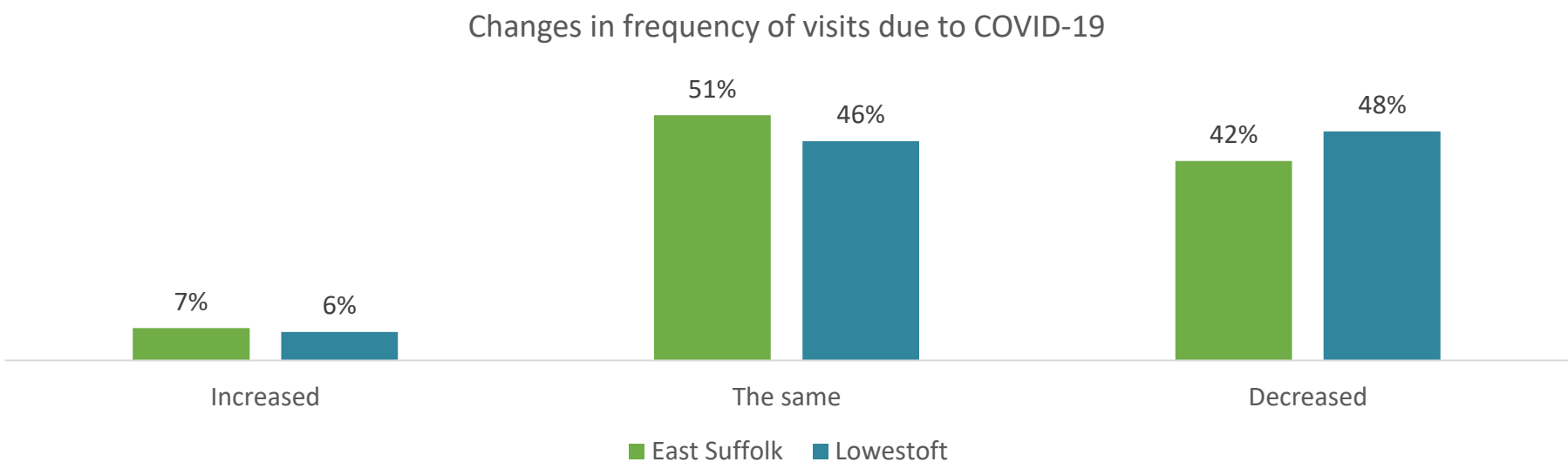


(*) Daily expenditure for respondent and immediate party on their visit to the town centre.



