

Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

*Working Together to Create
an Action Plan for
Recreational Access in
Monmouthshire's Wye
Valley*

**Public Consultation Report
April 2024**



Contents:

- The consultation process
- Who took part



- The **voluntary public consultation** ran from **8th November 2023 to 12th January 2024**
- It was promoted via social media channels and on the Wye Valley website*. Personal invitations were sent to a broad stakeholder network (100+ contacts) where were encouraged to share details across their networks.
- All materials were provided in English and Welsh
- Multiple methods were available for responses:
 - An **Online survey form** (see appendix) generated 350 responses
 - A **dedicated email address** to which 6 responses were received, 4 of which were connected to an online response
 - A **dedicated postal address (free-post)** was offered, though no responses were received via this option
- Two **community drop-in sessions** took place **27th and 28th February 2024** in **St Arvans** and **Penallt** respectively.
 - Each session displayed 7 boards outlining the background to the project, a review of the area and a summary of the feedback gathered through the voluntary public consultation. These can be viewed/downloaded via the Wye Valley National Landscape website [Lower Wye Tracks & Trails - Wye Valley AONB \(wyevalley-nl.org.uk\)](https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk)
 - Representatives of the Wye Valley National Landscape, Monmouthshire Council, Natural Resources Wales and Tomorrow's Tourism were in attendance to answer questions and to listen to the views of those attending
 - c.35 members of the public and local community attended the session in St Arvans and c.50 in Penallt
 - A feedback form was provided with 30 attendees across the two session providing comments in this way
 - The vast majority of attendees were local residents, along with several local councillors. Among those attending there was coverage of a wide range of usage of the tracks and trails, as well as residents living alongside various of the tracks and Trails.
- All responses were taken into consideration and this report provides a summary

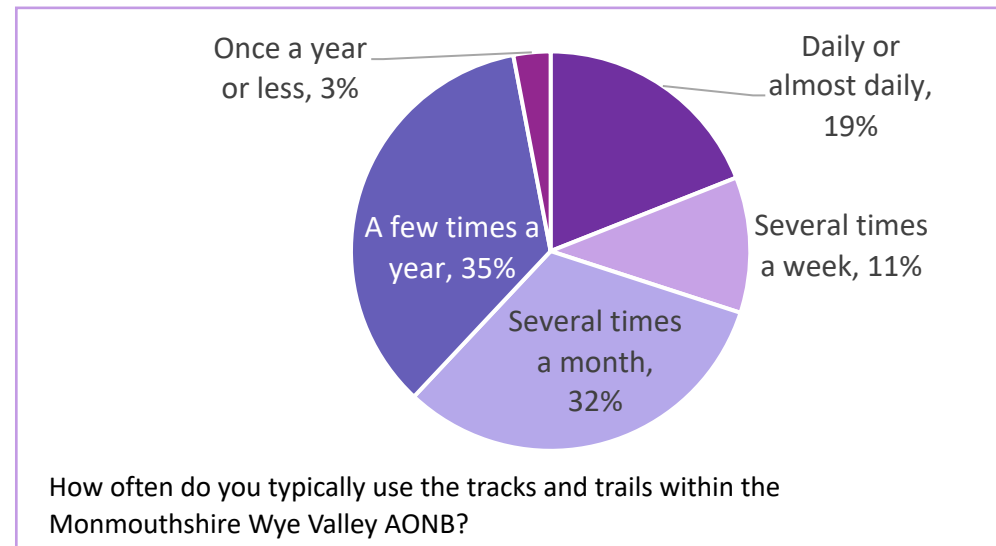
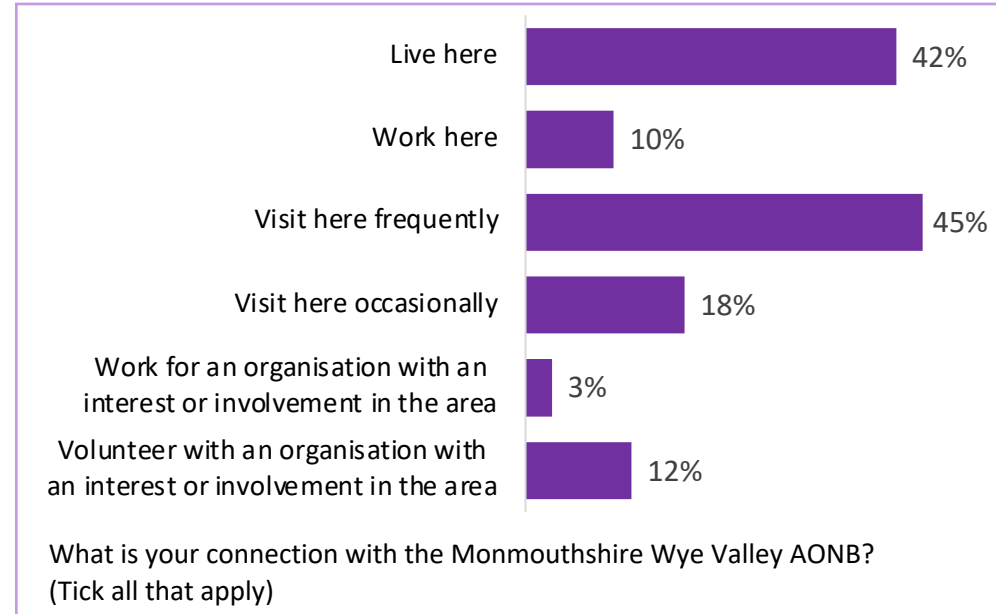
** Note: During the consultation the Wye Valley AONB rebranded to Wye Valley National Landscape. All consultation information was available via channels using both names.*

Who took part in the consultation

- The consultation attracted responses from both local residents and visitors.
- As well as individual people, 50 organisations were represented across the responses covering a wide range of interests:
 - Community groups
 - Environmental groups
 - 4x4 vehicles
 - Trail bikes
 - Cyclists/Mountain Bikers
 - Walkers/ramblers
 - Horse riders/drivers
- 99% of those taking part are users of the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB (NL)
 - A little under a third use the tracks and trails at least weekly
 - Just under a third use them several times a month
 - Over a third use them just a few times a year or less often
- Usage is predominantly for leisure (96%)
 - 4% use the tracks and trails to 'commute to work, school, college etc. on foot/cycle etc.'
 - 10% use them for work/volunteering (restoration, maintenance etc.)
 - Other reasons for use include access to property, commercial use (running courses, tours etc.)

