South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

# A cleaner, less polluted Siston and Warmley Brook

## Engagement report

# Background

Concerned about the condition of our waterways, the council is exploring how it might work with partners to improve the water quality of Warmley and Siston Brooks.

We believe there are interventions which could make a meaningful difference in helping nature recover, bringing back wildlife and making these places where people want to spend time. However, to progress that work, we would need to secure external funding. Through this engagement we sought feedback from people who live locally to the Brooks, asking about their interaction with the waterways and to measure support for such a project.

# Executive summary

This report demonstrates strong local support for urgent, sustained action to restore and protect Warmley and Siston Brooks, with people emphasising the importance of clean water for wildlife, recreation, and community wellbeing. The council is encouraged to work with partners to secure funding to tackle pollution and drainage issues, keeping the community informed and involved in its efforts.

## Key findings

- **High community engagement:** Most respondents spend time here regularly, valuing the Brooks for walking, exercise, spotting wildlife, and associated wellbeing benefits. Many have fond memories and a strong emotional attachment to this area.
- **Concerns about water safety:** 61% of respondents do not consider the Brooks safe for children or dogs due to pollutants and hazards like broken glass. Specific pollution hotspots were identified, notably near Hinton Drive/Hazelbury Drive/Roy King Gardens.
- **Decline in wildlife:** Many people provide anecdotal evidence of declines in river wildlife, both fish and birds.
- **Widespread pollution:** Litter is the most commonly observed pollutant (97%), followed by surface runoff, industrial waste, sewage, and agricultural chemicals. Residents express high concern about all forms of pollution, especially litter, industrial waste, pesticides, and sewage.
- **Strong support for action:** There is overwhelming support for efforts to reduce pollution, restore wildlife, and manage flood risk. Respondents prioritise benefits to nature over recreation, and many are willing to volunteer or support the project financially.
- **Other local environmental priorities:** Residents highlight issues such as industrial dumping, invasive species, poor flood defences, and lack of bins. There is a call for collaborative action, better enforcement, and ongoing community engagement.

# The engagement survey and respondents

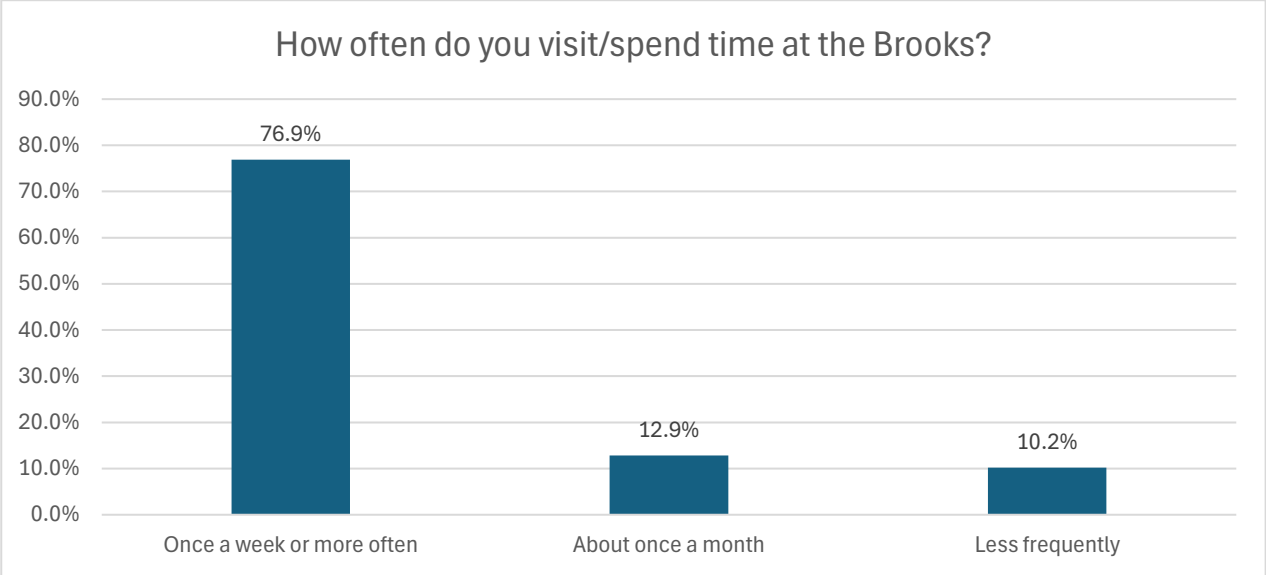
The engagement survey was open between 01 and 28 September 2025.

It was promoted via the usual channels the council uses to communicate with residents – a weekly newsletter and posts on its social media channels. We also reached out to town and parish councils, churches and other groups based in the area asking them to promote the survey more widely. Educational sessions were held in partnership with the Bristol and Avon Rivers Trust with local schoolchildren.

350 people completed the survey.

