

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



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

Prepared by:

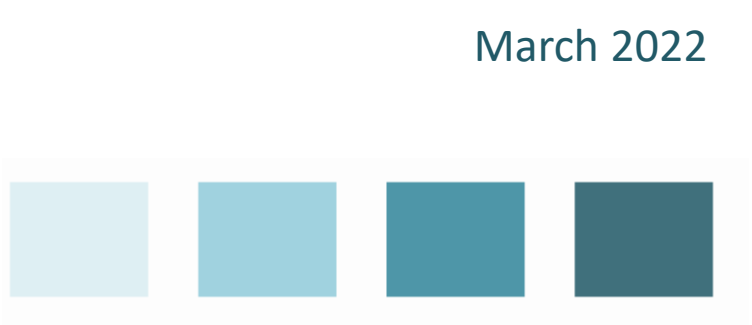


Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on East Suffolk Town Centre businesses

Town Report: Southwold

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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 **Southwold**.

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

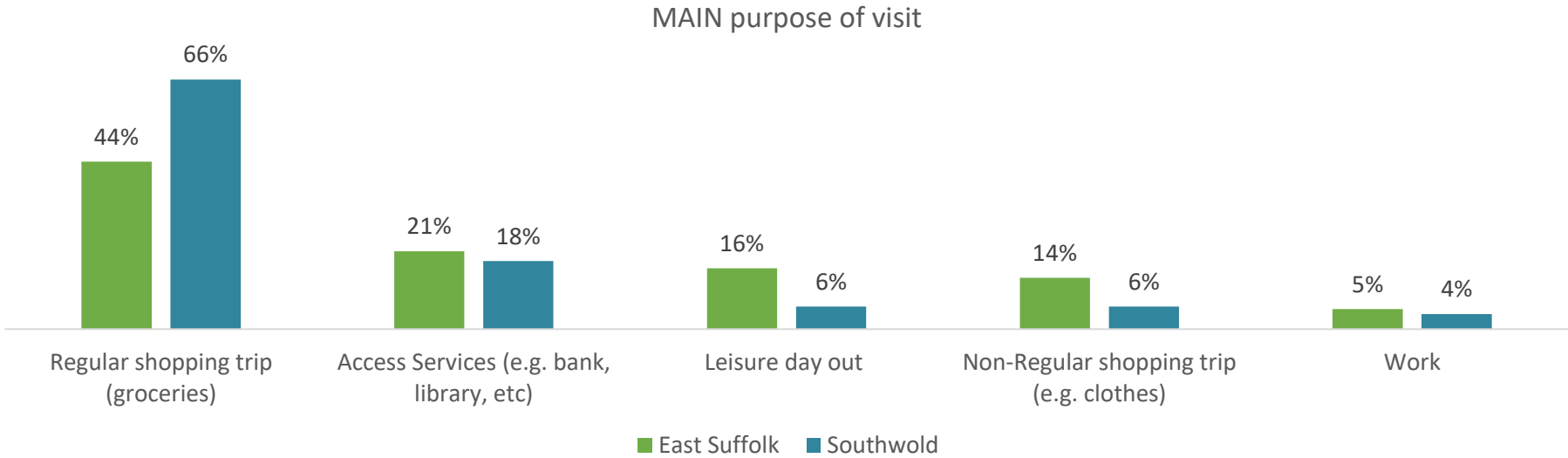
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Town centre users – Trip characteristics

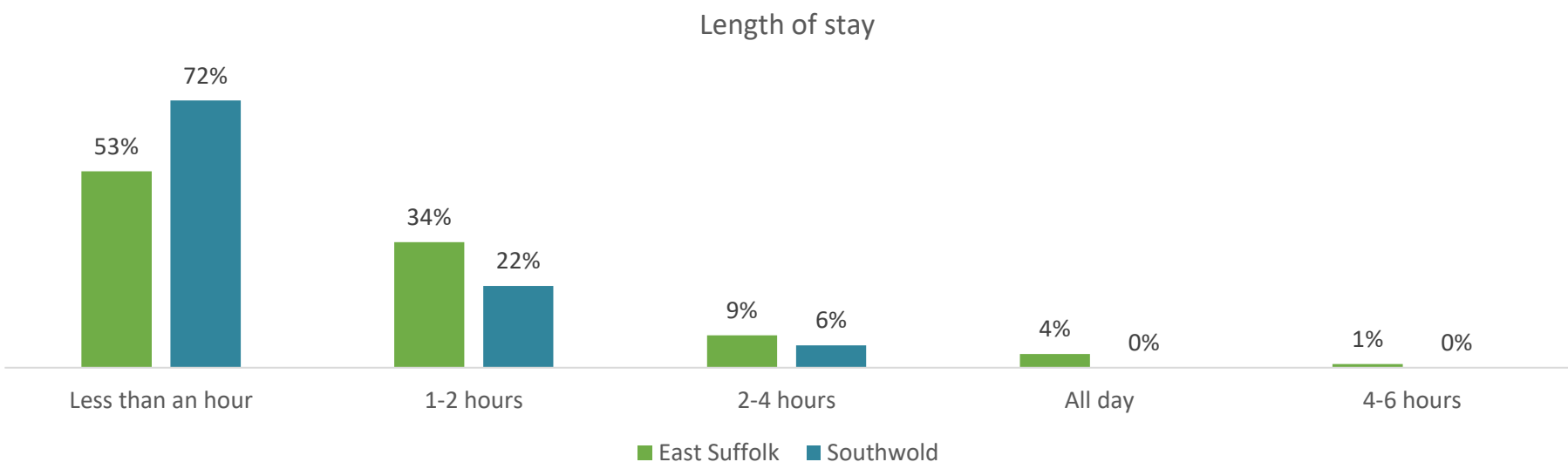
What is the main purpose of your visit to the town centre today?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

