



Aberdeen 2024 Christmas Village Research Evaluation Results

Prepared for: Codona's, Aberdeen Inspired & Aberdeen City Council

Prepared by: Research Chamber
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

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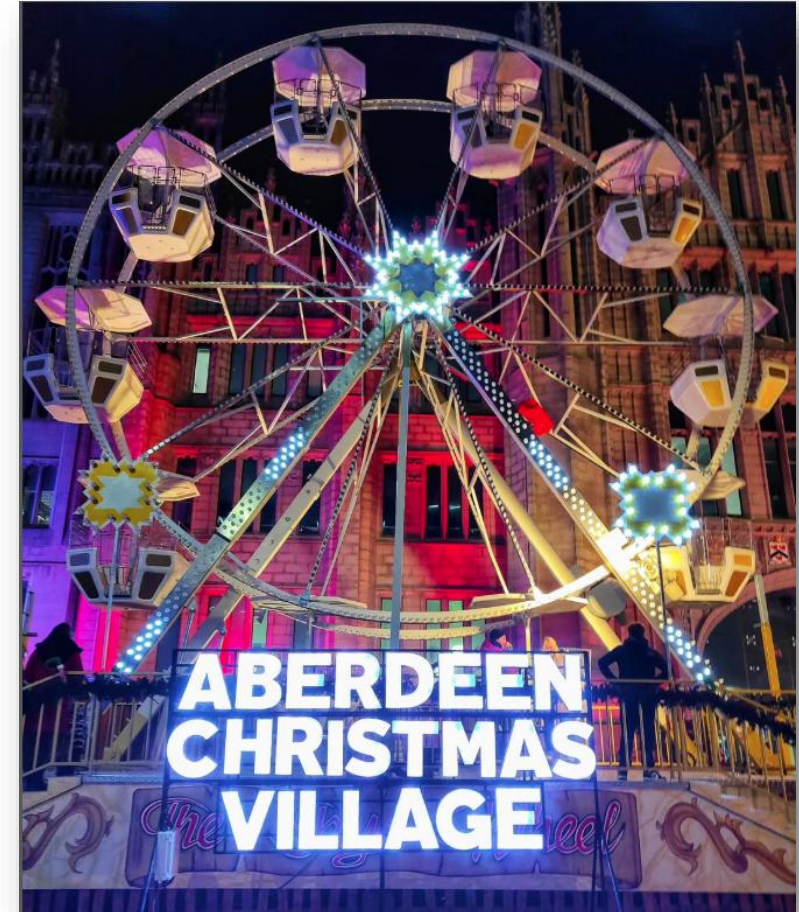
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Why this project matters; measuring the success of the 2024 event, part of the City's ongoing recovery and future growth

The Aberdeen Christmas Village is a cherished tradition that has become a cornerstone of the local festive culture. Its annual recurrence fosters a sense of familiarity and excitement within the community, making it a highlight of the holiday season.

In previous years, the event has brought vibrancy to the city, offering visitors a variety of attractions, including an ice rink, fairground rides, food and drink stalls, a local market and live music.

Beyond spreading festive cheer, the Village has played a significant role in supporting local businesses and creating a dynamic, celebratory atmosphere. It also attracts and engages visitors, fostering support for the local economy and providing a unique platform to promote Aberdeen's long-term economic prosperity.

To ensure the continued success of this beloved event, Codona's, on behalf of Aberdeen Inspired and Aberdeen City Council, has commissioned the Research Chamber of Aberdeen and the Grampian Chamber of Commerce to evaluate the 2024 Village.

This evaluation focused on understanding both visitor experiences and the impact on local businesses, helping to shape future events and maximise their benefits for the community.





Who we talked to...

Who	Village visitors	Village vendors	City businesses
How many	240 on street interviews 16 QR Code poster	31	21
How surveyed	In person interviews at the Village & by QR code publicised throughout the Village	Mailed by Charlie House	Canvassed by Codona's management team. Link also sent to AGCC members.
	Range of times/venues/days during the event	Vendors invited to participate, mailed throughout the Village	City businesses invited to participate via Codona's management team, 35 AGCC members received the link.

Note: Village attendance / interviewing / footfall at times impacted by poor weather





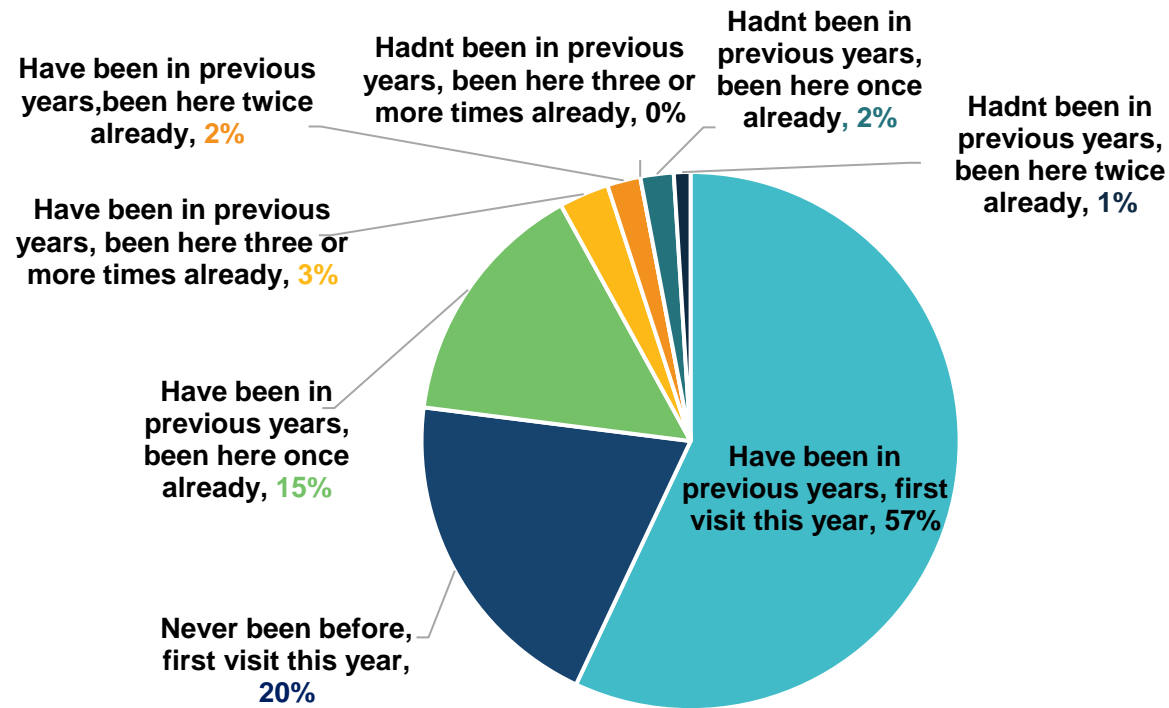
What they said...





