

Christmas Parking Promotion 2019

Report for Uttlesford District Council

January 2020



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Executive Summary

Plumb Associates were commissioned by Uttlesford District Council to undertake public consultation on a free Christmas parking promotion during December 2019.

Uttlesford District Council are responsible for the management of the Council's 10 car parks, four in Saffron Walden, four in Great Dunmow and two in Stansted Mountfitchet.

A key aim of the consultation was to identify whether the free parking promotion impacted on footfall in town centres.

A survey of users was undertaken during the free parking sessions across 4 dates in December, in AM and PM sessions. Two questions were agreed for the survey with Uttlesford District Council, to encourage more and quicker participation for busy individuals using the car parks. The questions were:

- Did you know about today's free parking before you started your journey?
- Does a free parking promotion encourage you to visit more frequently?

A total of **600** people were surveyed during the free parking sessions at three car parks: White Street in Great Dunmow, Swan Meadow and The Common in Saffron Walden. All 600 answered the first question, whilst 579 answered the second.

A total of **4 sessions** were undertaken at the request of Uttlesford District Council. The first two sessions at the start of the December parking promotion, the last two taking place two weeks into the promotion.

2nd December	White Street Great Dunmow	9 am – 1pm
4th December	Swan Meadow Saffron Walden	1- 3pm and
	The Common Saffron Walden	3 - 5pm
16th December	White Street Great Dunmow	9 am – 1pm
17th December	Swan Meadow Saffron Walden	1 - 3pm and
	The Common Saffron Walden	3 - 5pm

Although demographic information was not recorded as part of the survey it was noted that there was a good mix in terms of age range and gender at all sessions.

The car parking promotion was publicised but generally people surveyed did not know about the promotion. This remained the case even at the two week stage, although even where people 'had heard' about the promotion they still paid for parking on 'auto pilot'.

Slightly more people reported a greater likelihood that they would visit more frequently (55%). There was little difference overall between the two market towns of Great Dunmow (56%) and Saffron Walden (54%). However, there was a different response between the two car parks in Saffron Walden, with those in Swan Meadow less likely

to visit more frequently (39%) than those in The Common (67%). This may reflect the greater use of the long stay Swan Meadow car park by staff and business owners, while the short stay car park at The Common is filled with those shopping or visiting the town centre.

Nearly 34% of respondents said they were 'not very likely' to visit more because of free parking, with a further 11% saying reporting that they definitely wouldn't visit more frequently.

Reasons for these negative responses varied, but additional information gathered at the point of surveying indicated some of the main reasons for this was:

- People were visiting as a 'one off' – because of dental appointments, work meetings, Xmas shopping etc. (86 of the 275 who commented, or 31%)
- This was the case in both towns with 35% in Saffron Walden and slightly less in Great Dunmow at 28%.
- Parking fees were reasonable anyway/people already visit regularly/get fee refunded if spending £5 at the Co-op in Great Dunmow.
- Respondents were local business owners/worked locally who had to be there anyway.
- People had parking permits or their company paid for their parking – so it made no difference to them.

There was a general recognition that the parking promotion was a nice gesture from the local councils/businesses, especially appreciated from those outside the area who had come to do some Christmas shopping from more expensive parking areas like Cambridge. Some visitors surveyed came from as far afield as Romford, Luton, Norwich, Peterborough, Doncaster, Haverhill, Bishops Stortford and Norfolk.

Some people commented that it might encourage them to stay longer (10 people, or 4% of those who commented).

1.0 Introduction & Remit

For the last few years Uttlesford District Council has agreed a Christmas car parking promotion which included:

- Free parking after 3pm in all car parks except Fairycroft in Saffron Walden
- Free parking between Christmas and New Year
- Free parking from 12 noon on the day of the Christmas Lights Switch-on event in that town's car parks (except Fairycroft in Saffron Walden).

It has been difficult for the Council to evaluate the impact of this package of measures as they were unable to programme car park ticket machines to provide free tickets, which would have given them information about the number of people parking during the free period. Instead they have had only anecdotal feedback from local businesses who say that it made very little or no difference to footfall.

Uttlesford District Council are in the midst of a procurement process to bring in new car park ticket machines but these would not be in place by Christmas 2019. It is hoped that the new machines will be programmable and will issue free tickets to those parking during any future free car parking promotions.