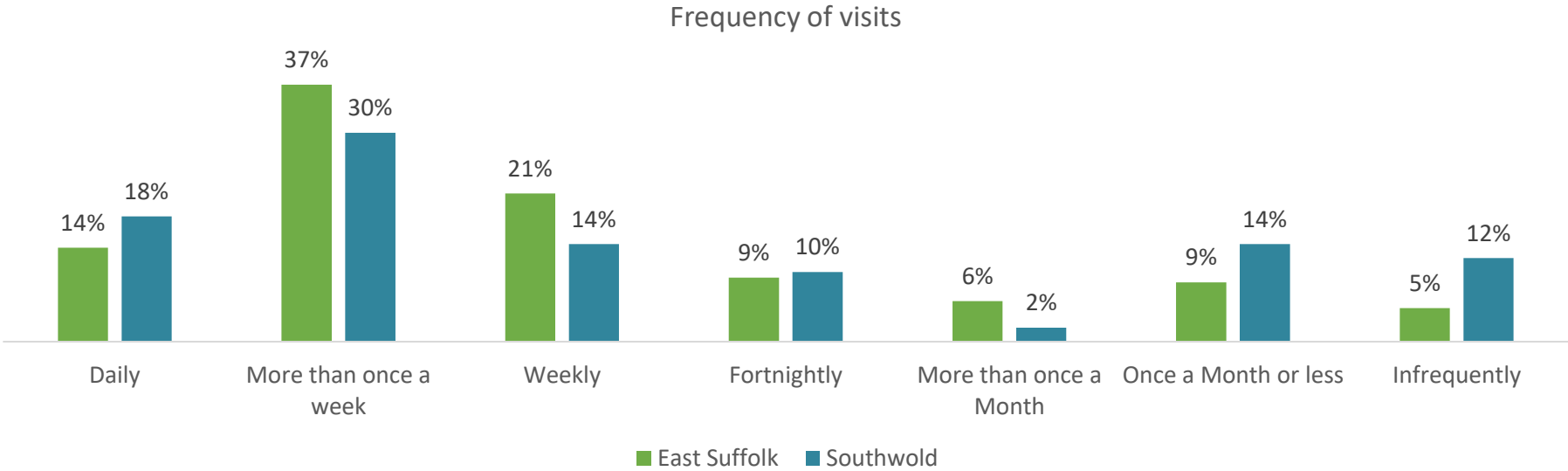
How long do you intend to stay on this visit to the town centre?





Town centre users – Trip characteristics

How often do you visit the town centre?

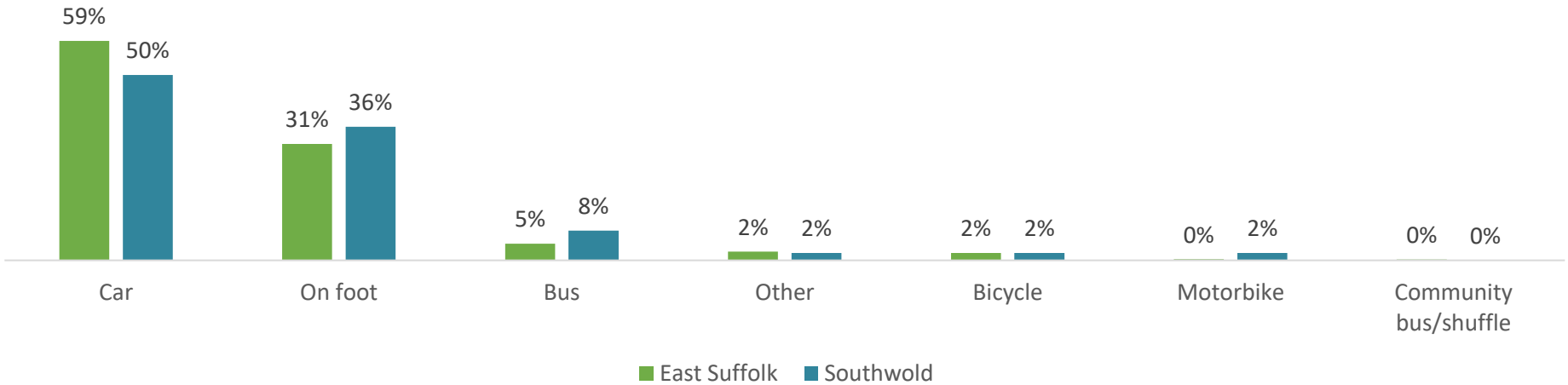




Town centre users – Trip characteristics

How did you travel into the town centre today?

Travel into the town centre



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

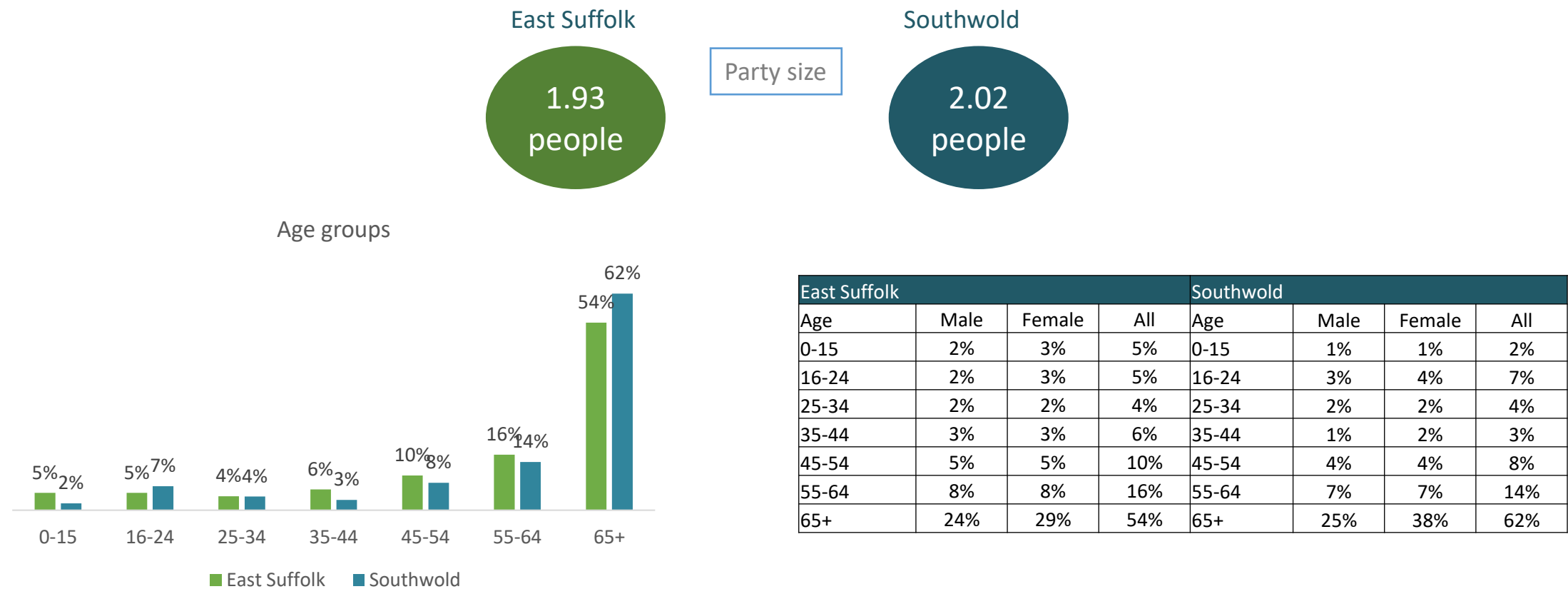
Responses have been summarised into main themes