Town centre users – Impact of Covid-19

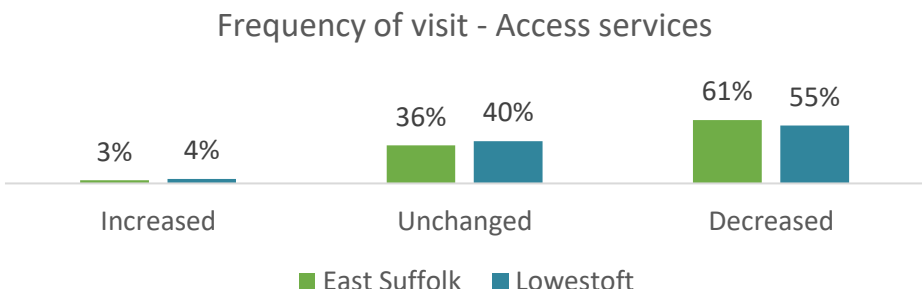
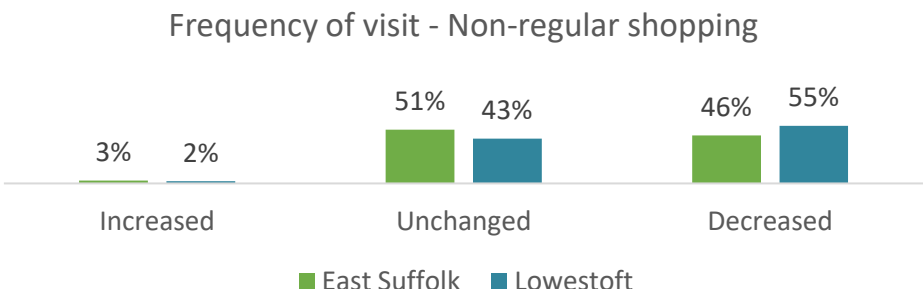
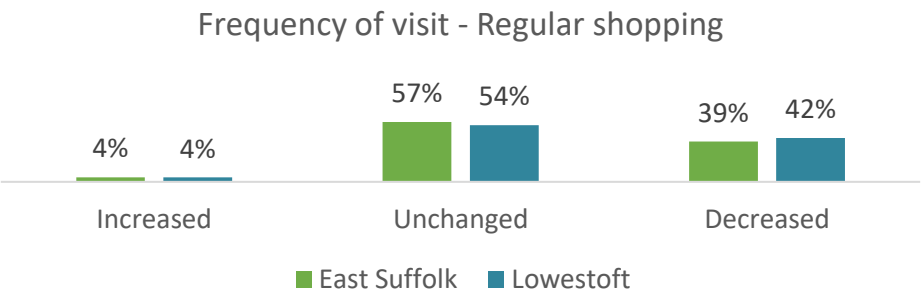
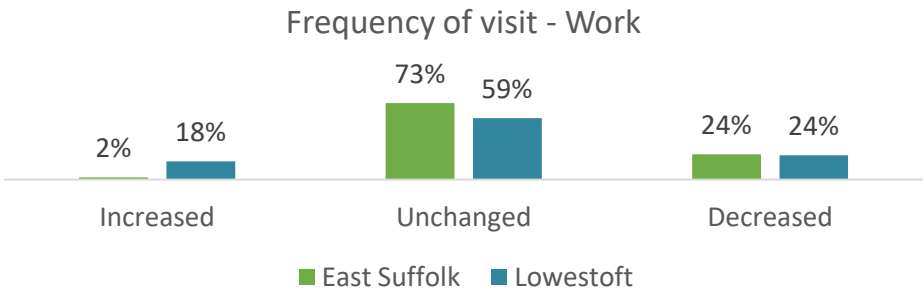
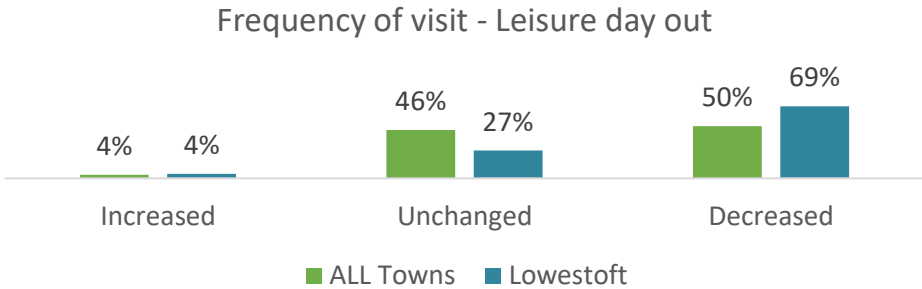
Would you say your frequency of visits to the town centre has increased, decrease or stayed the same since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?





Town centre users – Impact of Covid-19

Has the frequency of your visits changed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic for any of the following trip purposes?





Town centre users – Opinions and scores

We are interested in your opinions about different aspects of the town centre. Please rate your satisfaction level based on this visit? Please rate your satisfaction levels for the following aspects of the town.

1 = Very Poor, 5 = Very Good, 6 = Don't Know



Access to services (library...)
Value for money (eateries)
Customer service



Cycle lanes and bike racks
The Market(s)
Cultural activities
Public transport

Full breakdown of scores

	Lowestoft
Access to services (library...)	3.7
Value for money (eateries)	3.4
Customer service	3.3
Feeling of safety	3.0
Welcoming feeling	2.9
Road/pedestrian signs	2.7
Cleanliness of streets	2.5
National chains	2.4
Independent shops	2.4
Grocery shops	2.3
Pubs/bars	2.2
Cafe/restaurants	2.2
Leisure facilities/places to visit	2.0
Clothes, gifts etc	2.0
Events	1.8
Car Parking	1.7
Public transport	1.6
Cultural activities	1.6
The Market(s)	1.3
Cycle lanes and bike racks	0.7



Town centre users – Opinions and scores

What two suggestions would you make to improve the town centre / would make you use their town centre more often?

How to improve the town centre / encourage more frequent visits:

- Improve parking (availability and costs)
- More shops (overwhelming majority of comments) – independents, High Street brands,
- Improved street cleanliness
- Weekly market
- More (improvements to) culture and events (e.g. Christmas the lights switch on, live music)
- More entertainment and leisure facilities (escape room, pubs and clubs, arcades, sports bars).

What word would you use to sum-up this town centre?

old basic
sad messy
home dead



Town centre users – Opinions and scores

As part of your visits to the town, how useful do you find the following:

