

The Retail Support Initiative Update

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update for Members on the operation of the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) during 2015/16 and approve the operating criteria for 2016/17.

Public Interest

Supporting and helping to improve the retail offer in the towns and villages across Area East.

Recommendations:

- (1) To note the report
- (2) To approve the RSI scheme for 2016/17

Background

Members will be aware the RSI was originally set up in 2006 (following a pilot which started the previous year in Wincanton & Bruton). For many years it has proved to be an effective way of supporting and engaging with a wide range of retail and service outlets across the Area. Throughout this period regular performance reports have been brought back to this Committee.

In May 2009 Members considered expanding the eligibility to provide cross sector support for small businesses in Area East. Whilst the merit of widening the criteria was supported, it was also recognised that this could not be achieved within the limited budget without diluting the benefit to the retail sector because of the large number of businesses employing 5 or less who would have been eligible. As a result, the focus of supporting retail/service sector businesses operating in town centres/villages has continued.

A number of revisions were made to the scheme for 2012/13 and these included:

- The inclusion of farm shops and 'exceptional' support for projects which add to the viability of town/village centres (loyalty schemes or similar)
- Inclusion of grant assistance towards half the actual payment due for business rates for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first two years of trading
- Removal of interior works and equipment purchase for new businesses
- Removal of promotion/marketing support
- Removal of the Tourism Accommodation funding

These revisions have continued to form the basis for the operation of the scheme until Autumn 2014 when a 'top-up' scheme for Wincanton was implemented - this had been approved at the Area East Committee in July 2014

Operation

Appendix 2 shows a breakdown of the six grants awarded during 2015/16 by type and Location.

Since April 2015, 34 RSI information packs have been sent out. Whilst these will not necessarily all translate to full eligible applications this interest is encouraging.

A copy of the eligibility criteria is attached at Appendix 1.

It is now suggested to incorporate an additional element to assist with setting up a website page. This would allow High Street/Retail businesses the opportunity to expand their business. A maximum grant of £500 based on 50% of overall costs, this is to be included in the overall grant amount of maximum £1500.

The scheme of delegation limit is £1,000, in line with other grants and the Council's scheme of delegation which should remain in place. Grant requests can be considered at any time in consultation with the Chairman and Ward Member(s). Applications for amounts over £1000 would continue to be considered by Area East Committee.

A combination of face to face visits and email are used to remind businesses about the scheme annually and a leaflet drop will be undertaken during the Summer.

As part of our more general monitoring of our principal retail centres we undertake shop occupancy surveys. The table below shows the most recent shop surveys conducted in Wincanton, Castle Cary and Bruton with details of the number of shops open and empty units within the towns.

Town	Date	Number of open retail units	Number of closed retail units
Wincanton	April 2016	71	13
Castle Cary	May 2016	54	5
Bruton	May 2016	26	4

The graph at appendix 3 shows occupancy trends since February 2011 in the three towns. Given the high level of currently vacant units in Wincanton, Members may wish to consider extending those units which are eligible for the higher level of grant in Wincanton to include:

- 4 High Street – formally the White Horse
- New Unit corner of Carrington Way
- 15 High Street – formally HSBC
- 59 High Street – formally Nanny Jacks
- 3 South Street – Formally Thomas Property Sales

Financial Implications

If Members chose to approve the £1,689.31 award recommended in the previous report the remaining budget is shown in the table below:

	Revenue element	Capital	Wincanton 'top-up'
Unallocated budget 2015/16 as at April 2016*	£8547	£1212.00	£9763.69

If Members chose not to approve the award recommended in the previous report the remaining budget is as shown in the table below:

	Revenue element	Capital	Wincanton 'top-up'
Unallocated budget 2015/16 as at April 2016*	£10,000	£1212.00	£10,000

Implications for Corporate Priorities

A strong economy which has low unemployment and thriving businesses

Other Implications

Included within the Area Development Plan

Background Papers:

Area East Committee Agenda and Minutes July 2014 .

Retail Support Initiative

Operating criteria 2016/17

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and **no** retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works which have already been commissioned/started).