- Link public transport to the mainline station at Halesworth to make it more convenient
- Shuttle services available around the town
- More publicity of times and bus stop locations
- Increased service on the evening
- Make it easily accessible for disabled people.



Town centre users – Trip characteristics

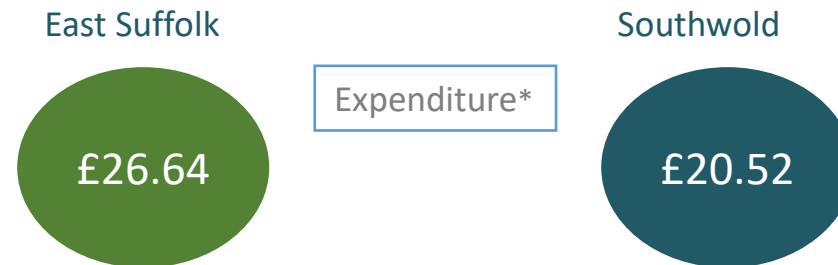
Including yourself, how many people in your party are male and female, and which of these age groups do they fall into?





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?

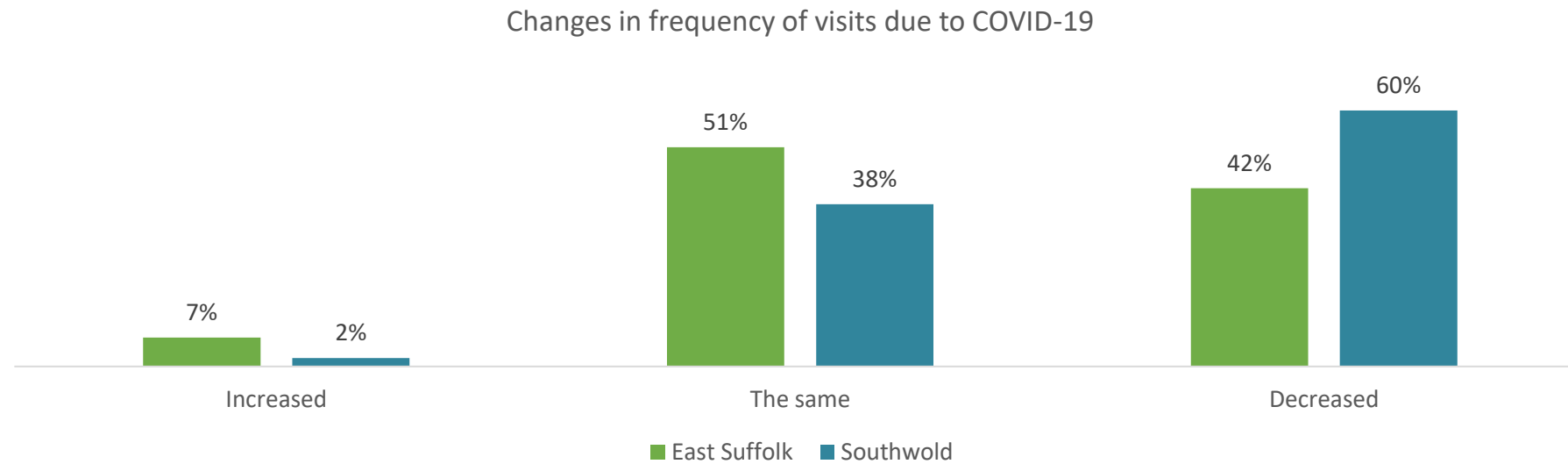


(*) Daily expenditure for respondent and immediate party on their visit to the town centre.



