

Business Networking in the Calder Valley:

Sowerby Bridge

16th February, 2018

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1. Executive Summary

- A survey was conducted in January-February 2017 to assess interest in and gather ideas for a revitalised business network or association for the Sowerby Bridge area.
- 124 businesses responded to the survey, representing a broad range of sectors, locations and business types: 26 (21%) via email, 22 (18%) via social media, 77 (61%) on paper
- 10% (13) of respondents had attended a networking event in the Sowerby Bridge area in the previous year. The events were useful for meeting and connecting with local businesses, and also for peer support, collaboration, promotion and inspiration.
- 90% (111) of respondents had not attended a networking event in the Sowerby Bridge area in the previous year. The most frequent reason given for not attending was: 'not aware of events' (71%).
- When asked to choose three of a list of eight business networking activities that would appeal to them, the top responses were a Social Media Group (52%), Business Support (49%), Informal Networking (49%) and Town/Group/Joint Promotions & Events (48%). A social media group was the top choice in particular for the hospitality sector, businesses with shopfronts/retail premises, and also businesses under 10 years old. Business support was a particular need of the arts and creative sectors, the manufacturing and skilled manual sectors, lone workers, home workers and new businesses (2-5yrs).
- When asked to choose three of a list of nine potential benefits of business networking, the top responses were 'Support to Develop and Grow my Business' (52%), 'Promotion of My Business' (52%) and a 'Stronger Business Community' (48%). Comments suggested that respondents felt such benefits could be achieved through better awareness of and connections between local businesses who could collaborate to attract visitors and trade to the area, and also trade with each other.
- Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were found to be the most popular days for meetings/events. Early evening was the most popular time for meetings/events. However, the Retail/Town Centre and Hospitality sectors also favoured breakfast meetings.
- Twenty-two respondents offered specific support to run a business network, such as venues, design, marketing, printing or specific business support expertise.
- UCVR will use information provided by businesses in Sowerby Bridge to facilitate a new business network for the area tailored to local needs and run by local businesses.

2. Background & Method

Background: UCVR has been commissioned by Calderdale Borough Council to support business networks along the Calder Valley, particularly in flood affected areas (Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Luddenden, Sowerby Bridge, Brighouse and Elland). To understand how local businesses can benefit from business networks or associations, and how UCVR and the borough can best support business networks, UCVR is conducting a series of surveys along the Calder Valley. Following a successful survey of 136 businesses in the Todmorden area in late 2017, the survey was repeated in Sowerby Bridge. Sowerby Bridge has a number of community groups and business networks which meet locally, and has previously had a traders association centred on high street businesses, but currently does not have an inclusive business association or network dedicated to the benefit of the local area.

Aims: The aim of the survey was to collect input and contact details from businesses interested in a revitalised business network or association for the Sowerby Bridge area. The survey aimed to collect information about preferred activities, anticipated benefits and barriers to participation and to identify individuals willing to offer support to a new network. UCVR will communicate the survey results to individuals identified to lead a new network in the area, who will use the information provided by businesses in Sowerby Bridge to ensure that a new network is tailored to local needs and run by local businesses.

Questionnaire Design: The Todmorden survey was revised slightly to suit the area, in collaboration with UCVR's board, UCVR's lead on business networking and with input from those involved in running current and previous groups in the area. The survey was also presented to the Sowerby Bridge development board. A draft questionnaire was piloted on a small number of businesses in the area.

Distribution: All types of business were included in the target audience (e.g. limited companies, partnerships, sole traders, social enterprises and cooperatives). However, participation was not restricted and all those with an interest in networking with the business community in Sowerby Bridge were encouraged to participate. The distribution area covered the Sowerby Bridge ward, Ripponden and surrounds, Warley to Wainstalls, Friendly, Copley, Sowerby Village, Norland, Triangle and Pye Nest.

The questionnaire was distributed via email and via social media, to:

- Calderdale Borough's email contact list for business support (created through flood support and other business support requests; c. 527 businesses in the areas listed above)
- Local facebook pages (e.g. Sowerby Bridge Chit Chat, Sowerby Bridge Business Network, Ripponden United)
- Twitter (@UCVR_ @BizNet_UCVR @DillonResearch and a number of retweets)
- Forwarding of the link from local businesses to existing networks (e.g. Rotary Club, GoosED).