1 = Not at all useful, 5 = Very Useful, 6 = D/K

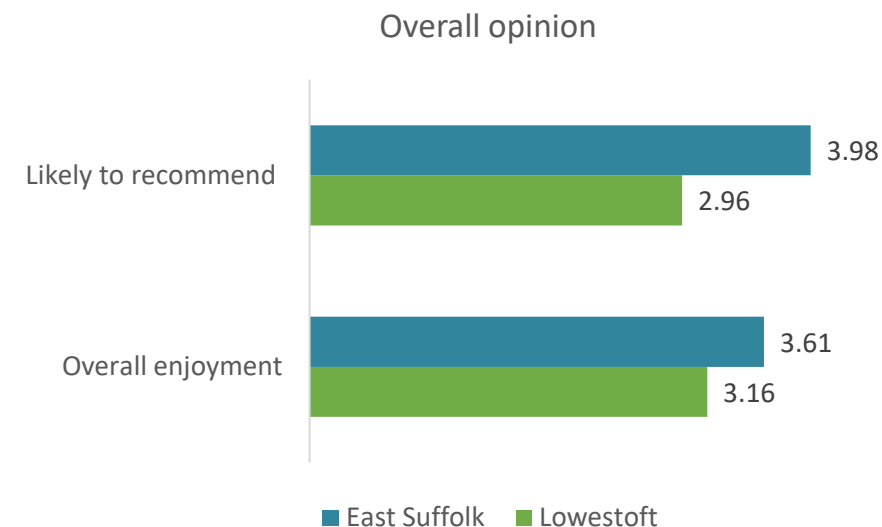
How useful do you find the following:	East Suffolk	Lowestoft
Info on social media about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do etc.	2.90	2.86
Regular updates direct from businesses about special offers, things to-do etc.	2.82	2.84
'Click and collect' or the ability to browse products as part of your visit	2.72	2.79
Web sites about the town or businesses to help plan your visit in advance	2.79	2.60

Taking everything into account, how would you rate the overall enjoyment of your visit today?

1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High, 6 = don't know

How likely are you to recommend the area to someone else?

1 = Very Unlikely, 5 = Very Likely, 6 = don't know





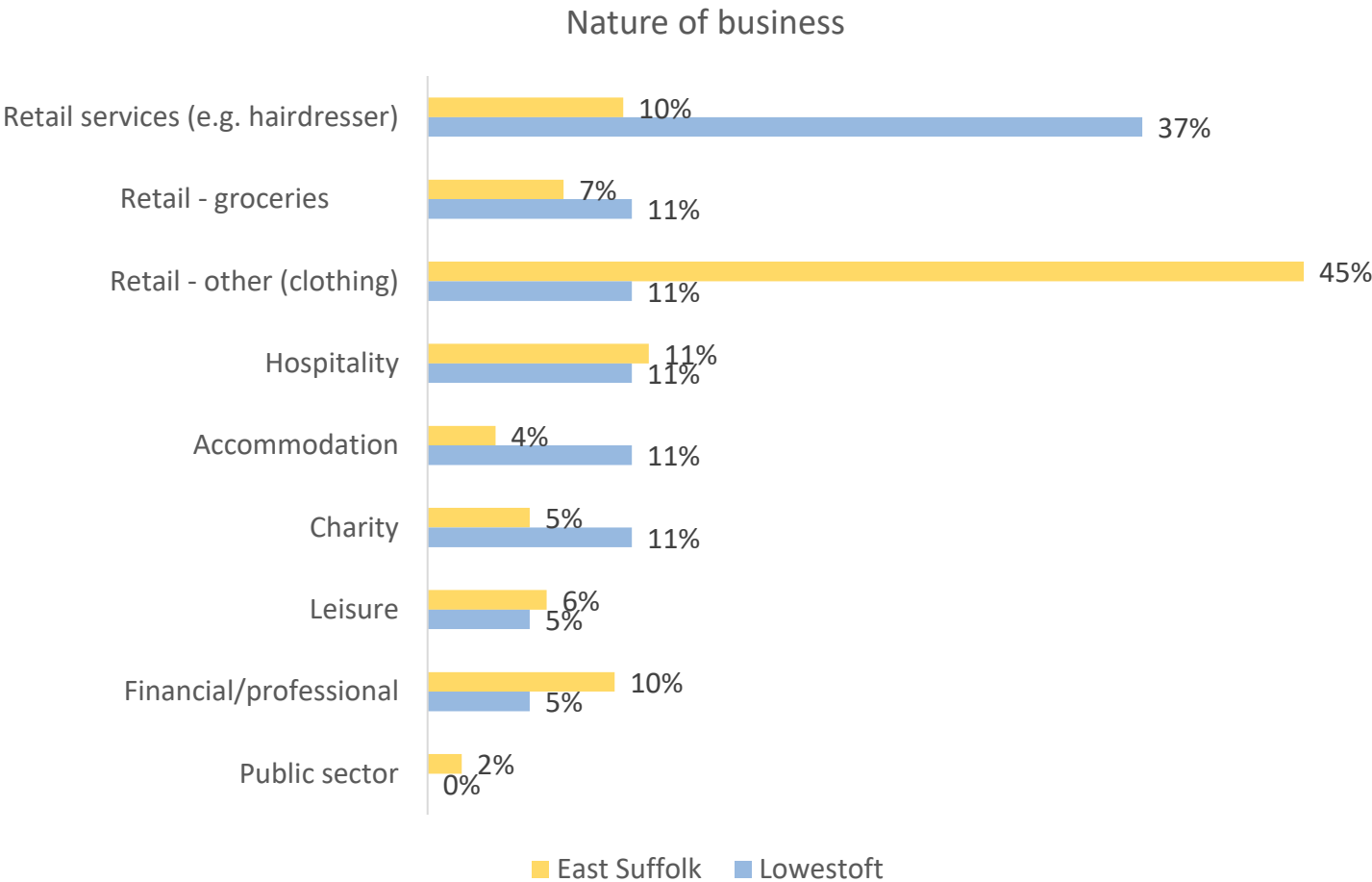
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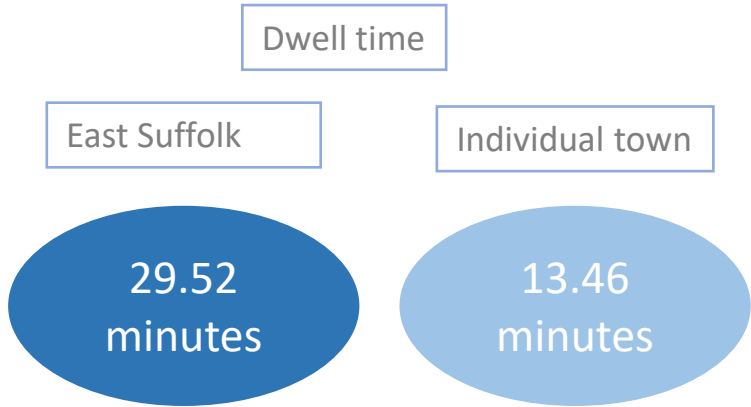