Applications over £1000 will be considered by Area East Committee on a monthly basis. Amounts up to £1000 may be considered at any time as a delegated grant in consultation with the Chairman & Ward Member(s).

Area-wide grant levels: **£1,500 to a maximum 50% of project costs as follows:**

Eligible costs:

Shop-front improvements, if they enhance the High Street
Business rates assistance – a contribution to the amount payable for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first two years of trading
Exceptional projects which add to viability of towns/villages

Wincanton top-up

In addition to the area-wide scheme the 'top-up' scheme for Wincanton also offers:

- Maximum grant £1,000 for businesses wishing to move into one of 7* units currently empty in the town, these are listed at Appendix 2 **or**
- Maximum £300 available to new **and** existing businesses for business improvements and marketing initiatives. For new businesses this could be used towards stock too.

Grants are only available to proprietors/owners with one business/premise and will not exceed 50% of project cost.

*Eligible empty units in Wincanton at July 2014:

3 Market Place – The Red Lion#
13 Market Street – formerly Boots Chemist#
6 High Street – formerly Chicken Grill/Yummy Yummy#
6 High Street – Digital Error
24 High Street – formerly Green Dragon
36 High Street – formerly Alldays
1-3 High St – formerly Brocks#

now occupied/partly occupied

Process

Applications for Grants are accessed and recommendations made on the basis of a fully completed application form and two 'like for like' quotes. Self-help/DIY schemes may complete the application form and supply a project budget with supporting information. All grant recipients must accept that the grant may be used for publicity purposes by the District Council. Payment of the grant is done retrospectively, for a completed programme of

works on the basis of receipted invoices. Exceptionally officers, in consultation with the Chairman, may release partial payments where there is clear justification for doing so.

The existing assessment and current scoring mechanism favours businesses:

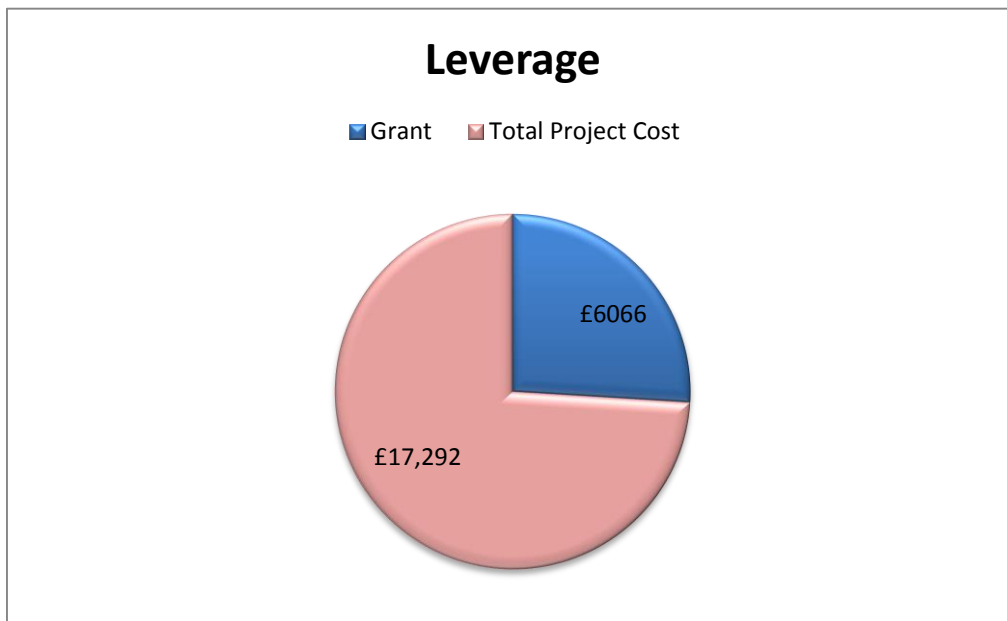
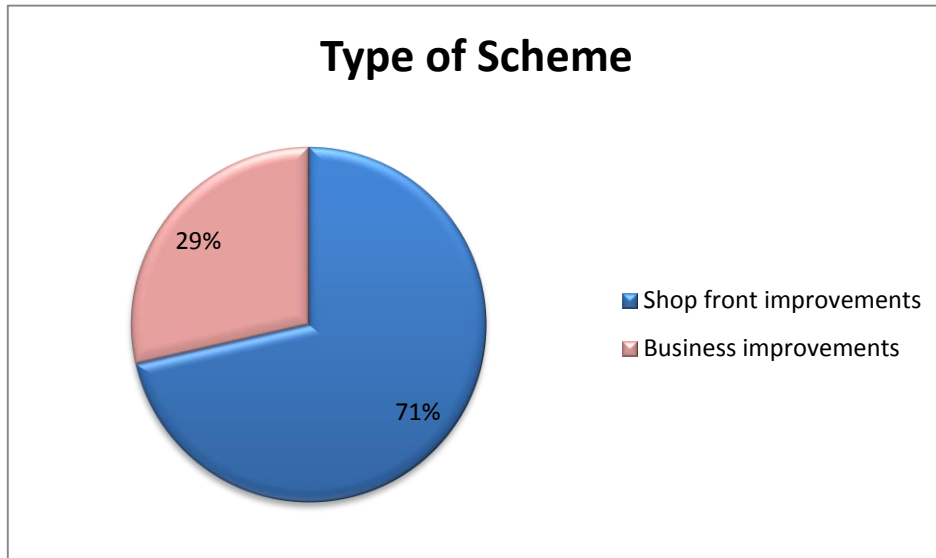
- employing more than 2 people
- in prominent places
- key rural stores/Post Offices
- retailers