Q: Is this your first visit this year? Have you been in previous years?

The typical village visitor was a young woman from the City who came with family/friends. They had been to the Village in previous years, but this was their first 2024 visit.

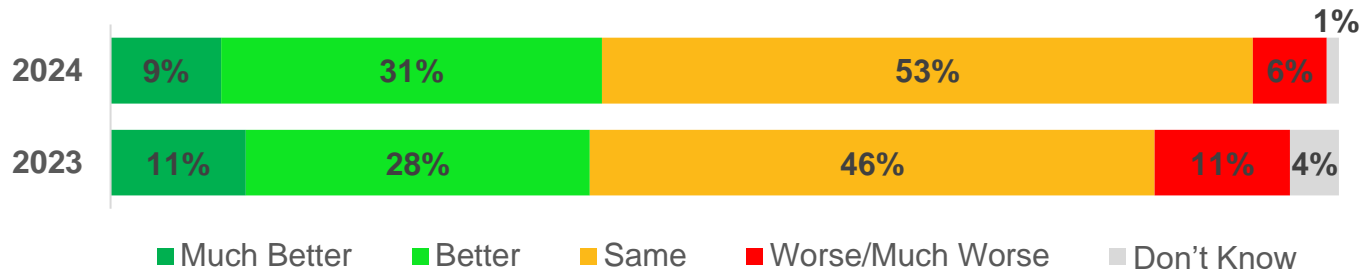


Age	48% 25-44	32% 16-24
Gender	65% Women	32% Men 3% Other/prefer not to say
Location	68% City	18% Shire 9% Elsewhere in Scotland 4% Overseas, 2% Elsewhere in UK
Came with	39% With family	37% With Friends
Group Size	Mode was 2 Mean was 2 27% of groups included children	



Q: How does this year's Christmas Village compare to when you went in previous years? Why do you say that?

While many visitors **appreciated the noticeable improvements** in offerings, atmosphere and overall experience, the **consensus is that the Village remains largely the same** compared to previous years. However, **two in five visitors felt the Village was better/much better**, citing more stalls, diverse food options, enhanced decorations, improved organisation and staff friendliness.



Example comments:

Better:

*Really good stalls this year, more choice of goods at the various stalls.
Overall had a lovely experience and thought a great effort was made can't wait to see what next year brings.*

About the same:

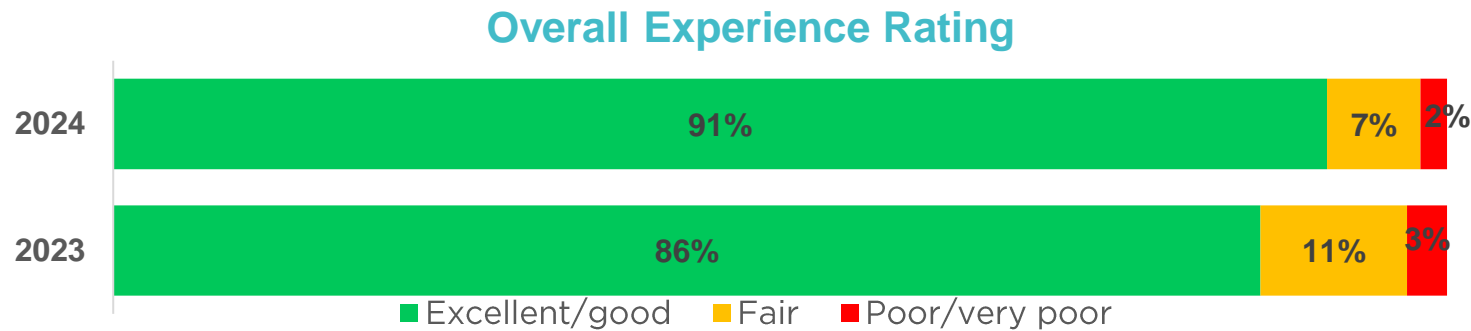
*The same attractions and choice of food and drinks.
Few different food stall but everything else same.*





Q: How would you rate your experience of the Christmas Village? To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

Highest score for 'overall experience' from Research Chamber records – **91% rating as Excellent / Good.** **Almost all (98%)** of visitors said the Village felt like a safe environment and **would like it to be repeated in Aberdeen next year.**