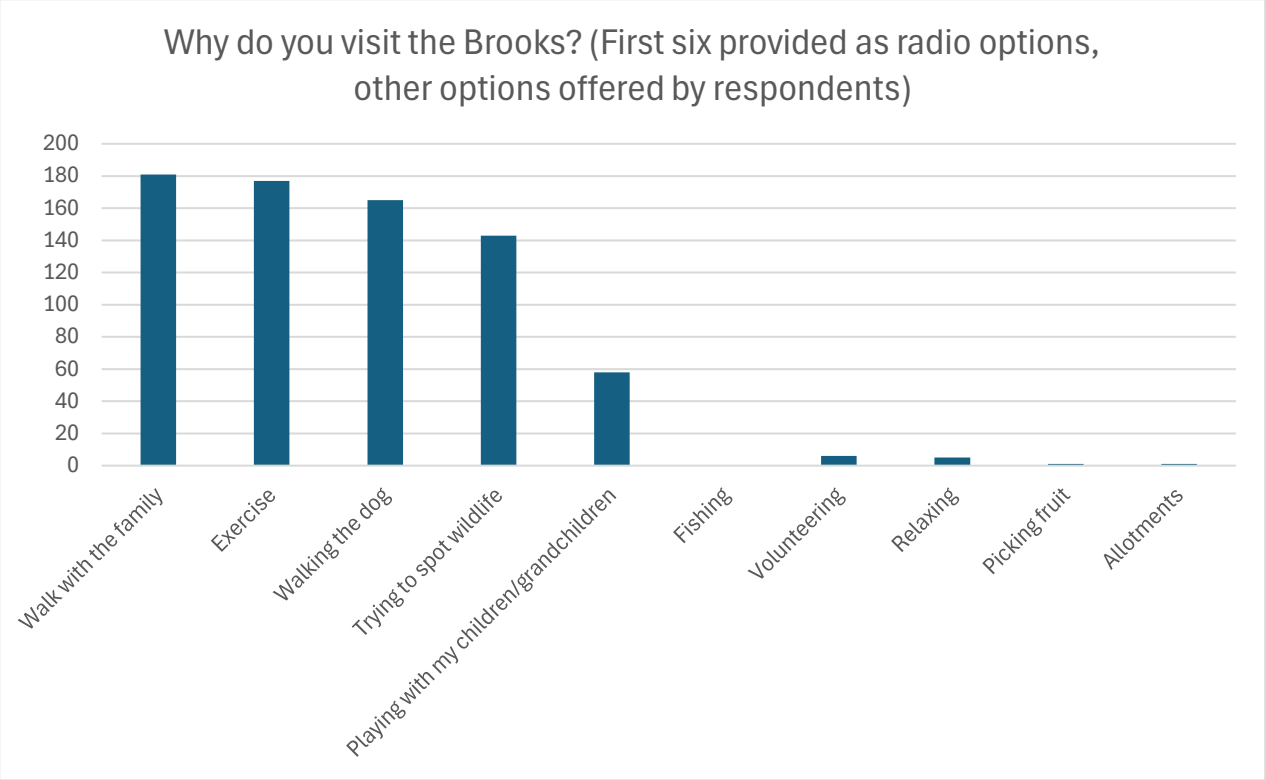
# How do people use the Brooks

People who responded to the survey were very regular visitors to the Brooks. Many told us they walked a route nearby every day.




The graph below shows that most people spend time on activities which take place out of the water; walking or exercising, rather than anything which involves getting into the water.

Although several people through the survey express concerns about the decline of nature in this area over recent years, it is still regarded as a good place to spot wildlife and several people talked about the wellbeing benefits of just spending time in nature.




It is clear from both the large number of survey responses and from the passion with which people talk, just how important the Brooks are to them. So many people echo the quote below, talking about their memories of happy times spent here either as children, parents or grandparents.

**"I have lived backing onto Siston Brook for 27 years. I used to take my children down to paddle and search for mini-beasts in the Brook. Kingfishers used to nest on the stretch by us and were regularly spotted and there were ducks, dragonflies and damselflies around all summer.**

**The Brook is very special to me, a calm, peaceful green corridor where you can lose yourself and truly believe you are in the countryside away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. I walk the stretch near me every day and have done for all these years."**