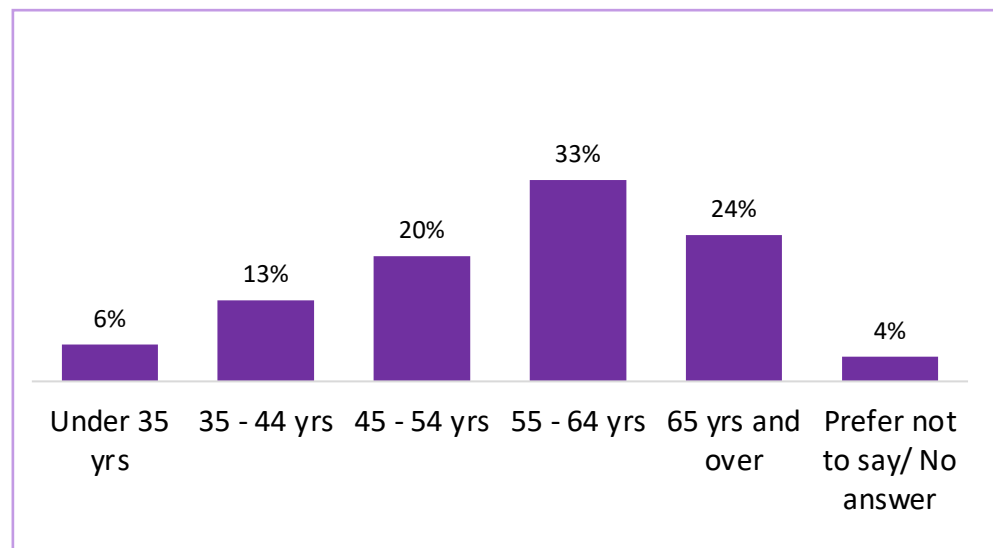
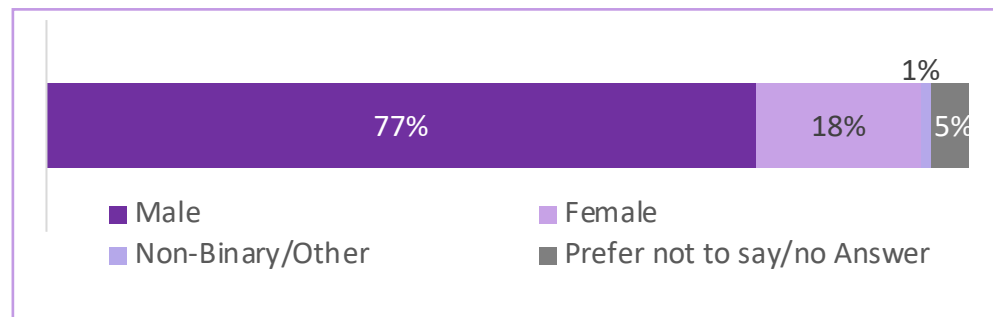
Note: This is the profile of people taking part in the consultation and is NOT necessarily reflective of the pattern of usage of the tracks and Trails overall.