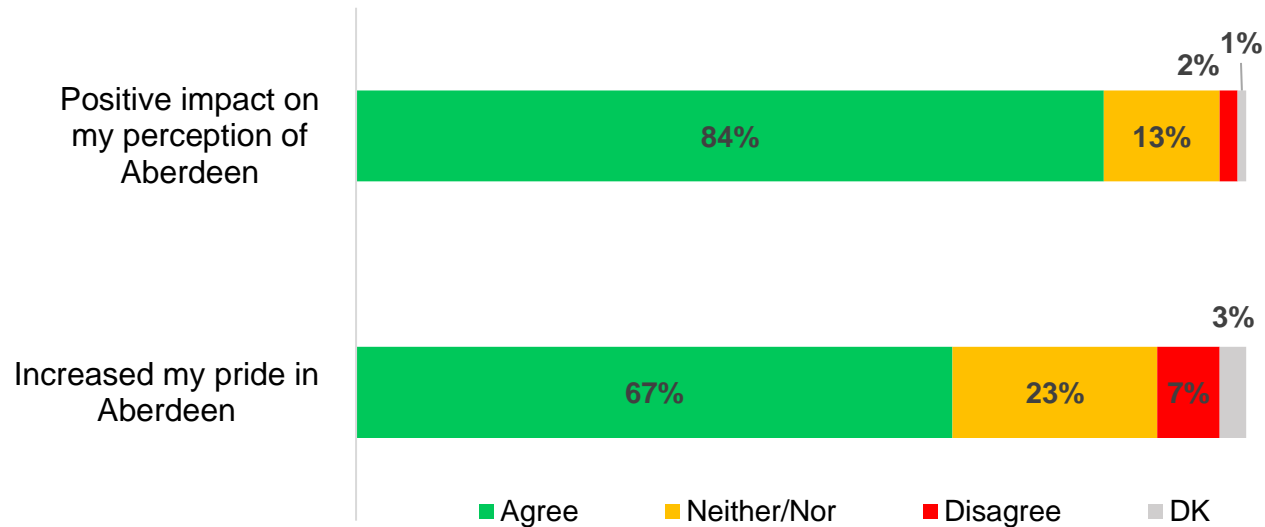
	Agree	Neither/nor	Disagree
The Christmas Village felt like a safe environment	98%	1%	1%
I would like the Christmas Village to be repeated in Aberdeen next year	98%	2%	0%





Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

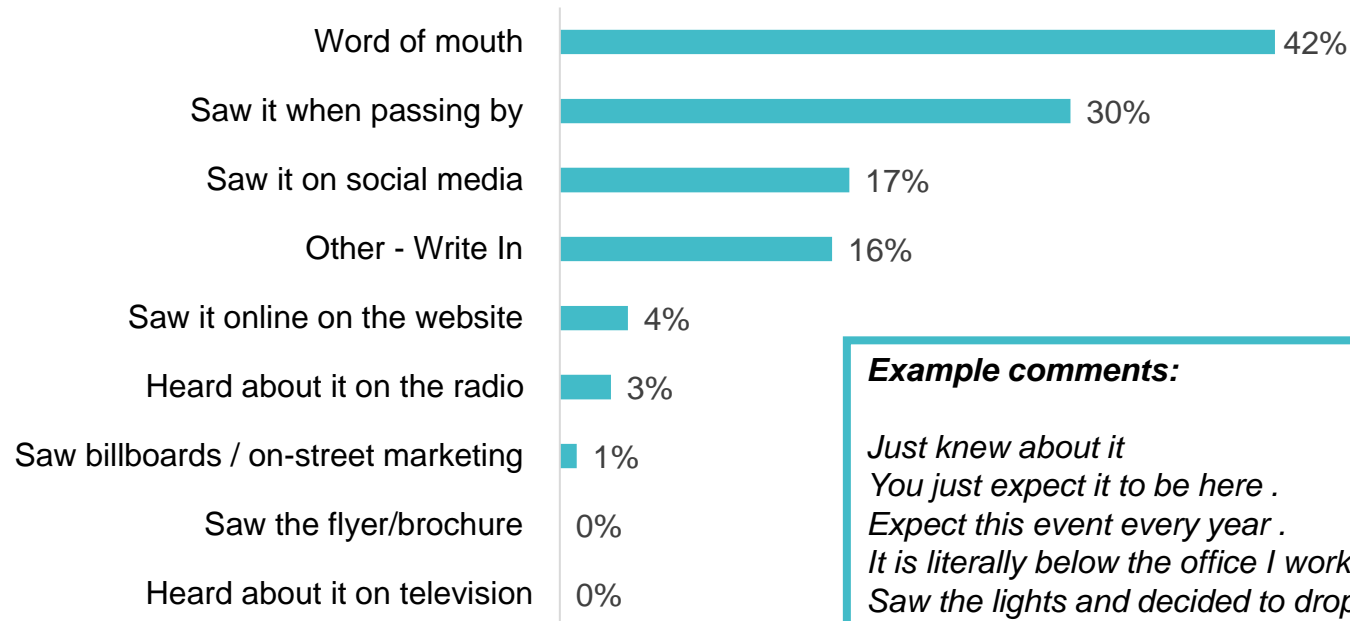
The Village enhanced the perception of the City and increased their pride in Aberdeen.
87% of visitors from 'elsewhere in Scotland/UK/Overseas' said that the village had a **positive impact** on their perception of Aberdeen. (Base 38)





Q: How did you hear about the Christmas Village this year?

Most of the village visitors had heard about it through **word of mouth** and when passing by. Those who selected "other" mentioned general awareness of the Christmas Village as a **well-established tradition**, with many drawn by its annual recurrence, local proximity, or through the local paper.



