Fireworks Bill

Report from Community Roundtable Events



Patricia Ferguson
MP for Glasgow West

Foreword from Patricia Ferguson MP

As an MP, and previously an MSP and a Councillor, I am frequently contacted by constituents raising concerns about fireworks. Those concerns cover a range of issues, from animal welfare and the impact on vulnerable people, to the anti-social use of fireworks and enforcement issues.



As a result, having been successful in the Private Members' Bill ballot earlier this year, I was keen to use the opportunity to introduce legislation which would tackle some of those concerns.

As part of the evidence gathering for my Fireworks Bill, I have endeavoured to hear directly from local residents and organisations to understand their experiences of fireworks, their views on current firework regulations, and to explore their ideas about how the Bill could help to improve the current situation. These insights were collected via an online survey and through two roundtable events in the constituency. The first roundtable was held on the 21st of September in Knightswood and the second was in Whiteinch on the 5th of October. Both events were attended by a mixture of constituents, local representatives, both elected Councillors and members of Community Councils, and local organisations, whose work is affected by firework use. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete my survey or attend a roundtable – your experiences and insight have been invaluable and will be at the forefront of my mind as I now turn to writing the Bill. I am also grateful to High Knightswood & Anniesland Community Council, who ran their own local fireworks survey, the findings of which I have attached as an annexe to this report.

Legislative Context

Currently, fireworks are regulated through their sale (either by the UK or Scottish Government), by their use (where the Scottish Government have responsibility), or through the implementation of Firework Control Zones (decided by the local council). Current regulations allow licenced outlets to sell fireworks to the public on any day, while unlicenced sellers can sell fireworks only on specified dates. Members of the public are permitted to use fireworks on private property and within specified times. A noise restriction of 120db applies to fireworks members of the public can purchase, but no restriction applies in relation to fireworks intended for professional use.





In 2022, the Scottish Parliament passed legislation aimed at tightening firework regulations. However, the Scottish Government have since confirmed they have no plans to implement significant elements of this Act.

The UK Government most recently updated firework regulations in 2015. However, earlier this year, the UK Government launched its own firework consultation, seeking the public's views in relation to reviewing the categorisation of some fireworks and the noise limit on consumer fireworks.

At the roundtable events, participants discussed current regulations set at all levels as well as the proposals currently being reviewed through the UK Government's consultation.

Discussions surrounding future proposals had a particular focus on those areas reserved to the UK Parliament, to allow ideas for the Fireworks Bill to be considered. However, proposals in relation to areas where the Scottish Government and local councils have responsibility were also suggested.

The following report provides information in relation to:

- Attendees' personal experiences, and those of their local communities, in relation to fireworks
- Views and experiences of the effectiveness of the current regulations
- Proposals and key asks for future regulations

Local Experiences of Firework Use

'It's like living in a warzone'

The overwhelming consensus among attendees was that the current experience of individuals, animals, and local communities was distressing – and unnecessarily so. Countless participants recalled stories of animals suffering serious harm and long-term implications as a result of fear triggered by fireworks. Attendees also emphasised the serious impact on veterans, domestic abuse survivors, neurodivergent people, and those who are blind or partially sighted. Finally, the anti-social use of fireworks was consistently described as leaving communities feeling as though they were living in 'the blitz' or a 'warzone'. Stories of misuse covered not only fireworks being discharged outside legal hours and in public spaces but also of fireworks being used as weapons to be fired at members of the public, at cars, and at buses.

The following is a summary of the local experiences described by attendees in relation to firework usage:

Animal Welfare - *'Every injury or death that is preventable is inexcusable'*

Dogs Trust highlighted that the use of fireworks and associated noise can last for months at a time, as such they consider it to be a 'season' rather than an evening or an event. They advised that they have to plan for fireworks season months in advance due to the impact it has on dogs in their care, with 50% of all dogs being fearful of fireworks and 60% of the dogs in the care of Dogs Trust needing to be medicated during fireworks season.

