South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Improving Cock Road Ridge for people and nature

Engagement report

Background

Cock Road Ridge is a public open space with over three kilometres of footpaths through woodland and open grassland, with views over Cadbury Heath and Oldland Common towards Bath. It is a much-loved site for nature, with numerous habitats for different plants and animals. But some parts of the site are not thriving.

As part of its commitment to create and restore habitats for nature, South Gloucestershire Council is making plans to improve Cock Road Ridge to help visitors get more out of the site, whilst supporting wildlife to thrive.

Between April and June 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

Cock Road Ridge is highly valued by local residents as a place to walk, exercise, enjoy views and spend time in nature. Feedback shows strong support for the proposed improvements, particularly where they would improve year-round access while protecting and enhancing the site's value for wildlife.

- Engagement ran from 14 April to 10 June 2026 through an online survey, engagement website, on-site visitor surveys and drop-in events. The survey received 82 responses, with many additional comments gathered through conversations with visitors.
- There was clear overall support for the proposals, with more than 90% of survey respondents agreeing with the suggested improvements.
- The strongest priorities were resurfacing paths to improve access throughout the year and enhancing wildlife habitats. Together, these accounted for around three fifths of respondents' virtual budget allocations.
- The main issues raised were path condition, drainage and accessibility, particularly in wet weather and winter. Concerns were also raised about whether proposed kissing gates would be suitable for wheelchair users and people using mobility vehicles.
- Respondents strongly supported nature recovery, including wildflower planting, pond improvements, bird and bat boxes, orchard maintenance and the longer-term ambition to designate the site as a Local Nature Reserve.

Overall, the feedback supports a balanced approach: improving access and maintenance where this helps local people use the site, while ensuring changes remain sensitive to wildlife, habitat protection and inclusive access.

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 14 April and 10 June 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 throughout the consultation window conducting visitor surveys and hosted family-friendly drop-in days, all designed to gather more feedback from visitors to the site. Comments captured by officers are included within this engagement report.