Base: 350 online responses

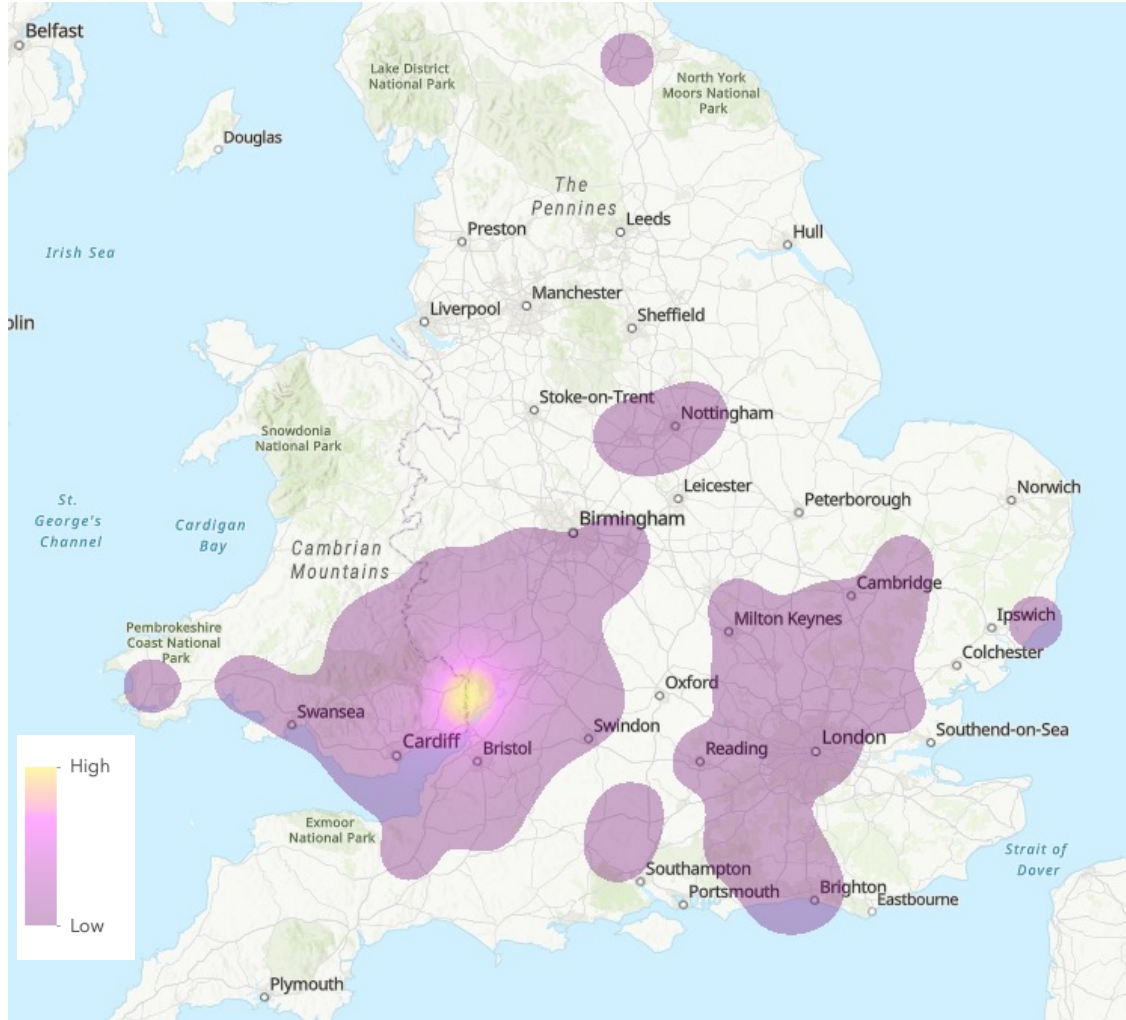


Demographic profile of consultation participants

- The profile of people taking part in the consultation is provided for reference
 - Over three-quarters of those taking part are male
 - There is good representation across age ranges, though the majority are 55 years and over
- The consultation has good representation of those with disabilities or health conditions. While 5% chose not to give an answer to the question, of those that did respond 28% reported health conditions
 - Health conditions reported include a range of physical and mental impairments
 - To protect anonymity of individuals, further details of health conditions are not included within this report
- The vast majority of responses are from people who describe their ethnic group or background as 'white' (85% of those that answered the question). 12% chose not to answer the question.
 - *To protect anonymity of individuals, further details of ethnic group or background are not included within this report*

