South Gloucestershire Council

De-declaring Wick Golden Valley

Engagement report

Executive summary

The new owners of Wick Golden Valley do not wish to enter into an Access and Management Agreement with the Council. Without such an agreement, the Council cannot continue to manage the land as a Local Nature Reserve in line with the relevant statutory requirements. With no feasible options for maintaining the land as a reserve, the Council has commenced the process to de-declare the site, which initially entails a public consultation.

The consultation shows that local people place significant value on the valley as an accessible green space, wildlife habitat and community asset. Respondents highlighted its role in supporting health and wellbeing, providing access to nature, offering educational opportunities for children and community groups, and contributing to the character of Wick. Many are concerned that de-declaration could lead to reduced public access, less active management for biodiversity, deterioration of paths and habitats, or future development of the site.

Most respondents oppose de-declaration and express significant frustration towards the landowner, who local people feel is disregarding their responsibilities to the local environment and to the community where they are based. They ask that the landowner, the Council and other partners continue to explore alternatives before any final decision is made. Suggestions included:

- Reconsidering the landowner's role,
- Council or community ownership,
- Involvement from charitable or environmental organisations,
- Exploring new funding sources,
- Reduced or shared management responsibilities,
- Retaining part of the valley as a protected nature reserve.

Only a very small number of respondents felt de-declaration was the right approach, mainly because of the potential cost and liability of managing the site.

If de-declaration proceeds, respondents ask for clear safeguards to protect the valley's environmental value and community use. Requests included stronger protection against future development, retention and formal recognition of public access routes, continued support for the Friends group, and clearer information about the costs, liabilities and options considered by the Council.

Overall, the feedback underlines the strength of local feeling about Wick Golden Valley and the importance of transparent communication about next steps.

Background

Wick Golden Valley is not owned by the Council. When it was declared a Local Nature Reserve in 2005, the landowner was happy to enter into an Access and Management Agreement (A&MA) with the Council, setting out the management and maintenance responsibilities of each party.

* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

Following a recent change of ownership, the new landowners have told us that they do not wish to be party to an A&MA, which means the council can no longer manage the site as a Local Nature Reserve in line with the requirements of the 1949 Act. We have therefore been exploring alternative opportunities to manage the land for nature, including:

- Liaising with the landowners to explore other possible avenues,
- Evaluating the costs and benefits of the Council taking on full responsibility and liabilities for the site,
- Inviting partner organisations to work with us to manage the site.

This is an extremely complex site to manage and maintain. Until 1970, it was a busy industrial site with extensive structures and infrastructure spread across the valley. Under the Access and Management agreement which has been in place for the last 20 years, the council managed site access (rights of way and permissive paths) and completed general site management (trees and habitats, safety fencing etc.) and the landowners were responsible for the ongoing upkeep of the industrial structures.

In exploring alternative options for managing the site, the council has investigated the implications of taking on management of the industrial buildings and structures itself. Early reports on some of the more easily accessible structures have shown the potential costs and liabilities involved are considerable, requiring significant external expertise. And it has not been possible to assess several other structures because of the access challenges and costs involved in completing a technical review.

Unfortunately, these complexities and expenses have meant no other party is willing or able to take on the potential liabilities either.

Having explored opportunities to maintain Wick Golden Valley as a Nature Reserve, the Council is following the steps it needs to de-declare the site. Natural England set out the process local authorities must follow in these circumstances, with the first step being to inform local people about the de-declaration, and the steps taken to mitigate any potential loss in environmental benefit.

Survey methodology and respondents

A dedicated online survey site was created to provide background to the decision.