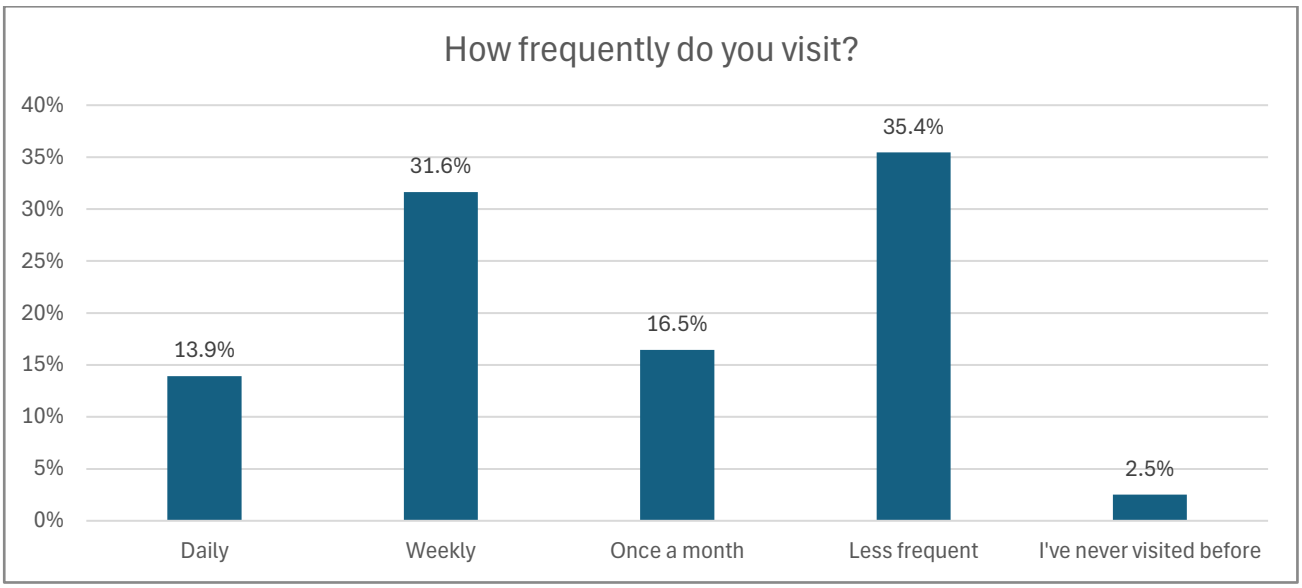


Conversations with visitors to the reserve on one of our drop-in days

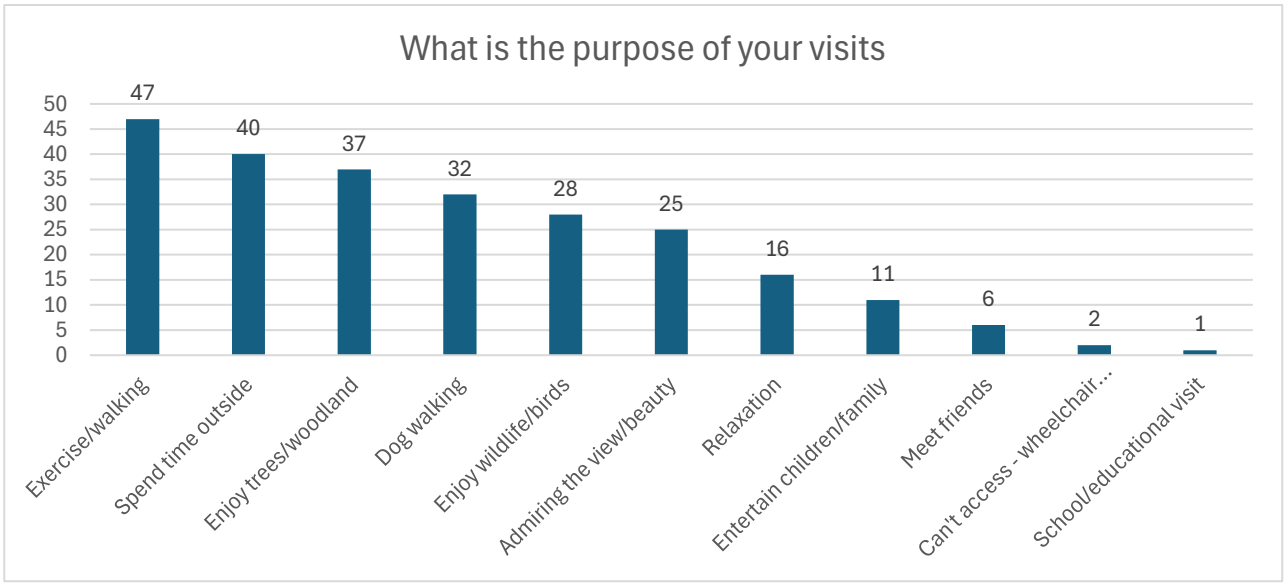
82 people completed the survey and many more discussed their thoughts directly with officers.

How do people use the site?

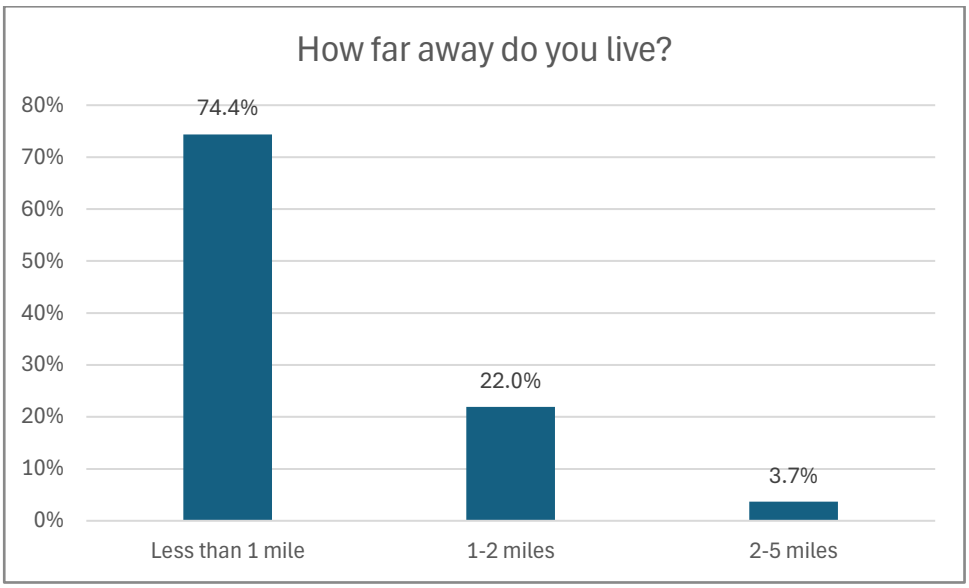
People who responded to the survey were regular visitors to Cock Road Ridge. Many told us they walked a route nearby every day.



Cock Road Ridge can only be accessed on foot, but people visit the site for many reasons. Exercising or walking was the most common use amongst survey respondents, but it was also seen as a very pleasant place to spend time outdoors, either enjoying the view, being in nature or to walk dogs.