Town centre businesses – Business profile

What is the nature of your business?



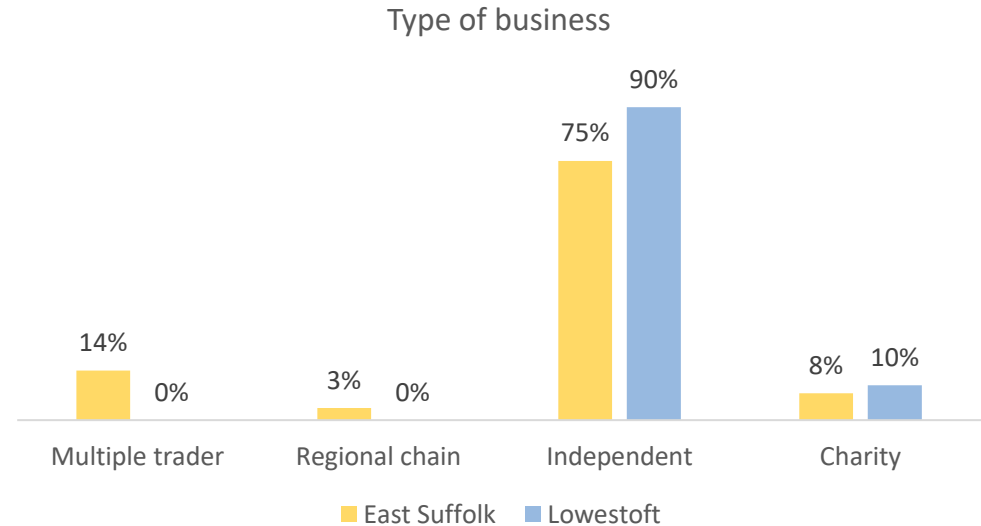
What would you say is the average customer dwell time for a standard visit to your premises?



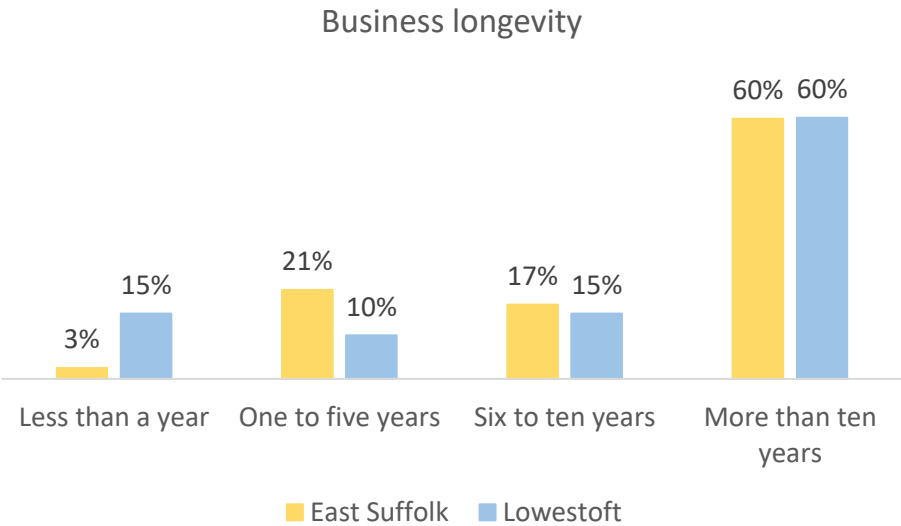


Town centre businesses – Business profile

What type of business are you?