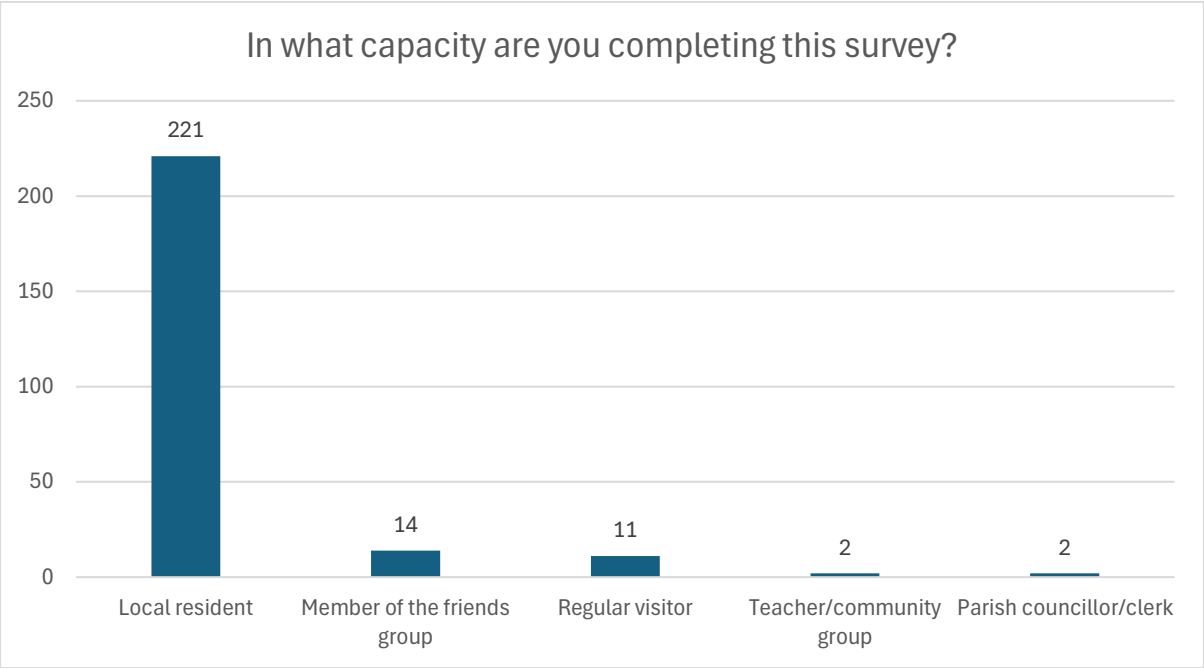
Respondents could provide feedback either via an online survey on this site or by completing a paper survey response between 22 May 2026 and 16 July 2026.

The engagement was widely promoted through various channels including emails to key stakeholders and promotion on social media. Additionally, we held two in-person engagement events at Wick Village Hall on 11 and 18 June to give people an opportunity to ask questions and to encourage them to complete the survey. Approximately 50 people attended across the two events