Town centre users – Impact of Covid-19

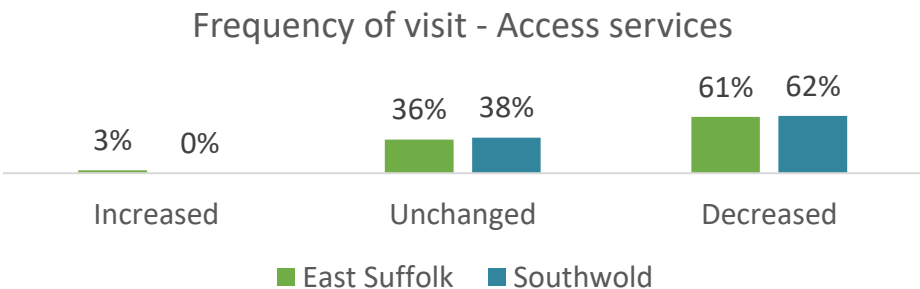
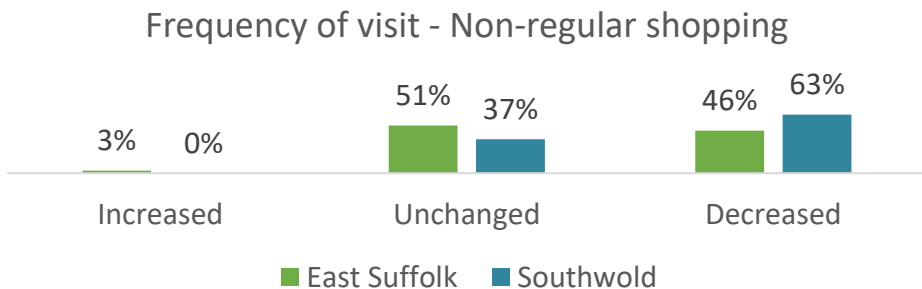
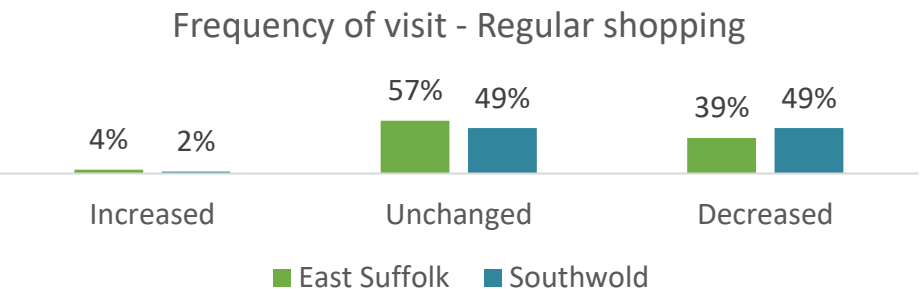
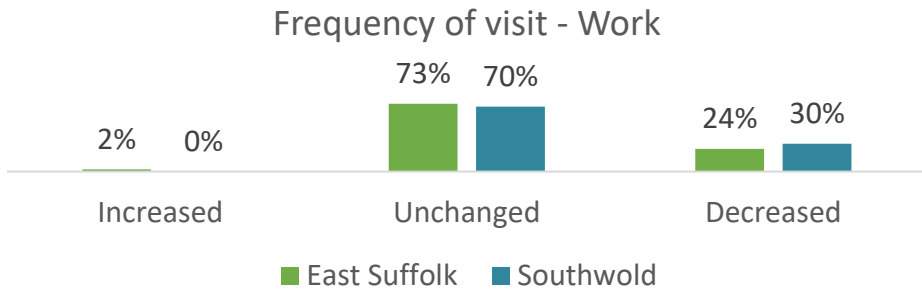
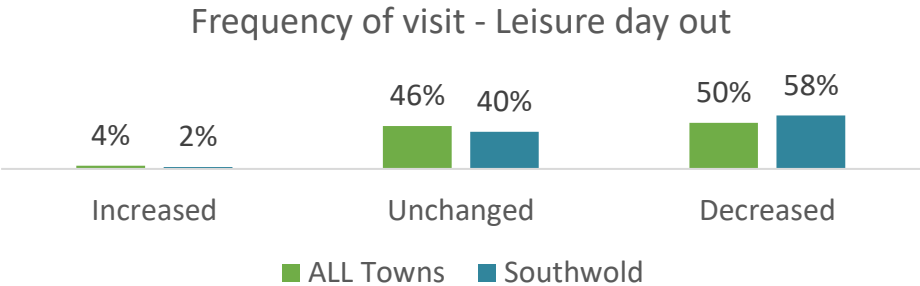
Would you say your frequency of visits to the town centre has increased, decrease or stayed the same since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?





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



Feeling of safety
Welcoming feeling
Independent shops
Customer service
The Market(s)



Cycle lanes and bike racks
Public transport
Car Parking

Full breakdown of scores

	Southwold
Feeling of safety	4.1
Welcoming feeling	3.6
Independent shops	3.5
Customer service	3.5
The Market(s)	3.5
Access to services (library...)	3.3
Grocery shops	3.2
Cleanliness of streets	3.2
Leisure facilities/places to visit	3.0
Cultural activities	2.9
Road/pedestrian signs	2.8
Events	2.7
Cafe/restaurants	2.7
Pubs/bars	2.7
National chains	2.7
Clothes, gifts etc	2.6
Value for money (eateries)	2.6
Car Parking	1.8
Public transport	1.8
Cycle lanes and bike racks	1.5



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:

- Improved parking (availability and costs)
- Variety of shops - more basic / affordable shops are needed (groceries, shoes / clothing shop for older people, a launderette.)
- More pedestrian areas / High Street.

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

pleasant
good
attractive
wonderful
comfortable



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

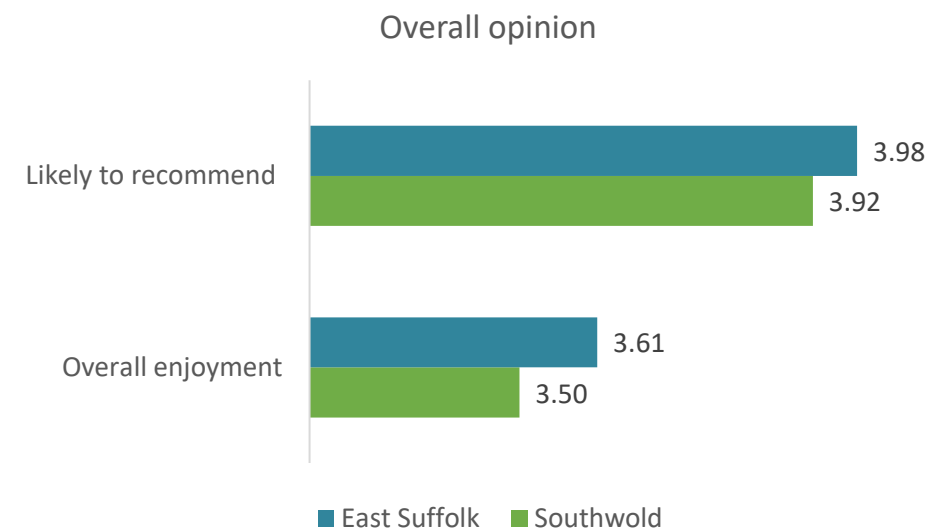
How useful do you find the following:	East Suffolk	Southwold
Info on social media about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do etc.	2.90	2.59
Web sites about the town or businesses to help plan your visit in advance	2.79	2.53
Regular updates direct from businesses about special offers, things to-do etc.	2.82	2.45
'Click and collect' or the ability to browse products as part of your visit	2.72	1.94