The SPPCA provided examples of the distress and fear experienced by many animals due to fireworks, which can result in them causing harm to themselves. Such incidents can set back the animal's rehabilitation progress and delay rehoming. The SPPCA also noted that this has an impact on staff who become more anxious around the animals during fireworks season because of the discomfort of having to watch and manage the animals' distress.

The impact on livestock was also highlighted by the SPPCA, as animals cannot always be brought inside to shelter from fireworks. They highlighted an incident in the Isle of Man where a number of sheep were injured or died due to firework induced fear, and gave examples of horses bolting onto busy roads, and the marked increase in incidents they have to respond to during the season.

Cats Protection highlighted the impact of fireworks on stray and feral cats, particularly in relation to noise but also poisonous debris, which they often consume. They also noted that they often see cases of firework abuse directed at animals.

Many of the attendees were themselves pet owners and described the difficulty of seeing their pets distressed by fireworks. The need to medicate and sedate pets during fireworks season was a common experience, and the associated financial impact on pet owners was also raised. It was also highlighted that distressed pets can pose a risk to their owners, with one example given of a stressed dog which, uncharacteristically, bit two family members.

The unpredictability of firework usage was clearly a particular issue for pet owners. Many attendees expressed frustration at taking their pets out only for fireworks to be set off randomly, without warning, and sometimes outside of legally allowed times. Such incidents would often leave pets traumatised and cause longer term behavioural issues.

Impact on Vulnerable People – *'Why does somebody have to live like that?'*

RNIB advised that every year in the UK around 300 people suffer serious eye injuries due to accidents involving fireworks, and roughly ten of those injured lose their sight. They explained that the main impact on blind and partially sighted people is fear of fireworks. Concern was also raised regarding the associated issue of the impact on guide dogs, as two-thirds of guide dog owners report fireworks affecting their dogs. As a result, many blind or partially sighted people do not go outside during fireworks season and so become isolated. RNIB also noted the related expense of training dogs who are fearful of fireworks.

Concerns were also raised regarding the impact on other vulnerable people such as those who are neurodivergent or sufferers of PTSD – including veterans and victims of domestic abuse. The noise and unpredictability of fireworks were again cited as specific issues.

Anti-Social Behaviour – *'We need to get the fireworks out of the hands of those who misuse them'*

Attendees frequently described fireworks season as 'like living in a warzone'. Countless examples were given of fireworks being set off outside of legal hours and often continuing for many hours. It was widely felt that firework usage seems to have ramped up in recent years, with fireworks frequently being let off in Glasgow from September.

Damage caused by fireworks to public spaces was also discussed, with attendees reporting that they often find boxes of used fireworks and other debris left lying on the street or in local parks. Fireworks being set off illegally in public spaces was also noted and a local sports club raised concerns about people using their open spaces to set off fireworks, causing damage to their playing fields.

The use of fireworks as weapons was widely cited. Examples included fireworks being fired at buses, cars and out of windows as well as being fired at the police, rescue services, and members of the public. An incident involving a firework hitting a pram and injuring a baby was particularly concerning.

Views on the Current Regulations

The current use of fireworks is 'excessive' and 'harmful'

The current experience of firework usage under existing regulations was overwhelmingly negative. It was clear from discussions that the regulations are both too lenient to tackle the variety of concerns raised, but are also not being enforced properly, limiting their effectiveness. There was clear consensus among all attendees that the current, legal noise levels cause particular issues. The type of firework that can be sold to the public – particularly by an unlicenced seller – was also discussed, as well as specific concerns about fireworks being sold online. There was a clear feeling that the current operation of Firework Control Zones in Glasgow was unsatisfactory. Frustration covered both the application process, which was felt to be inconsistent and unclear, as well as the effectiveness of the existing Zones.

The information below summarises attendees' views on the effectiveness of current firework regulations:

Firework Control Zones - *'not a cure-all'*

There was general support for the idea of Firework Control Zones in principle however the feeling was that the way they are currently operated in Glasgow undermines their effectiveness.