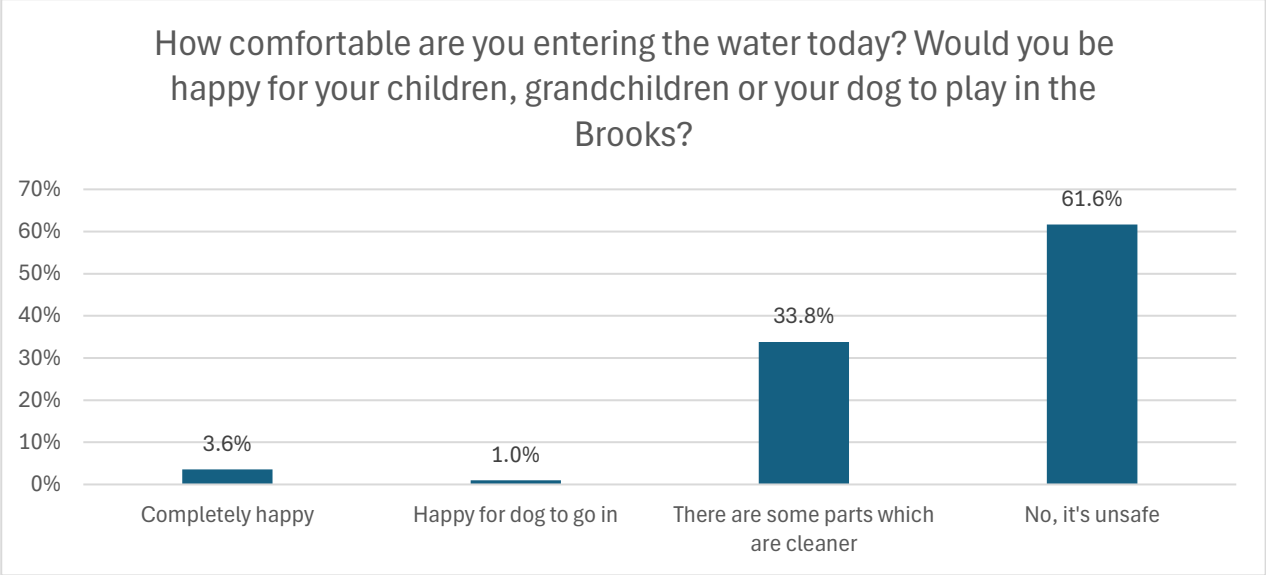
The council is extremely grateful to the many survey respondents who shared with us photographs of happy memories of their time spent at the Brooks, including this photograph of a kingfisher spotted on the river bank. We're sorry we've not been able to publish all of them in this report.



*Photograph courtesy of survey respondent*

## Do people think the water is safe?

61% of people who completed the survey said they didn't think it was safe for children or dogs to be in the water. Pollutants were the main concern, but people also mentioned broken glass as a hazard.




**NOTE:** 39 people said this question was not applicable to them. These responses have been excluded from the graph above.

A third of respondents thought some parts of the Brooks are cleaner. At the same time, a significant number of people raised concerns about specific areas. There would appear to be particular issues with pollution from petrol, oil and other chemicals in the section of Siston Brook around the culvert near Hinton Drive/Hazelbury Drive/Roy King Gardens – this issue was raised by dozens of people, including some providing photographic evidence.

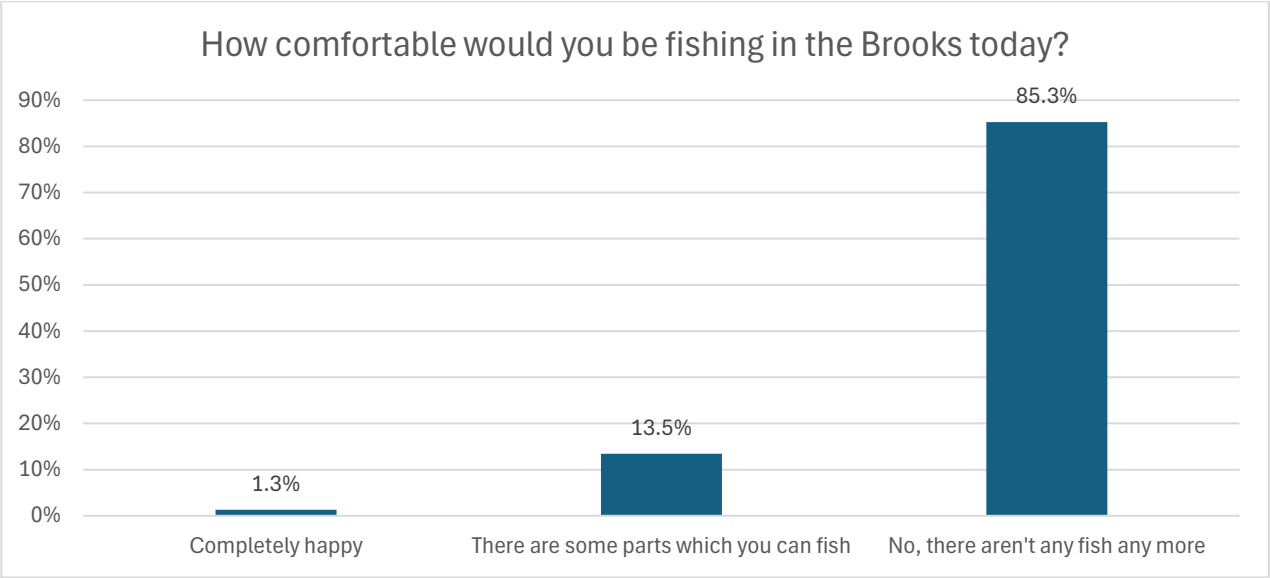
**"I very often smell and observe a toxic solvent that flows into the Siston Brook via the culvert that is adjacent to the Roy King residential area and have reported this. Consequently, there doesn't appear to be any river wildlife, including birds."**



*Photograph of pollutants entering Siston Brook provided by a survey respondent*

Three people said they would let their dogs paddle but wouldn't want children to be in the water. 3.6% of respondents were completely happy for children to play in the brooks.