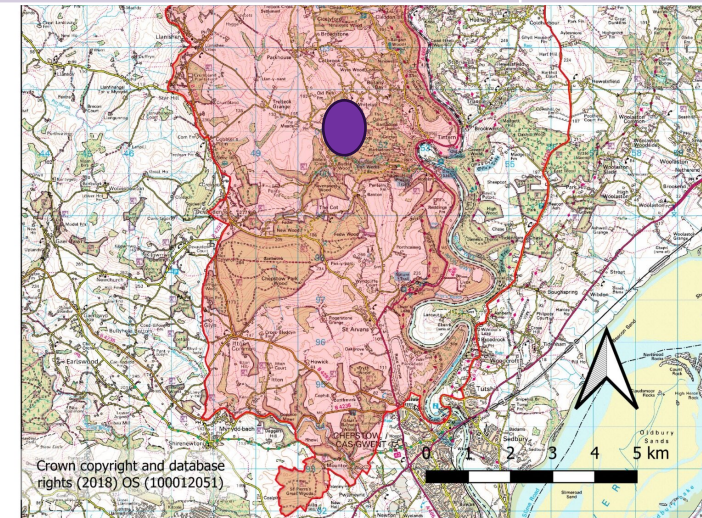


Location of consultation participants



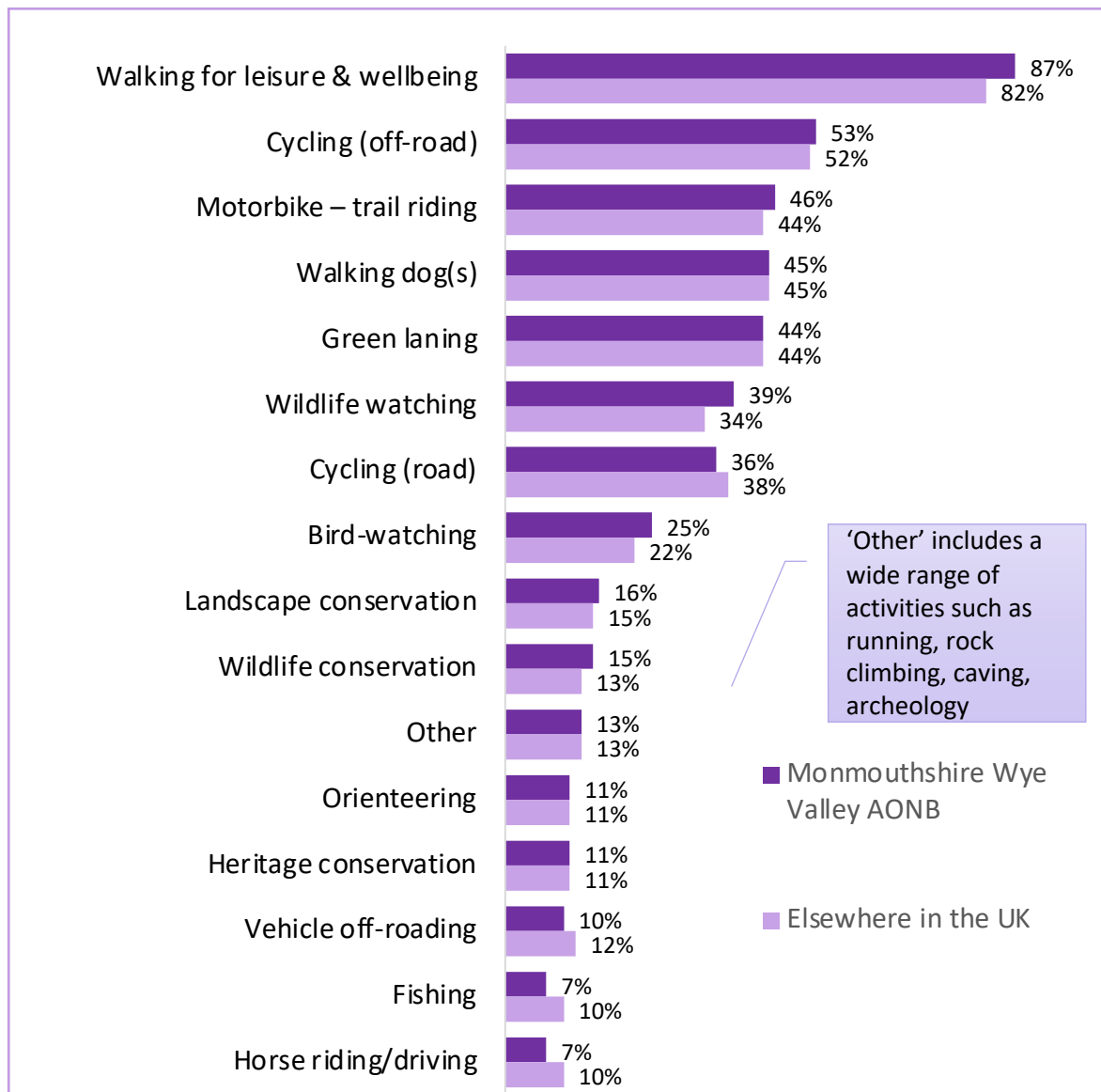
Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Project Area

Distance from area (central point marked on map for distance calculation)	Percentage of responses
Less than 3 miles	12%
3 – <5 miles	12%
5 - <10 miles	13%
10 - <15 miles	9%
15 - <20 miles	10%
20 - <30 miles	16%
30 - <50 miles	9%
50 - <100 miles	8%
100 miles or more	10%



Activities participated in by consultation participants

- Among the activities taken part in the Lower Wye Valley, walking is the most prevalent (87%)
- 53% off those taking part are cyclists
- The consultation attracted a large response from those involved in motorbike –trail riding (46%) and green-laners (44%)
- Other activities well-represented in the responses are wildlife/bird watching and landscape/wildlife/heritage conservation
- Only 7% of those taking part in the consultation ride or drive horses on the tracks and trails of the Wye Valley