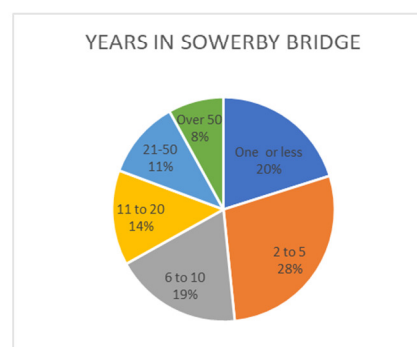
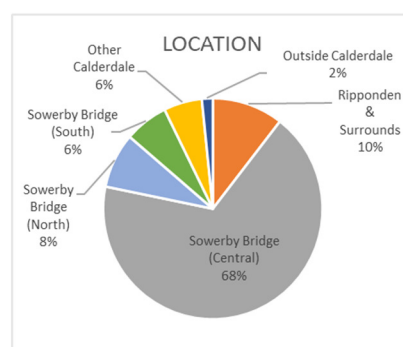
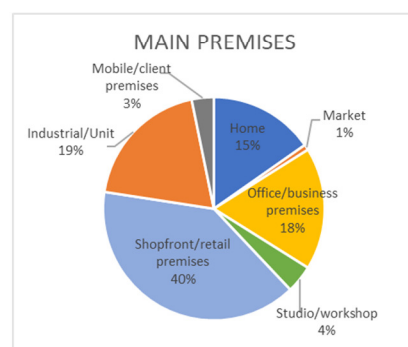
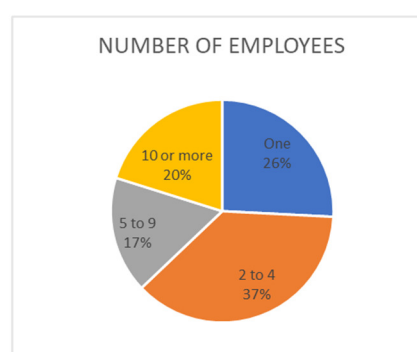
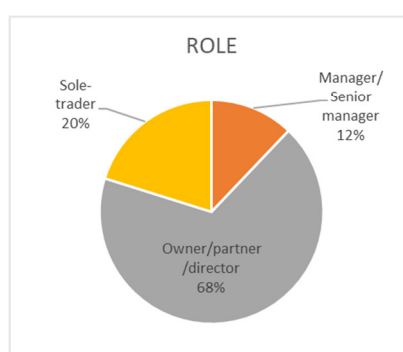
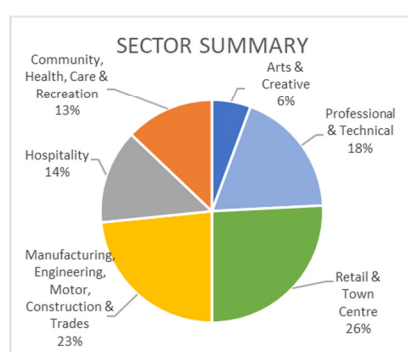
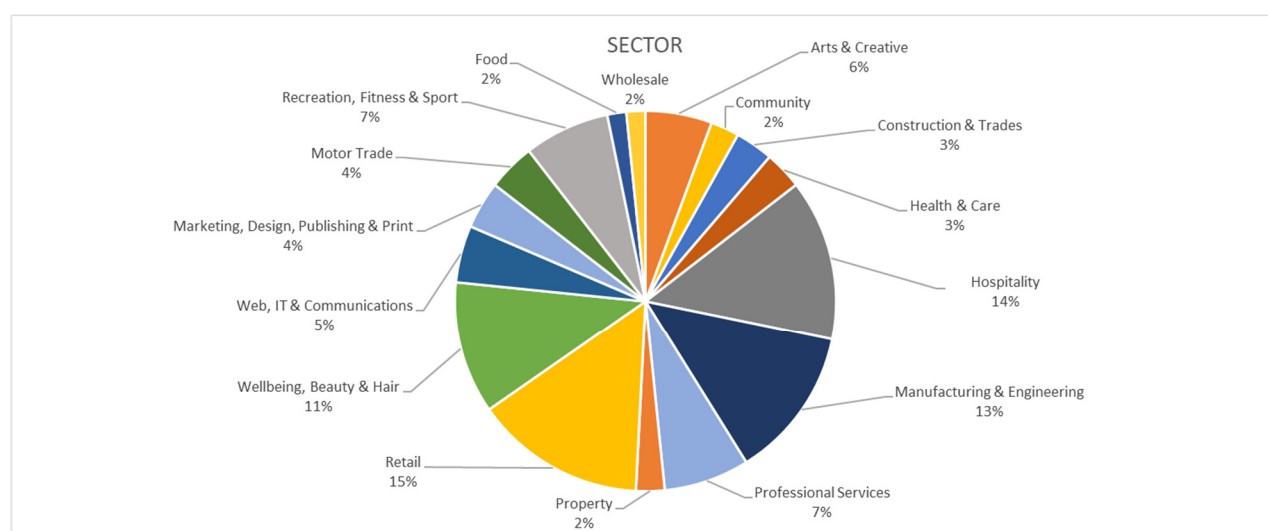
Visible businesses were also visited on foot, with a focus on the town centre, but also including areas listed above.

The survey was open from 23rd January to 7th February 2017.

3. Participants

124 businesses responded to the questionnaire, representing a broad range of sectors, locations and business types: 26 (21%) email, 22 (18%) social media, 77 (61%) on paper.

- Retail/town centre and hospitality businesses accounted for 40% of responses, with manufacturing, engineering, motor, construction and trades sectors accounting for 23% of responses
- Most respondents (68%) were business owners/partners/directors, and 20% were sole traders
- Over half (57%) worked in businesses with fewer than five employees (a quarter overall were lone workers).
- Twenty-five (20%) businesses with 10 or more employees responded, including some of the largest employers.
- Three-quarters (77%) of respondents were based in business premises, but the remainder were in less visible, mobile or less permanent workplaces (e.g. home).
- Two-thirds of respondents were based in central Sowerby Bridge (68%). However, all surrounding areas were also represented.
- Nearly half of respondents represented new businesses (48%, 5 or less years). However, a number of businesses (8%) had been based in the area for over 50 years.