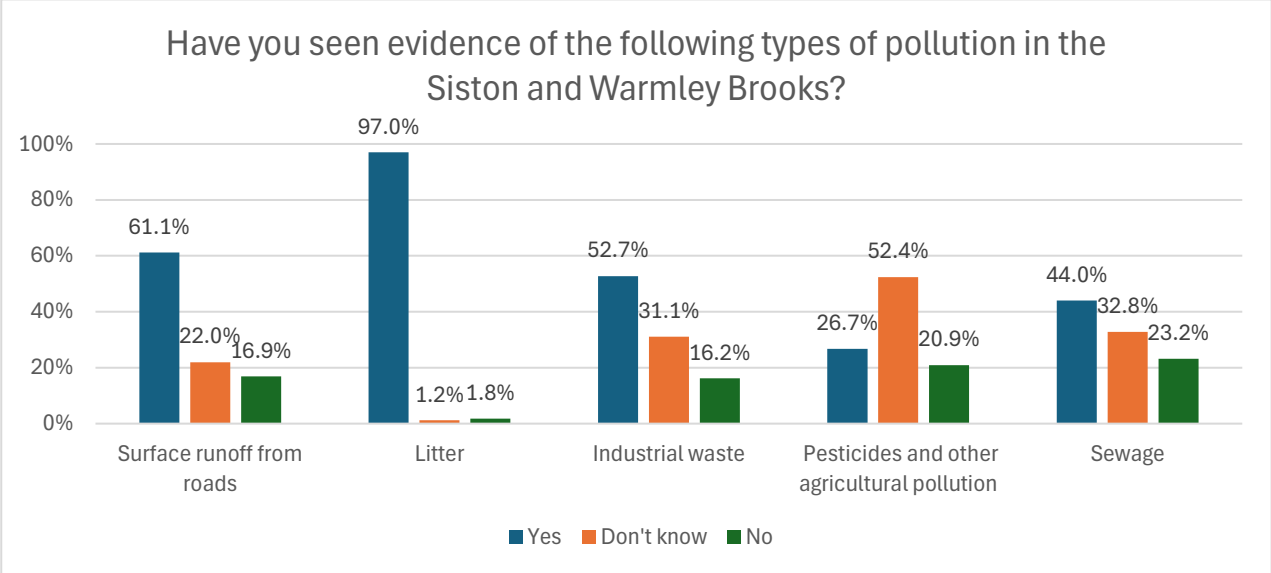
Most respondents weren't interested in fishing, so this question was not relevant to them, but of those who did respond, 85% said there weren't fish in the water. 13.5% knew somewhere where it was possible to fish and 1.3% were completely happy fishing.




**NOTE:** 189 people said this question was not applicable to them. These responses have been excluded from the graph above.

## Perceptions of pollution

This project has been prioritised following concerns reported by local people. Through the survey we wanted to understand how widely held these concerns were. We first asked people if they personally had seen evidence of pollution of the Brooks.




97% of people said they had seen litter dumped in the water or on the pathways and banks of the Brooks. This ranged from dog poo bags and packaging right up to large electrical appliances like fridge freezers dumped in the water.