The limited number of Zones approved in Glasgow and the difficulty of securing a Zone was highlighted as specific issues. A number of Community Councils as well as Cats Protection explained they had applied unsuccessfully for an FCZ. It was clear from discussions that there was some confusion as to the criteria applicants were expected to meet as well as a lack of detailed, consistent explanation as to why applications were rejected.

Other Community Councils reported that there was no appetite in their areas to apply for an FCZ. There were a number of reasons given for this position such as the inconsistent approach to awarding FCZs resulting in people losing faith in them, firework usage being localised around specific areas, such as local parks, and the suggestion that there may be a degree of apathy among local residents who feel their views will not be taken into account.

Concern was also raised regarding the inconsistent application of FCZs across Scotland. The current system where councils decide whether to implement zones as well as how many to introduce was thought to be unsatisfactory and results in a patchwork application of regulations. The difference in experiences between FCZs implemented in Edinburgh and Glasgow was described as 'night and day', with many participants feeling that the model used for Zones in Glasgow is not as effective as that in Edinburgh. The difference was partly attributed to the agreement reached by retailers in Edinburgh not to sell fireworks within FCZs. The contradiction in Glasgow, where individuals can buy but not use fireworks in a Control Zone, was noted on numerous occasions.

It was also recognised that FCZs can be very difficult to enforce and fail to address much of the frustration surrounding fireworks, particularly those that are noise-related, for the simple fact that sound travels beyond the boundary of any Control Zone. There was some suggestion that the Zones simply push people into using fireworks in surrounding areas, instead of stopping or reducing firework usage. Breaches of Control Zone rules were also noted, with Dogs Trust explaining that although their premises are within a Control Zone, fireworks were intentionally set off above their kennels last year. The limitations of FCZs were also illustrated by the SSPCA who explained that their centre is on the border of a Zone meaning fireworks can still be set off directly across the street from their centre.

Enforcement Issues – *'Completely random and haphazard'*

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service described issues they and the Police have with enforcement 'as a game of cat and mouse.' They also noted that if felt as though the sale of fireworks had increased in recent years. There was a general agreement that greater enforcement powers were needed for the Police, Fire Service and Trading Standards.

The need for an effective deterrent was also widely cited as well as the lack of resources for enforcement of the current regulations. Specifically, attendees highlighted the need to crack down on the illegal sale of fireworks, with particular concern raised that individuals may have access to F4 fireworks.

Fireworks Usage – 'like the blitz'

Attendees consistently likened their community to feeling like a 'warzone' during fireworks season – a season that seems to begin earlier every year and goes on for months.

Problems connected to firework usage spanned several different issues from noise and debris to unpredictability and the issue of bonfires which are often linked to firework misuse. It was widely agreed that F3 and F4 fireworks cause most problems, partly due to the noise they make but also because of safety issues. Particular concern was raised about the safety instructions for F3 fireworks which require users to stand 25meters away from the firework after lighting it.

Attendees noted that most people do not have that amount of space in their gardens. The feeling was therefore, that people are using fireworks in an unsafe way in their gardens or are instead using them in public spaces.

Noise of Fireworks – 'it should be about the spectacle, not the noise'

There was a clear consensus that the current legal noise levels for fireworks is excessive. Participants were particularly concerned that there is currently no noise restriction on fireworks used in professional displays (F4). Additionally, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the current noise level for privately used fireworks (F1-3) is too loud and there is a need to lower decibel levels across the board. 90db was broadly seen as the highest acceptable limit, although it was noted that the legal noise limit in the workplace is 85db and Dogs Trust advised that this decibel level can still affect dogs. Dogs Trust highlighted that 75db is equivalent to the decibel level of a domestic washing machine.

Sale of Fireworks – 'it blows my mind you can buy something with gunpowder in it'

Some attendees criticised the current regulations which allow unlicenced traders to sell fireworks on certain days of the year. While the feeling among some was that unlicenced sellers should not be permitted to sell fireworks at all, the three-week period in October/November when they are currently permitted to sell fireworks was seen as particularly excessive.