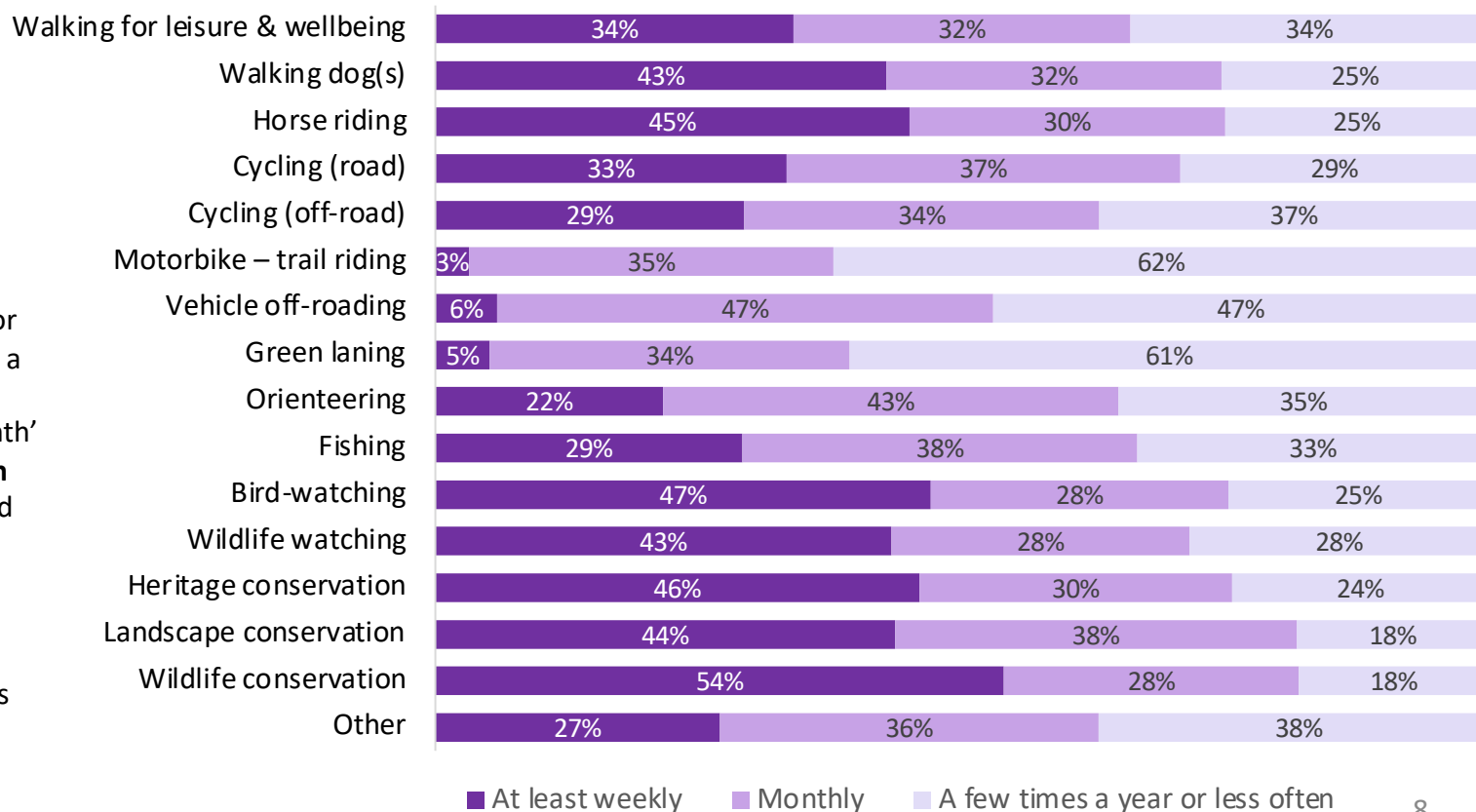


Frequency of use varies by proximity and activity

	Live here	Work here	Visit here frequently	Visit here occasionally	Work for an organisation with interest/ involvement in area	Volunteer with an organisation with interest/involvement in the area
At least weekly	68%	51%	9%	0%	18%	37%
Monthly	28%	43%	48%	5%	45%	39%
A few times a year or less often	3%	6%	43%	95%	36%	24%

At least weekly includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'
Monthly = 'several times a month'
A few times a year or less often includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'

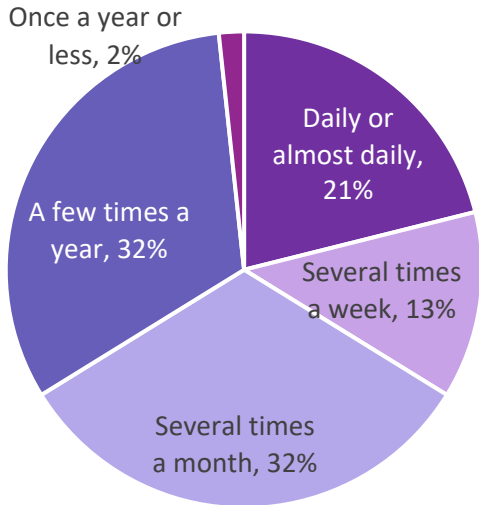
Note: Individual people may be counted multiple times in the activity data as many individuals participate in more than one activity in the area



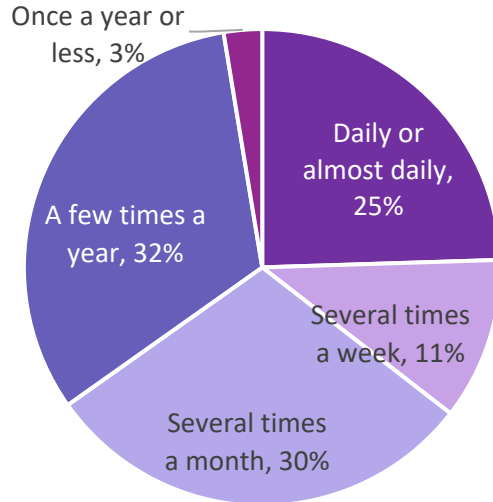
Profile by activities and frequency

Around a third of people undertake their activities at least weekly in the area, except those using motorised vehicles, who typically only do so at most a few times a month, but often less frequently

