South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Improving Gorse Covert Nature Reserve for people and nature

Engagement report

Background

Gorse Covert is a public open space in Patchway, which has been designated a Local Nature Reserve. With over a kilometre of footpaths through woodland and open grassland, the site is well used by residents for exercise, dog walking, and recreation. But currently, some parts of the site are not thriving.

We are therefore proposing several improvements – including upgrading footpaths, renewing the wildlife pond, looking after trees, and supporting a variety of habitats for different nature species.

As part of its commitment to ensure everyone in South Gloucestershire has access to good quality local green places, South Gloucestershire Council is making plans to improve Gorse Covert to help visitors get more out of the site, whilst supporting wildlife to thrive.

Between July and September 2026, we asked local people to tell us their thoughts about opportunities to improve the area, involving them in decisions about how the site is managed and what future improvements are prioritised.

Executive summary

Gorse Covert Nature Reserve is a valued and well-used local green space. Engagement undertaken from July to September 2026 included an online survey completed by 41 people, alongside conversations with visitors on site.

Most respondents were frequent users and 85% lived within one mile of the reserve. There was strong overall support for the proposed improvements, with 95% of respondents agreeing with the plans. Resurfacing and upgrading paths was the highest priority, followed by clearing and restoring the wildlife pond. Respondents particularly welcomed the prospect of safer, less muddy paths that could be used throughout the year.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of protecting habitats, securing specialist ecological input for pond works, addressing litter and antisocial behaviour, maintaining paths and vegetation, and ensuring that investment is supported by ongoing maintenance rather than treated as a one-off intervention. Overall, local people want Gorse Covert to remain a nature-rich space while becoming safer, more welcoming and more accessible throughout the year, with opportunities for community involvement in its longer-term care.

The engagement survey and respondents

A dedicated engagement website was created for the project to provide people with background information about the site and the improvement proposals. The site also hosted an online engagement survey, which was open between 06 July and 10 September 2026.

The engagement and survey were promoted via the usual channels the council uses to communicate with residents – a weekly newsletter and posts on its social media channels.

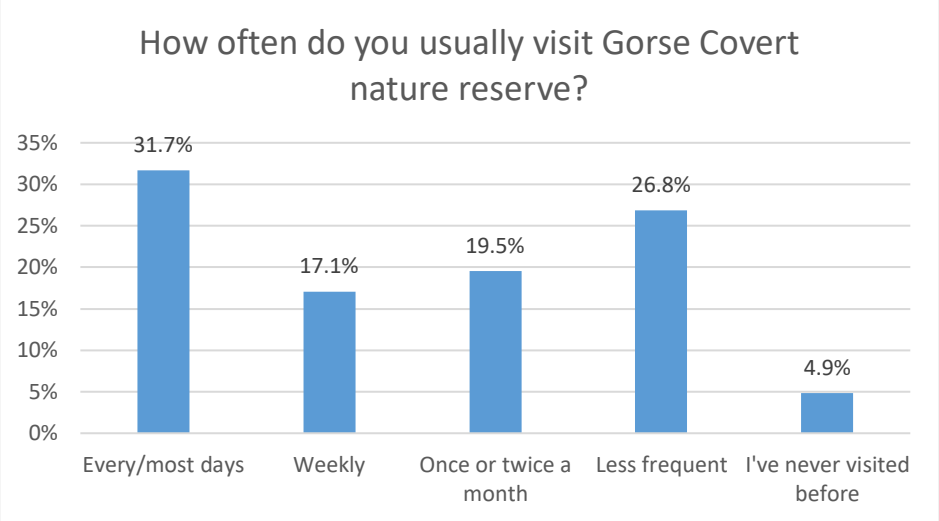
Council officers were on site during the consultation window answering questions and conducting visitor surveys to gather more feedback. Comments captured by officers are included within this engagement report.

41 people completed the survey, and others discussed their thoughts directly with officers.

Engagement findings

How do people use the site?