Pop-up shops and newsagents were also cited concerns, particularly in relation to the transportation and storage of fireworks. The need for stricter licencing and regulation of these shops was emphasised.

Another issue attendees highlighted was the sale of fireworks online, particularly on social media, and the associated issue of policing such sales. Examples of pop-up adverts to buy fireworks on Facebook were given.

Some participants felt that the way fireworks are sold in supermarkets is an example of effective firework regulation as supermarkets only sell fireworks on permitted days. The concern here was that while supermarkets follow the law, online sellers and pop-up shops continue to flaunt regulations.

There was support from a small number of attendees for a complete ban on fireworks, including organised displays. However, the majority of participants felt this would be going too far.

Proposals and Key Asks

We need to 'find a balanced, proportionate response'

Attendees were keen to emphasise during discussions that it is vital that proposals are workable, enforceable, and proportionate. It was widely recognised that firework displays can be an enjoyable spectacle which can bring communities together. However, steps must be taken to find a balance. Further restrictions on sales and, in particular, restricting the sale of fireworks to the public, were highlighted as positive steps. Furthermore, overwhelming support for stricter limits on decibel levels was clear. Improvements that could be made to the operation of Firework Control Zones were suggested; however, the view was that FCZs would not resolve the issues associated with firework usage alone.

Firework Control Zones:

There was some interest among attendees for introducing a city-wide Control Zone across Glasgow. However, this proposal raised a number of concerns. Participants noted that such a large Zone would be difficult to enforce, and questions were raised as to whether a lack of resources to enforce such a system would essentially render the proposal ineffective. It was also suggested that, to be successful, the selling of fireworks within FCZs would need to be prohibited.

The overall feeling was that Control Zones are not a 'cure-all' and so would need to be accompanied by other legislation and other measures. It was broadly agreed that FCZs are only part of a longer-term solution. Furthermore, the current patchwork approach to council's support for, implementation of, and regulation of FCZs is too inconsistent to provide a workable solution.

Sale of Fireworks:

It was suggested by some attendees that the size of fireworks that can be sold to the public should be reduced, e.g. fireworks with multiple shot tubes. There was also some interest in restricting the hours and/or dates when fireworks can be bought by members of the public – specifically the period in October prior to Bonfire Night.

There was also a discussion as to whether attendees would support an individual licencing system, whereby people could obtain a licence allowing them to buy fireworks and, if misuse or illegal activity occurred, the licence could be revoked. There was a feeling among some that such a system should require individuals to have to pay for their licence, otherwise, if the licence was free, it would undermine its ability to act as a deterrent against anti-social behaviour and firework misuse. Concerns were also raised about how such a system could ensure the competence and safety of those who had a licence. The consensus was that an individual licencing system would be unlikely to resolve the variety of issues highlighted in discussions and would lack the enforcement powers needed to ensure it was effective.

There was a general concern that, without proper policing, any future regulations restricting the sale of fireworks would be undermined if people were able to buy fireworks from abroad online instead. As such, attendees noted the importance of greater policing of the online sale of fireworks. Some participants felt that such action would only be effective if social media and other technology companies perceived there to be a threat of new legislation, tougher enforcement, and the introduction of fines or penalties. The approach taken in the Online Safety Bill was highlighted as a desirable one, where legislation placed an onus on technology companies to clamp down on people breaking the law on their sites.

Noise:

The overwhelming consensus among attendees was that current noise limits were 'excessive' and that people wanted fireworks 'turned down'.

There was broad agreement that there should be a blanket restriction in relation to noise levels that applied to all fireworks, including F4, so that public displays would also be quieter. Furthermore, the clear view from all attendees was that the current noise limit of 120db was too high and must be reduced. The majority of attendees believed this should be reduced to 90db, with some calling for even lower – either 85db or 75db.

Taking action to restrict noise levels was seen as a particularly desirable approach when compared to other proposals since such a measure would not be reliant on the availability of public funding and would require less additional enforcement action.