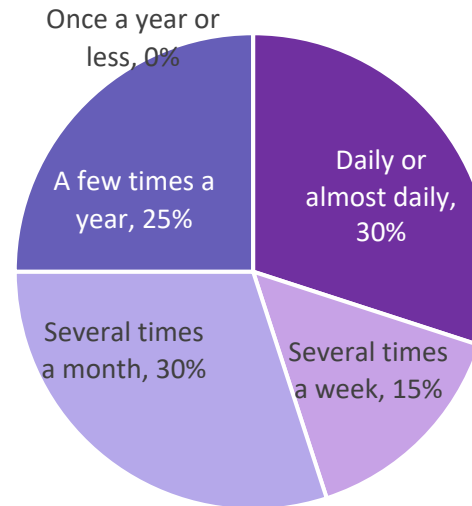
Walking for leisure



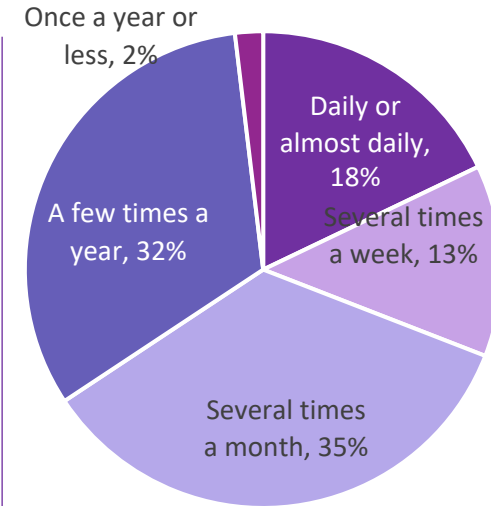
Walking the dog



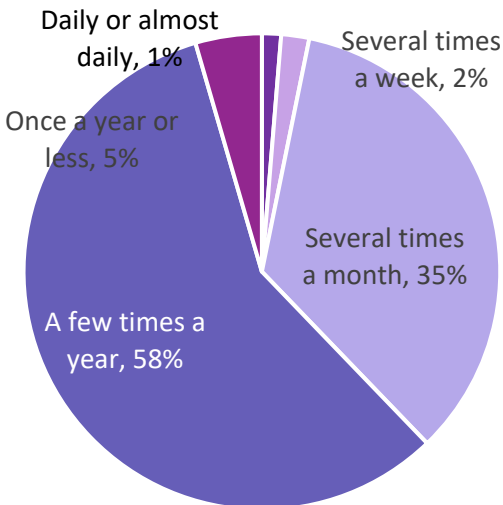
Horse riding/driving*



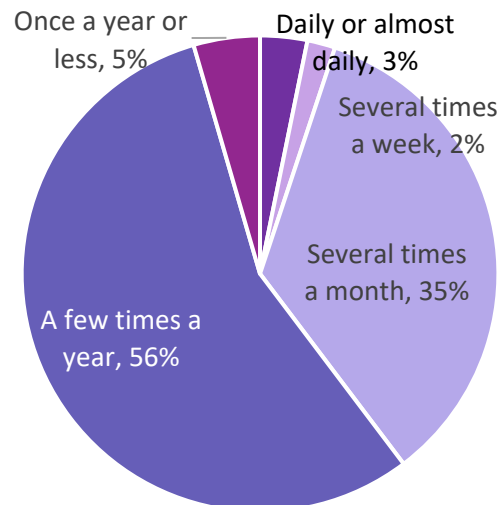
Cycling/Mountain biking



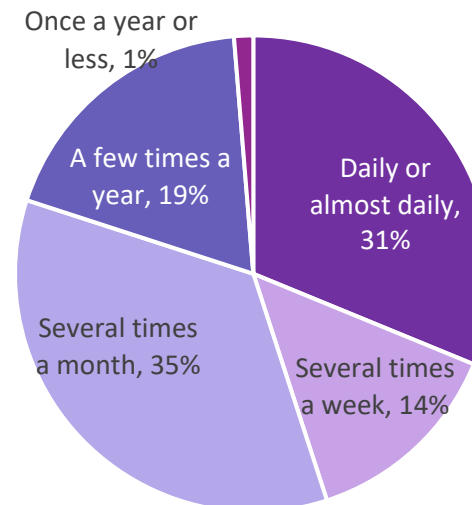
Trail Bikes/Motorcycling



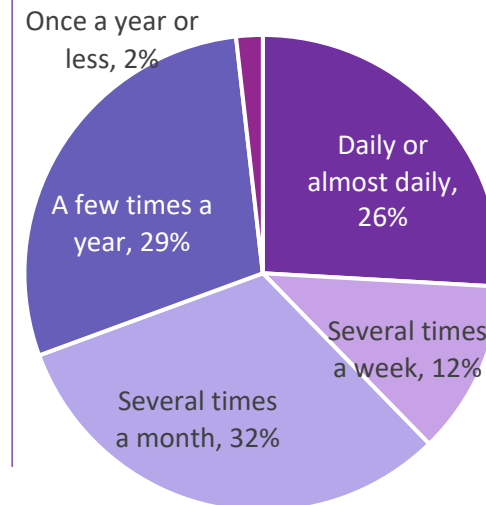
4x4/Greenlaning



Conservation activities



Other outdoor interests



What makes the area special

What Improvements are needed

Two introductory questions asked prior to sharing any ideas or information around strategic priorities and action areas



The appeal of the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (1)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme	
Breath-taking, beautiful scenery	Such a beautiful area with a rich history and a network of tracks and trails that enables the public to access, explore, learn and appreciate the area.	The scenery is outstanding
Tracks, trails, paths, green lanes	The unspoilt and ancient nature of the trails, styles, byways and paths.	The extensive network that rapidly take you into a diverse and beautiful natural environment.
Natural environment	Amazing environment, great mix of streams, hills, trees, etc.	The abundance of natural beauty.
Heritage, historic area	Their heritage of human, animal and vehicular use going back over passed centuries.	The scenery is wonderful and I like to see all the industrial heritage which can be discovered on these Byways and UCR's
Accessible	Beautiful scenery in an accessible area	Accessible, often flat and easy to cycle, walk, drive
Flora & fauna, plants and wildlife	The different trees, fungus, moss and rocks. It has so many different species	Each trail or track is different, lined by different woodlands - many ancient - as well as rocks and mosses and lichens and wildflowers
Outstanding, wonderful views	Breathtaking views that change with the seasons.	Stunning views and scenery.
Peaceful, quiet	Peace and quiet. Low numbers of other people	Beautiful scenery, tranquillity, very good for my mental health
Forest, woodland, trees	The tracks that pass through Woodlands are spectacular	Access to beautiful deciduous ancient woodland, views of the valley and other natural features e.g. waterfalls, dells

In your view what makes the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails so special?

The appeal of the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (2)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme
Varied landscape	<p>The vast number and variety of tracks is amazing, and there are so many different types of landscape, vegetation, and outlook across all of them. The fact that the tracks join in so many ways to create an almost never-ending network is wonderful.</p>
Location	<p>Their proximity to my home and to regional cities.</p> <p>Their locality to where I live means there is minimal travel time when using for leisure.</p>
Hills	<p>Their steep and rocky surfaces.</p> <p>There are many ancient bridleways and paths descending hillsides which have absolutely unique surface characteristics due to erosion.</p>
River	<p>The views of the river and the forested sides of the valley.</p> <p>Outstanding area of watercourses hills woodland..</p>
Unique	<p>Unique beautiful environment, also with great trails for recreation especially mountain biking</p> <p>They are as varied as they are unique.</p>
Technical, challenging	<p>The unique & challenging terrain for motorcycles coupled with the friendliness of locals.</p> <p>It has to be said that the rugged and "technical" nature of the trails is one of the most appealing aspects</p>
Signage, navigation	<p>Signage is also used to provide access for horses and carriage drivers.</p> <p>Easy to navigate</p>

In your view what makes the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails so special?