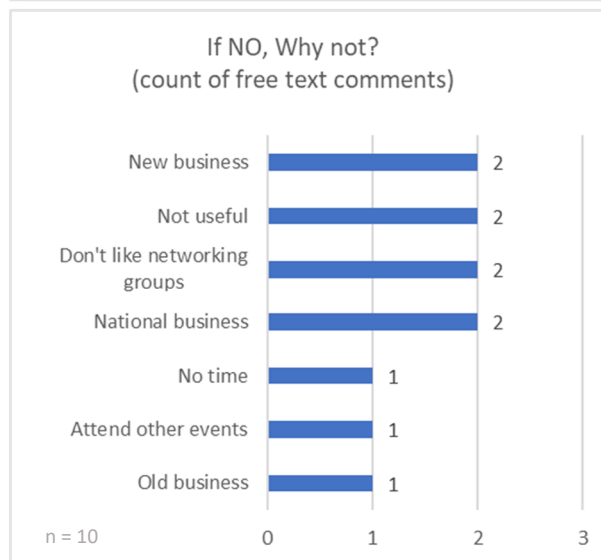
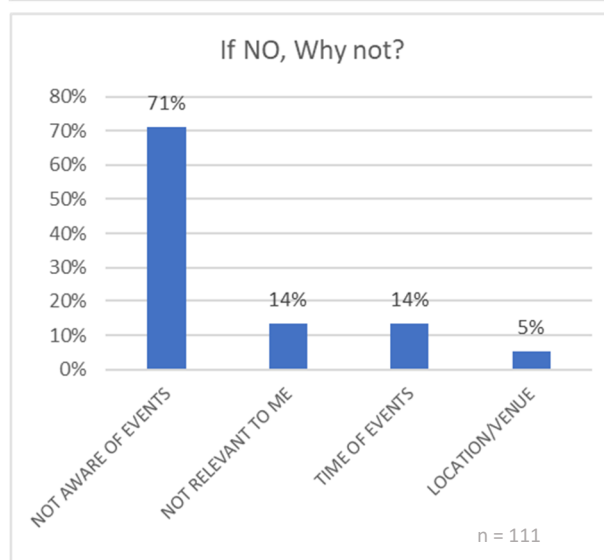
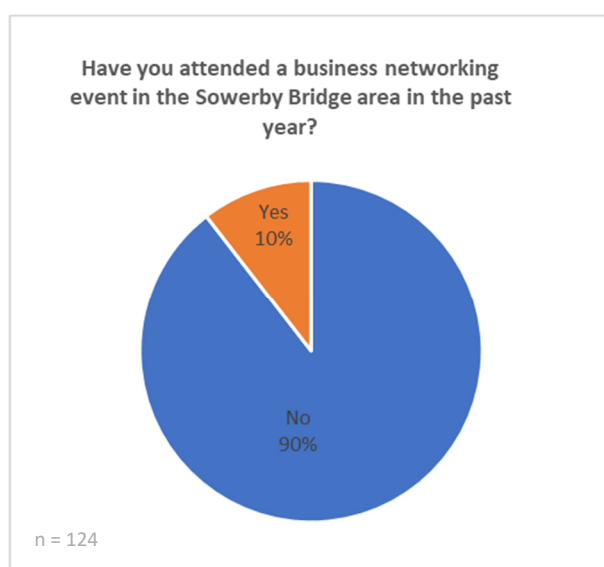
4. Experiences of Business Networking in Sowerby Bridge

10% of respondents attended a networking event in the area in the previous year (13 in total)

- Respondents had attended: Fire & Water, Perfect People, BNI, Rise & Shine (Ripponden), Calderdale & Kirklees Manufacturers Association, council events, a Courier awards evening and Sowerby Bridge Traders Group.
- The events were felt useful for meeting and connecting with local businesses, and also peer support, collaboration, promotion and inspiration.
- Businesses that had recently attended events were proportionally older, smaller and from retail or professional services. No hospitality or arts/creative respondents had attended recent events for businesses.

90% of respondents had not attended a networking event in the area in the previous year.

- Of four choices, the most frequent reason for not attending was 'not aware of events' (17%). 'Time of events' (14%) and 'not relevant to me' (14%), were also frequent reasons for not attending, whereas location/venue (5%) was a concern for only a small number of people.
- The time of events may be a particular barrier for retail/town centre and the smallest businesses (Appendix 1).
- A number of new businesses were not aware of events or had not had a chance to link in yet.
- Local networking may be perceived to be less relevant to larger or older businesses, particularly in the manufacturing group of sectors.
- A small number of respondents said that they do not attend networking events because they do not like them or find them useful (e.g. the format or content of meetings)