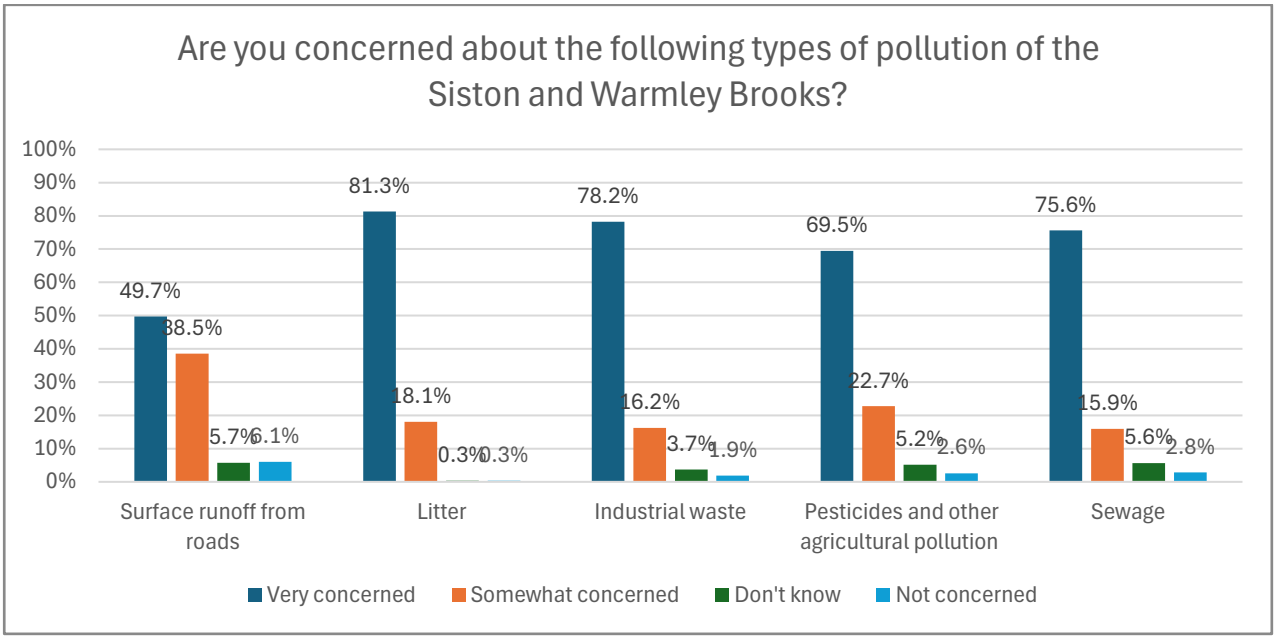
Other forms of pollution are more difficult to identify, so there were larger numbers of people selecting the ‘don’t know’ option when it came to sewage and chemical pollutants.

However, 61% thought they had seen signs of pollution caused by surface runoff, typically in the form of a ‘film’ on the surface of the water. 53% felt there was an issue with

industrial waste. This was mostly linked to specific locations, notably the culvert near Hinton Drive, but was especially alarming to people who reported strong chemical smells coming from the water, which often flowed bright red or other unnatural colours.

Issues with sewage were reported by 44% of respondents, whilst pesticides and agricultural pollution was the least reported issue with 27% thinking they had seen evidence of this kind of pollution in the water.

Clearly, in responding to the survey, residents were showing that this was an issue which was important to them, and this is reflected in the responses asking whether they were concerned about the different types of pollutants.