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





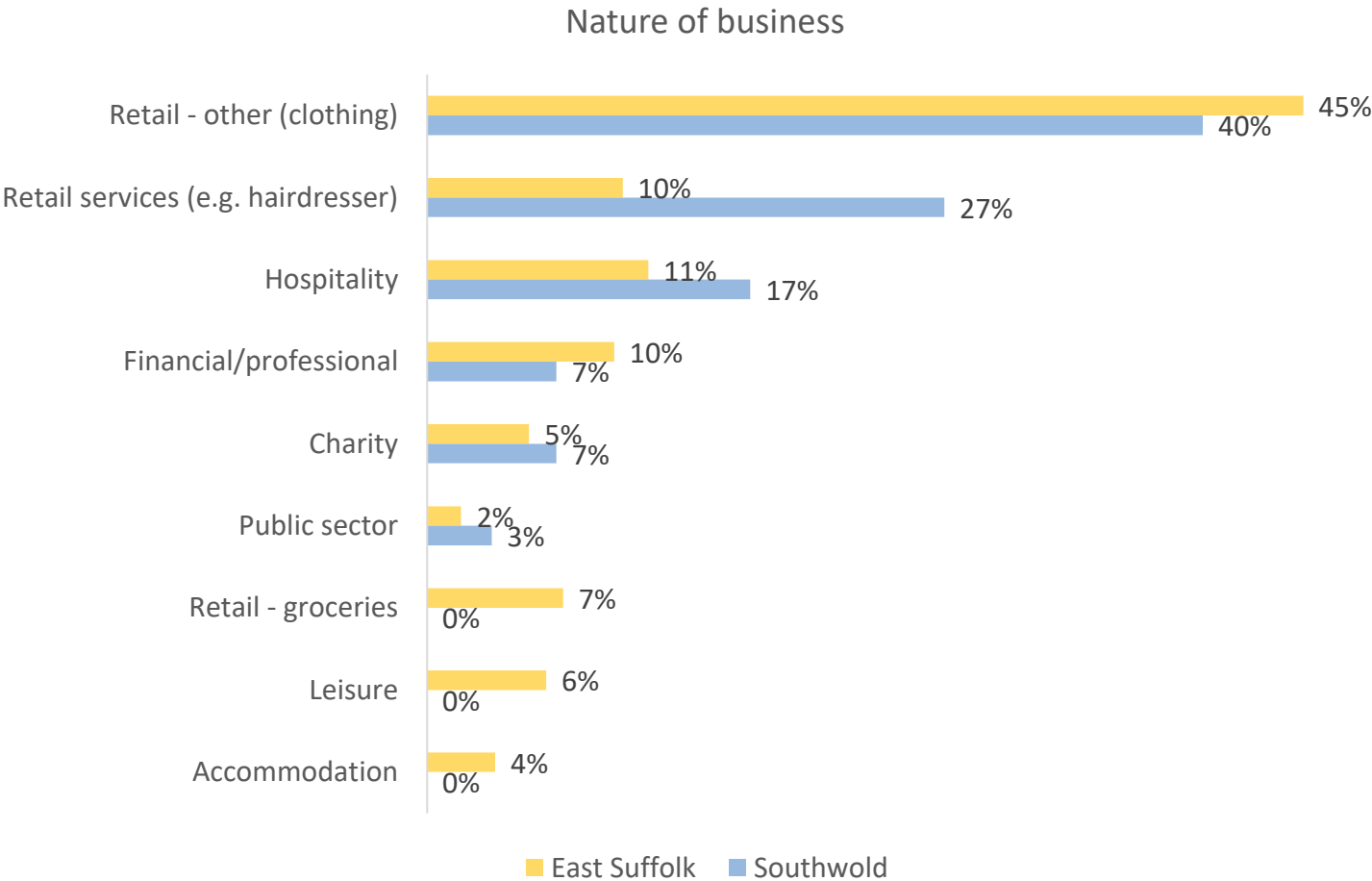
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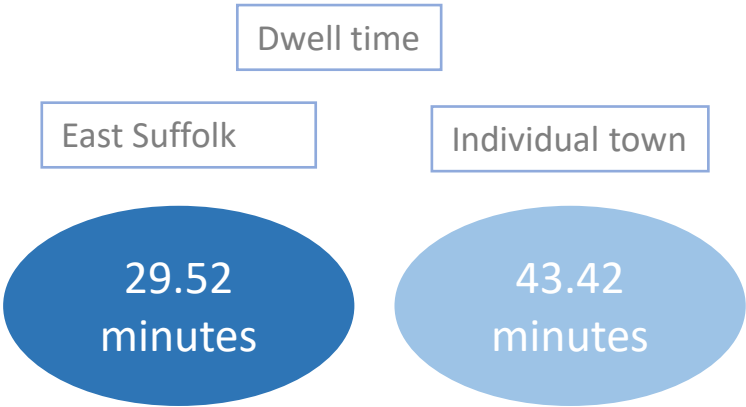


Town centre businesses – Business profile

What is the nature of your business?



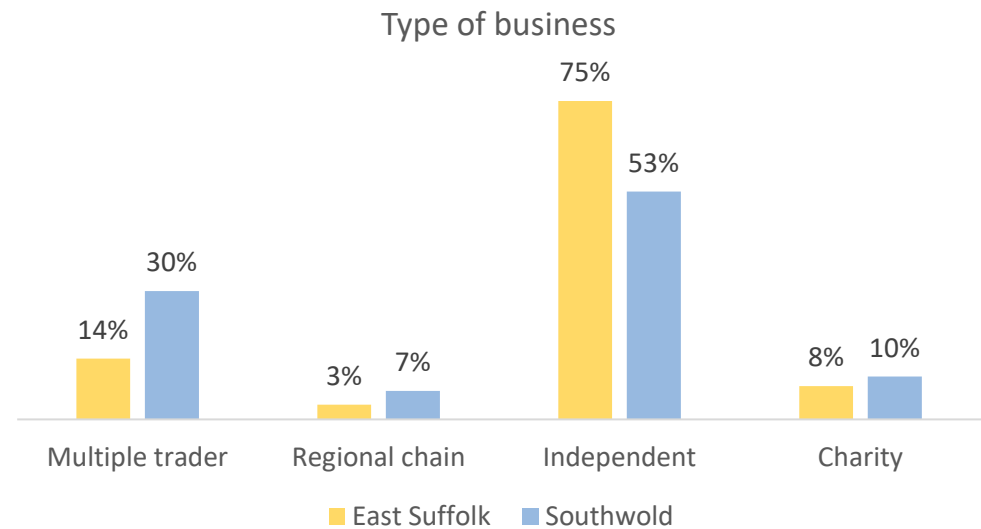
What would you say is the average customer dwell time for a standard visit to your premises?