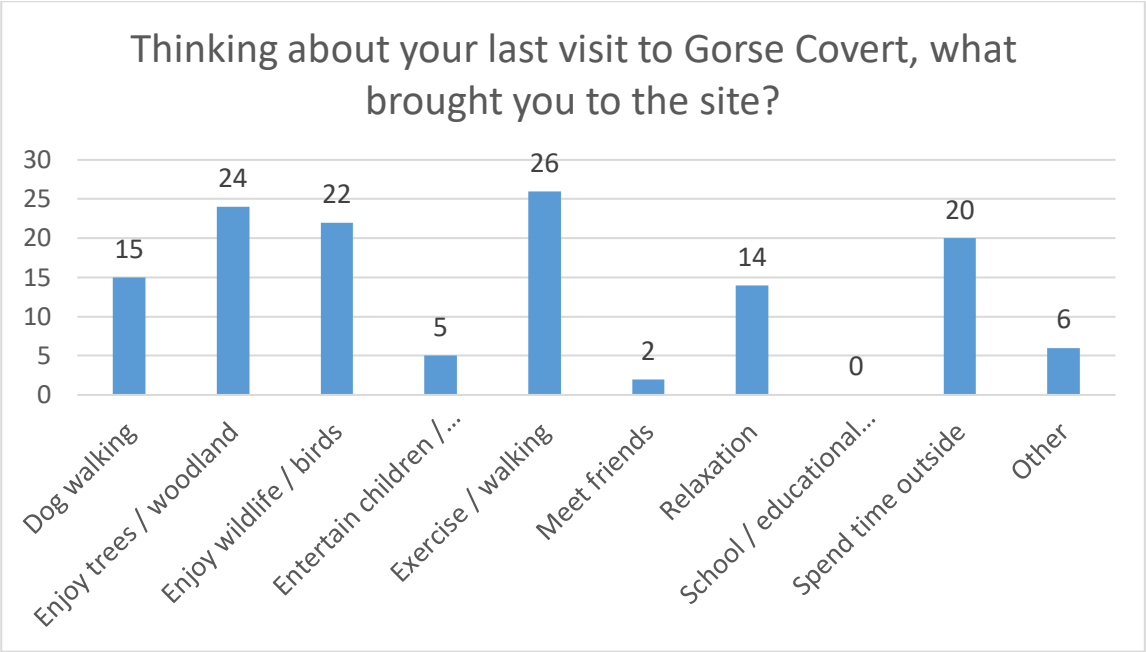
Many people who responded to the survey were regular visitors to Gorse Covert. Many told us they walked a route nearby every day (32%), and around half visited at least weekly (49%, 20 people).



Base = 41 survey respondents

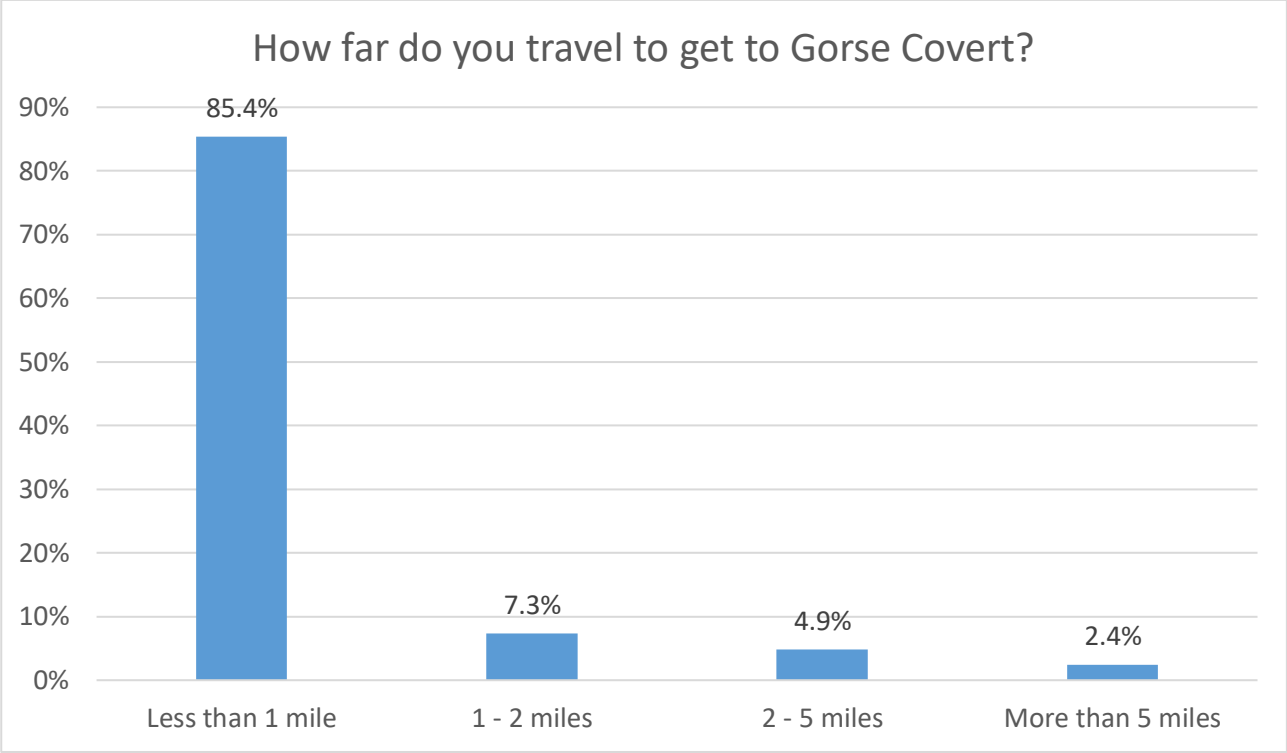
Gorse Covert is a popular green space in a built-up area which people visit for many reasons. Exercising or walking was the most common use amongst survey respondents (26 people), and enjoying trees/woodland (24 people), enjoying wildlife/birds (22 people) and spending time outdoors (20 people) were also popular options.