For 2019 the Council negotiated a package of free car parking sessions with businesses in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow up to maximum loss of expected income of £4,000 for each centre. The Council stipulated that the sessions must be designed to increase footfall and to support the vitality and vibrancy of that centre. Alternative arrangements were agreed with Stansted Mountfitchet where an equivalent amount of funding would be provided for marketing activities in liaison with Stansted Business Forum and Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council.

The following was agreed:

Great Dunmow

- Free parking from 12 noon on the day of the Christmas Lights Switch-on event., Saturday 30th November 2019
- Free parking between Christmas and New Year.
- Free parking all day on Mondays 2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd December 2019.

Saffron Walden

- Free parking from 1- 5pm on Tuesdays 3rd, 10th and 17th December and on Wednesdays 4th, 11th and 18th December in all car parks except Fairycroft.

Surveys were conducted by Julia Plumb, director of Plumb Associates, assisted on the first morning by Linda Howells, Business Support Officer for Uttlesford District Council. Resulting data was captured and input/presented electronically in the graphs which can be seen at **Appendix 1**, and which is discussed in **Section 3** of this report.

2.0 Methodology

Uttlesford District Council (UDC) chose the sites for the consultation exercise, the preferred methods of consultation (face-to-face), and the questions contained in the survey.

A range of questions were proposed at early stages and the two questions chosen by UDC seemed to afford the most practical solution for a number of reasons:

- The shorter survey enabled reaching a higher number of participants
- The survey did not delay people unnecessarily
- The short survey was purely focused on the impact of the Christmas car parking incentive

2.1 Sites and Times Chosen

Sites were chosen by UDC for several reasons:

- They offered reasonable size and number of likely participants
- They offered good churn in the car parks to make contact with as many people as possible
- They offered good locations near to high streets / town centres
- They afforded good pedestrian access through which to survey those parking during promotion times.

The four hours survey sessions were spent at **one site in Great Dunmow** and across **two sites in Saffron Walden**.

2.1.1 White Street, Great Dunmow (Long Stay car park 172 spaces)

At the time of the consultation there were two ticket machines at either end of the car park. For the first morning of the survey Linda Howells (UDC) and Julia Plumb (Plumb Associates) manned an area near to one ticket machine each.

On the second day of surveying Plumb Associates positioned themselves central to both ticket machines near to the pedestrian access by the library.

Promotions were for free parking on Mondays so surveys took place on Dec 2nd and 16th.

2.1.2 Swan Meadow, Saffron Walden (Long stay car park with 394 spaces)

There are 9 ticket machines throughout the car park. Surveying took place at the path adjacent to Park Lane, out of the car park towards the High Street. This afforded excellent access to a regular stream of people arriving and leaving the car park.

Promotions were for free parking on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons so surveys took place on the 4th and 17th of December.

2.1.3 The Common, Saffron Walden (Short Stay car park with 109 spaces)

There are two ticket machines centrally located back to back, and another at the entrance which was not operational on the first days surveying. Being a smaller surface area this was easier to walk around to survey motorists arriving or leaving.

Promotions were for free parking on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons so surveys took place on the 4th and 17th of December.

2.2 Publicity and Advertising

To promote the free parking promotion, Saffron Walden BID Company and the Great Dunmow Town Team both delivered their own marketing campaigns. Plumb Associates has not been given any details of what the campaigns involved or how they were implemented.

UDC advised Plumb Associates there had been had a prominent Christmas section on the home page of the Council's website which featured the car park promotion, bin collection dates, Council opening hours etc.

2.2.1 Online Advertising - UDC Twitter

A thorough review of advertising and marketing was not conducted as part of this remit but a brief trawl of online desktop research showed that:

UDC Twitter posts appeared on the 2nd, 3rd, 10th, 16th and 17th of December.



Figure 1 – UDC Twitter post

2.2.2 Online Advertising - UDC Facebook

UDC posted on their Facebook page on the 25th of November, to tie in with the Christmas lights switch on event in Great Dunmow, but nothing was subsequently posted as a reminder during December.



Figure 2 – UDC Facebook post

2.2.3 Online Advertising – Saffron BID Twitter

Saffron Walden BID Twitter account posted a short promotional video on the 10th December



Figure 3 – Saffron Bid Twitter post

2.2.4 Online Advertising – Great Dunmow Town Council Facebook



Figure 4 – Great Dunmow TC Facebook post

The Great Dunmow Town Council did post about the promotion on the 13th of November, to tie in with the free parking at the Christmas lights switch on event, but nothing was subsequently posted as a reminder during December.