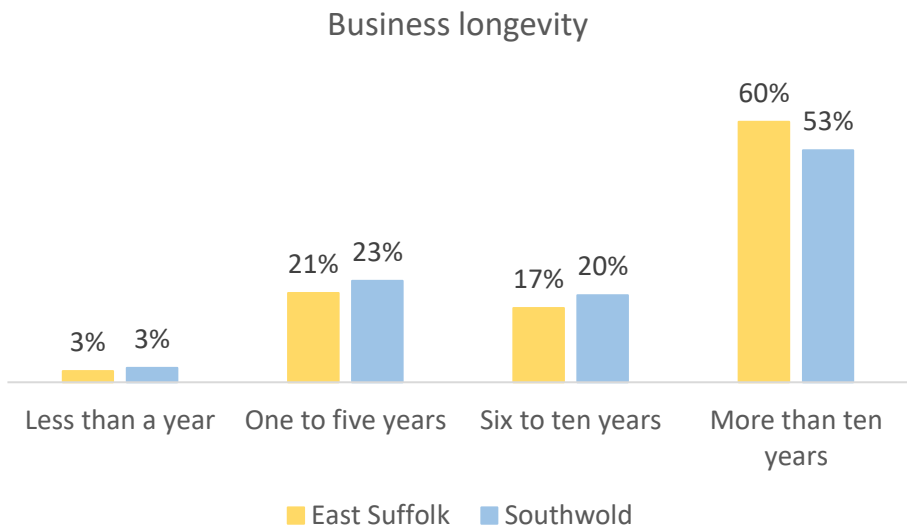


Town centre businesses – Business profile

What type of business are you?



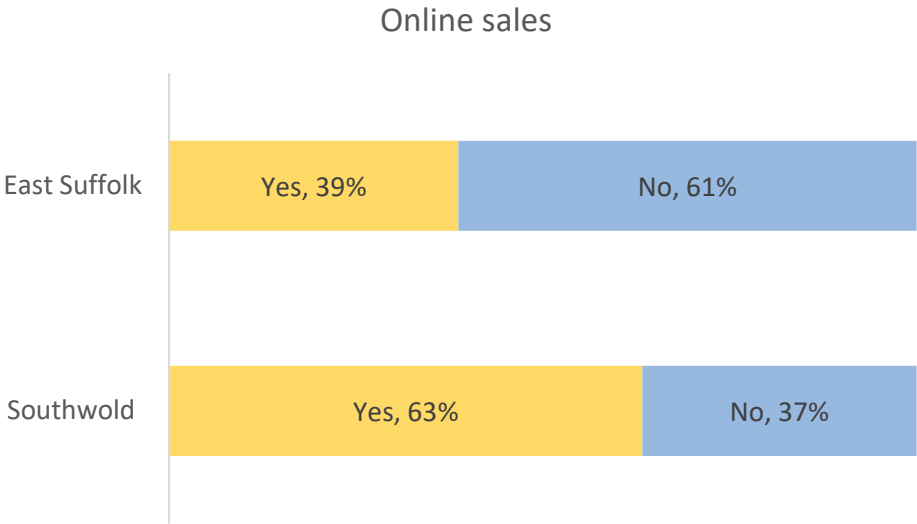
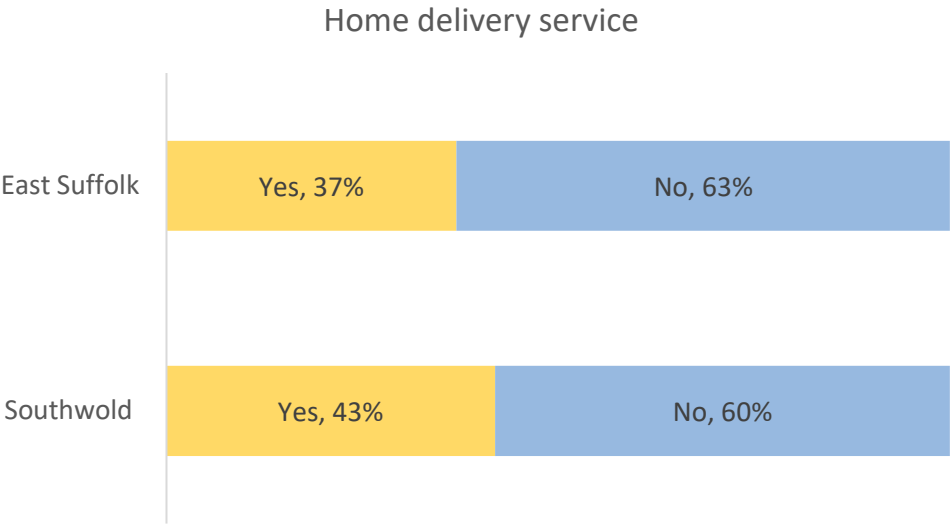
How long has your business been in the town?