Example comments:

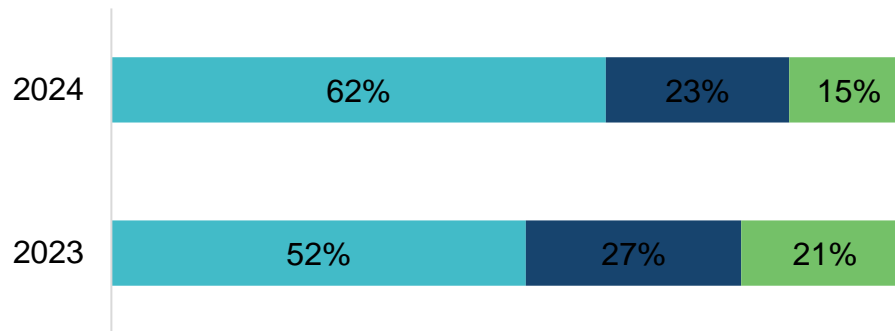
*Just knew about it
You just expect it to be here .
Expect this event every year .
It is literally below the office I work in.
Saw the lights and decided to drop in*





Q: Which of the following statements about coming into Aberdeen City Centre is most true of you?

Three in five visitors came to the city centre primarily for the Village, 23% included it as part of other plans and 15% visited unplanned—highlighting the Aberdeen Christmas Village’s significant role in driving footfall to the city centre.



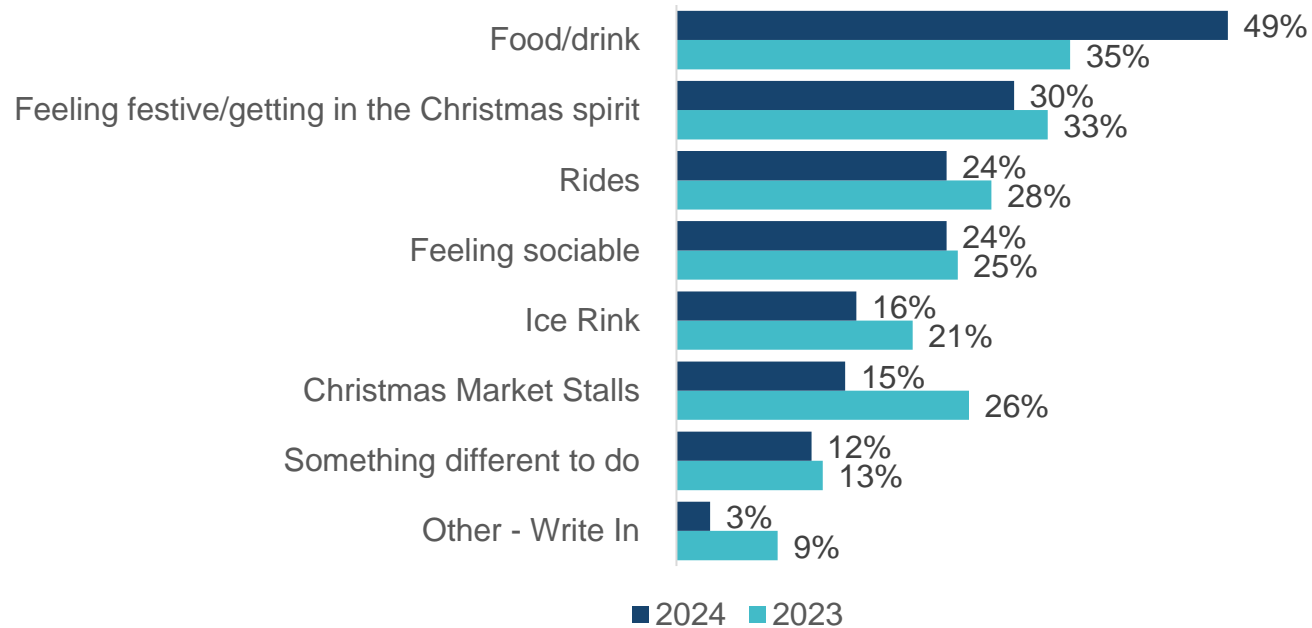
- Village was main reason for coming
- Came to the City Centre & the Village
- Ended up at the Village





Q: What was your main reason for coming to the Aberdeen Christmas Village today?

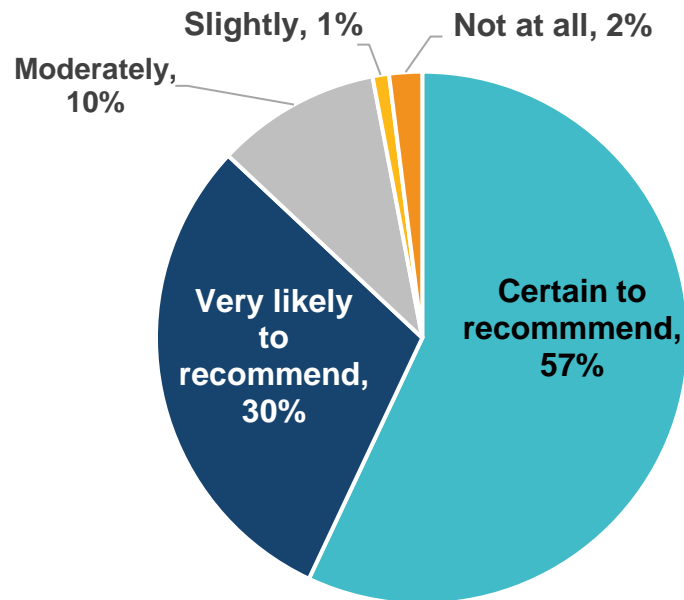
Visitors highlighted **food and drink**, getting into the **Christmas spirit** and the **rides** (consistent with last year's responses) - as their main reason for visiting the Aberdeen Christmas Village. Notably, half of the visitors identified food and drink as their primary reason for attending.