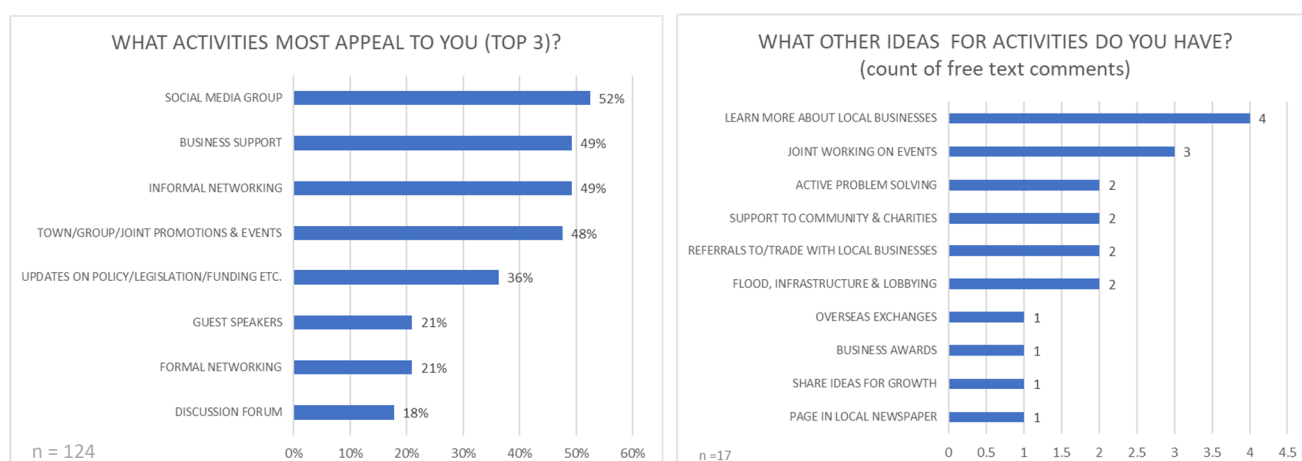
5. Business Networking Activities

When asked to choose three of a list of eight business networking activities that would appeal to them, the top three responses were a Social Media Group (52%), Business Support (49%), Informal Networking (49%) and Town/Group/Joint Promotions & Events (48%).

- A Social Media Group was the top choice for the hospitality sector, businesses with shopfronts/retail premises, and also businesses under 10 years old (see Appendix 2).
- Less frequently chosen were Guest Speakers (21%), Discussion Forums (18%) and Formal Networking (21%)
- Business Support (49%) and Updates on Policy/Legislation/Funding (36%) were more appealing to some businesses than other. Business Support was the top choice for the Arts & Creative and Manufacturing... sector groups, and the latter also frequently chose Updates (see Appendix 2).
- Lone workers, home workers and new businesses (2-5yrs) also frequently chose Business Support.
- Town/Group/Joint Promotions and Events was chosen frequently by the Retail/Town Centre sector, and also by smaller and very recent (<1yr) businesses.

When asked for other ideas for activities, comments reiterated support for active engagement and problem solving in the local business community, such as visiting or showcasing local businesses, joint working on events, promoting to each other and supporting community groups and charities.

- Two of the largest businesses expressed the need for discussions or lobbying, particularly around flooding and infrastructure. While these businesses are likely to network nationally and internationally, their interest in a local network might be in contributing to discussions around these concerns.



Be pro-active, not just sit and talk

Promote local businesses trading with each other

It would be great if you could showcase a business at each event - perhaps something interactive where people can try out a service or product

Soundboard growth network. Sharing ideas for growth.

Local community activities - charity walks, group open days

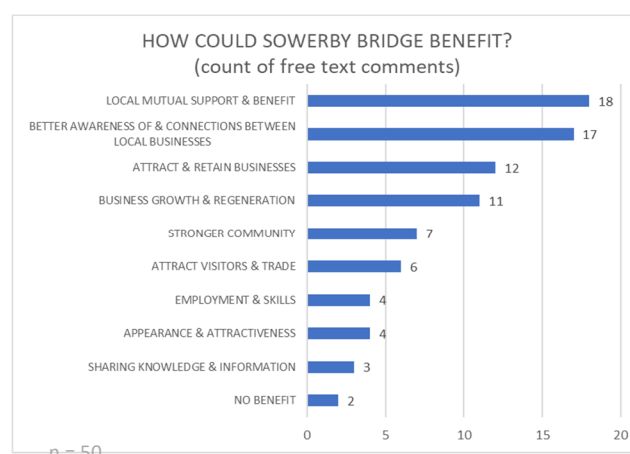
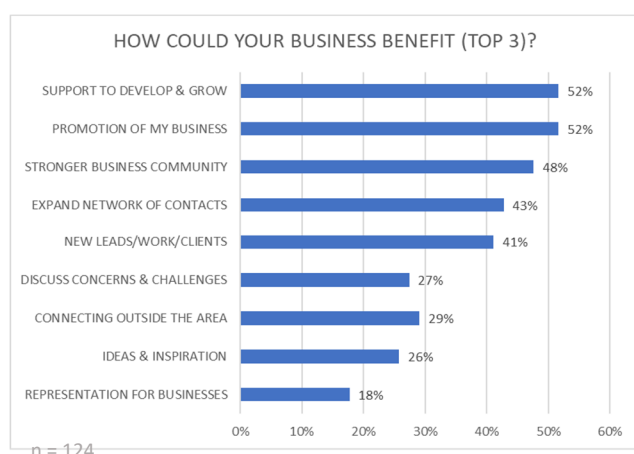
6. Business Networking Benefits

When asked to choose three of a list of nine potential benefits of business networking, the top responses were 'Support to Develop and Grow' (52%), 'Promotion of My Business' (52%) and a 'Stronger Business Community' (48%).