The award is subject to the following standard conditions:

- The grant award may be used by SSDC for promotional/publicity purposes;
- Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices;
- Awards are subject to a summary of the benefit of the scheme being supplied;
- Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within six months of the offer and if not will have to inform us of the reason(s) for the delay. If there is a valid reason, officers can provide a 6 month extension, but beyond this the grant would either be withdrawn or referred Area East Committee to be re-affirmed;
- That appropriate consents are obtained;
- Works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulation consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds;
- If, within three years of a grant award, the business ceases to trade the District Council reserves the right to reclaim the grant on the following basis; year one –100%, year two – 75%, year three – 45%.

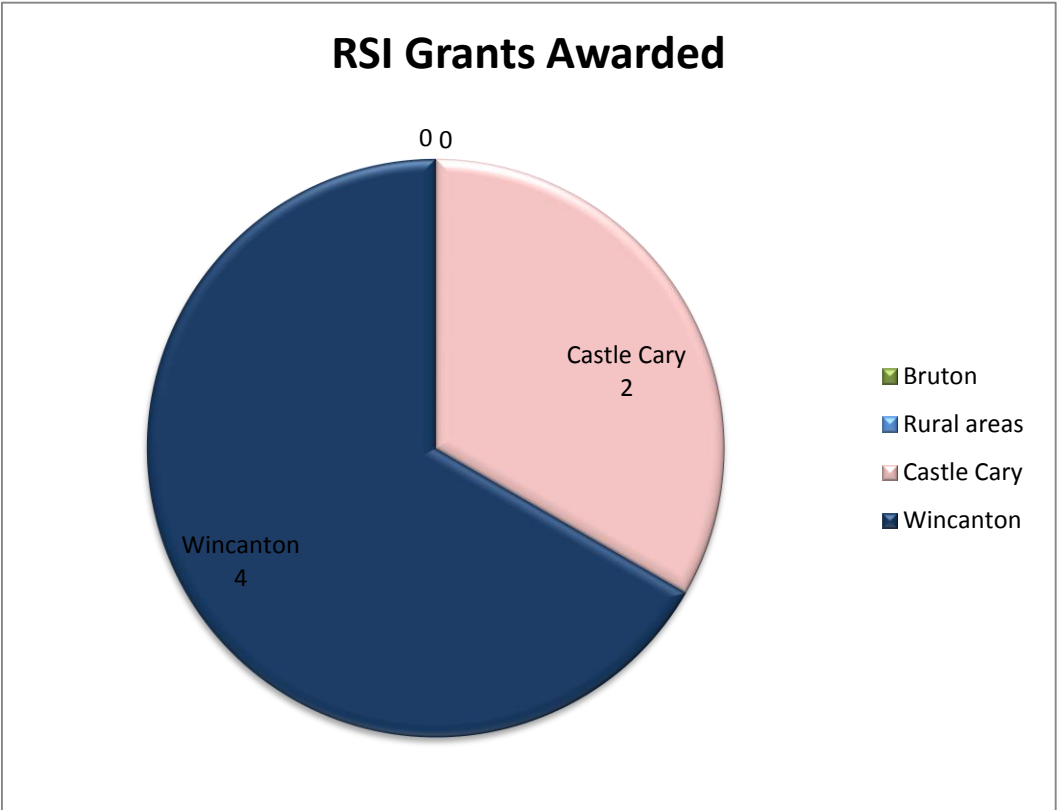
Retail Support Initiative 2015-16

The graph below shows the purpose for which the grants were awarded and the second graph shows the proportion of grant against overall scheme costs.



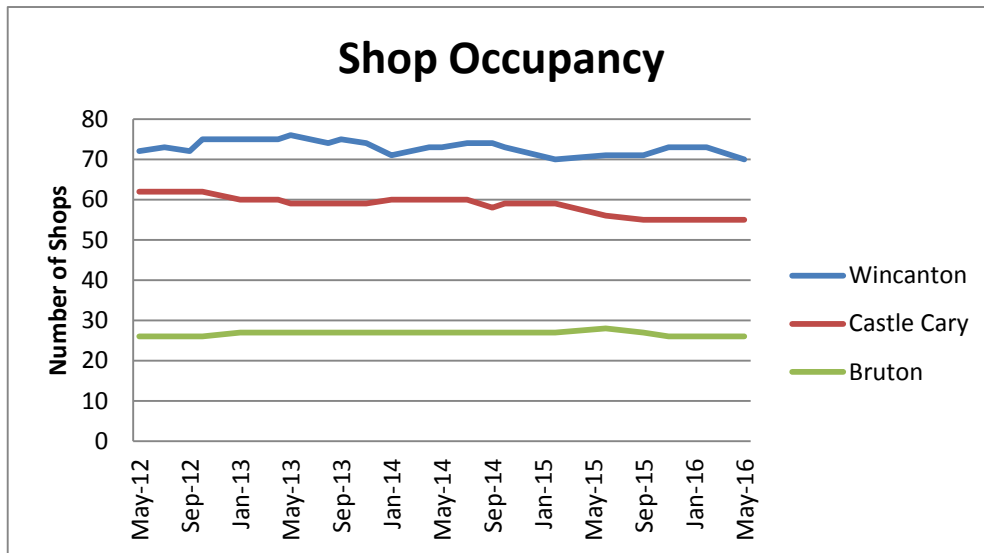
During April 2015 – March 2016, 5 grants were decided under delegated powers and 1 awarded at Committee.

From April 2015 – March 2016, 4 grants were awarded to businesses in Wincanton, 2 grants were awarded to businesses in Castle Cary, with no grants being awarded to Bruton or other rural areas.