Whilst the engagement process took place during school summer holidays, several respondents told us that this was their preferred route when walking to school, but that paths were often impassable during winter months.



Base = 41 survey respondents who could give multiple responses to the question

The covert is used by local people. 85% (38 people) of those who completed the survey live within one mile and only one person lived further than five miles away.



Base = 41 survey respondents

Support for the proposals

The engagement website provided a visual guide setting out the proposed improvements.



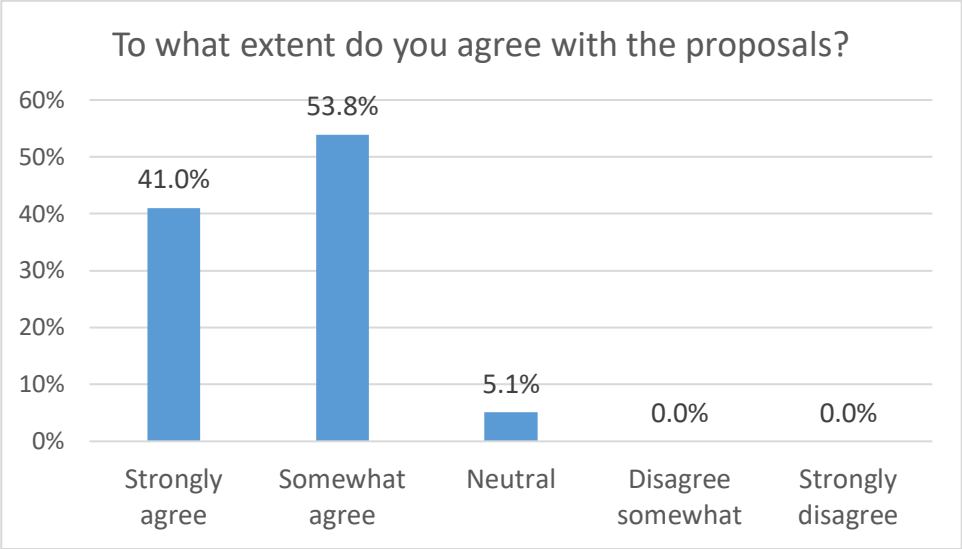
Visual guide to the proposals shared through the consultation

These included:

- Entrance improvements to enable easier access for pushchairs and mobility vehicles,
- Improvements to the paths to allow access to and through the space year-round,
- Clearing the site of litter and establishing new scrub-land habitats for insects and wildlife
- De-silting the pond and additional improvements to support its role as a habitat for nature,
- Woodland management, including replacing dead trees.

Strong support for the proposals

The proposals attracted strong support. 95% of survey respondents (37 people) agreed with the improvements which were put forward, and only two people felt neutral about them.



Base = 39 survey respondents

The reserve borders Callicroft Primary school and several people told us that their children prefer to walk to school using paths through Gorse Covert. They were especially supportive of the proposals to improve the surfaces of paths, which they said currently couldn't be used in winter months because they were too muddy and waterlogged.

Local people highlighted that the space currently has some issues with antisocial behaviour. They welcomed additional focus and improvement works as a way to build greater community engagement and use of the spaces, which could help reclaim them for the community and reduce antisocial behaviour.