Organised Public Displays Only:

A significant portion of attendees stated they would want the private sale of fireworks to be prohibited, and would be in favour of only allowing organised, public displays. Support for this proposal was centred on the fact this would provide a solution to the unpredictability of firework usage as communities could be notified of planned events in advance, allowing those who would be affected to take necessary steps to lessen the impact. For example, the SSPCA highlighted that this would allow horse owners to ensure their horses were moved inside to stables, allowing them to shelter from the noise but also for fields to be cleared of any debris before the horses were released. It was also recognised that such a regulation would help clamp down on the anti-social use of fireworks, ensuring they would not be easily accessible to those who may misuse them.

It was suggested that licences could be given to recognised organisations or that events which were granted permission would be required to have local council involvement, not just permission. It was argued that this would help to ensure the quality and safety of such displays.

The consensus among participants was that allowing public, organised displays only was both preferable and more practical than banning fireworks outright or introducing an individual licencing system. It was however noted by some attendees that these displays would themselves need to be better regulated. Specifically, a restriction on the decibel level for public displays was desirable. Restricting the type of fireworks which could be used at organised displays was also discussed.

Summary of Findings

At the end of the roundtable discussions, attendees were asked what single biggest change they would like to see made to firework regulations. The two changes which were the most popular were introducing a stricter noise limit (41% of responses) and introducing a restriction on the sale of fireworks to the public (44%). A quarter of respondents who favoured restrictions on sale specified that they wanted such restrictions to apply to F2 category fireworks and above, and 16% specified they should only apply to F3 fireworks. Additionally, more than a quarter of respondents stated that the single biggest change they wanted to see was prohibiting the private use of fireworks in favour of only allowing organised, public displays.

Responses collated through the local survey, where respondents were asked to submit views on potential issues future regulations could target, echoed the results of the roundtable discussions. Just under half of all respondents supported further noise reduction of fireworks, while over 70% of all responses indicated a desire for greater restrictions on the sale of fireworks. Over half of total respondents also specified that they favoured only allowing organised, public events. A full summary outlining the proportion of support for different proposals can be found in the appendix below.

The survey conducted by High Knightswood & Anniesland Community Council – extracts of which are also included in the appendix – had similar results. Three-quarters of their respondents stated they would be happy if the sale of fireworks to the public was prohibited, with professional displays kept. Just under half supported allowing only quiet or low-noise fireworks to be sold. An additional 47% specified the noise limit on professionally used fireworks should also be restricted.