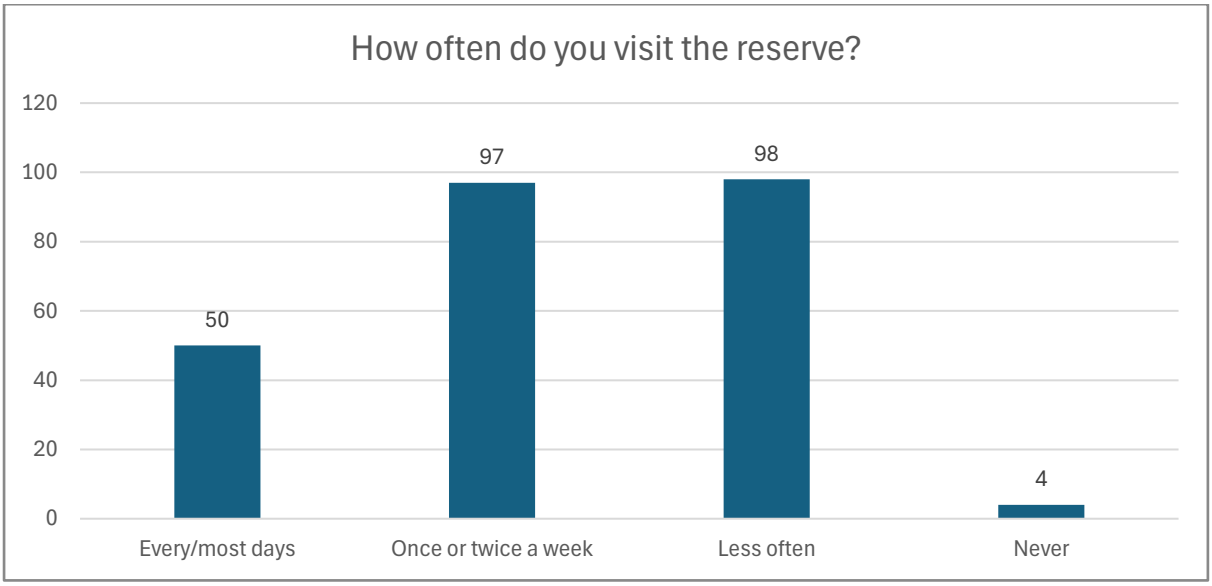
253 people completed the survey, mostly Wick residents and visitors to the reserve, but also community figures like representatives of the local parish council, teachers

* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

and leaders of community groups. 14 members of the Friends Group provided feedback.



Respondents are regular visitors to the reserve. 59% of people visit at least once a week.



The survey sample is not fully representative of the local population, with women more likely to respond than men.

A more detailed profile of the people who responded to the survey is provided in the appendices.

Due to the software used and the different response options open to respondents, it was possible for people to submit more than one response. This was monitored and duplicate responses were removed.

* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

Personal information and comments that can identify individuals have been removed from the analysis. Percentages used in this report have been rounded and may not add up to exactly 100%.

Feedback

The engagement exercise has shown the value local people place on Wick Golden Valley. 253 people responded to the survey, generally people who live in Wick expressing their concerns about the potential de-declaration. Very similar sentiment was expressed at the in-person events we held.

"It would be like ripping the heart out of the village."

What would be the impact of de-declaring the site?

As highlighted above, most of those who responded to the engagement survey, did so to highlight how important the reserve is to them. The reserve performs several functions for local people, including:

- a place to experience nature; people consider it to be an important green space in a relatively built-up area,
- one of very few local places to walk which is accessible to all, including people with pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility vehicles,
- used by schools, brownies and other groups to teach young people about nature,
- for running and exercise.

"The nature reserve has always been a key part of the community - from the primary school education trips, school art projects dotted around the site from the last 20 years, use from brownie/guides/scouts groups, to local walking groups, and the history of the site, it's something people in Wick are proud of."

Many people talk about the reserve as a key community asset, a place where multiple generations of families have spent time over decades.

The importance of the reserve in supporting the wellbeing of local people comes through as a strong theme in the survey. The mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors in nature are well-known. Residents point to this being one of very few places in the area where people can enjoy nature and it is considered the only accessible place for people with mobility needs and parents with pushchairs. Several people highlight the role it played during the Covid pandemic, with its many footpaths providing people with a safe place to spend time outdoors.

"It has become a part of our life, a favourite walk, our go to place, our calm and sanctuary amid the troubles of the world. During Covid, it was a lifesaver."

In terms of potential impacts of the de-declaration, the primary concern people have is whether this is the first step towards development of the site for housing. They point to the steps landowners have already taken in putting up fencing to stop members of the public accessing areas of the reserve.

"What guarantees are in place that the Golden Valley will remain as it is, dedicated to wildlife - and not being used for commercial or private purposes?"

Even if their concerns about the prospects for large-scale development of the site do not materialise, walkers are worried that de-declaration could restrict which areas the public have access to. Whilst the public footpaths through the site would remain, local people have been using many other permissive paths for years to get to their favourite spots. They worry whether the landowner could restrict access to paths or stop maintaining them so that they become inaccessible or dangerous.