Reasons for levels of agreement with the proposals

Two survey respondents said they felt neutral about the proposals. Their comments on Gorse Covert were as follows:

- *This will need ongoing and concerted maintenance and not a one-off action. More bins to mirror places like Bradley Stoke would be useful with less aggressive notices around what is deemed inappropriate use. Work on finding out who does it rather than penalise the whole community. Better policing of ASB. Overall I would say that better open space maintenance to keep it safe and useable.*
- *Repair or remove the bridge before someone gets hurt. There is nothing in this proposal that helps wildlife. De silting the pond needs proper wildlife expert surveys, planning and supervision due to the presence of newts*.

Lots of useful suggestions were made on how the area should be improved:

"Just to maintain wildlife habitat. Possible educational signage to create wildlife awareness but know that is a funding issue. Really would like to get involved. Thank you for caring about our community."

"I'd like to see the metal benches be replaced with wooden ones and have them dotted around the whole area, not just in the main field. And a picnic table or two. Most importantly, fruiting trees and native wildflowers to help the bees and butterflies (and also add some colour to the area). Litter bins and/or litter picking incentives."

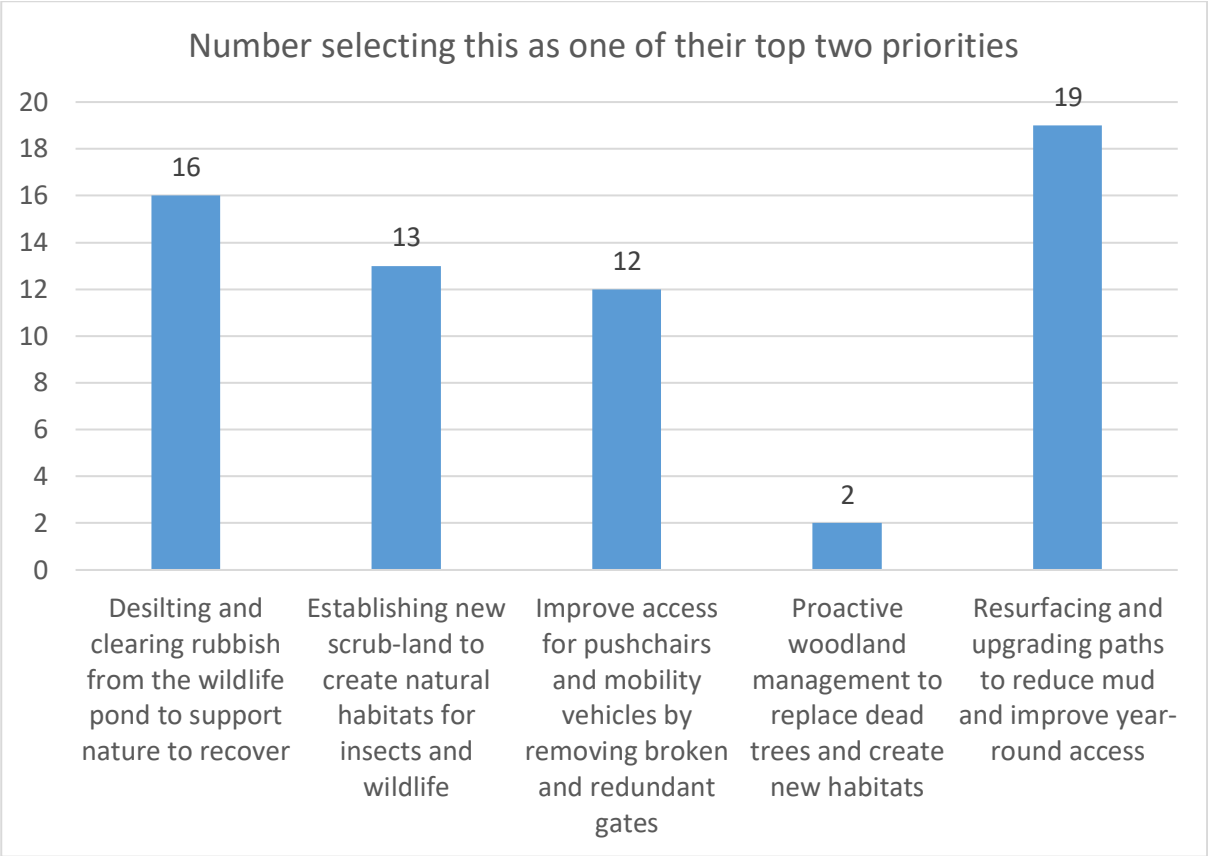
"It would be interesting to see if you could work with other organisations for advise on how to achieve the aims of improving the site for wildlife, nature and educational purposes. Two possible organisations are Grow Wilder/Avon and Wildlife Trust (https://www.growwilder.co.uk/) based in Frenchay and the Hazelnut Community Farm project in Easton, Bristol (https://hazelnutcommunityfarm.com/). The latter has been particularly successful in developing church grounds from scrub and waste land to a productive garden for veggies and beneficial plants for wildlife."