Q: How likely or unlikely are you to recommend friends and family to visit the Christmas Village in the future? Why do you say that?

Nearly nine in ten visitors would recommend the Village for its festive, family-friendly atmosphere and diverse offerings. Many praised its energy, welcoming vibe, cosy scale and relaxed environment, which stood out compared to larger markets. However, some mentioned high costs, limited activities, limited food variety and accessibility challenges as reasons they might be less likely to recommend it.



Example Comments:

Compared to Edinburgh's Christmas market, it offers a more festive and relaxed atmosphere, with plenty of space to sit and enjoy your drink.

Many attractions for children and adults and is a good evening out.

Have already recommended to friends and family...

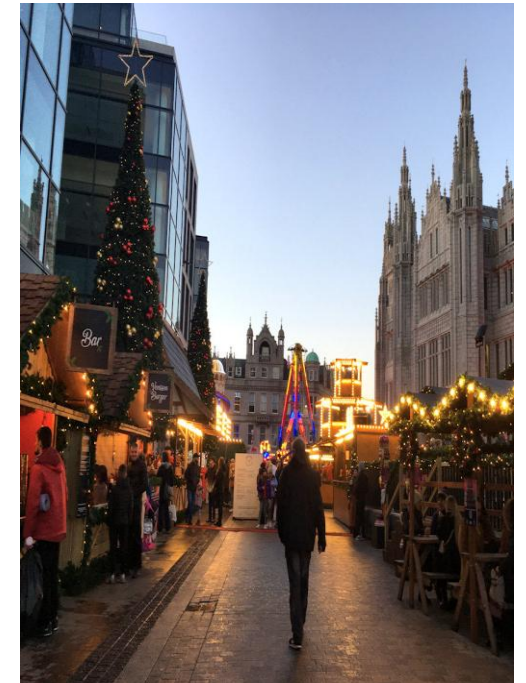
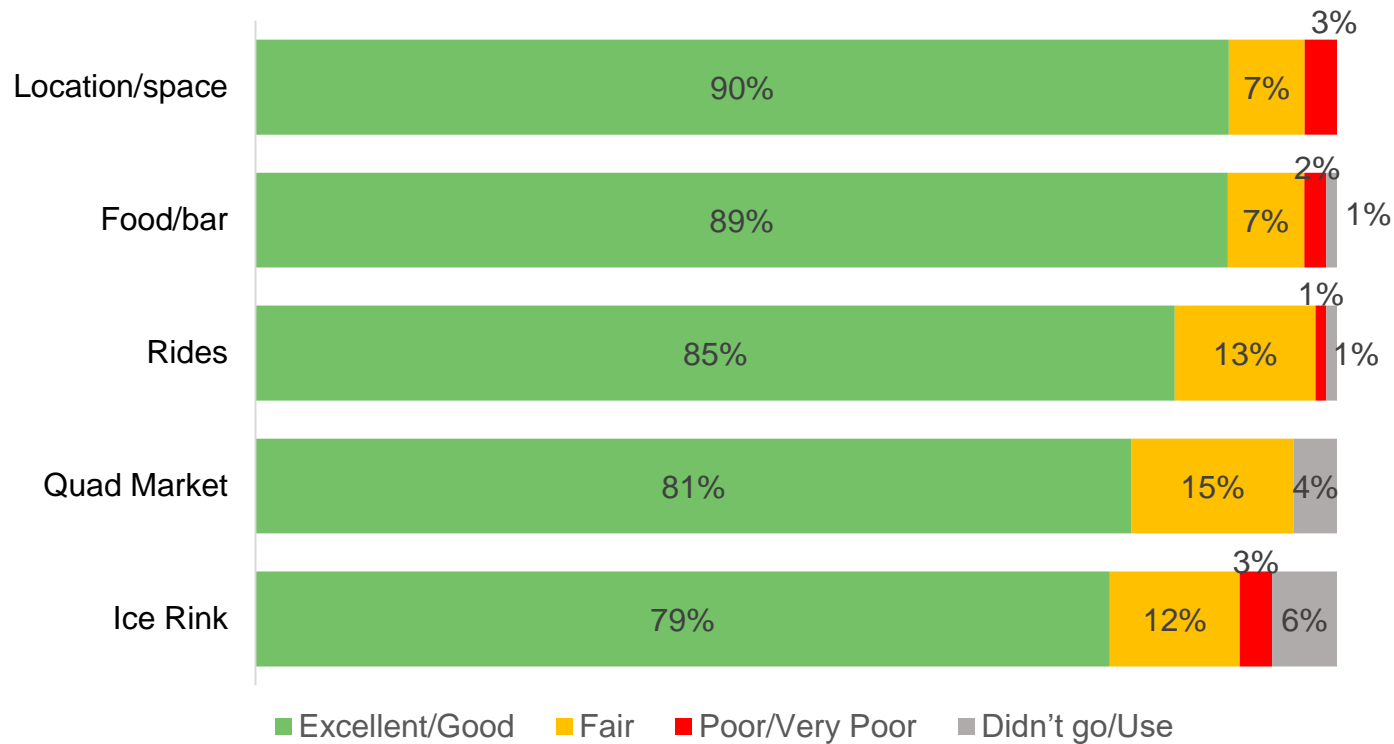
Nice place to go in this dark and cold time of the year

Smaller and more intimate than other cities.



Q: How would you rate your experience of the Christmas Village?

Most visitors had a **positive experience across all Village attractions**, with the location/space and food/bar being the highest-rated, while the ice rink had slightly more mixed feedback.





Q: Please let us know if you have anything else to add, or anything you would like to see at the Christmas Village in the future.