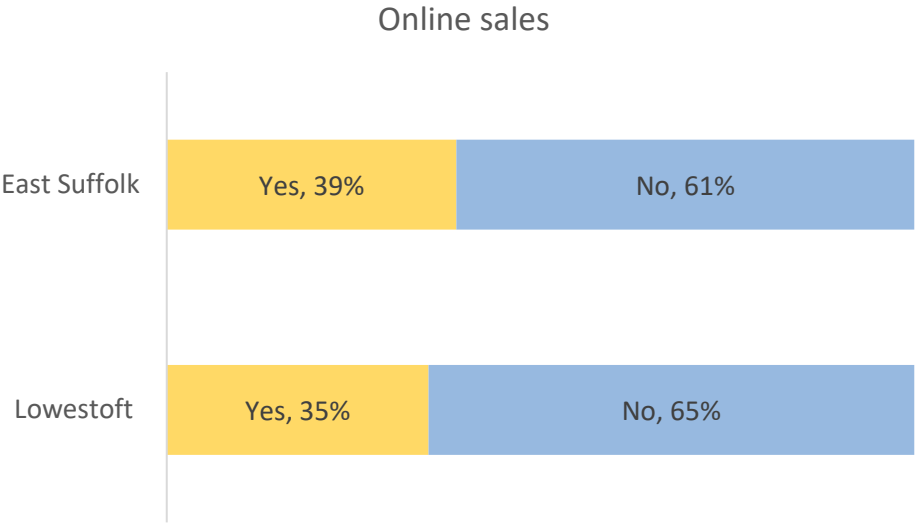
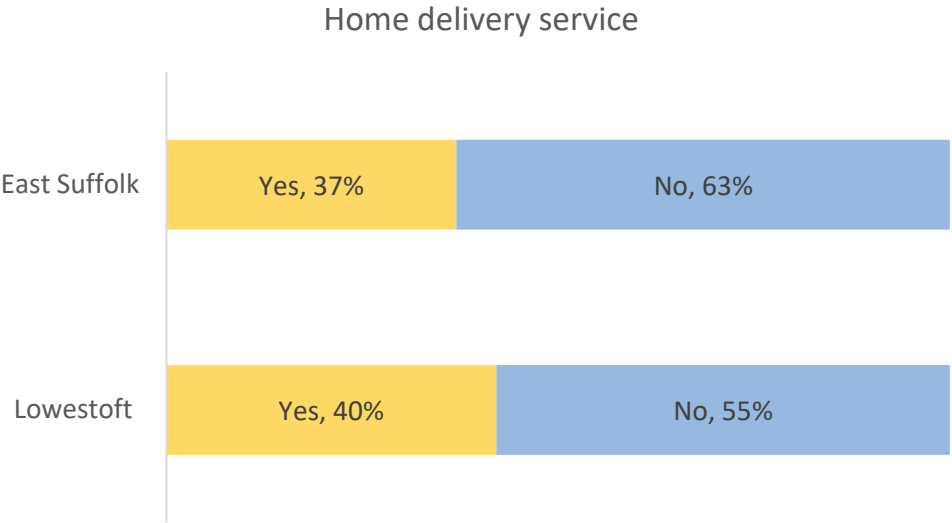
How long has your business been in the town?





Town centre businesses – Business profile

Do you offer any of the following? Yes / No
(Home delivery service / Online sales)