They ask for additional assurances that public access will be retained and that the site will be protected for the benefit of local people and nature.

People believe the site provides important habitats for wildlife, especially bats, kingfishers and dippers. It is also home to many specimens of the rare Bristol Whitebeam tree and red campion flower and calcareous grassland (a priority habitat which has been subject to a huge loss of area over the past 30 years and requires active management to prevent it from becoming encroached by scrub).

A Friends group are very active in protecting and improving the site for nature. They worry that even without any development of the site, de-declaring Wick Golden Valley could limit access for their group and lead to less proactive maintenance resulting in a loss to biodiversity. For this reason, a couple of people do not believe the assumption which has been made that de-declaration would not have significant impact for biodiversity. People are also worried concerned that with fewer people visiting regularly, and access to more areas restricted, this could encourage more anti-social behaviour.

Some respondents highlight South Gloucestershire Council's commitment to nature and want reassurance that the Council has genuinely considered all options before pursuing de-declaration.

"I have observed several indicator species for ancient woodland and therefore potentially SSSI status, including Red Campion and Bristol Whitebeam."

Finally, a few people suggest that de-declaring the site could have a negative impact for the local economy. They point to visitors to the reserve spending money in the

* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

pub and in local shops, which could be at risk. They also think having a protected space for nature on their doorstep is a draw for people buying houses in the village.

Alternatives to de-declaration

Clearly, many residents care deeply about Wick Golden Valley and see de-declaration as a backwards step. Only two people felt de-declaration was the right approach, arguing that it is too expensive to continue managing the land for nature.

In expressing their opposition to de-declaration, some people question whether every potential avenue has been explored to retain the status of the reserve and ask for an interim arrangement to be put in place whilst parties explore different options.

They ask for a public meeting with the landowners and the Council to consider alternative approaches, which could include:

A different ownership model

A significant proportion of local residents express frustration, disappointment and anger with the landowners for not entering into a management agreement – and for seemingly dis-engaging with local people and their concerns. The landowner is a major local business, who they believe benefits greatly from having positive relations with local people. They ask that the organisation re-considers its decision and take on responsibility for maintaining the site to give back to the local community.

"Is it too much to ask a company turning over £108.8m who regularly pollutes the environment driving large trucks up and down through the village to put their hand in their pocket and support the area in which it's based?"

"I feel strongly about an approach to (landowners), demonstrating the strength of feeling about the change. I would support a public meeting so that residents can be informed fully of the implications."

Some people point out the commitments South Gloucestershire Council has made to counter the climate and nature emergencies. They ask for more information about the costs, liabilities and risks involved with maintaining the site and ask whether the Council could buy the land.

Residents also wondered whether community ownership and management could be an option, either via the parish council, or a community trust, potentially in conjunction with South Gloucestershire Council.

Finally, one person asked if there were opportunities for the landowner to be forced to sell to an alternative buyer who would comply with the management arrangements.

* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

Alternative management responsibilities

Survey respondents speculate whether other organisations could take on greater responsibility for maintaining the site – either in support of, or instead of, the landowner and/or Council. Suggested organisations include:

- The Friends group,
- A community trust,
- A charitable nature-focused organisation,
- A local university or training provider.

Supporting information provided through the consultation explained that South Gloucestershire Council has engaged with several regional and national organisations with a focus on nature but has not been able to identify any group willing to take on responsibility.

Secure new funding

Supporting information shared through the consultation highlighted the complexities and potential costs with owning and managing a site with multiple former industrial buildings in varying states of disrepair. In seeking a potential way forward, respondents suggested opportunities to raise funds. Ideas proposed included:

- Identify funding streams from central or regional government (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority),
- Seek funding from local businesses (either the current landowner or another organisation) as part of their corporate social responsibilities,
- Form a charity and organise fundraising events and activities,
- Charge visitors to visit and park at the reserve,
- Install solar panels on part of the land to earn income from power generation,
- Restore the buildings and establish the reserve as a historical attraction with entry fees,
- Build eco lodges to let out to earn tourist income,
- Feature the reserve on a tv programme.