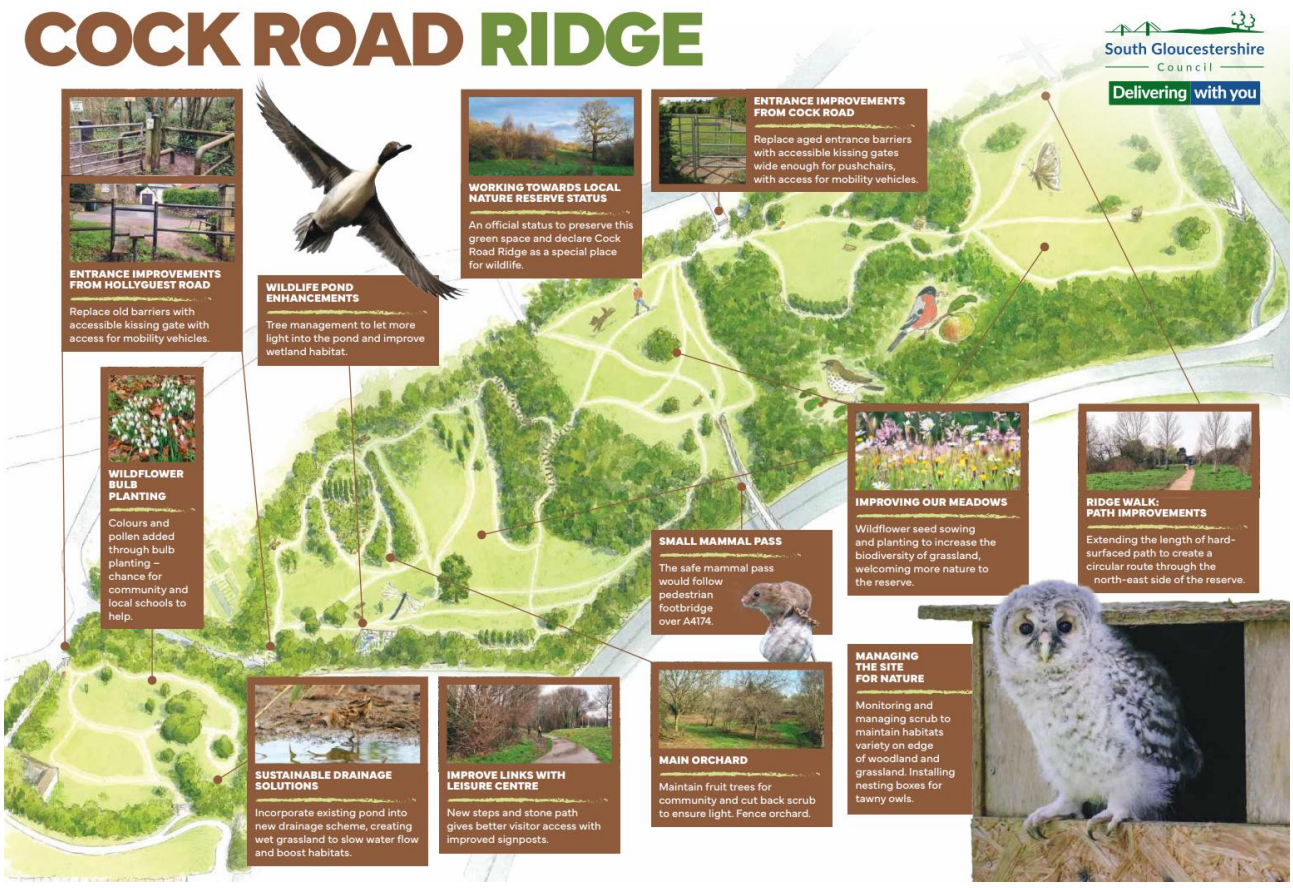


It would appear that Cock Road Ridge is primarily a very local attraction. Almost three quarters of those who completed the survey live within one mile and only 3.8% lived further than two miles away.



Support for the proposals

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



Visual guide to the proposals shared through the consultation

These included:

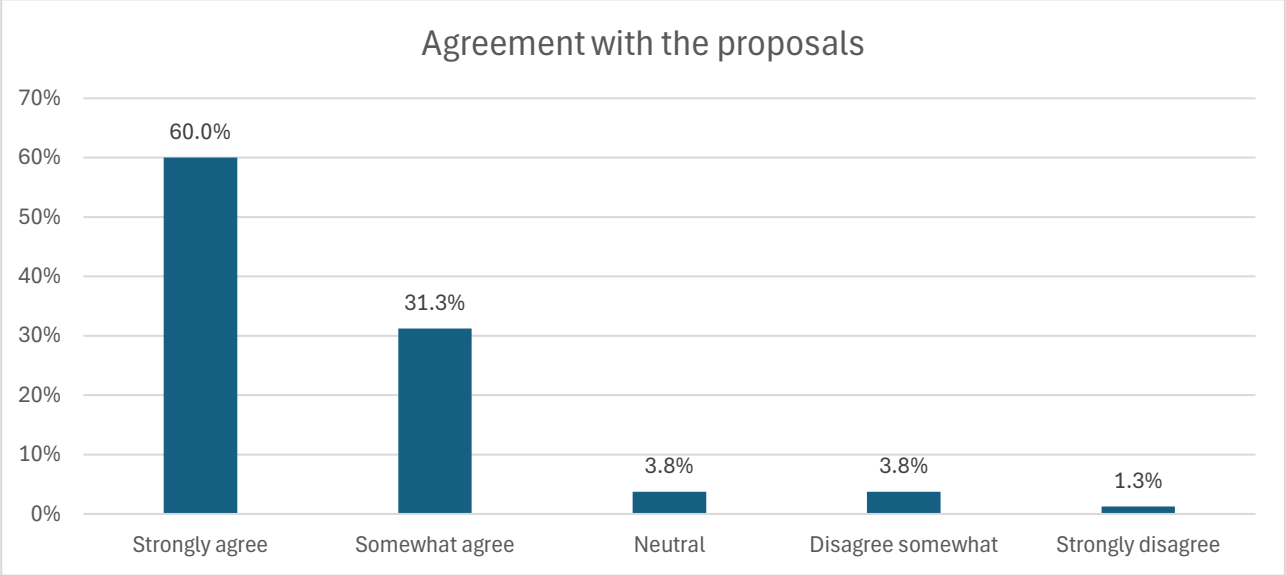
- Entrance improvements from both Cock Road and Hollyguest Road,
- Sustainable designs to address some of the drainage issues at the site,

- Wildflower bulb planting and creation of wildflower meadows,
- Habitat improvements to the pond area, managing vegetation to let in more light,
- Work on the orchard to maintain fruit trees and to fence it,
- Further improvements to the paths, creating a circular route through the reserve,
- Improvements for wildlife, including new nesting boxes, a safe mammal pass and work to create and restore habitats.

Ultimately, by actively managing the site, we would look to declare Cock Road Ridge as a Local Nature Reserve, offering further protections.

Strong support for the proposals

The proposals attracted strong support. Over 90% of survey respondents agreed with the improvements which were put forward, and only four people disagreed.



Reasons for disagreeing with the proposals

Turning first to those who disagreed with the proposals. Two of the four people were wheelchair users. Both argued that the accessible kissing gates proposed for the two entrances would not allow people in wheelchairs or mobility vehicles to access the site. They would like the Council to explore an alternative solution which would enable access to all.

"Some 'accessible' kissing gates are anything but. You need to be able to get a large mobility scooter through it. Pathways need to have a reasonable gradient even if that makes them longer."

Other reasons given for disagreeing with the proposals included:

- Opposition to fencing the orchard,
- Preference to protect the reserve for nature, rather than opening up access for people and dogs,
- Concern about planting new trees, (new trees are not proposed, only management of existing trees and wooded areas),

- Signage not needed,
- Concern about increased noise, litter and security issues.

"My experience with other nature reserves is that an increase in dog walking seems to be associated with making the environment less attractive to wildlife."

"If wildlife is a priority, then keep humans out!"

"The wider access gates will have bikes (motor and cycles) being ridden there, gangs of people causing noise and mess and garden security compromised."

However, as highlighted by the first graph, these opposing views were very much in the minority. More than nine out of ten people were very positive about the initial improvement work which has taken place and welcomed additional focus to building on this progress.

"It's wonderful that at long last things are being done at the ridge because it really is a beautiful place."