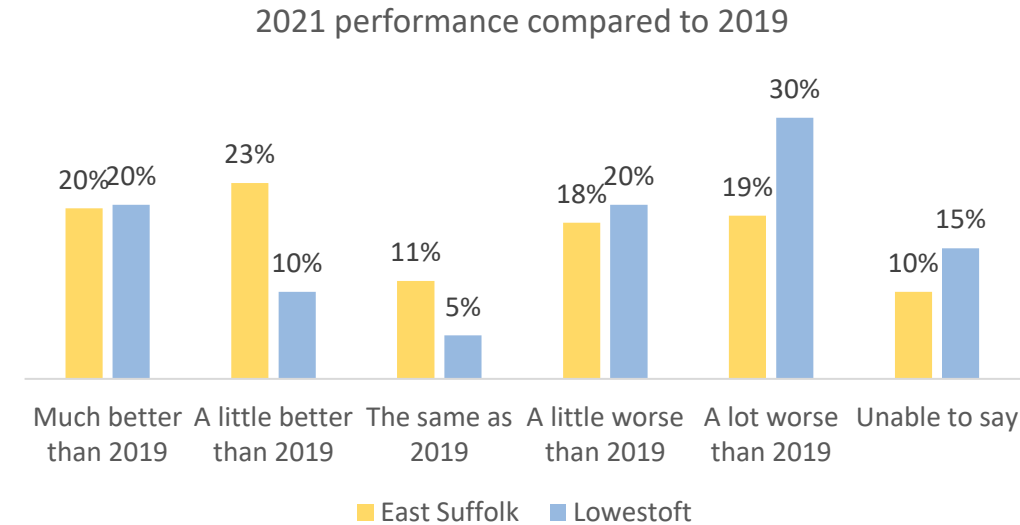




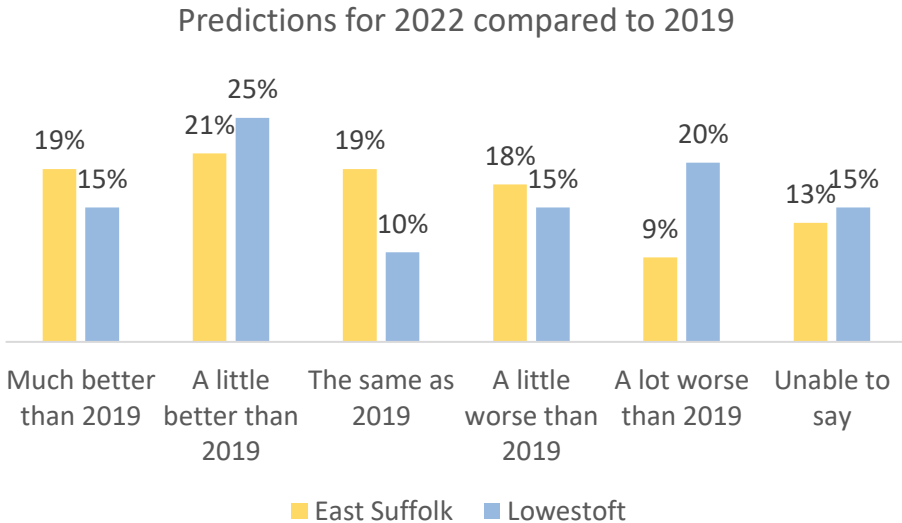
Town centre businesses – Business performance

Thinking now about 2021 as a whole, do you expect your business performance to be?

(Note that we are using 2019 as a benchmark)



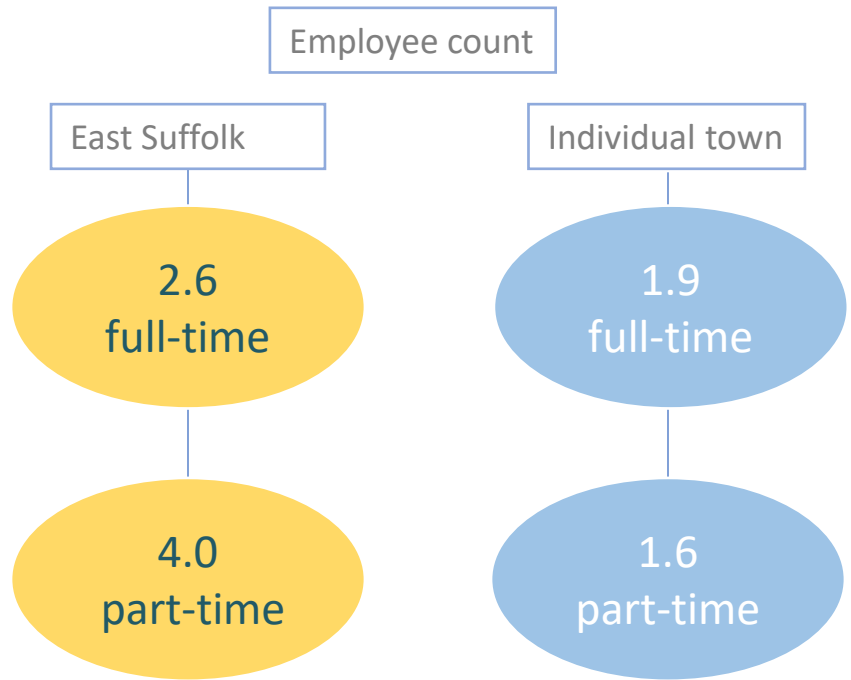
Thinking now about 2022, what are your early predictions?
Do you expect your business performance to be:



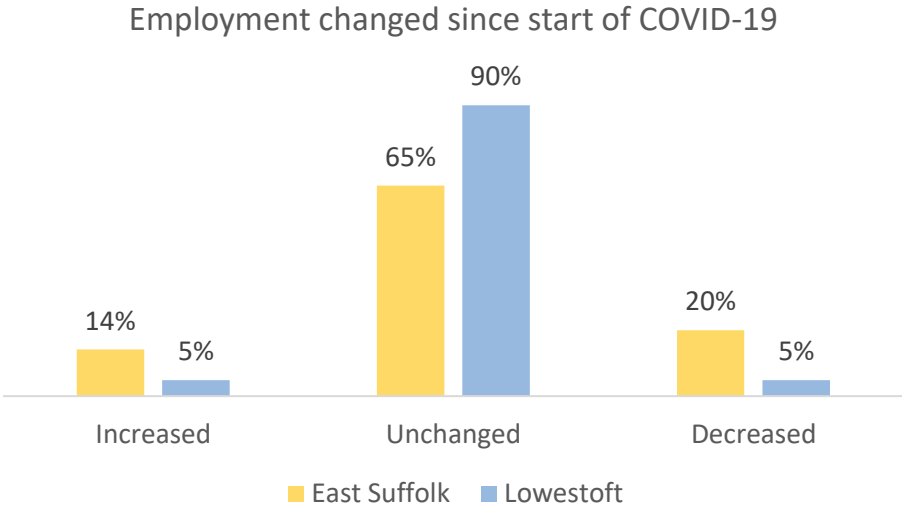


Town centre businesses – Employment

How many people work at these premises?
(Including owners)



Has this changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?