Town centre businesses – Business profile

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

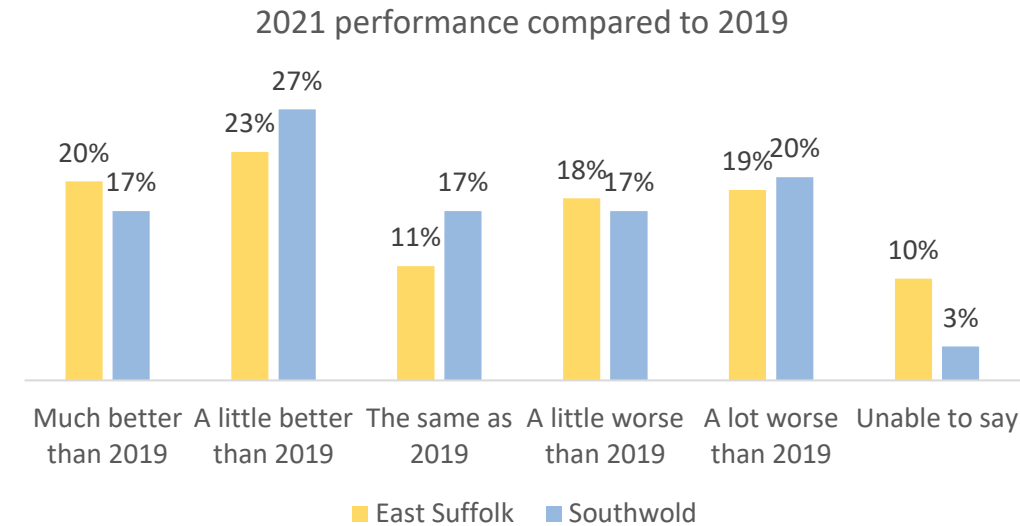




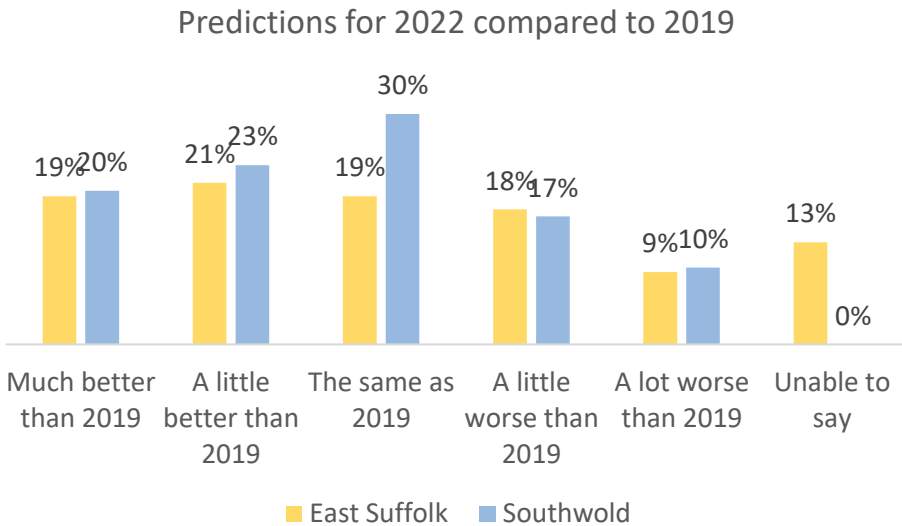
Town centre businesses – Business performance

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

(Note that we are using 2019 as a benchmark)



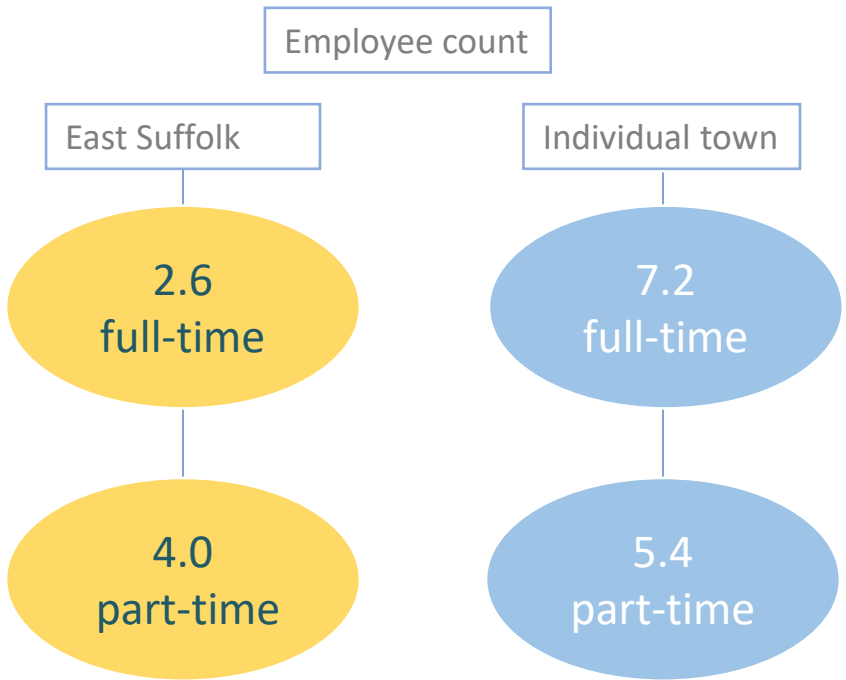
Thinking now about 2022, what are your early predictions?
Do you expect your business performance to be:



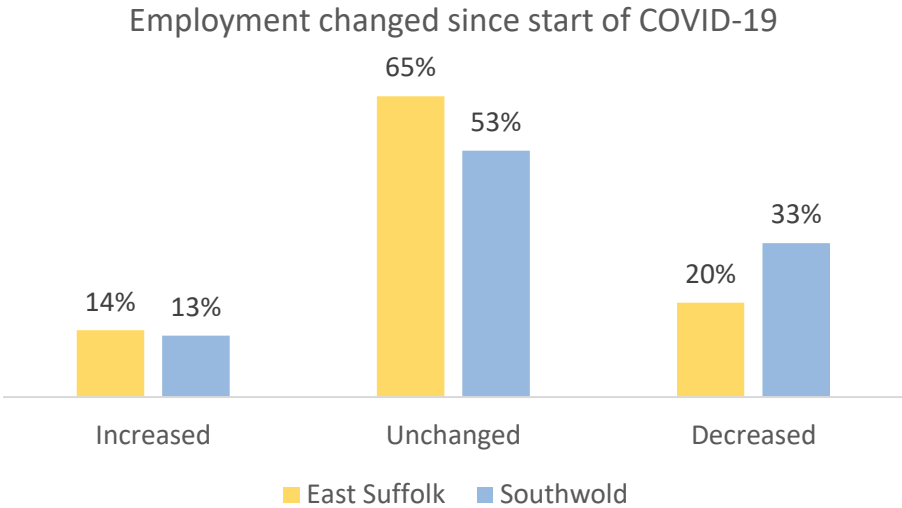


Town centre businesses – Employment

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



Has this changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?