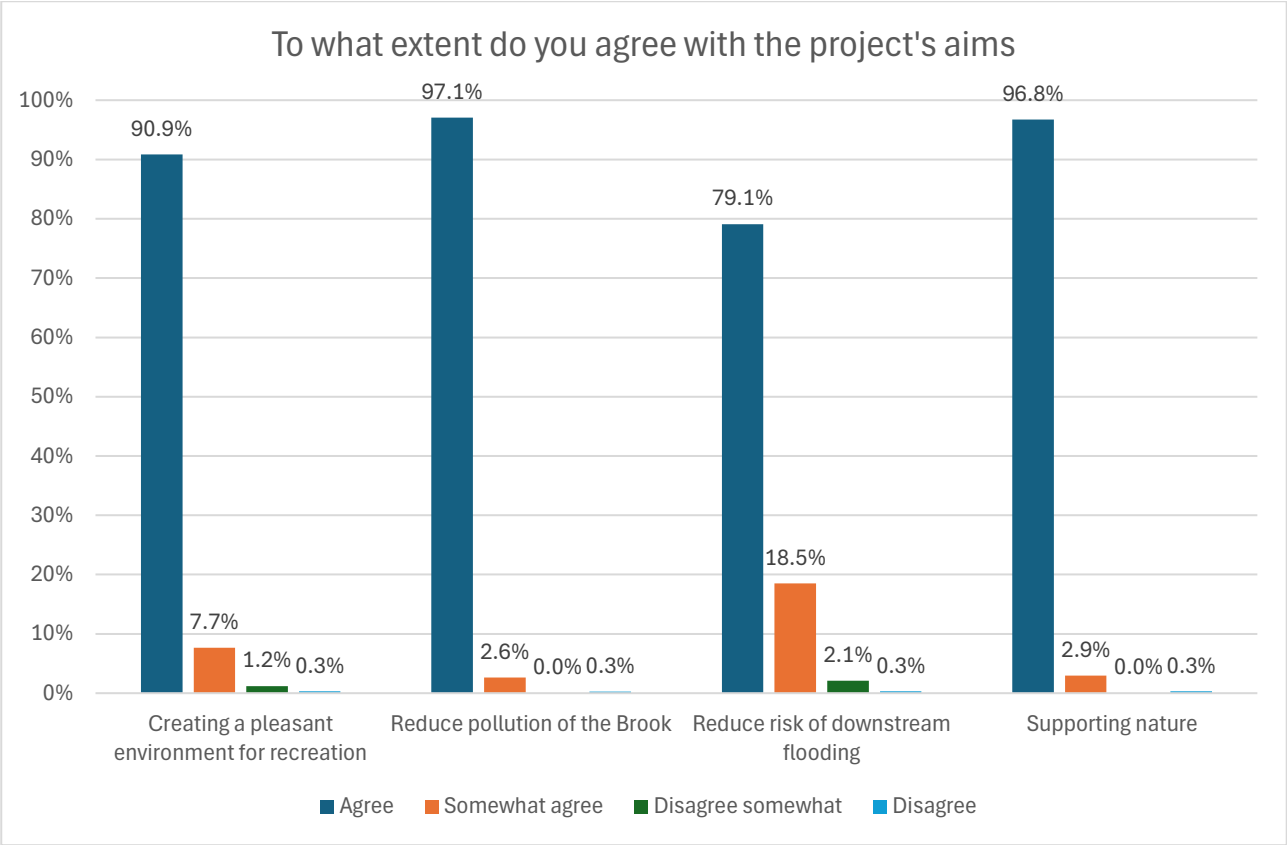



Respondents showed some level of concern about all the types of pollution. There were similar - very high - levels of concern about litter, industrial waste, pesticides and sewage. It is notable that even where people had not personally seen evidence of industrial waste, pesticides or sewage, they were still concerned about this, which probably reflects their understanding of how harmful some of these can be.

There was a lower level of concern about surface runoff from roads. This could be that people are less concerned about the impacts of petrol, oil, brake dust and the like on rivers and nature. An alternative hypothesis might be that litter, industrial waste, pesticides and sewage can all be blamed on ‘others’ whereas anyone driving a car is contributing to the surface runoff issue!

## Do people support action to address the problems?

The engagement exercise demonstrated overwhelming community support for efforts to reduce pollution and flood risk in local rivers.




Respondents emphasise the importance of clean water for wildlife, recreation, and community wellbeing, and call for urgent, sustained action to restore and protect these vital natural resources.



*A four-legged friend enjoying a paddle! Photograph courtesy of a survey respondent.*

There were numerous comments like the ones below from people very concerned about the current state of the Brooks and the resultant decline in wildlife and nature. They welcomed efforts to address the problems.

**"The project is essential to ensure the longevity of this area for young and old to enjoy for years to come."**

**"The brook could become a real public amenity once again and attract the wonderful wildlife we remember enjoying when we first moved here some 30 odd years ago."**

**"From Mill Lane to Willsbridge you have a great wildlife corridor, but the stream is in such a poor state it doesn't support any wildlife at all. No insects means no bats, nor aquatic birds (I haven't seen a duck on the brook for years)."**

In prioritising aims, the benefits to nature from reducing pollution were seen as more important than making it a more pleasant place for people to spend time. A significant number of responses focus on the importance of preserving safe and clean habitats for wildlife. Birds (ducks, kingfishers, dippers, herons, otters, egrets) and other animals are frequently mentioned as being at risk due to poor water quality.

Respondents recall a time when the Brooks were vibrant with wildlife and express a desire to restore these conditions for future generations.

There is concern about the broader environmental impact, including the effect of pollutants on downstream rivers and ultimately the sea.

That is not to downplay the wellbeing benefits of protecting and improving the Brooks, with many people expressing the mental and physical benefits they derive from walking, exercising and spending time in nature.

**"Whilst (improving the area) for recreation purposes would be lovely, the main focus should be to benefit wildlife and nature."**

**"The Brook being so close was one of the reasons I chose to move to this area. Having safe access to wildlife, nature and green spaces is vital for us to live and thrive."**

Not all respondents were personally aware of/concerned about flooding risk. The Brooks cover a large area, so it may be that they do not live near parts which have experienced flooding, hence feel less supportive of this priority. However, most people do support this aim and attribute recent increases in flooding to climate change, but also to changes in land management (e.g., straightening of river bends, loss of natural drainage).

There is a call for natural solutions to flood prevention and for better management of green spaces to support both people and wildlife.

**"I've not seen any risk of flooding so not worried about that, but the pollution is awful and has been for years."**

**"Flood management is very important also, especially near St Anne's Church, it needs clearing and proper routine maintenance."**

Whilst some people point to past interventions being ineffective, respondents urge the council and its partners to work together to address pollution, enforcing regulations, and investing in the restoration and maintenance of waterways. Indeed, there is a recurring theme that clean, safe, and biodiverse waterways should be a given, not something that needs to be fought for.

A large focus of this report has been on the views of those concerned about the issues and urging the council and its partners to take action - because such a high proportion of the 350 people who responded provided this kind of feedback. However, it is also important to report the counter-narrative. One person who didn't agree with the project's aims wanted further evidence of the problems. Another person was supportive of the benefits of the project but wondered whether there were better uses of public funds.

**"First it needs to be established that there is a risk of flooding, industrial waste, agricultural pollution or sewage in the brooks and how serious the problem is."**

**"I think the aims of the project are noble, however I think the council probably has bigger projects to spend our money on. Maybe look at community litter picking which could keep costs low."**

## Other comments and suggestions

The final question asked people to suggest other priorities in restoring Warmley and Siston Brooks.