This post did provoke some comments seen on the screen shot, and was shared 19 times.

2.2.5 Online Advertising – UDC Press Releases

UDC sent a press release to local newspapers and picked up at least one online publication: Hunts Post 13th November 2019

<https://www.huntspost.co.uk/news/free-parking-in-uttlesford-over-the-christmas-period-1-5776008>

2.3 On Site Publicity and Advertising

In addition Uttlesford District Council put stickers on appropriate car park ticket machines (The promotion was not available to people parking at Fairycroft car park in Saffron Walden, aka Waitrose).

It was clear on this first morning of the promotion that most people were unaware of it, so surveying acted as an additional marketing of the promotion and highlighting the timescales for future free sessions.



Figures 5 and 6 -Ticket Machine Promotional stickers at White Street, Great Dunmow



Figures 7 and 8 - Ticket Machine Promotional stickers at Swan Meadow and The Common, Saffron Walden

3.0 Survey Results – Overall

All sessions saw a good flow of motorists using the chosen car parks, and the vast majority were happy to participate in the survey when approached. People on mobile phones or in conversations with others were not interrupted.

Although demographic information was not recorded as part of the survey it was noted that there was a good mix in terms of age range and gender at all sessions.

Site	Date	Number	Weather	Notes
White Street Great Dunmow	Monday 2/12/19	197	0 degrees at 9am Cold, dry and sunny	L Howells (UDC) also surveying until 12 o'clock with Plumb Assoc.
Swan Meadow Saffron Walden	Wednesday 4/12/19	46	6 degrees at 1pm Cold, dry and bright	
The Common Saffron Walden	Wednesday 4/12/19	45	Very cold but dry –dropping to -1 degrees by 4.30pm	
White Street Great Dunmow	Monday 16/12/19	158	7 degrees at 9am. Cold and bright	
Swan Meadow Saffron Walden	Tuesday 17/12/19	71	6 degrees Light rain/ cloudy	Market Day
The Common Saffron Walden	Tuesday 17/12/19	81	5 Degrees Light rain/ cloudy	Market Day
Total		598		

Table 1 - Response rates broken down by site/session

Despite allowing for a short turnaround time, additional comments were often given during the survey and where relevant these were captured and annotated into the electronic data survey records to provide additional context for responses. Responses

of less than 1% of the response rate have not been commented on in this report, but the full details of all responses can be seen at **Appendix 1** and findings are discussed further as part of **Section 3.1 and 3.2 in Overall findings.**

As well as accounting for the seasonal impact of Christmas on the visitor rate for December, it is worth noting the prevailing weather conditions and other external factors such as Market Days to provide context for the numbers of respondents at each session.

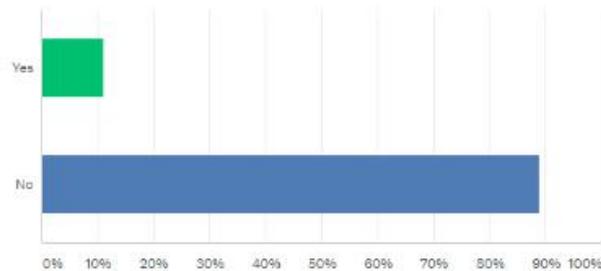
3.1 Overall Survey Findings Summary

	Total Survey Responses Summary (Both Towns)
Total number of responses (of 600 overall)	598
Responses Day 1	288
Responses Day 2	310
Q3 responses to <i>Did you know about today's parking before you started your journey?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 67 (11%) • No 533 (89%)
Q4 responses to <i>Does a free parking promotion encourage you to visit more frequently</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes definitely 166 (29%) • Quite likely 151 (26%) • Not very likely 196 (34%) • No 66 (11%)
Highest scoring additional response information offered – out of 275 comments	86 (31%) Here as a 1 off apt./dentist/Xmas shopping etc. 34 (12%) paid fee/machines should not have accepted it 30 (11%) Reasonable charges/usually in anyway/gets fee back via Co-op 27 (10%) works locally/business owner/at nursery

Table 2 – Total Survey Response Summary across both towns

Did you know about today's free parking before you started your journey?