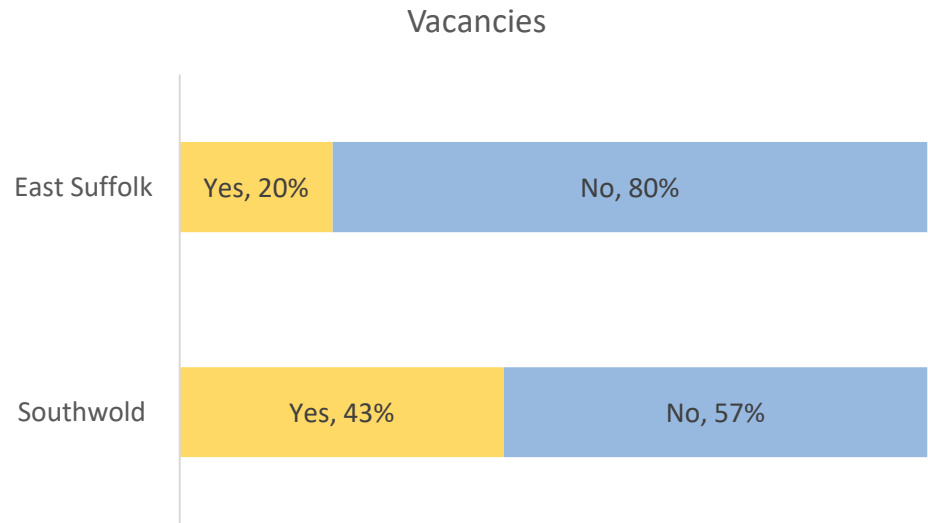


Town centre businesses – Employment

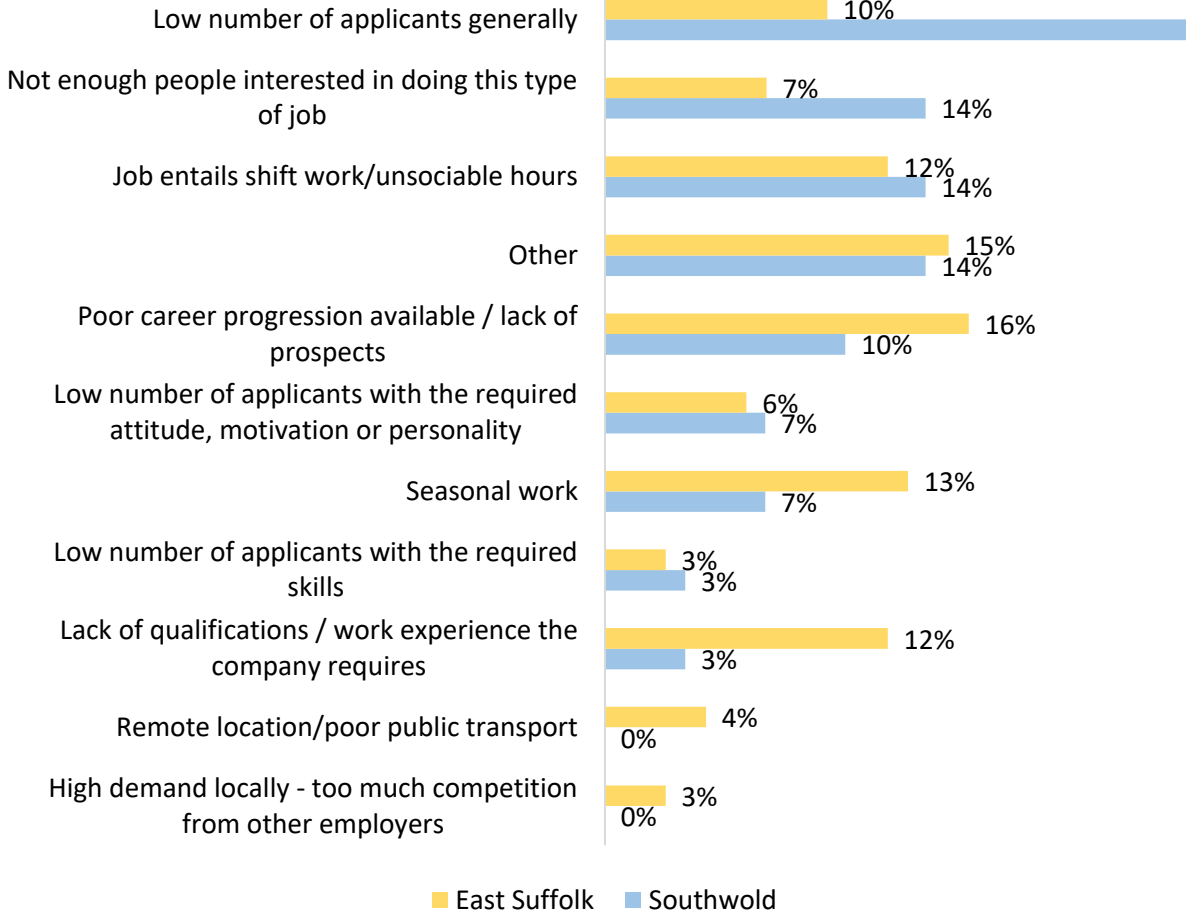
In your view, what are the reasons that make your vacancies hard-to-fill?



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



Cafes, pubs, restaurants
Customers - Volume of visitors
Prosperity of the town



Car parking
Affordable housing
Road / Pedestrian Signs
Seasonal economy

Full breakdown of scores

Aspects of Town Centre	Southwold
Cafes, pubs, restaurants	4.1
Customers - Volume of visitors	4.0
Seasonal economy	3.8
Prosperity of the town	3.6
Footfall	3.4
Physical appearance	3.3
Geographical location	3.3
Events / activities	3.2
Mix of retail offer	3.1
Local partnerships/ organisations	3.0
Marketing and promotion	3.0
The Market(s)	2.8
Rental values/ rates	2.4
Customers - Volume of town residents	2.4
Availability of premises	2.4
Traffic	2.2
Public transport	2.2
Labour pool	2.1
Road / Pedestrian Signs	2.1
Affordable housing	2.0
Car parking	1.8



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:

- Reduce seasonality – second homes drive prices up reducing the number of year-round residents that would support independent retailers
- Reduce rental and rates costs to encourage independent shops to move in
- Increase availability of parking facilities / introduce charges to avoid second home owners to stay all day and encourage shorter shopping visits
- Improve infrastructure (hospital and surgery) to encourage people to want to live in the town
- Availability of public toilets.

Priorities	East Suffolk	Southwold	Difference
Regular use of social media to promote business and engage with customers	3.7	4.1	0.4
Creation and management of business website	3.4	3.9	0.5
Generation and provision of on-line sales	2.3	3.5	1.2
Collection and analysis of customer data to help target marketing	2.7	3.4	0.7

Competition to your business	East Suffolk	Southwold	Difference
Local business competition	3.9	4.0	0.1
Competition from out-of-town shopping	3.6	3.7	0.1
Competition from other localities	3.7	3.5	-0.2
Competition from internet	3.3	3.2	-0.1



HM Government



European Union

European Regional
Development Fund



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