It is clear from the responses just how much local knowledge there is of the Brooks and of specific issues in different areas. Concerns raised include:

- Dumping of industrial chemicals and waste feeding into the Brook near Hinton Drive/Hazelbury Drive/Roy King Gardens,
- Growth of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and other invasive plant species,

- Broken sluice gate and regular blockages at the Warmley Forest Park,
- Tree felling – particularly at the forest school on Siston Brook,
- Shallow water at various points,
- Impacts of surface water runoff following construction of new housing,
- Flooding near St Anne's church,
- Issues with the pond in Warmley Forest Park,
- Pollution from old industrial dump underneath developments on St Ivel Way,
- Overgrown foliage blocking pathways,
- Runoff of petrol near Hot Water Lane,
- Lack of bins, including dog poo bins,
- Poor state of flood defences,
- Narrowing of the waterway at various points.

Enhancing conditions for nature was a common theme running through the responses and most people responding to this question used it to repeat their support for the project.

Several people repeated their concerns about the levels of pollution entering the Brook and again especially the part of the Brook near Hinton Drive/Hazelbury Drive/Roy King Gardens. They support the project's aims to clean up pollution but would like to see the council work with partners to identify the source of the pollution and if it can be tracked to particular companies or individuals, to take action against them.

Eight people emphasised tackling litter as their priority and there was a general feeling that the area is unkempt and unloved. People think that in several places, vegetation is overgrown and blocks paths and drops leaves and branches into the water, adding to the flooding risk. There also appears to be a growing problem with invasive species like Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

This engagement exercise demonstrated a strong sense of local pride and a desire for collective action – for example several people were keen to volunteer for community litter picks, and some indicated that they would be happy to financially support the project.

A few people stressed the importance of engaging and educating the community, especially local schools, about the project and environmental issues more broadly.

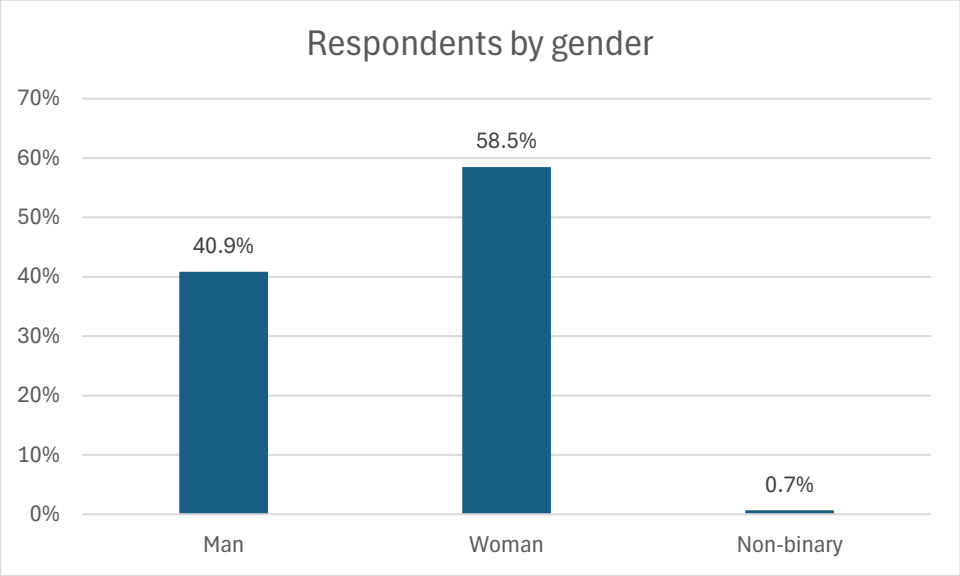
People welcome the proposed intervention by the council and its partners and would like to be kept informed about and involved in efforts to restore the Brooks.