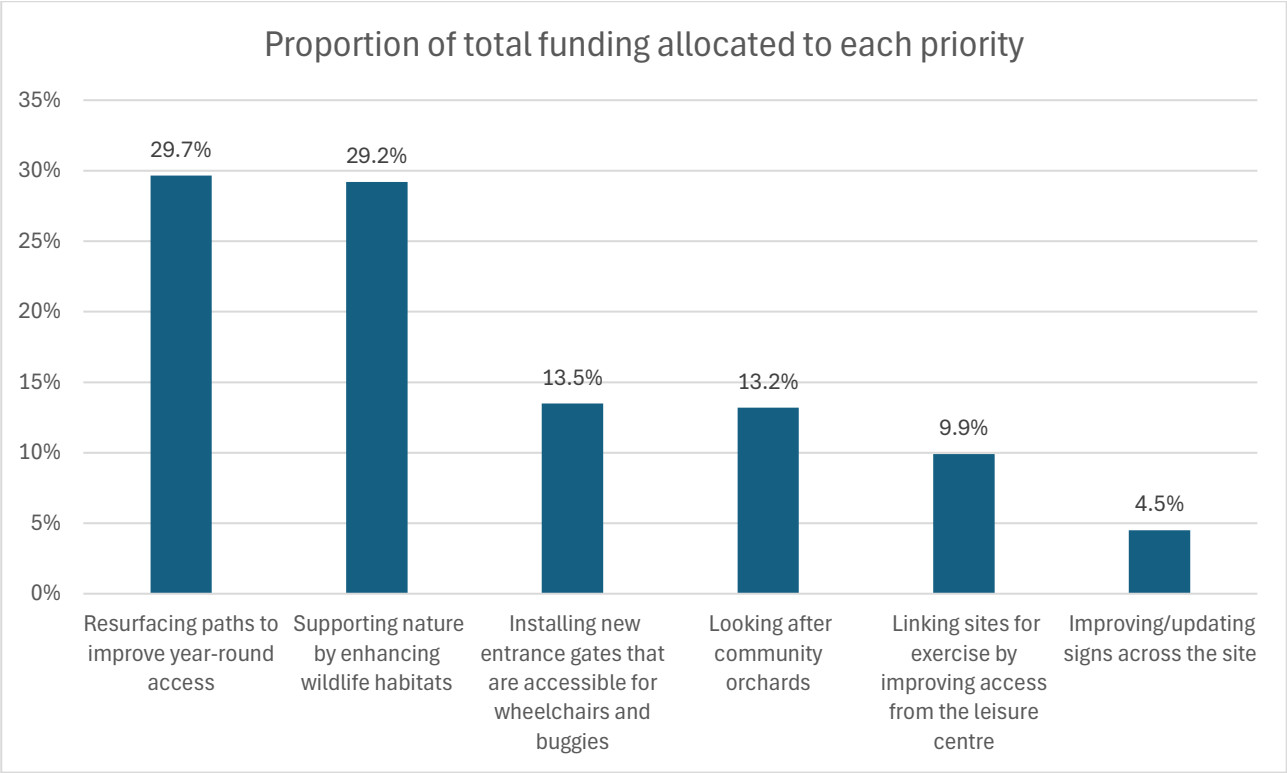
"I'm really excited about what's happening."

"What has been done recently is great and I have already been visiting more."

Priority improvements and feedback on individual proposals

To help prioritise work, respondents were asked to allocate spend of a 'virtual budget' across six priorities:

- Resurfacing paths to improve year-round access
- Installing new entrance gates that are accessible for wheelchairs and buggies
- Improving/updating signs across the site
- Supporting nature by enhancing wildlife habitats
- Looking after community orchards
- Linking sites for exercise by improving access from the leisure centre

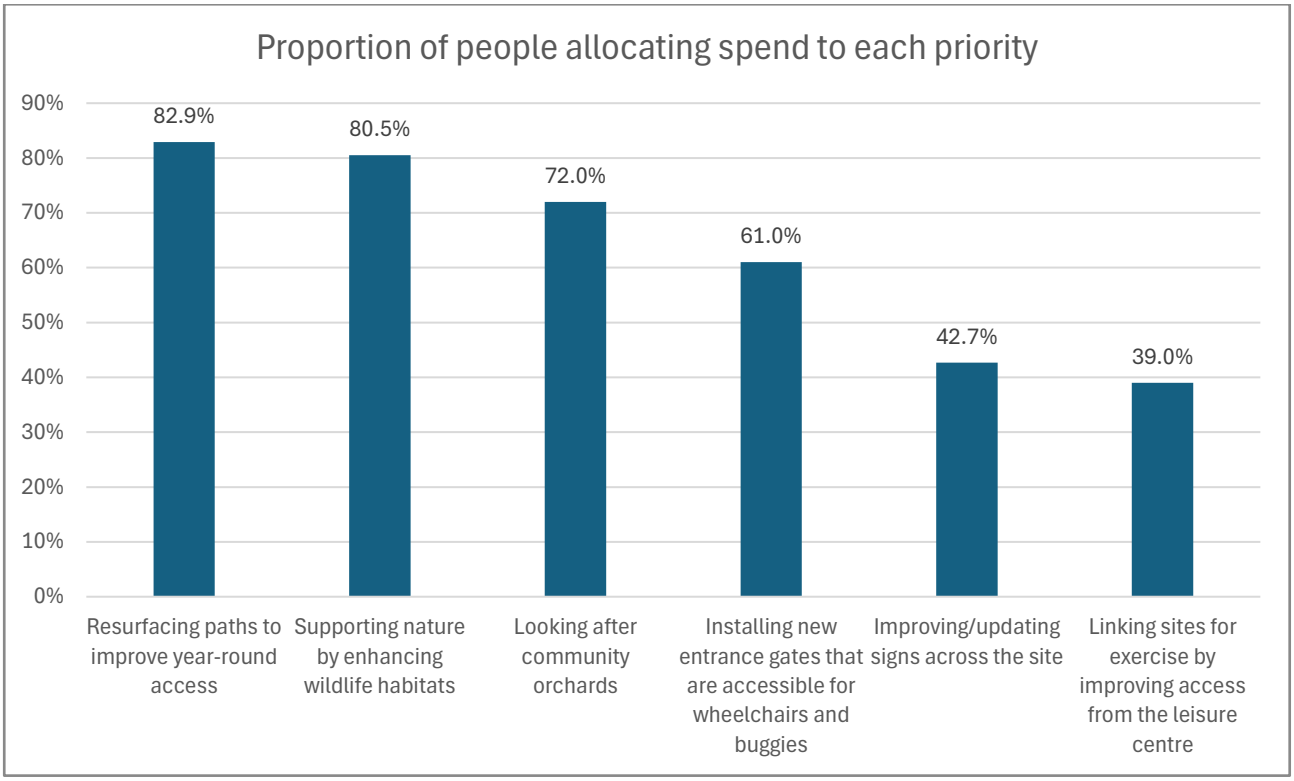


Two initiatives attracted significantly more 'funding allocation' than others. These were:

- Resurfacing paths to improve year-round access – 29.7% of all spend
- Supporting nature by enhancing wildlife habitats – 29.2% of all spend

Installing new entrance gates, work to restore the community orchards and improving access from the leisure centre all attracted less than half as much funding support, whilst only 4.5% of survey respondents' budget was allocated towards improving signage across the site.

Another way to look at this data is to calculate what proportion of people allocated *any* funding to each of the proposals.



The same two priorities come out on top, with more than eight in ten people wanting money spent on resurfacing paths and enhancing wildlife habitats. However, it is interesting that such a high proportion of people (72.0%) felt that money should be spent on the orchards. 61.0% supported the introduction of new accessible entrance gates. Clearly, however, people wanted larger budgets allocated to the first two priorities.

Less than half of respondents allocated funding towards either new signage (42.7%) or improving access from the leisure centre (39.0%).



Resurfacing paths

In survey responses there were far more comments about footpaths and drainage issues than any other subject. This was also the main topic of conversation at the drop-in days.

People welcomed work completed as part of the Common Connections project to improve path surfaces but highlighted different areas of the reserve which were muddy or inaccessible during winter and following wet weather.

Specific areas mentioned included:

- Top and bottom of the main steps,
- Southern path into most eastern field (by the Wraxall Road entrance),
- Path near entrance via the ring road overbridge,
- Proposed new path through the woods.

It was recognised that a balance needs to be achieved in opening up access so that local people can observe, enjoy and learn about nature without inadvertently damaging the natural environment you're seeking to protect through too much human intervention. People generally thought the proposals were sympathetic to nature.

Most people were positive about the proposed improvements, welcoming the better access this would allow, although a couple of people thought that the circular route was too long and that too much money was allocated to this.

"The improvements to the pathway in the middle section have been excellent. It would be lovely if similar paths could be laid at the other two ends to facilitate year-round access as it is a mud bath in the winter rendering it unusable."

"I was sceptical about new stone path (installed through Common Connections project), but I've been surprised with just how well it has blended in."

Several people commented on the maintenance requirements to ensure the paths were always accessible. This was primarily about cutting back brambles and overgrown vegetation to keep the paths clear. One respondent asked whether more could be done to make the gradients suitable for those using wheelchairs or mobility vehicles.

Finally, some respondents asked that consideration be given to improvements to steps to improve accessibility of the site:

- Increasing number of steps to reduce step heights,
- Reinstating old steps currently inaccessible due to brambles,
- Fill in spaces underneath steps which could pose a trip hazard.

In combination with work to improve drainage, funding invested in footpaths was widely welcomed.

Supporting nature and enhancing habitats

As highlighted previously, there was widespread support for the different initiatives to restore habitats, with people recognising that the Ridge should primarily be a place for nature.

Although several people through the survey express concerns about the decline of habitats and 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.

Respondents appreciated the importance of the reserve in providing habitats for birds and supported the suggestion to install boxes. They specifically asked for bat and kestrel boxes. One of the respondents was a keen bird watcher and advised that retaining an unmanaged grassland area was best for supporting the range of birds of prey which visited the reserve. Another person asked if it would be possible to build a 'hide' for bird watching and another suggested a bat trail could help attract more visitors to the Ridge.

People supported the proposals to complete work on the pond to improve wetland habitats. Most people also liked the idea of maintaining fruit trees in the orchard for the community. However, a couple of people questioned the suggestion that the orchard area be fenced, wanting the area kept open for dogs (another person said it would be better for nature to have areas where dogs couldn't access).

"I look forward to improvements to the pond so it can be accessible and a real attraction like Willsbridge."

"I would value the attention to the pond, we used to be visited by a heron but it's now overgrown and littered."

Introduction of more wildflowers through planting bulbs and setting seeds was enthusiastically supported.

Clarification was sought about whether new trees or shrubs would be planted as part of tree management with one person questioning whether new trees would be appropriately watered and cared for and another concerned about impact on views.

A longer-term aim for the Council is to officially declare the site as a Local Nature Reserve. Local people very much supported this ambition.