- These were particular priorities of businesses in Shopfront/Retail premises, and smaller (2-4 employee) businesses (see Appendix 3)
- Other top responses were 'Expanding my Network of Contacts' (43%) and 'New Work/Clients/Leads' (41%), particularly for the Professional & Technical sectors, home workers and younger businesses (2-5yrs).
- There were other slight variations in perceived benefits of networking across business types and sectors. For example, the Manufacturing... group of sectors favoured 'Connecting Outside the Area' relatively more frequently than others.

Comments suggested that respondents felt that the above benefits could be achieved through better awareness of and connections between local businesses who could collaborate to attract visitors and trade, but also trade with each other.

- Attracting new businesses to the area, and being able to retain existing businesses, in order to enhance the choice and offer to visitors was also mentioned, as was the need to improve the look and feel of the area.
- Although the larger and manufacturing businesses might trade and network nationally, one mentioned the opportunity for local businesses to market to them (e.g. hospitality and accommodation).



If the local businesses are not aware of each other, they'll most likely buy or sell their products to other businesses/clients outside of Sowerby Bridge and therefore Sowerby Bridge loses out.

There are many great businesses already in the area and a wealth of knowledge and experience. People will be able to learn and support each other and may help to create new opportunities which weren't previously thought of. This could in turn attract an audience outside the area and raise the town's profile.

It could really make businesses stronger and drive more sales to the local

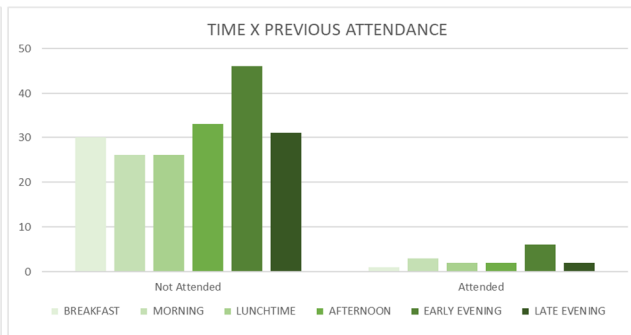
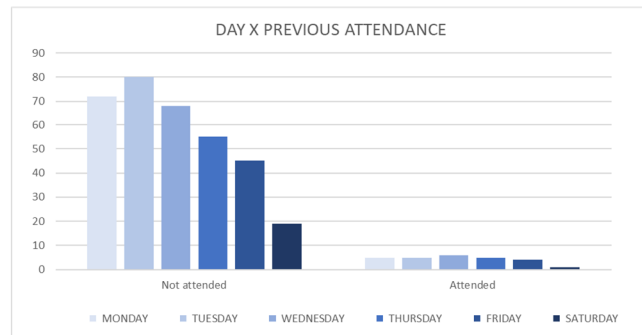
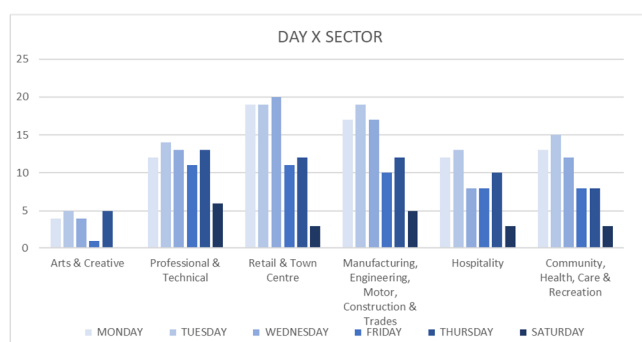
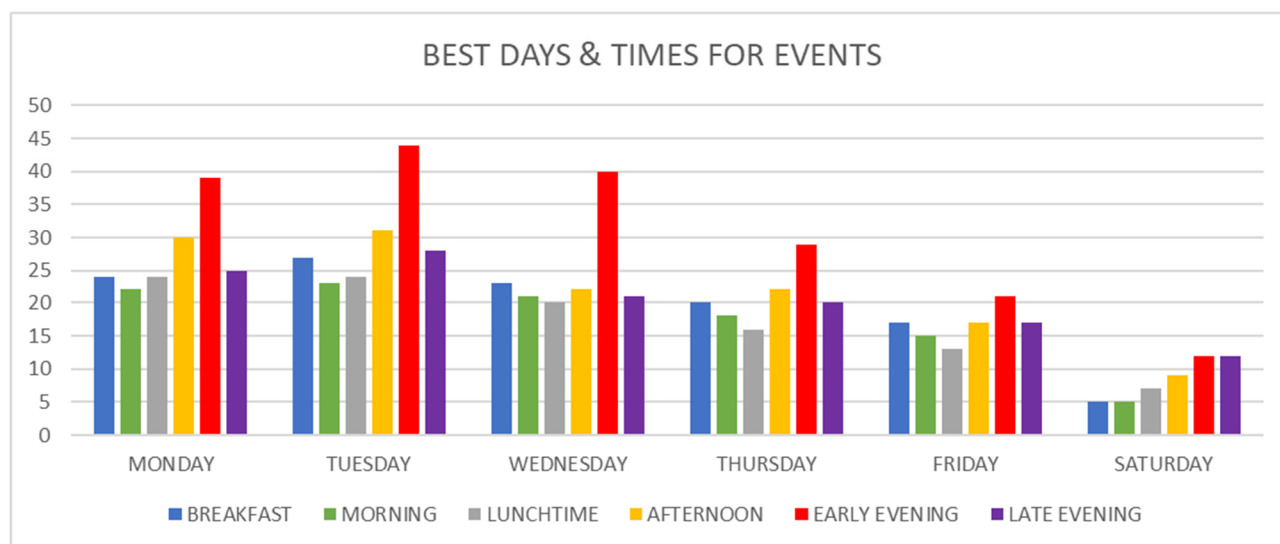
Greater pride in the community

A stronger community to improve the look and feel of the area

7. Preferred Days and Time

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are the most popular days for meetings/events. Early evening is the most popular time for meetings/events.