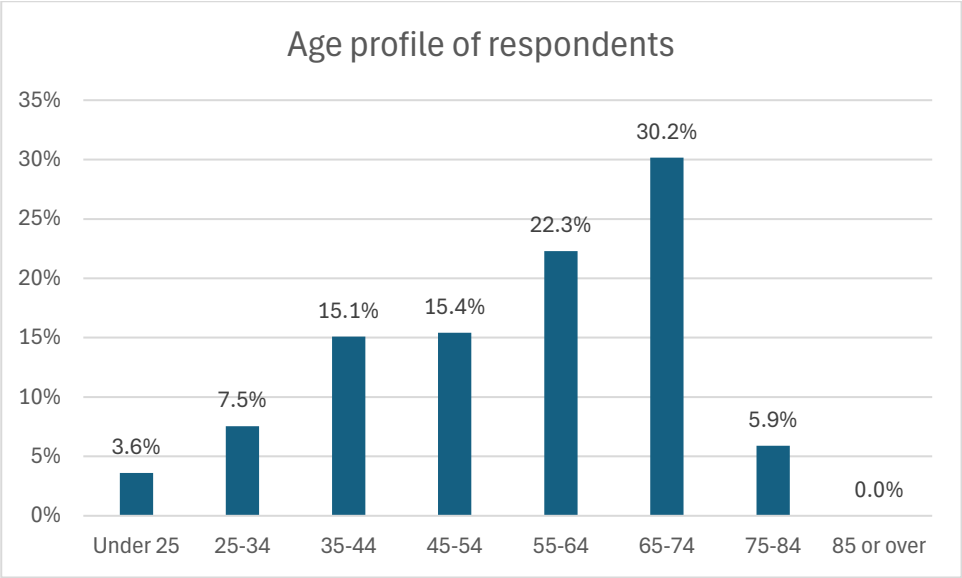


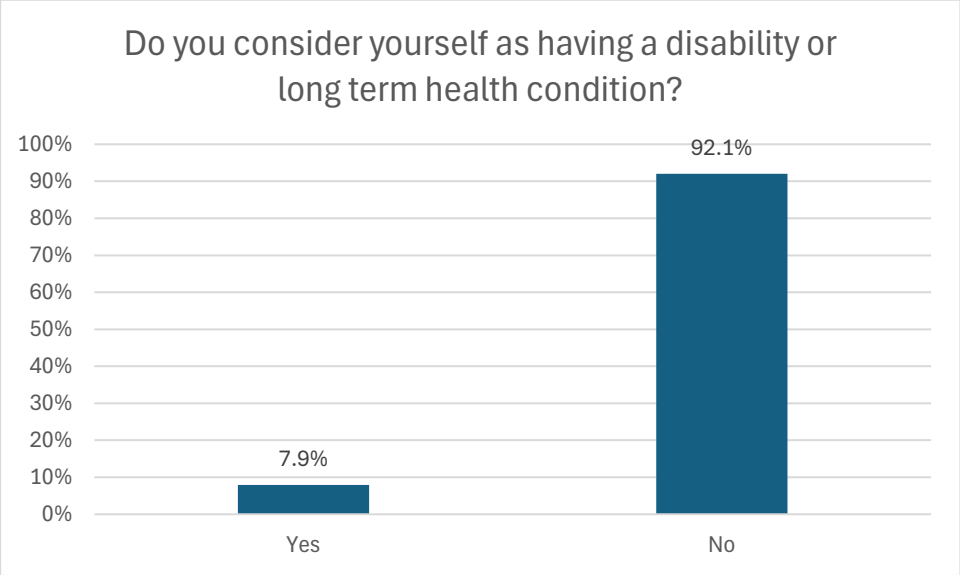
*Father and child enjoying spending time in the water. Photograph provided by a survey respondent*

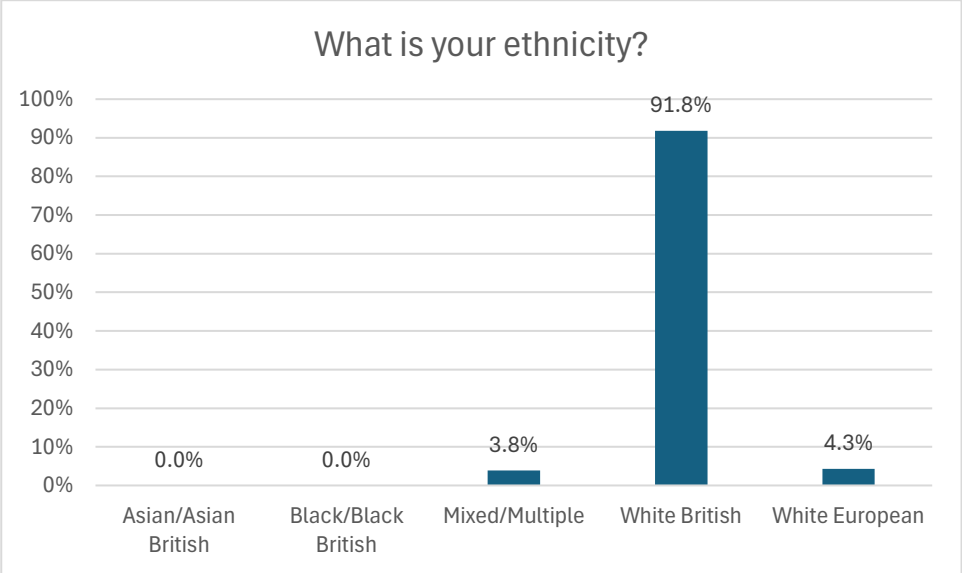
## Appendix: profile of respondents

Our survey sample is not fully representative of the local population. A higher proportion of women responded, older people were over-represented and fewer younger people responded than live in this area.




Age profile of respondents
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
3.6%
7.5%
15.1%
15.4%
22.3%
30.2%
5.9%
0.0%
Under 25
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75-84
85 or over


Do you consider yourself as having a disability or long term health condition?
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
7.9%
92.1%
Yes
No


What is your ethnicity?
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0.0%
0.0%
3.8%
91.8%
4.3%
Asian/Asian British
Black/Black British
Mixed/Multiple
White British
White European