Installing new entrance gates

As highlighted above, two people opposed the proposals because they didn't think new kissing gates at the entrance would be accessible for people using wheelchairs or mobility vehicles. Others, however, supported having more of a barrier to help prevent dogs running onto roads.

There were comments about individual entrances. The gate at Belsher Drive was too narrow and difficult to open and people found the Palmers Close entrance too steep and often muddy. The improvements made at the Wraxall Road entrance through the Common Connections project were seen positively.

Signposts

Only a couple of people mentioned signposts, reflecting the lower priority people assigned to this. One person said signage from the leisure centre would be useful, whilst another commented that it was difficult to be accurate with timings because of different people's walking speeds.

Other comments, requests and suggestions

In appreciating the increased attention on the reserve, some people asked for additional facilities. This included:

- more litter and dog poo bins,
- picnic benches and additional seating,
- lighting and CCTV to improve security.

A couple of people wondered if it might be possible to construct some form of building or a covered area to provide shelter and potentially for wider community use.

Through the survey and in-person conversations, several people commented on maintenance of the reserve. People were encouraged that the Ridge was now being more actively managed, noting how this was bringing back into use areas which felt abandoned with overgrown brambles and vegetation. They hoped that this would mean paths could be kept clear of brambles and undergrowth.

"The changes to the community orchard have been noticed. A year ago you barely knew those apple trees were there."

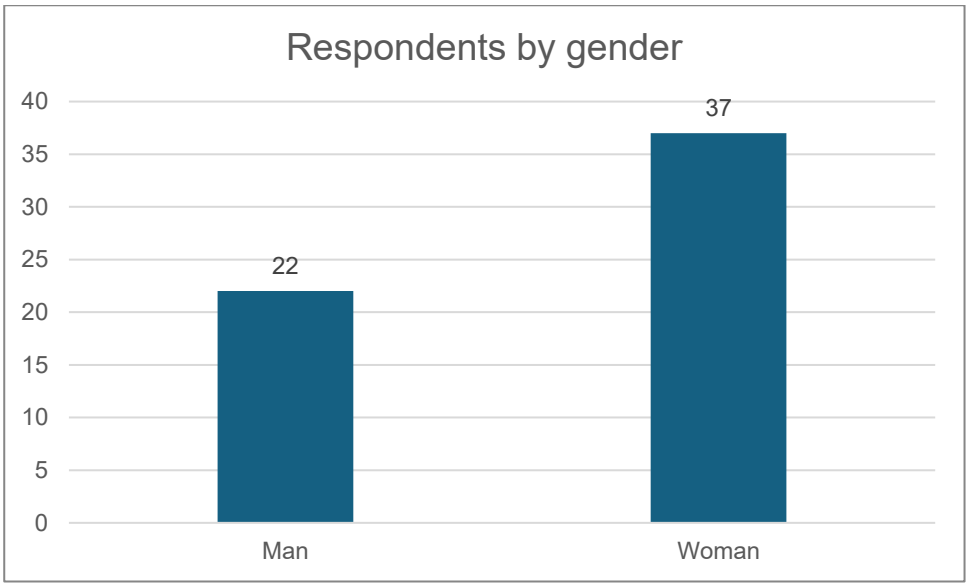
A couple of people speaking to officers at one of the drop-in events gave feedback on how maintenance was carried out, complaining about areas being left untidy following work. There was also a request that grass be cut more regularly.

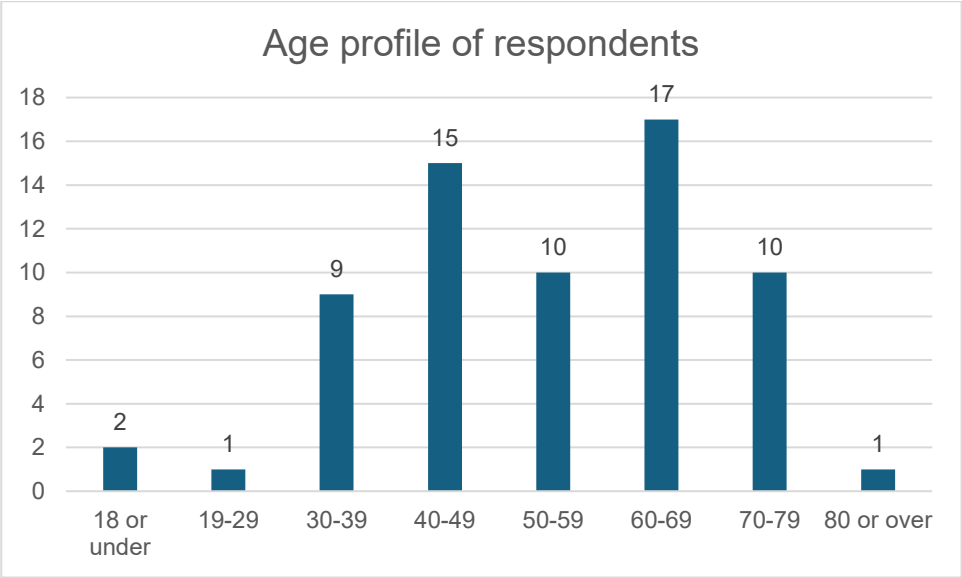
A couple of people expressed concern about whether making the reserve easier to access could encourage more people to ride motorbikes or e-bikes on the site.