- However, even the most popular time slots represent less than half of respondents.
- Different sectors differed slightly in their preferred times, with breakfast meetings preferred by some in the Retail/Town Centre and Hospitality sectors.



All charts show frequency of responses ($n = 124$; multiple responses)

8. Supporters

A pool of 22 survey respondents offered specific support to a new business network or association in Sowerby Bridge. Support offered included venues, catering, design, printing, activities (e.g. a site visit), meeting support, expertise in specific areas of business support, promotion and social media. Representatives from number of local community groups, a local marketing publication and a nearby business network responded to the survey.

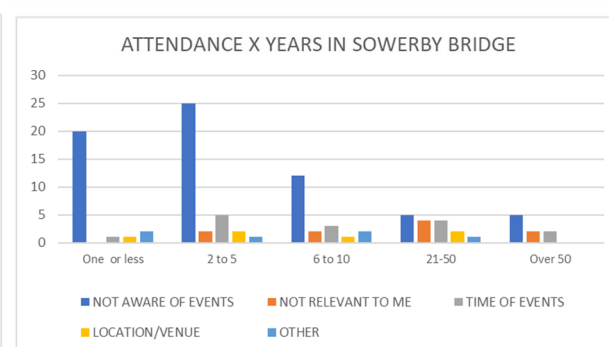
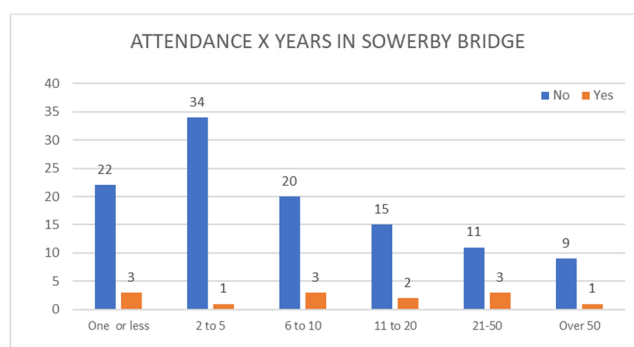
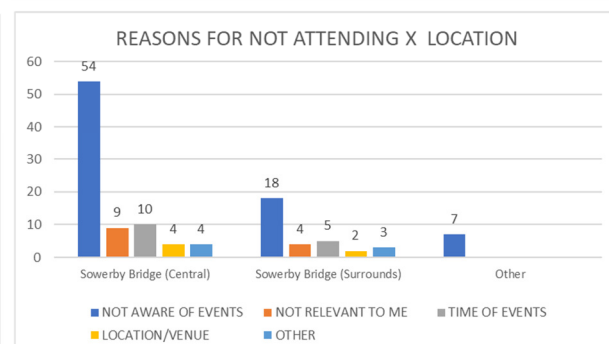
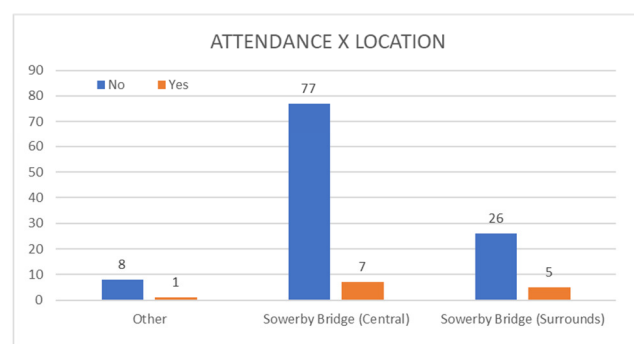
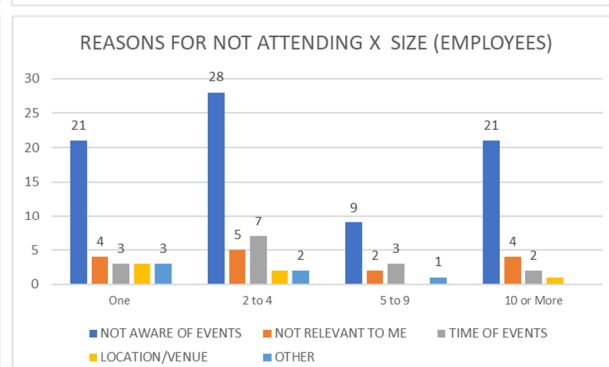
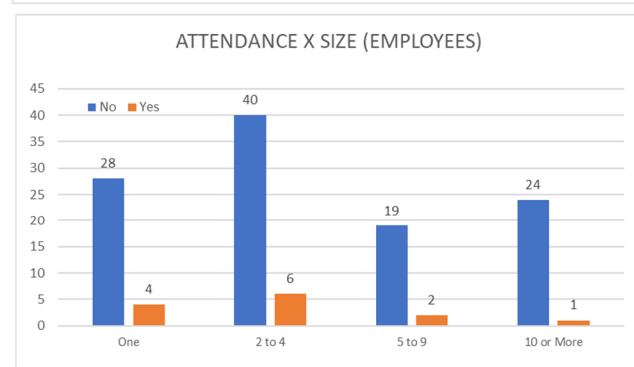
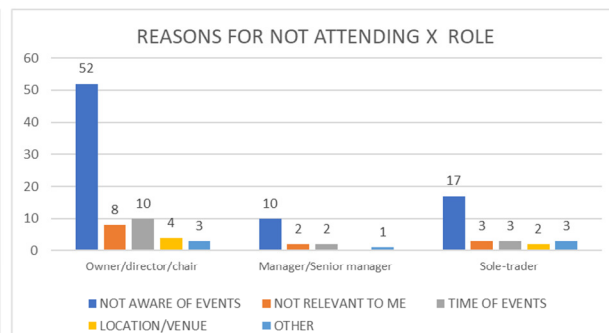
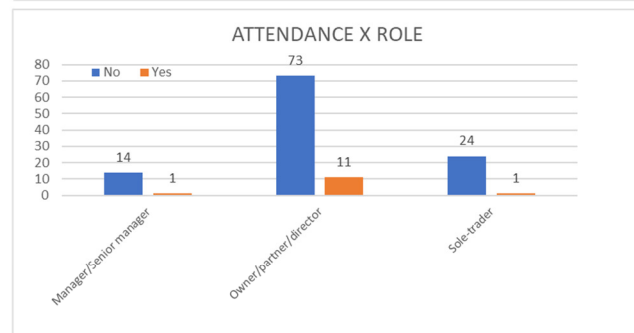
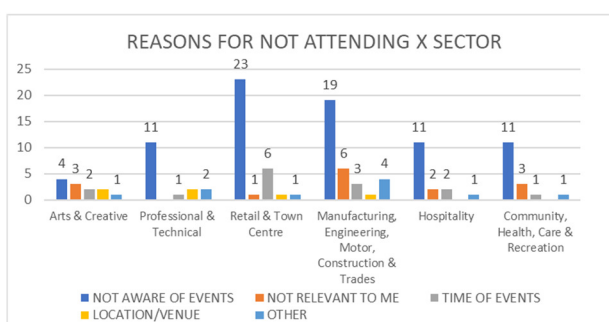
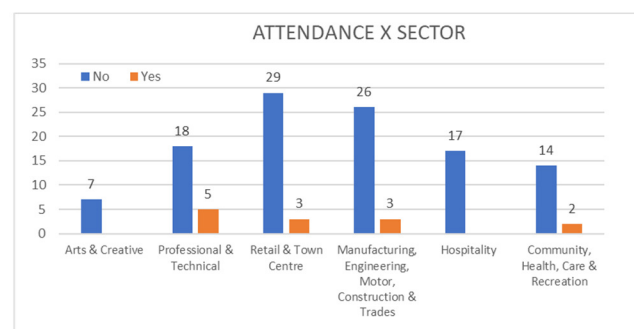
9. Acknowledgements