A full list of comments is given in Appendix 2.

Priority improvements and feedback on individual proposals

To help prioritise work, respondents were asked to rank the different proposals in order of priority:

- Resurfacing and upgrading paths to improve year-round access,
- Improve access for pushchairs and mobility vehicles by removing broken and redundant gates,
- Desilting and clearing rubbish from the wildlife pond to support nature to recover,
- Establishing new scrub-land to create natural habitats for insects and wildlife,
- Proactive woodland management to replace dead trees and create new habitats.



Base = 31 survey respondents

The most popular proposal was resurfacing and upgrading paths (19 people selecting this as one of their top two priorities), followed by desilting and clearing rubbish from the wildlife pond (16 people selecting this as one of their top two priorities).

A number of comments related to the issue of paths and path maintenance:

"I'm just happy that the currently muddy paths in wet weather will be improved."

"I would visit more if the area had better access/paths. I was put off by the tracks."

"Putting a mini-path to dog waste bins as the areas in front of them become very muddy as people step off the path to reach the bin."

Appendix 1: profile of respondents

Respondents to the survey tended to be in the older age groups (76% aged over 50), and female (76% female).

Age	Number of respondents
Under 30	0
30 to 39	4
40 to 49	6
50 to 59	12
60 to 69	10
70 to 79	5
Prefer not to say	4
Total	41

Age	Number of respondents
Male	7
Female	31
Prefer not to say	3
Total	41

Appendix 2: Full list of comments made

Do you have any other suggestions to improve Gorse Covert nature reserve?

Replace several lidded dog waste bins which have been removed for unknown reason, they are essential in hot weather especially. Locate same away from seating areas as smell can be unpleasant, especially if no lid.

Put some interesting wood sculptures Community teams For keeping area lovely for everyone

How about using wood chips for the paths in the wood. Clearing the ditch/ drainage for the pond. Have some information placed by pond informing as to what inhabits the pond and what happens when rubbish/ branches are thrown in. How about a camera to record those who deposit things in the pond. Have more bridges over drainage ditch.

Vegetation cut back to ensure safety on paths as some areas have poor visibility

It would be useful if you could liaise with other organisations that may be of assistance and perhaps advise on grants. Two local organisations are Grow Wilder/Avon and Wildlife Trust based in Frenchay (https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/grow-wilder) and Hazelnut Community Farm based at Easton (https://hazelnutcommunityfarm.com/) for advise, inspiration and ideas. They may also be able to give advise on grants that may be available. Hazelnut is a good example of making previously unused land as something that can be beneficial to the community.

It would be interesting to see if you could work with other organisations for advise on how to achieve the aims of improving the site for wildlife, nature and educational purposes. Two

possible organisations are Grow Wilder/Avon and Wildlife Trust (https://www.growwilder.co.uk/) based in Frenchay and the Hazelnut Community Farm project in Easton, Bristol (https://hazelnutcommunityfarm.com/). The latter has been particularly successful in developing church grounds from scrub and waste land to a productive garden for veggies and beneficial plants for wildlife.

Putting a mini-path to dog waste bins as the areas in front of them become very muddy as people step off the path to reach the bin.

The entrance and pathways need to be disabled friendly during the whole year. Removing all gates would help and wide smooth paths. Dogs on a lead only would also make it safer for all. Having been chased a few times by dogs it's makes me feel unsafe around lose dogs. I would love to volunteer for something if it is a wheelchair friendly task. Disabled people want to be involved but often that's restricted to able bodied only. It would be lovely to have some park benches around the site to just be still

Plant a tree on your birthday?

Coordination of volunteer group to maintain all green space around Patchway and litter pick. Thank you for the access and biodiversity improvements.