Answered: 600 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	11.17%	67
No	88.83%	533
TOTAL		600

Figure 9: First Question of the survey & results

- Nearly **89%** of respondents (533 people) claimed they **did not** know about the promotion on its first day.

Just over **11%** of respondents (67 people) said they **did know** about the promotion.

Of those who commented:

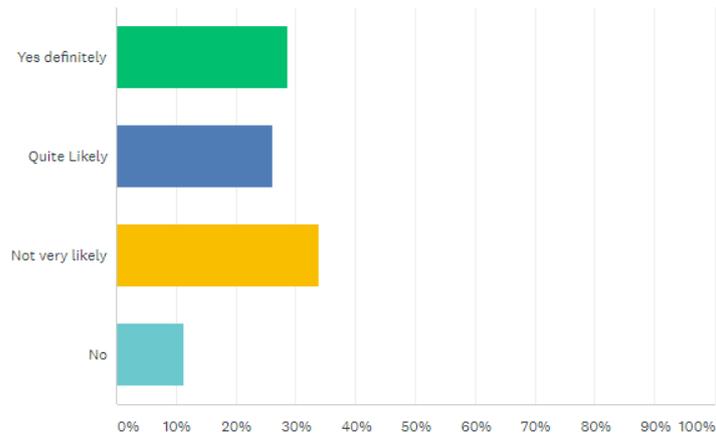
- Just under **6%** (16 people) said they **only saw the promotion on the ticket machine stickers.**
- 3%** of respondents (9 people) **heard about the promotion somewhere/by word of mouth**
- 2.5%** of respondents (7 people) **found out about the promotion** only because of a difficulty paying for parking **via the MiPermit app.**

In addition:

- 2.5%** of respondents (7 people) said the **signage/advertising should be better**
- 12%** of respondents (34% of people) **had still paid the parking fee** at the time of surveying and felt the machine should not have accepted their money or should have had bags placed over them to prevent unnecessary expenditure

Does a free parking promotion encourage you to visit more frequently?

Answered: 579 Skipped: 21



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Yes definitely	28.67%	166
▼ Quite Likely	26.08%	151
▼ Not very likely	33.85%	196
▼ No	11.40%	66
TOTAL		579

Figure 10: Second Question of the survey & results

- Just under **29%** of respondents (166 people) felt that a parking promotion would **definitely** encourage them to visit more frequently, with a further **26%** (155 people) saying they were **quite likely** to do so.
- A **combined total** of just under **55%** of respondents (317 people) responded **positively** to this question.
- Nearly **34%** of respondents (or 196 people) said they were **not very likely** to visit more frequently as a result of the parking promotion, with a further **11%** of respondents (66 people) saying a definite **no** to this question.
- A **combined total** of **45%** of respondents (262 people) responded **negatively** to this question.

Responses were similar in both Great Dunmow but there were some differences as shown in the following table.

Percentage of people who answered Question 2 in different centres / car parks

	All	Great Dunmow	Saffron Walden	Swan Meadow	The Common
Yes definitely	29	30	26	16.5	36
Quite likely	26	25	27	23	31
Not very likely	34	31	39	45.5	32
No	11	14	8	15	1

Table 3 - Analysis of results of Question 2

3.1.1 Relevant additional Information given at point of surveying

- Just over **31%** of respondents (86 people) were there as a **'one-off' visit**: visiting the dentist/because of a children's inset day/Doing Christmas shopping from outside the area/visiting family nearby etc.
- Just under **10%** of respondents (27 people) **worked locally or had children at regular nursery sessions**
- Just under **3.7%** of respondents (10 people) **felt they would stay longer** during free sessions **even if they wouldn't necessarily visit the high street more often.**

2.5% of respondents (7 people) **would normally walk** into the High Street but drove because it was cold or they had parcels that were awkward to carry too far.

3.2 Car Park Charges

- Nearly **11%** of respondents (30 people) felt that
 - **car parking charges were reasonable** whether parking was free or not or
 - **they were usually in regularly** anyway or
 - **they would get their parking fee back** if they spent over £5 at the Co-op in White Street anyway.
- Just under **4.8%** of respondents (13 people) had **parking permits** or **employers paid parking fees**, so free parking promotions made no difference to them.