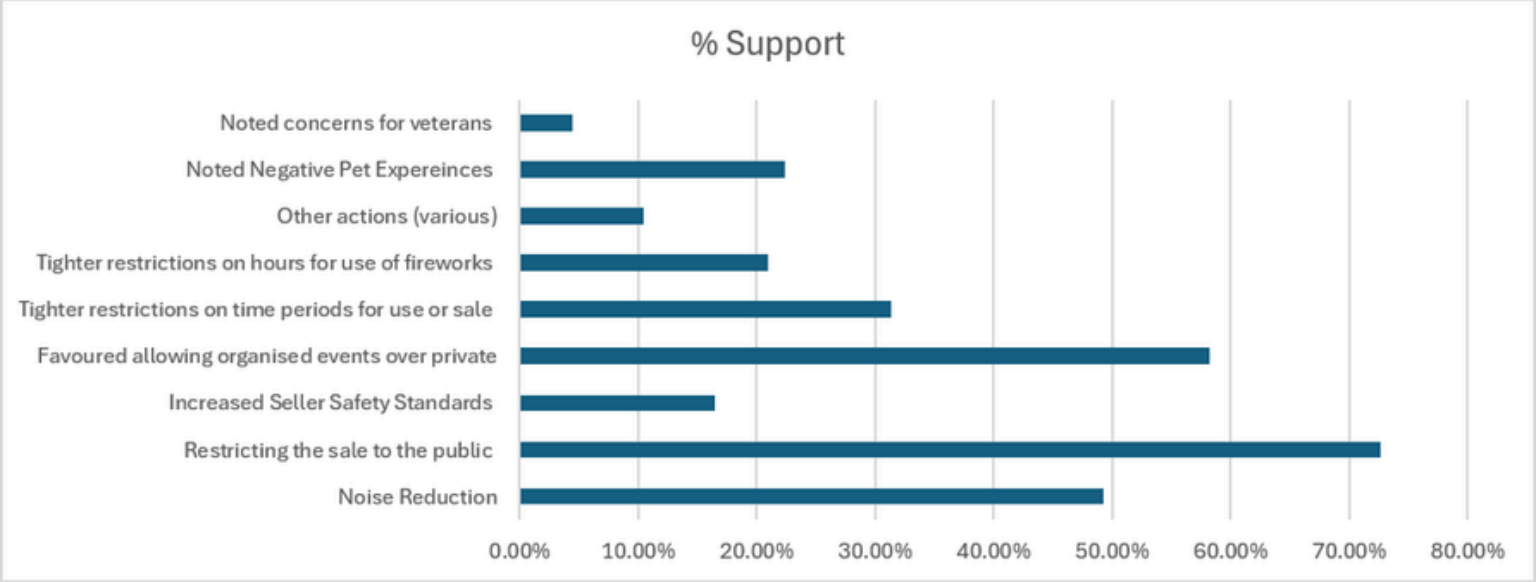
The clear response from local residents in Glasgow West is that current firework regulations, at both a UK and Scottish Government level, are unsatisfactory and do little to protect communities from harm.

Conclusion

Reform to firework regulations is desirable, and strong support for a number of options was evident. Both the surveys and the roundtables indicated support for a reduction in the legal noise limit for fireworks to a maximum level of 90db, including for F4 fireworks. It is also clear that there is overwhelming support for greater restrictions on the sale of fireworks, with a significant degree of support for prohibiting the private use of fireworks. A variety of other actions in relation to the sale of fireworks were discussed and had support from some attendees, including allowing the private use of F2 fireworks but not F3 and tightening the restrictions on the time periods when fireworks can be sold.

Appendix

Patricia Ferguson MP
Glasgow West Survey Response Summary



The proportion of respondents who supported each measure is as follows:

- 49.25% supported a noise reduction
- 72.64% supported restricting the sale of fireworks to the public
- 16.42% specifically supported greater fire safety regulations in relation to the sellers
- 58.2% favoured allowing organised events over private fireworks use
- 31.34% supported tighter restrictions on time periods for use or sale of fireworks
- 20.9% supported tighter restrictions on the times fireworks can be used
- 10.45% supported various other actions, such as action to combat debris and littering or further age restrictions on the sale of fireworks.
- 22.39% cited examples of pets having a negative reaction to fireworks
- 4.48% noted concerns in relation to veterans

Extracts from High Knightswood & Anniesland Community Council Fireworks Survey

AT A GLANCE

What 176 residents told us

176

people took part — 61% living in the area and 39% nearby and affected by fireworks here

46%

are affected at unpredictable times through the year. Only 2% are affected solely around 5 November

67%

of households said pets, assistance animals or livestock are affected — by far the most common answer

26%

reported deliberate harm, such as fireworks thrown at people or property. 49% reported unsafe use

75%

could accept ending the sale of fireworks to the public, with professional displays kept. 94% accept at least one restriction on sale

88%

had never reported firework misuse. Of those affected, 68% did not think anything would come of it

This is a self-selecting survey: it shows how widely and strongly residents are concerned and what they experience, not what proportion of all residents hold any view. HKA CC agreed a formal position on the strength of it, unanimously, on 22 September — see section 9.