Improvements for the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (1)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme	
Signage, navigation	Signage, an app to allow people to plan and track journey?	Improved signposting would be very useful. Clear signposting indicating, footpath, bridleway, Byway or unclassified county road with multi-user access
Better access	Gates and suitable paths that are accessible for horses and riders.	Ensure marked footpaths are accessible. There are many points around the area where nearby residents have discouraged access by letting growth block paths, or even blocking stiles.
Maintenance, repairs	Make maintenance more consistent: one area may have work carried out and be left beautiful, clean and natural, like no one has been there. Another might be left almost unusable through branches, scattered trees, and chasmic tracks left in the earth	Maintenance of tracks and trails - particularly footbridges
More tracks and routes	Connecting together existing routes in a more strategic manner	Derestrict more byways so a larger number of routes can be enjoyed by trail riders. Many footpaths could be opened up to be bridleways & allow access to more areas for horse riders or cyclists. MX riders are damaging many trails & making them dangerous to access
Restrict access/use	4wd and motorbikes should not be allowed to continue to destroy these historic routes and prevent and deter other users	Motorbikes are ruining the byways physically and environmentally plus (some) abuse usage of the trails i.e. they are blatantly using public footpaths !! Very upsetting and extremely dangerous.....Motorbikes must be dealt with.....
Drainage, landscape actions	Water erosion could also be avoided by adding better drainage to some ROW in the area as we are often blamed for water erosion damage as motorcycle users.	Water erosion is a major problem and I'm sure volunteer groups could be arranged for some maintenance. Most people enjoy a day out in the countryside.

And what do you think could be improved around the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails?

Improvements for the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (2)

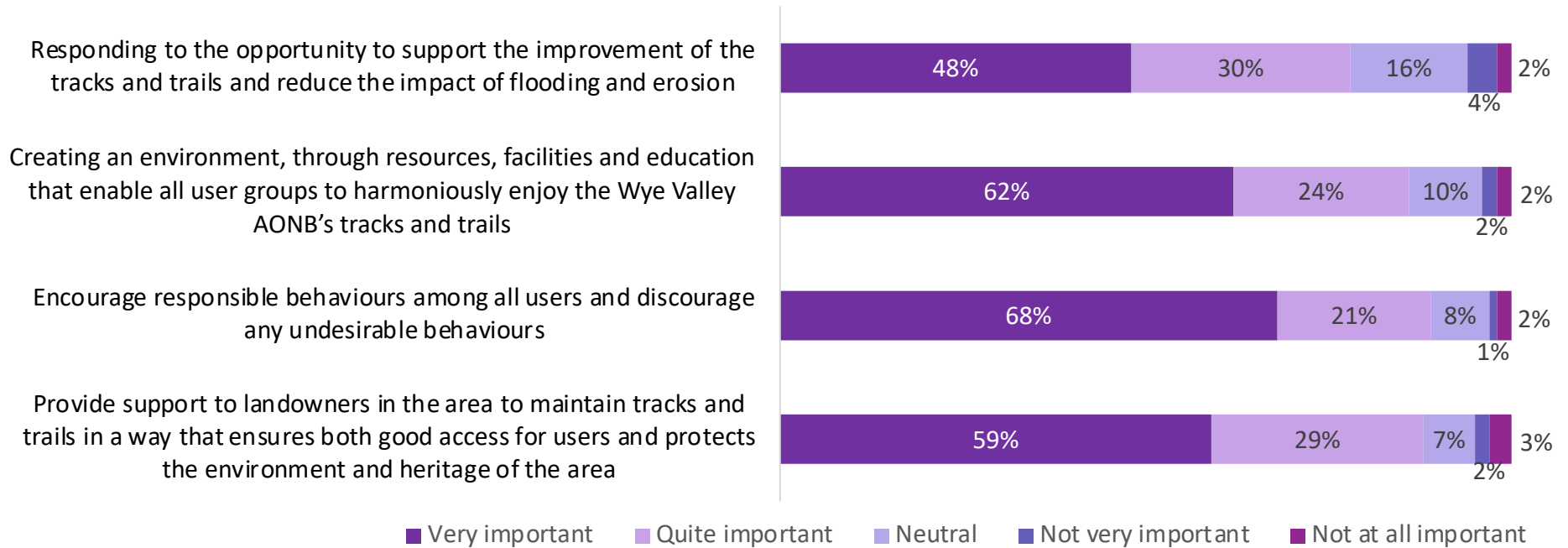
Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme		
Leave unmaintained	<p>They should be left to rewind naturally. All improvements will damage the natural ecology</p>	<p>I don't think there is any need for improvement, they are great as they are. I don't think they need to be 'managed' more than they are currently.</p>	
Information	<p>I would love to see maps of walks where more information is given of the plants, lichens and misses and bird life for example.</p>	<p>Informing new visitors to the area, and new residents that BOATs and Bridleways are there to be used as Rights of Way.</p>	<p>Informing leisure visitors of being responsible when undertaking their recreation.</p>
Parking	<p>Better access, parking facilities, hostels, over-night parking and camping.</p>	<p>Clear signage and enforcement to stop groups of camper vans parking in car parks at the entrances to tracks and trails overnight</p>	
Keep all routes open/ access for all	<p>Keeping the lanes open for all to use from walkers, horses and trail riders etc.</p>	<p>Making sure the lanes remain open to all and resisting the noise from those who want to take it away from others.</p>	
User collaboration	<p>The only thing I feel could be improved is collaboration and co-operation between all user groups to foster a tolerant and mutually beneficial relationship</p>	<p>Education of dog owners about their responsibilities when out with their dogs.</p>	

Priorities

“The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and, essentially, through this consultation process.”