White Street (Long Stay)

Bank Holidays Free Parking

Postcode: CM6 1AB

Number of Spaces: 172 marked bays

Height Restrictions: N/A

Season Tickets: Available

MiPermit Location Number: 737933

[Location Map](#)

Hourly Charge	Monday to Saturday 8am to 5pm	Sunday
Up to 30 minutes	£0.40	Free
Up to 1 hour	£0.60	-
Up to 3 hours	£1.20	-
Up to 4 hours	£2.00	-
Up to 5 hours	£2.40	-
Up to 9 hours	£3.50	-

Disabled badge holders can park for free all day when displaying a valid disabled badge.

Season Tickets

1 month - £30.00 6 months - £175.00 12 months - £300.00

The Common (Short Stay)

Maximum 3 hours stay Bank Holidays Free Parking

Postcode: CB10 1JG

Number of Spaces: 109 marked bays

Height Restrictions: N/A

Season Tickets: Not Available

MiPermit Location Number: 737936

[Location Map](#)

Hourly Charge	Monday to Saturday 8am to 5pm	Sunday
Up to 30 minutes	£0.50	Free
Up to 1 hour	£0.70	-
Up to 2 hours	£1.20	-
Up to 3 hours	£2.00	-

Disabled badge holders can park for free all day when displaying a valid disabled badge.

Swan Meadow (Long Stay)

Bank Holidays Free Parking. This is a Town Centre car park

Postcode: CB10 1DA

Number of Spaces: 394 marked bays

Height Restrictions: N/A

Season Tickets: Call 01206 282316

MiPermit Location Number: 737937

[Location Map](#)

Hourly Charge	Monday to Saturday 8am to 5pm	Sunday
Up to 1 hour	£0.70	Free
Up to 2 hours	£1.20	-
Up to 4 hours	£2.00	-
Up to 6 hours	£2.50	-
Up to 9 hours	£3.50	-

Season Tickets for Private Individuals

1 month - £30.00 3 month - £90.00 6 months - £175.00 12 months - £300.00

Season Tickets for Companies

6 months - £175.00 12 months - £300.00

Figure 11: Screenshot of Car parking charges at time of writing the report.

<http://www1.parkingpartnership.org/north/about-uttlesford>

4.0 Survey Results Summary by Location

	Great Dunmow	Saffron Walden
	White Street	Swan Meadow and The Common
Total number of responses (of 600 overall)	355	(117 SM +126 TC) = 243
Responses Day 1	197 (55% of day 1 totals)	46 (SM) 45 (TC) = 91 (37%)
Responses Day 2	158 (45% of day 2 totals)	71 (SM) 81 (TC) = 152 (63%)
Total % (of all 600 responses overall)	59%	41%
Q3 responses to Did you know about today's parking before you started your journey?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 36 (10%) • No 320 (90%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 31 (13%) • No 213 (87%)
Q4 responses to Does a free parking promotion encourage you to visit more frequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes definitely 104 (30%) • Quite likely 87 (25%) • Total Positive 191 (55%) • Not very likely 105 (31%) • No 48 (14%) • Total Negative 153 (45%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes definitely 62 (26%) • Quite Likely 64 (27%) • Total positive 126 (53%) • Not very likely 91 (39%) • No 18 (8%) • Total Negative 109 (47%)
Highest scoring additional response information – out of 275 people who commented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38 people (30%) Here as one off/dental appointment etc. • 18 people (13%) Thought parking fees reasonable/got fees back at Co-op etc. • 17 people (13%) work locally/business owner/at nursery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48 people (34 %) Here as one off/dental appointment etc. • 18 (13%) people paid fee/machine should have been bagged/not accepted fee • 12 people (9%) Thought parking fees reasonable • 11 people (8% have parking permits or parking paid by employers

Table 4 - Survey Response summary by location

4.1 Survey Results by Location

By breaking down the overall data in Table 2, on the preceding page into the two district locations we can see that:

- There were slightly more responses captured at White Street Great Dunmow than at the two locations in Saffron Walden.
- In both districts the vast majority of people surveyed did not know about the parking promotion in advance of starting their journey.
- Both towns scored very similarly, responding generally more positively than negatively on whether the free parking promotions encouraged them to visit the town centre more frequently.
- There were differences in the responses from those parking at the long stay Swan Meadow car park, and those parking at short stay The Common car park, suggesting that a free parking promotion would be more likely to encourage short stay shoppers and visitors.
- (It is noted that White Street Great Dunmow responded more highly on the answer Yes definitely, and also to the answer No – much more definitive responses than Saffron Walden)
- In both towns people offering additional information related mostly to those visiting as ‘one offs’ for dental appointments etc. This equated to around a third of responses in both towns, and 31% of the overall total. This would seem to indicate that these people are not regular High Street Shoppers.

