

Executive Summary

Introduction

The South Lakeland Business Premises Survey was carried out by South Lakeland District Council.

The Business Premises Survey is carried out each year to help provide an up-to-date assessment of the supply and demand of business premises in South Lakeland. The survey helps to inform the South Lakeland local planning authorities evidence base about employment needs in so far as the supply and demand for land and premises and strategic policy about land requirements going forward in the Local Plan. The survey is also used to better understand the opportunities and challenges faced by businesses operating in South Lakeland.

Method

The Business Premises Survey was sent by post to 4,014 business premises on the South Lakeland Business Rates Register.

There was a news release to advertise the survey in South Lakeland News and the local press. The survey was also promoted through the Invest in South Lakeland newsletter and on social media.

Businesses were able to complete a paper copy and return free of charge by post, or complete the survey online using the link provided. 60% of completed surveys were returned by post.

As in 2020 and 2021 the consultation was primarily advertised digitally (via email) in the early stages of the consultation period. This resulted in an online completion rate of 40%, a 4% increase on the previous two years' online response rates.

Responses

There were 1,243 complete useable responses to the consultation. This represents a response rate of 31% of businesses that received the survey, which is considered a statistically significant sample and can be considered representative.

Summary

- A response rate of 31% (1,243 responses) can be considered statistically representative of the district as a whole. This is compared to 28% in 2020, and is the highest response rate seen since the survey began in 2014.
- A quarter of businesses responding to the consultation are from Kendal or the surrounding area. There was, as usual, a good response rate from all parts of the district, including Windermere/ Bowness, Ambleside/Grasmere and Ulverston, as well as the more rural towns and villages.
- There was also a good representation from businesses of all ages, from those trading for a reasonably short time (under 5 years) to those who have been operating for over 31 years.
- The vast majority of responses were from businesses in the hospitality/catering and wholesale/retail sectors, which is expected due to the nature of the South Lakeland economy.
- Limited companies, soles traders and partnerships were the main types of businesses responding to the survey.
- The majority of responding businesses are currently operating from residential (hotels, B&Bs etc.) premises and retail outlets. Those in light industrial and food/drink premises also contributed a significant response rate.
- The majority of responding businesses are operating from premises in a town centre location, however businesses on the edge of town and in more rural locations are also well represented. There was a good response rate from businesses that have occupied their current premises for a relatively short time to those that have been at the same premises for over 31 years.
- The majority of respondents classed their premises as their main workplace/headquarters. Just over one in two indicated that their floor space was under 2,500 ft², and more than two thirds employed between 1 to 5 employees. This shows that the majority of responses were from small businesses.
- The majority of responding businesses have a current broadband speed between 24-80Mbps.
- Just under two thirds of respondents feel confident about the next twelve months, while just under a quarter are expecting their staffing levels to stay the same. However compared to the results from the 2021 survey, there has been a 15% decrease in confidence rates.
- Of the 1,243 responding businesses, 15% (183 businesses) indicated that they would expect their premises needs to change in the next 3 years. The majority expect to increase in size by means of expanding their existing

premises or moving to a larger site. This year's survey showed a slight shift towards more businesses wanting to downsize, compared to last year's results which showing a shift towards a need for larger premises.

- The majority of those looking for new premises would do so either in an edge of town (e.g. industrial estate) or town centre location, with Kendal being the most likely location.
- The most likely types of premises these businesses would be looking for are office, retail and light industrial units. More than a third of respondents would prefer a 'small sized' premises (under 2,500ft²), while just over a quarter would prefer a 'medium sized' (2,501 – 9,999ft²).
- All responding businesses feel that the location/accessibility of premises, cost of premises, sufficient broadband/mobile connectivity and energy efficiency were important factors to consider when choosing a new premises.
- A third of businesses identify energy/fuel costs and staff retention/recruitment as obstacles which prevent their business growing.
- Around half of the responding businesses are seeking to address rising energy and fuel prices by implementing energy efficiency measures and/or reducing business costs.
- Overall, two thirds of responding businesses indicated that addressing climate change is important to them.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to leave any other comments. The main comments/issues relate to; Staffing/recruitment, lack of affordable housing, energy prices/rising costs, parking and high streets/town centres.