This report was prepared for UCVR by Dr Cath Dillon, an independent research consultant based in Calderdale. Cath is a certified member of the Market Research Society and a member of the Social Research Association, and works within the guidelines of these organisations.

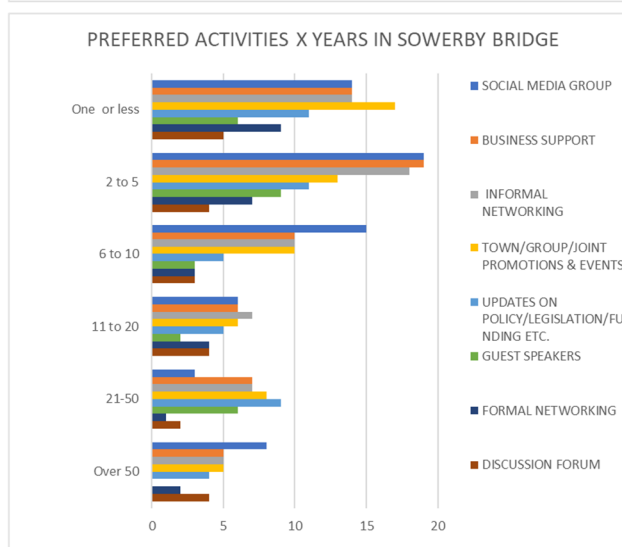
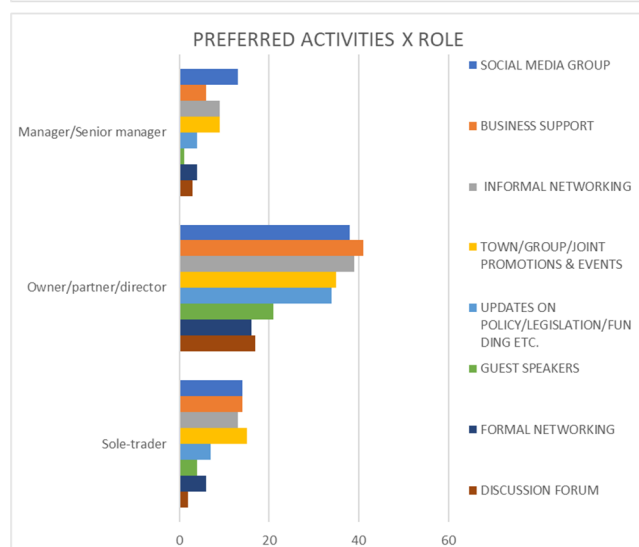
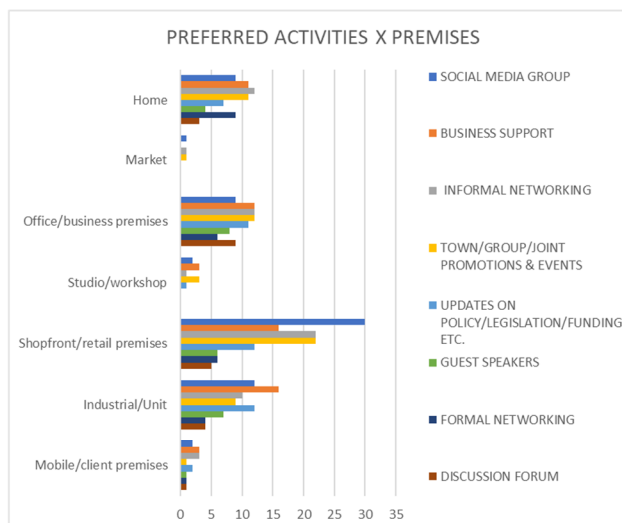
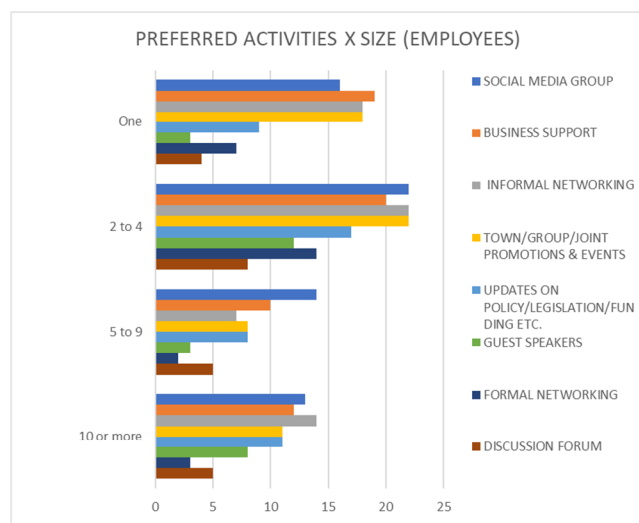
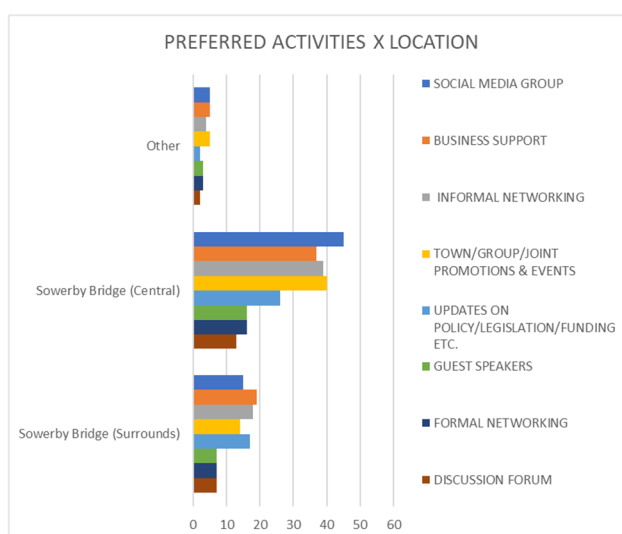
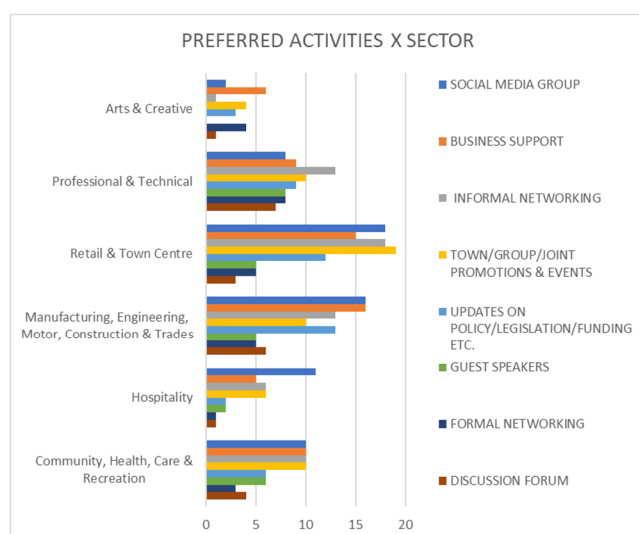
Thanks to the Stephen Curry, Sarah Moss and members of the Sowerby Bridge development board for sharing their thoughts on business networking in Sowerby Bridge during the development of the research. Thanks to Do Good Digital CIC, Customology and Stonehouse Logic Ltd. for piloting the questionnaire and assisting with distribution.

With thanks to the many businesses and organisations in Sowerby Bridge who took time out to express their interest and contribute their ideas.

Appendix 1: Networking Experiences by Subgroup



Appendix 2: Preferred Activities by Subgroup



Appendix 3: Perceived Benefits by Subgroup