Please use a disability charity regards the paths and talk to disabled people. Wheelchairs, powerchairs and rollators can struggle on gravel (eg like the path that currently exists in parts), it is painful and wheels can get stuck and it is uneven under foot for ambulatory stick users. Please also take care with the great crested newts in both ponds and have specialist people deal with the pond. I live in {local road} so being advised when work will take place (as I'm disabled and wfh). Considerate parking of workers and disposal of rubbish and careful management of the wood (ie unlike the high speed, grass mowing or tree/bush maintenance i see regularly, which seems to prioritise speed over care)

I'd like to see the metal benches be replaced with wooden ones and have them dotted around the whole area, not just in the main field. And a picnic table or two. Most importantly, fruiting trees and native wildflowers to help the bees and butterflies (and also add some colour to the area). Litter bins and/or litter picking incentives

Benches and areas to sit and enjoy the reserve

Line pathways with existing fallen tree debris,tree trunks etc,to prevent further erosion, wood chip ground areas, remove dumped patio slabs on path.Prevent motorcycle access.Provide woods & locals with bat/swift boxes.Install motion cameras to monitor wildlife/ any crime.Provide awareness of damage , regarding dumping of garden waste there.Nominate locals as guardians of the woods,for point of contact..Planting of wildflower meadows on surrounding grass verges.

I'm just happy that the currently muddy paths in wet weather will be improved. The pond needs to be made more obvious too, as lots of people don't know about it

Paths could be kept clearer throughout the year, as there's often brambles and nettles growing over the path. It would be nice to see some of the grass areas planted as wildflower meadows which would also have the benefit of only needing to be mowed twice a year.

Reduce the brambles that have become very large around the buffer zones swamping hedging that was planted many years ago. Deter fly tipping and the dumping of garden waste by local households. Unfortunately opening access boundaries also allows motorbikes in which use the woods. I'm not sure what can be done to help this yet still allow access for all.

Restrict access to motorbikes, and people use the woods after dark, fires, drinking etc not sure what can be done re this, the pond has been destroyed by rubbish and taking the frog spawn, lifeless now, when it has water !

Just to maintain wildlife habitat. Possible educational signage to create wildlife awareness but know that is a funding issue. Really would like to get involved. Thank you for caring about our community

This will need ongoing and concerted maintenance and not a one off action. More bins to mirror places like Bradley Stoke would be useful with less aggressive notices around what is deemed inappropriate use. Work on finding out who does it rather than penalise the whole community. Better policing of ASB. Overall I would say that better open space maintenance to keep it safe and useable.

I would hope the ash trees that are being proposed for felling will be replaced with other native British trees. Better access to litter bins would perhaps go some way to help discourage littering in the cover and pond, particularly around the woodland entrances

Arrange a litter picking to clean gorse covert

Information boards giving details and specific info about what can be seen at THAT board's point ?

Three bins with a lid for dog waste. At the moment its open bins directly by the benches. They get full over the weekend with flies such a ridiculous place to put them and take away dog waste bin

Does anyone now where the evidence of Roman activity is? I was told that is was near the kissing gate entrance on Coniston Road and B on your map. We seam to be getting less bluebells each year. How are you going to preserve and may be enhance the number we do have?

Repair or remove the bridge before someone gets hurt. There is nothing in this proposal that helps wildlife. De silting the pond needs proper wildlife expert surveys, planning and supervision due to the presence of newts.

As long as the stones to be used on the footpaths are small and walkable. Not so with the path alongside the M5 down to Asda. Not good for wheelchairs, rollators and very uncomfortable to walk on

I would visit more if the area had better access/baths. I was put off by the tracks.

It would be nice for it to be an area where local people don't have to worry about antisocial behaviour. Because of it's isolated location, gorse covert is often used for drugs dealing/use or just local young adults drinking. It would be nice to have some nice shrubs or meadow flowers but where wild flower meadows have been used in Patchway, they do

not self seed well and areas like this will often be forgotten in the future. For that reason, it should not be 'one and done' situation as much of Patchway is.

There is a small bridge across the stream made of railway sleepers half way down the main path through the woods. It's dry a lot of the time but a reasonable dip. The sleepers are pretty rotten now. Replacement of that would be great to continue access into the main part of the woods from near swallow drive. Year round paths would be great as we walk to school this was and in the winter have to use the back lane which isn't as safe because of the mud especially under the big oak tree.