Shop Occupancy Trends

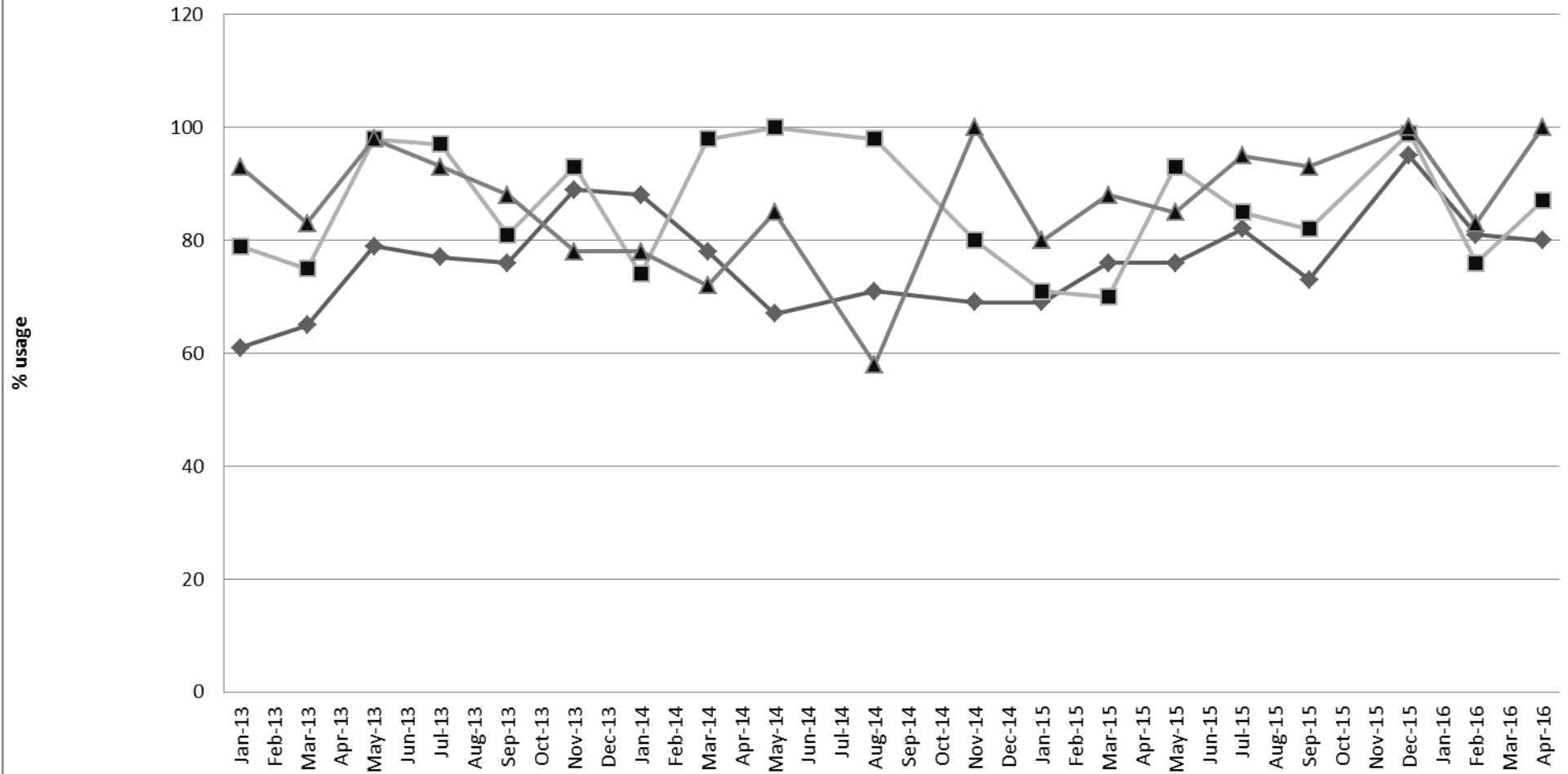
The graph below shows the shop occupancy trends since May 2012.