Retain part of the land as a reserve

A few people asked whether it might be possible to separate the land for different purposes, with a smaller section of the Valley being retained as a nature reserve. To reduce maintenance costs, the preference was that land containing industrial buildings would be excluded from the nature reserve.

Reduce cost of maintenance

One person asked if the costs of maintaining the land could be reduced if the buildings were demolished or fenced off. Clearly, this approach would not be supported by those who talked about the importance of the site's industrial heritage.

Managing the site following de-declaration

As well as those proposing an alternative to de-declaration, there are a smaller group of people who recognise that given the circumstances, this is the most likely next step. Should the site be de-declared, they set out how they would like this process to be managed.

Firstly, they would like any de-declaration to come with further protections to prevent the land being developed for housing. Specifically, some people ask for Restrictive Covenants to be placed on Wick Golden Valley to remove the possibility of the land being built on in the future. Another wondered whether Conservation Orders could be placed on trees to achieve the same effect. One person felt that given the prevalence of rare trees, flora and fauna on the site, it should be considered for accreditation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Retention of footpaths is also important to people. There are several public rights of way footpaths across the site, but locals say there are many other permissive footpaths which have been regularly used for many years and therefore qualify to be declared public footpaths with the same restrictions applied.

Many members of the Friends group for Wick Golden Valley completed the consultation survey, expressing concern about how they might continue their work going forward. Supporting information to the consultation set out the landowner's position that they are happy for the Friends Group to continue working on the site with the appropriate insurance arrangements in place. In response to this, many members of the Friends group ask that the landowner pay for the insurance.

Other comments

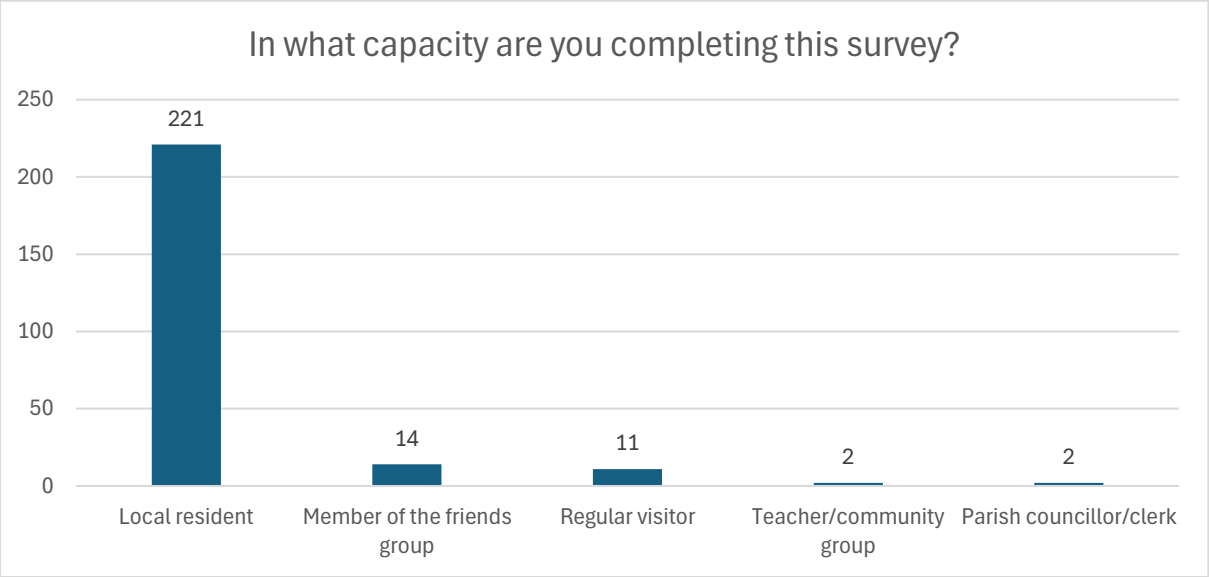
A few residents felt that South Gloucestershire Council had not kept people informed. They specifically wanted more information about what the costs and liabilities might be to purchase and manage the site.