Individual district and overall data can be found in the Appendices.

Appendix 1 – Survey results Total

Appendix 2 – Survey results Summary for White Street, Great Dunmow

Appendix 3 – Survey results Summary for Swan Meadow and The Common, Saffron Walden Combined

Appendix 4 – Survey results Summary for Swan Meadow, Saffron Walden

Appendix 5 – Survey results Summary for The Common, Saffron Walden

5.0 Conclusions

Most people were pleased about the parking promotions and saw it as a 'bonus' to their trip, but few of them had seen the promotional articles or social media posts/tweets about it. On site people felt the stickers were positioned wrongly and needed to be more prominently placed, if the ticket machines weren't programmed to reject fees during a promotion (which they weren't able to do).

Just under **3%** of respondents (8 people) wished the promotion was **either all the time/on a different day/at weekends or free after 3pm.**

Whilst the promotion was appreciated as a nice gesture by **4.8%** of respondents (13 people) the parking charges are not felt to be excessive by people who had paid during a free session.

There was a fairly even split between those responding **positively (55%)** and those responding **negatively (45%)** to the question of whether free parking encourages more visits, in our survey.

With just under **3.7%** of respondents saying they would **stay longer** during free parking sessions even if they wouldn't necessarily visit the high street more often, there is potential for a different marketing approach in future promotions: Stay a little longer, have that coffee, meet your friend for lunch, try on those new jeans...etc...

It was noted that some people who had paid parking fees in the second half of December had been aware of the free parking but had simply **paid on 'auto pilot'** without thinking. This was not helped by one of the ticket machine stickers having been removed at the point of the 3rd days surveying in White Street (N.B. it was not practical to check all stickers in Swan Meadows, but The Common retained all their promotional stickers on the 2nd days surveying).

Some people were unsure about which areas had free parking on which days and felt it was confusing trying to remember free sessions especially when they were only temporary.

Certainly those from outside the area who were visiting from more expensive parking areas like Cambridge, felt even without the promotion the parking charges were reasonable at the survey car park.

Concern was raised by one or two respondents that free parking encourages excessive use of parking spaces unnecessarily meaning that shoppers or other visitors are then unable to park when they want or need to.

6.0 Recommendations

Survey results demonstrate a fairly even positive/negative split in answer to the question of whether offering targeted free parking increases footfall. With around 29% of respondents feeling that a parking promotion would definitely encourage them to visit more frequently, this may justify providing a future promotion in December 2020.

If such a promotion is to be offered then the following recommendations should be made to improve its effectiveness:

- Many people lead busy complicated lives and need simplicity to encourage take up of free promotions. Ideally this would mean the same free sessions across all areas, or a regular free days/sessions that are ongoing and more likely to become part of a regular routine on quieter trading days.
- If temporary parking promotions are to be maximised then the advertising of this needs to be increased or made more prominent, as there was hardly any improvement in the knowledge of the promotion between Day 1 of surveying and Day 2, two weeks later.

It was noted by Plumb Associates who used some of the retail facilities in both Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden across all 4 survey days, that more in-store promotion would be beneficial. No window advertising or leaflets were noted in store and some of the store owners admitted when surveyed that they hadn't advertised the free promotions on their premises.

Appendices (attached separately)

Appendix 1 Survey responses

Appendix 2 – Survey results Summary for White Street, Great Dunmow

Appendix 3 – Survey results Summary for Swan Meadows and The Common, Saffron Walden Combined

Appendix 4 – Survey results Summary for Swan Meadow, Saffron Walden

Appendix 5 – Survey results Summary for The Common, Saffron Walden

Appendix 6 – Survey Results for Day 1 of surveying

Appendix 7 – Survey results for Day 2 of surveying

Please note: for the convenience of recording which car park sessions took place at which times, data has been entered as additional questions 1 and 2.

The survey itself consists of Questions 3 and 4.

Additional information has been recorded as Q5