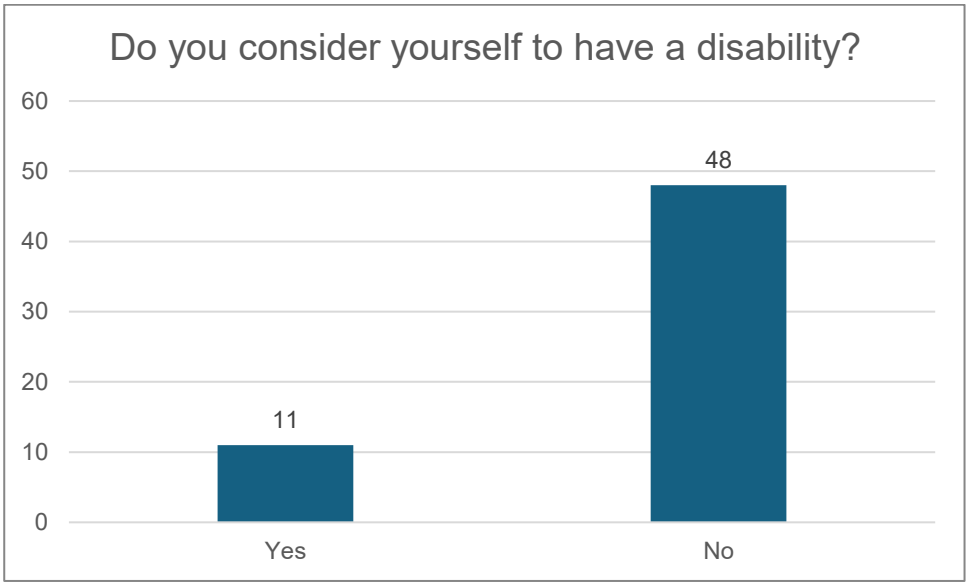
Through the survey, an email address was provided to identify people interested in volunteering to help maintain and improve the site. A couple of people asked for greater co-ordination and planning of volunteering efforts, potentially including community events.

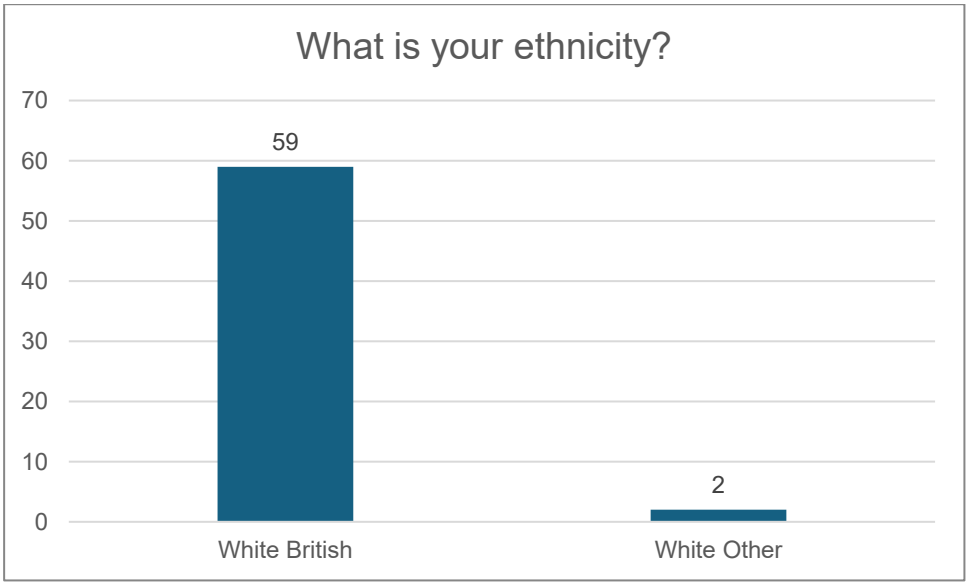
Whilst this would sit outside the scope of the project, a further suggestion for improving access was to design local footpath infrastructure in such a way as to allow people to walk or cycle up the side of the ring road from Hanham/Longwell Green to Kingswood without having to cross the ring road to the cycle/path.

Appendix: profile of respondents




Age profile of respondents
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
2
1
9
15
10
17
10
1
18 or under
19-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60-69
70-79
80 or over


Do you consider yourself to have a disability?
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
11
48
Yes
No


What is your ethnicity?
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
59
2
White British
White Other