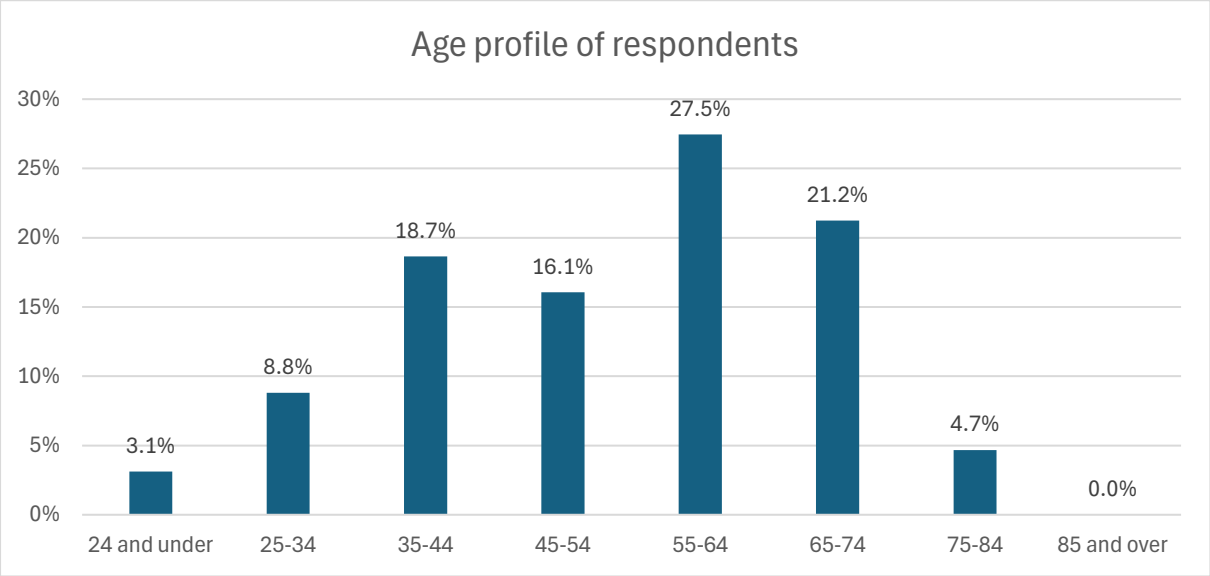
As detailed in the supporting information to the consultation, the Council investigated the implications of taking on management of the industrial buildings and structures itself. Early reports on some of the more easily accessible structures showed that the potential costs and liabilities involved would be considerable, requiring significant external expertise. And it was not possible to assess several other structures because of the access challenges and costs involved in completing a technical review.

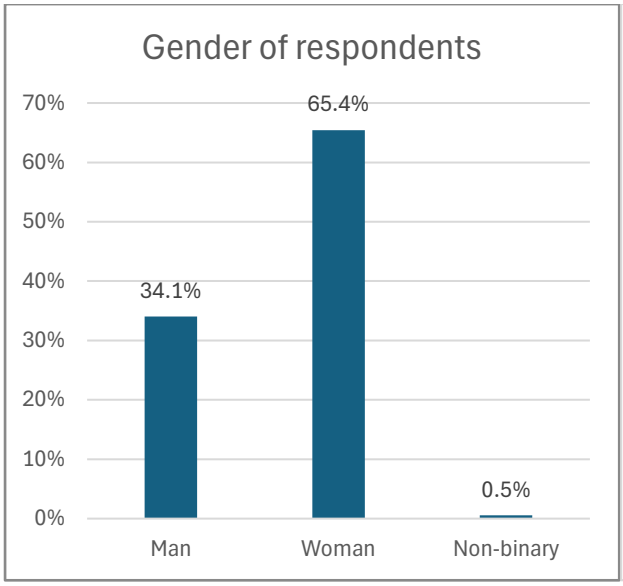
* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.