Visitors' feedback has a positive tone – the suggestions imply that the Village is so enjoyed that they would like to see 'more' in all areas. Bigger space, more variety, more rides, longer operating hours, more localised touches – enhancements that build on the experience, making it **more unique and inclusive**.

Location and Space: Preference for Union Terrace Gardens or expanded space to reduce crowding and enhance the experience.	<i>"The location should be bigger." "It was better when it was in Union Terrace; ice skating is too expensive, and the location is too small here." "It should be spread more and use Union Terrace Gardens as well."</i>
Food and Drink: Desire for more variety , including halal, vegan, vegetarian, healthier and alcohol-free options. Concerns about high food prices and small portions.	<i>"I would love to see a vegan hot chocolate offered with dairy-free cream & gelatine-free marshmallows." "More food options for halal and vegetarian. Ferry's wheel price should be reduced."</i>
Rides and Activities: More rides , better ice rink maintenance and additional activities like live music or movie nights. Complaints about high ride prices, especially for children.	<i>"Bring back the big ride and snowball thing from last year. These would make us visit more." "Need more fun activities like in Manchester. Food is smaller and more expensive." "More good rides. More snow, more nice music, live music."</i>
Accessibility and Affordability: Extended opening hours , better promotion, and lower costs for families through discounts or deals.	<i>"Food is expensive for people with kids." "Market should be opened more times a week, leave it open later as well." "Having this type of event is really good, but regarding the economic situation of families these days, coming to the Christmas Village was really expensive."</i>
Atmosphere and Entertainment: Praise for the festive and family-friendly environment, but suggestions for unique local touches , improved music, and magical elements.	<i>"Better entertainment, shows, and kids' competitions, like a dance contest, would make us spend more time and money." "Hope it continues year after year. Better to have it than not." "Please switch off the blaring pop music and play something more magical."</i>



Q: Approximately how much do you expect to spend today on the following?

Although visitors spent more within the Christmas Village this year, overall spending was down compared to last year due to reduced spending on other shopping outside the Village - likely due to 62% of visitors coming to the city centre primarily for the Village (see slide 11).

Spend per 'party group'*	2021	2022	2023	2024	Difference 2024 v 2023
Inside Christmas village	£20	£25	£25	£33	+ £8
Food, drink outside the event	£8	£10	£17	£6	- £11
Other shopping/ anything else	£12	£20	£17	£4	- £13
Overnight Accommodation**	£1	£6	£6	£1	- £5
Local travel, i.e. to get to Aberdeen City Centre	£1	£4	£3	£2	- £1
Outside Christmas Village ***	£22	£40	£43	£13	- £30
Total Spend	£42	£65	£69	£46	- £23

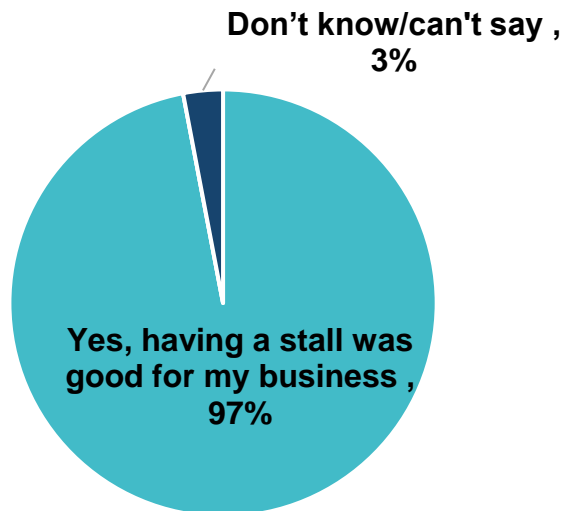
*Out of all respondents, 234 answered this question. Where exact breakdowns couldn't be provided, we asked for estimations /total spend. Based on trends, a share of the total was calculated for each element.
**Overnight accommodation base (1) - £100
***All spending outside the Village
Note: Spend breakdowns were not compulsory. Numbers are rounded





Q: Was having a stall at Aberdeen Christmas Village market good for your business?

Vast majority of village vendors noted that having a stall was good for their business. They believe the Village supports them by boosting visibility, fostering connections and driving sales. Noone answered that having a stall was not good for business.



Why do you say that?	
Increased Brand Exposure	It gave me a chance to reach out to thousands of local people. The brand recognition I was able to establish and develop with locals and those from all over the world was hugely valuable.
Repeat & New Customers	Customers from last year also remember me and have purchased again. New & returning customers and increased visibility in the local area for my business.
Good Sales Performance	Sales totals at the market were double what they were last year. Good footfall meaning our brand was seen by new customers and good sales figures.
Networking & Community	Fantastic organisation, helpful staff and vendors, amazing atmosphere. I met other crafters and managed to speak to customers and promote my products.
Publicity & Marketing Opportunities	The footfall was great, and so was the exposure on social media



Q: How much do you agree or disagree about these Christmas Village stall holder statements?

Stallholders expressed high satisfaction with the Christmas Village, praising its organisation, the Marischal College Quad location and the overall experience. **Many plan to return next year and would recommend participation to others**, reflecting the event's success and value to vendors.



■ Strongly agree ■ Slightly agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Slightly disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Q: Please let us know if you have anything else to add, or anything you would like to see at the Christmas Village in the future.

Stallholder comments valued the festive atmosphere, strong organisation and customer engagement at the Village, suggesting logistical improvements to enhance convenience.