Car Park Trends

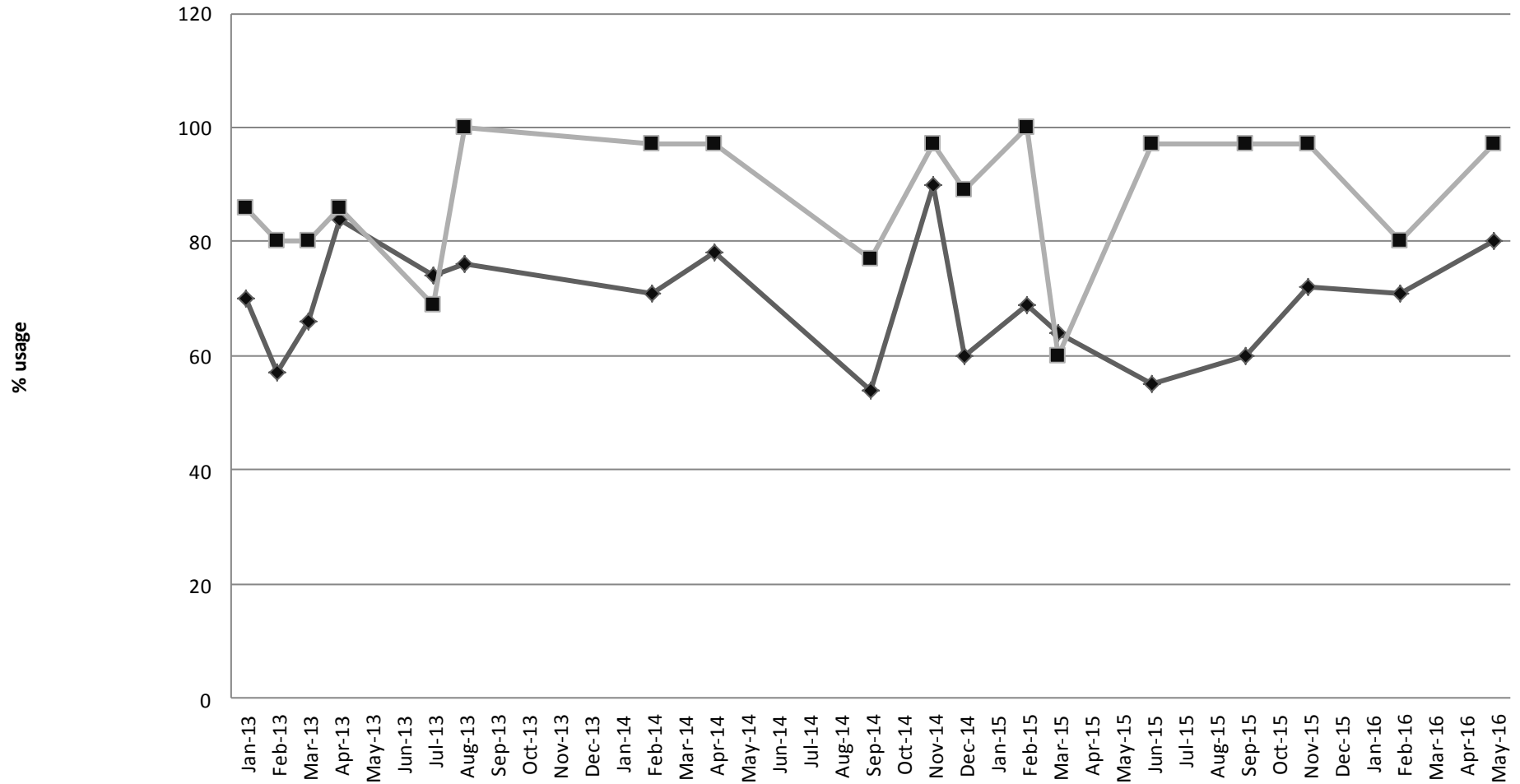
Please find details below of the car parking trends in Wincanton, Castle Cary and Bruton since Jan 13.