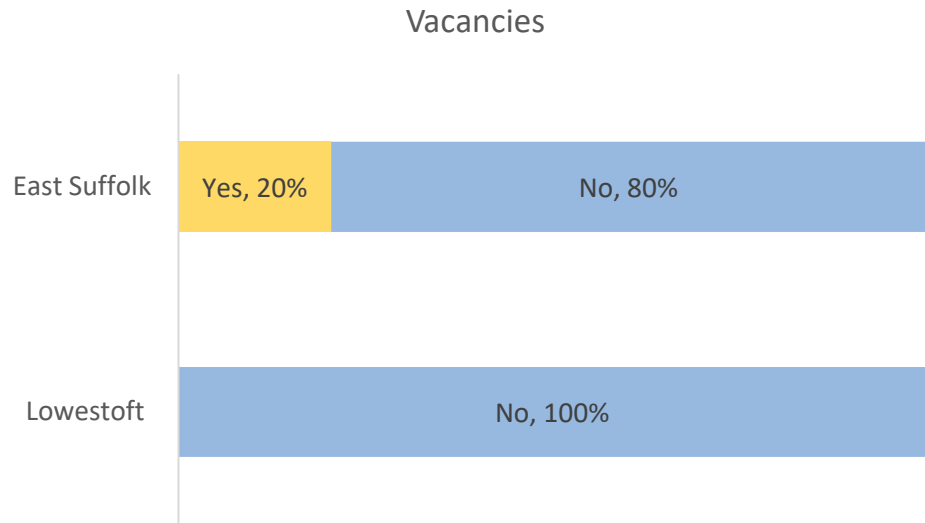


Town centre businesses – Employment

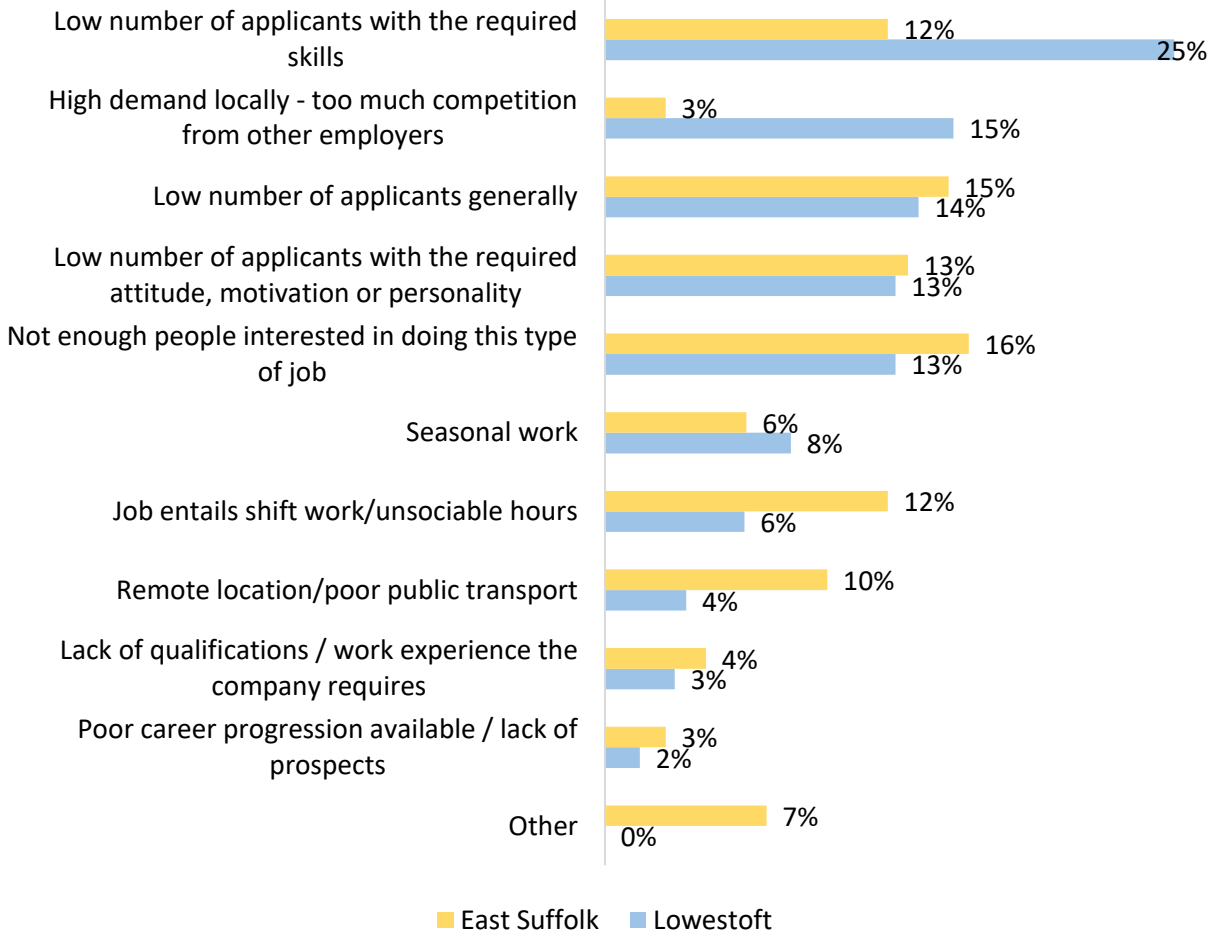
In your view, what are the reasons that make your vacancies hard-to-fill?



Do you currently have any vacancies?



Hard-to-fill vacancies





Town centre businesses – Opinion scores

We are interested in your opinions about different aspects of having a business located in the town. Please rate your satisfaction levels for the following aspects of the town.

1 = Very Poor, 5 = Very Good, 6 = Don't Know



Mix of retail offer
Cafes, pubs, restaurants
Availability of premises



Local partnerships/
organisations
Marketing and promotion
Events / activities

Full breakdown of scores

Aspects of Town Centre	Lowestoft
Mix of retail offer	2.8
Cafes, pubs, restaurants	3.4
Availability of premises	3.4
The Market(s)	1.7
Rental values/ rates	2.6
Labour pool	2.9
Prosperity of the town	2.4
Physical appearance	2.2
Geographical location	2.2
Customers - Volume of town residents	3.2
Customers - Volume of visitors	3.1
Seasonal economy	2.6
Affordable housing	2.3
Footfall	2.2
Road / Pedestrian Signs	2.8
Traffic	1.9
Public transport	2.7
Car parking	1.9
Events / activities	3.1
Marketing and promotion	2.2
Local partnerships/ organisations	2.3



Town centre businesses – Opinion scores

What priority does your business currently give to?

1 = Very unimportant, 5 = Very important, 6 = Don't know

Please rate the different types of competition in relation to your business:

1 = Always a problem for me, 5 = Never a problem for me, 6 = Don't Know

What two suggestions would you make to improve the town's economic performance?

How to improve the town's economic performance:

- Improvements to parking (availability and costs) / town centre can't compete with free parking in out of town retail parks
- Lower the rents and rates for businesses
- Renovate old buildings, bring them back to the market
- A new general market (in addition to the existing craft market)
- More marketing / promote Ness Point as an attraction / events in the town/high street to encourage footfall
- A mixture of retail (including more higher end / high street brands), entertainment and food venues to encourage families to come along in the day time and good venues to build the night time economy.

Priorities	East Suffolk	Lowestoft	Difference
Regular use of social media to promote business and engage with customers	3.7	4.0	0.3
Creation and management of business website	3.4	3.8	0.4
Collection and analysis of customer data to help target marketing	2.7	3.1	0.4
Generation and provision of on-line sales	2.3	2.4	0.1

Competition to your business	East Suffolk	Lowestoft	Difference
Local business competition	3.9	3.2	-0.7
Competition from other localities	3.7	2.8	-0.9
Competition from internet	3.3	2.7	-0.6
Competition from out-of-town shopping	3.6	2.5	-1.1



HM Government



European Union

European Regional
Development Fund



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