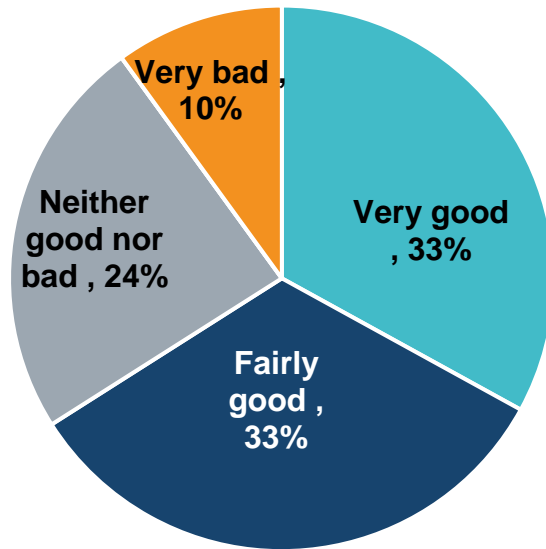
Many look forward to returning next year.

Logistics & Facilities	Communication & Organisation	Market Layout & Event Design
<p>Having to use the back stairs for setting up and shutting down is the worst part of the whole experience. The stairs make things harder for those less able to attend the event.</p> <p>Electricity on the setup days is a must as it's winter. The dark afternoons mean lights are needed to see, plus tools are needed to build shelving and decorate before market days.</p> <p>Could there be the potential for stallholders to park in the multi-car park directly beside the loading bay at the back stairs of the quad? This would stop complaints and help us be on time.</p> <p>It would be great if we could have access to clean toilets nearby.</p>	<p>The site coordinator has been brilliant this year, very attentive to traders and available for queries.</p> <p>The 3-way communication between Codona's, Charlie House, and the vendors results in a lack of clarity for vendors.</p> <p>I missed one day of sales due to weather. I know it's out of our control, but no communication regarding this after a single email on Friday night.</p> <p>The Quad is great for me and my business and I'm looking forward to being back for every weekend next year!</p>	<p>Lots of people attending the Xmas village still don't know there is a market in the Quad. More integration of the Xmas Village with the Quad would improve footfall.</p> <p>Could more mainstream advertising be undertaken to highlight the Quad and the traders in future years? It still surprises me the number of people who come in saying they never knew we existed!</p> <p>Maybe more small businesses. There were a couple of stalls with what seemed to be brought-in toys, which looked tacky and didn't fit the Christmas market vibe.</p>



Q: Thinking of your business, would you say that the Aberdeen Christmas Village was: Why do you say that?

66% of businesses* cited that the Village boosted trade through increased footfall and sales, while others saw neutral / indirect benefits and a small minority (10%) reported no impact.



*Base: 21

Why do you say that...

Very/fairly good for business

*Helps increase trade
Extra people to the hotel
Brings more people to this end of town
Most profitable time of the year for our business, lots of footfall.*

Neither good nor bad for business

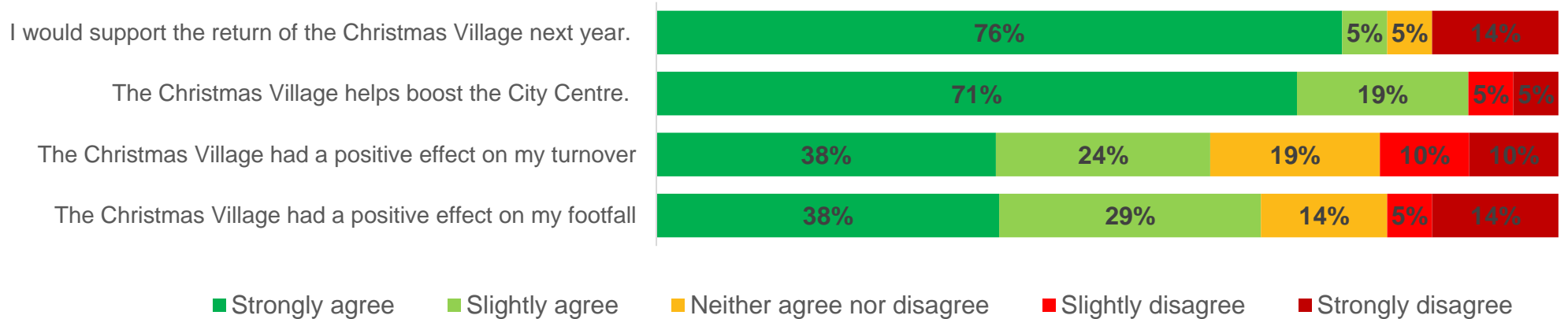
*Can't really tell, however think good for Aberdeen in general.
No evidence of sales as a direct result of the Village, but the Village is a positive for the City's destination reputation.
We have not seen increased revenue. Possibly because our products are similar to the food offerings at the Market.*





Q: How much do you agree or disagree about these Christmas Village City business statements?

City businesses widely acknowledged the Christmas Village as a positive influence, with most supporting its return next year (81%) and agreeing it strengthened the City Centre (90%), while noting boosts in footfall (67%) and turnover (62%).





Q: Please let us know if you have anything else to add, or anything you would like to see at the Christmas Village in the future.

City businesses **praised the Village for boosting footfall**, the improved signage, and diverse vendors. **Suggestions included expanding festivities** and enhancing features, with many valuing the Quad but seeing **potential for greater city-wide integration**.

Enhancements to the Village Experience	Santa's grotto, like the one we used to have in the Bon Accord Centre. More features to get involved with photo backdrops. Would be nice to have a Christmas Tree or a light display in the courtyard of MSQ. Something to drive footfall into the building rather than it all out on Broad Street.
Location and Layout Improvements	Would prefer to see the Christmas Village on Union Street since it's closed...it would make far more sense Would like to see Christmas activity in other parts of the city, specifically UTG and something to drive footfall to the West End. Extend the Winter Illuminations until February; because of the lack of shop window lighting, the city feels unwelcoming at night.
Infrastructure and Logistics	The signage for the Quad was much, much better this year—very difficult to miss! More signage for the toilets, apart from that really great for the area. More event security to help deal with youths around MSQ



Summary: Key insights from Village visitors

1. The typical village visitor was a **young woman from the City who came with family/friends**. They had been to the Village in previous years, but this was their first 2024 visit.