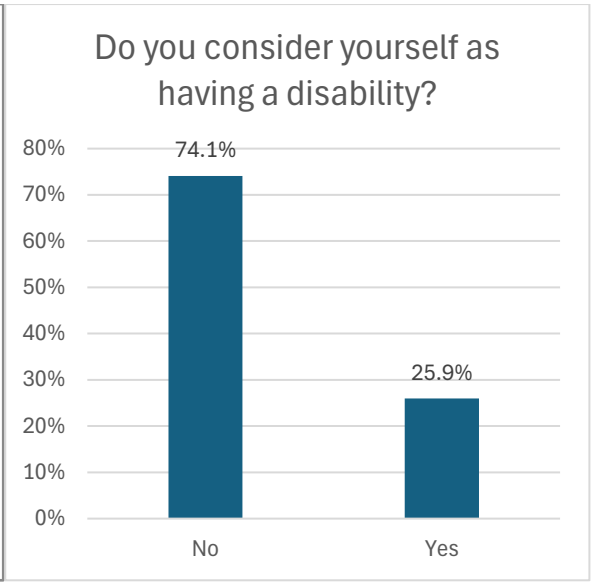
Appendix: Respondent profile

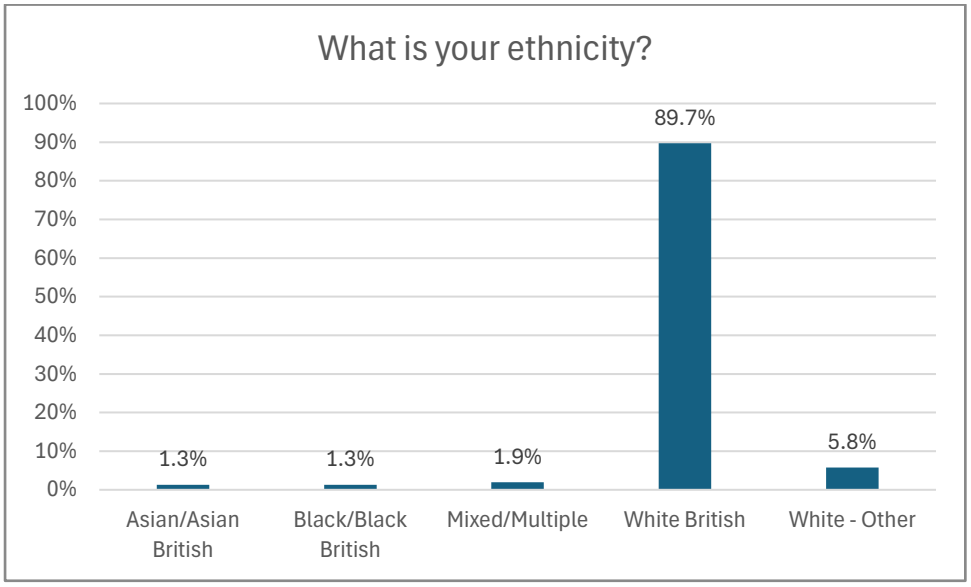
253 people completed the survey to offer their views on the proposed de-declaration and potential options for the nature reserve. Almost all were local people. Women were over-represented in the survey sample and the age profile skewed slightly older.











* The purpose of this report is simply to summarise feedback provided through the consultation. Given the focus of the consultation, much of this feedback comes in the form of suggested alternatives to de-declaration. In highlighting feedback, the report's author makes no comment on the potential viability of any individual suggestion.