Wincanton Car Park usage Jan 13 - Apr 16



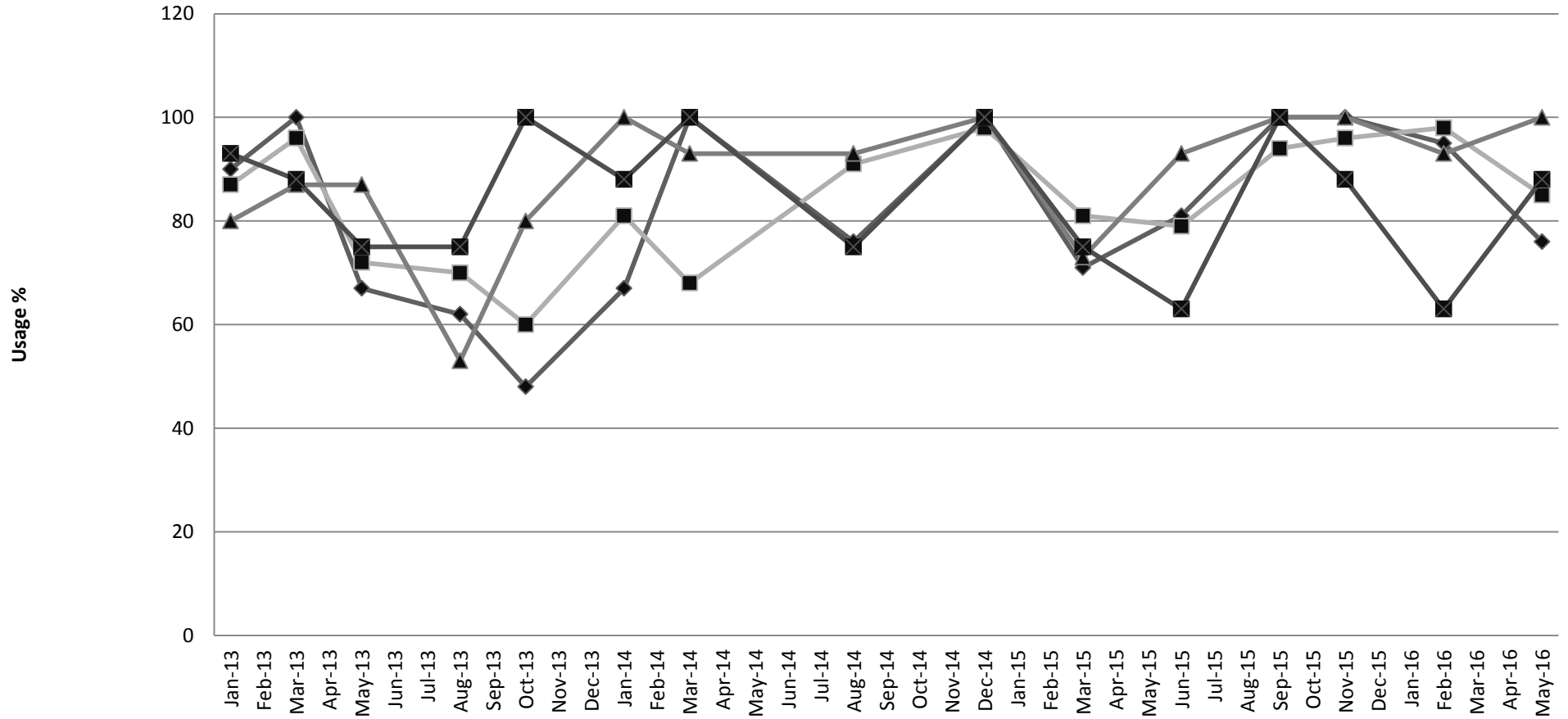
	Jan-13	Mar-13	May-13	Jul-13	Sep-13	Nov-13	Jan-14	Mar-14	May-14	Aug-14	Nov-14	Jan-15	Mar-15	May-15	Jul-15	Sep-15	Dec-15	Feb-16	Apr-16
◆ Carrington Way	61	65	79	77	76	89	88	78	67	71	69	69	76	76	82	73	95	81	80
■ Memorial Hall	79	75	98	97	81	93	74	98	100	98	80	71	70	93	85	82	99	76	87
▲ Churchfield	93	83	98	93	88	78	78	72	85	58	100	80	88	85	95	93	100	83	100

Castle Cary car park usage Jan 13 - May 16



	Jan-13	Feb-13	Mar-13	Apr-13	Jul-13	Aug-13	Feb-14	Apr-14	Sep-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Feb-15	Mar-15	Jun-15	Sep-15	Nov-15	Feb-16	May-16
◆ Milbrook Gardens	70	57	66	84	74	76	71	78	54	90	60	69	64	55	60	72	71	80
■ St Catherines Close	86	80	80	86	69	100	97	97	77	97	89	100	60	97	97	97	80	97

Bruton Car Park usage Jan 13 - May 16



	Jan-13	Mar-13	May-13	Aug-13	Oct-13	Jan-14	Mar-14	Aug-14	Dec-14	Mar-15	Jun-15	Sep-15	Nov-15	Feb-16	May-16
◆ Tolbury Mill	90	100	67	62	48	67	100	76	100	71	81	100	100	95	76
■ High Street	87	96	72	70	60	81	68	91	98	81	79	94	96	98	85
▲ Higher Backway	80	87	87	53	80	100	93	93	100	73	93	100	100	93	100
⊠ Packhorse Bridge	93	88	75	75	100	88	100	75	100	75	63	100	88	63	88

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