2. While many visitors appreciated the noticeable improvements in offerings, atmosphere and overall experience, the **consensus is that the Village remains largely the same** compared to previous years. However, **two in five visitors felt the Village was better/much better**, citing more stalls, diverse food options, enhanced decorations, and improved organisation and staff friendliness.

3. Highest score for 'overall experience' from Research Chamber records – **91% rating as Excellent / Good**. **Almost all** (98%) of visitors said the Village felt like a safe environment and **would like it to be repeated in Aberdeen next year**.

4. **Village enhanced the perception of the City and increased visitor pride in Aberdeen**. 87% of visitors from 'elsewhere in Scotland/UK/Overseas' said that the village had a positive impact on their perception of Aberdeen. (Base 38)

5. Most of the village visitors had heard about it through **word of mouth** and when passing by. Those who selected "other" mentioned general awareness of the **Christmas Village as a well-established tradition**, with many drawn by its annual recurrence, local proximity, or through the local paper.

6. **Three in five visitors came to the city centre primarily for the Village**, 23% included it as part of other plans and 15% visited unplanned—highlighting the Aberdeen Christmas Village's significant role in driving footfall to the city centre.



Continued:

7. Visitors highlighted **food and drink**, getting into the **Christmas spirit** and the **rides** (consistent with last year's responses) - as their main reason for visiting the Aberdeen Christmas Village. Notably, half of the visitors identified food and drink as their primary reason for attending.

8. **Nearly nine in ten visitors would recommend the Village** for its festive, family-friendly atmosphere and diverse offerings. Many praised its energy, welcoming vibe, cosy scale and relaxed environment, which stood out compared to larger markets. However, some mentioned high costs, limited activities, limited food variety and accessibility challenges as reasons they might be less likely to recommend it.

9. Most visitors had a **positive experience** across all Village feature, with the location/space and food/bar being the highest-rated, while the ice rink had slightly more mixed feedback.

10. Visitors' feedback has a positive tone - the suggestions imply that the Village is so enjoyed that they would like to see 'more' in all areas. Bigger space, more variety, more rides, longer operating hours, more localised touches - enhancements that build on the experience, making it **more unique and inclusive**.

11. Although visitors spent more within the Christmas Village this year, overall spending was down compared to last year due to reduced spending on other shopping outside the Village - likely due to 62% of visitors coming to the city centre primarily for the Village.



Summary: Key insights from Village vendors / City businesses

Village vendors

12. Vast majority of village vendors believed that **having a stall was good for their business**. They believe the Village supports them by boosting visibility, fostering connections and driving sales.

13. Stallholders expressed **high satisfaction with the Christmas Village**, praising its organisation, the Marischal College Quad location and the overall experience. Many plan to return next year and would recommend participation to others, reflecting the event's success and value to vendors.

14. Stallholders valued the festive atmosphere, strong organisation and customer engagement at the Village, suggesting logistical improvements to enhance convenience. **Many look forward to returning next year.**

City businesses (low base)

15. **66% of businesses cited that the Village boosted trade** through increased footfall and sales, while others saw neutral / indirect benefits and a small minority (10%) reported no impact.

16. City businesses widely acknowledged the Christmas Village as a positive influence, with most supporting its return next year (81%) and agreeing it strengthened the City Centre (90%), while noting boosts in footfall (67%) and turnover (62%).

17. **City businesses praised the Village for boosting footfall**, the improved signage, and diverse vendors. **Suggestions included expanding festivities** and enhancing features, with many valuing the Quad but seeing potential for **greater city-wide integration.**



Conclusions & Considerations





Conclusions

Strong Overall Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The Village is a cherished event that enhances Aberdeen's festive atmosphere, city pride, and reputation.✓ Visitors, vendors, and city businesses widely support its continuation, with many recognising its role in driving footfall and boosting local trade.
Visitor Satisfaction & Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Visitors enjoyed the safe, family-friendly festive atmosphere, with food and drink as the primary draw.✓ Feedback highlights areas for improvement, including affordability, variety in attractions and accessibility.
Vendor & Business Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Vendors appreciated the Village's organisation, festive ambiance and customer interaction.✓ Businesses acknowledged its positive impact but noted indirect benefits for some and logistical challenges for others.
Economic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Visitor spending within the Village increased, but overall city spending saw a decline, signalling a need to balance Village success with broader city engagement.
Event Expansion / Logistical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ There is strong interest in expanding the Village to Union Terrace Gardens and the West End, with stakeholders suggesting better integration with city-wide attractions to maximise impact.✓ Recurring themes around accessibility, parking, transport links and space constraints, with calls for extended lighting and further additional signage.



Considerations

Expand and Integrate with the City	Consider extending the Village to Union Terrace Gardens and the West End, integrating it better with other city attractions to increase footfall and create a more widespread festive atmosphere.
Diversify Offerings & Improve Affordability	Introducing a wider variety of activities, stalls and attractions could cater to different interests and age groups, while also addressing feedback around affordability and variety.
Improve Accessibility	Enhancing parking options and accessibility could make the Village more inclusive and improve the overall visitor experience.
Extend the Festive Atmosphere	Expanding the Winter Illuminations and adding more signage and lighting throughout the city could help make Aberdeen feel even more welcoming and vibrant during the holiday season.
Support for Vendors	Continuing to build strong relationships with vendors, while addressing logistical challenges, could help ensure their continued success and satisfaction at the event.



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