SECTION 5

Findings: Restrictions

What may be sold

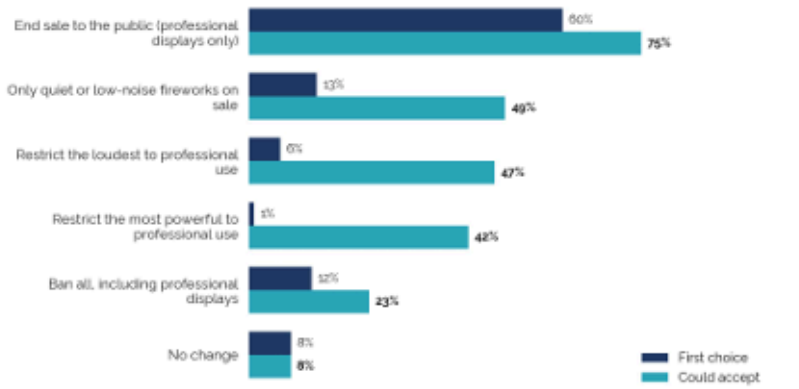


Figure 4 — First choice (Select one only) and what else could be accepted (Select all that apply), with first choices counted as accepted. n = 176.

Ending the sale of all fireworks to the public, with professional displays retained, was the first choice of 105 respondents (60%) - more than four times the next option. Allowing only quiet or low-noise fireworks to be sold came next (23, 13%). 21 (12%) went further and named a total ban including professional displays. 14 (8%) wanted no change. Restricting only the loudest (11) or only the most powerful (2) were rarely anyone's first choice.

On acceptability, ending public sale stands well clear: 132 respondents (75%) could accept it. Allowing only quiet or low-noise fireworks was acceptable to 87 (49%), restricting the loudest to 82 (47%), and restricting the most powerful to 73 (41%). A total ban including professional displays was acceptable to 41 (23%). Only 15 (9%) could accept no change.

Three figures worth holding together. Three in four respondents (132, 75%) could accept ending public sale. Seven in ten (122, 69%) could accept at least one of the narrower measures - quiet-only, restrict loudest or restrict most powerful - even though none of the three reaches a majority on its own. And more than nine in ten (165, 94%) could accept at least one restriction on sale of some kind. Residents here differ on how far to go, not on whether to act. Of the 105 whose first choice was ending public sale, 79 (75%) also accepted a narrower measure.

How fireworks may be used

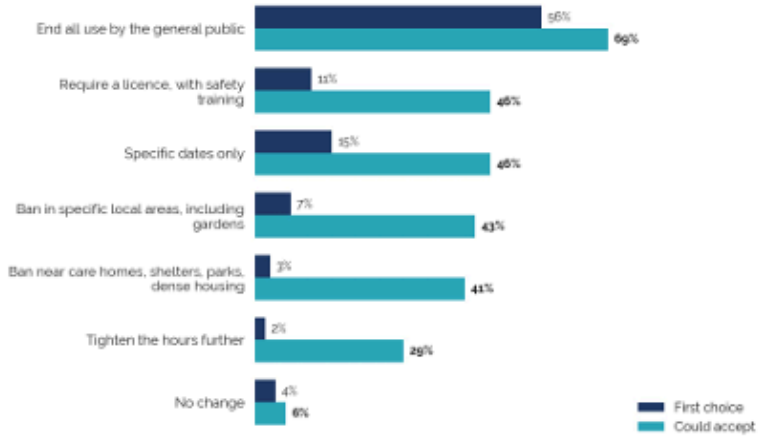


Figure 5 — First choice and what else could be accepted, first choices counted as accepted. n = 176.

Ending all use of fireworks by the general public was the first choice of 99 respondents (56%). Restricting use to specific dates came next (27, 15%), then a licence requirement (19, 11%) and bans in specific local areas (13, 7%). 8 (5%) wanted no change.

On acceptability, ending public use was acceptable to 121 respondents (69%). A licence requirement and restriction to specific dates were each acceptable to 81 (46%), bans in specific local areas to 76 (43%), and bans near care homes, animal shelters, parks and dense housing to 72 (41%). Tightening the hours further was acceptable to 51 (29%). Only 11 (6%) could accept no change, and 170 (97%) could accept at least one restriction on use.