- Across all those taking part in the consultation, the need to encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours is seen as the highest priority, with 68% saying this is ‘very important’. This is supported by 62% saying it is ‘very important’ that an environment is created, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Wye Valley AONB’s tracks and trails.
- There is also high recognition of the need to support landowners in maintenance of the tracks and trails
- Less than half (48%) of those taking part in the consultation believe it is ‘very important’ to respond to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion. Whilst only 6% say it is not important, 16% give a neutral response



The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and, essentially, through this consultation process. How important do you feel each of these priorities are?

Activity Priorities

- Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails to support their use and sustainability
- Improve the durability of the landscape
- Managing use
- Provide information



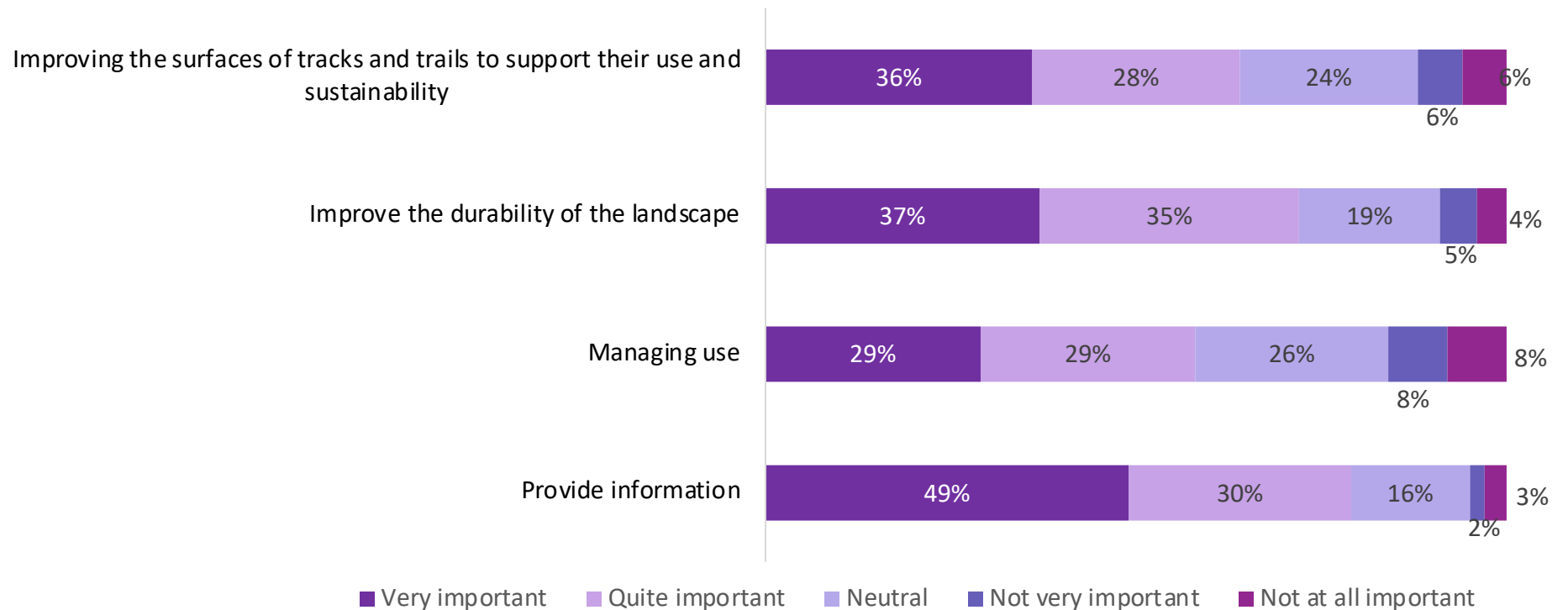
- The survey explored some potential action areas. The descriptions below were provided within the survey and are summarised to the short description (shown in bold) within the question asked

There are many different ways in which actions can be targeted to reduce the impact human users have on the AONB environment. Some of the ways being considered are:

- Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails** to reduce the impact of use on them. This might include covering existing surfaces with new materials, installing raised paths over existing ones or replacing existing surfaces with new, more durable ones
- Limiting use**, for example by restricting use to the times of year/weather conditions when the least damage is done or restricting the types of use. In this scenario it is easy to think simply of restricting access to motorised vehicles, but consideration must also be given to the impact that large groups of walkers can have, or cyclists following the same wheel track, or horses cutting in to soft ground. Another option may be to operate a permit system in some areas, where access is managed such that for example local residents have 24-7 access, but visitors to the area are limited in when they can use the most vulnerable areas
- Improve the durability and resilience of the landscape around the tracks and trails**, for example through new natural flood management schemes including better drainage, changes to management of the surrounding land to slow down water run-off and reduce its erosive force, all designed to help the tracks and trails cope with increasing rainfall and cope with increasing human use
- Provide information** to help users understand the challenges, understand what rights and needs other users have and encourage the right behaviours.

Activity priorities

- Consultation respondents were provided with 4 possible action areas (see following for details)
- Almost half (49%) believe the provision of information is ‘very important’
- Improving surfaces is ‘very important’ for 36% of those taking part, while 12% say it is not important. Similarly, 37% say it is ‘very important’ to improve the durability of the landscape, while 9% say it is not important
- Only 29% say managing use is ‘very important’ and 16% say it is not important



How important do you think each of these are?

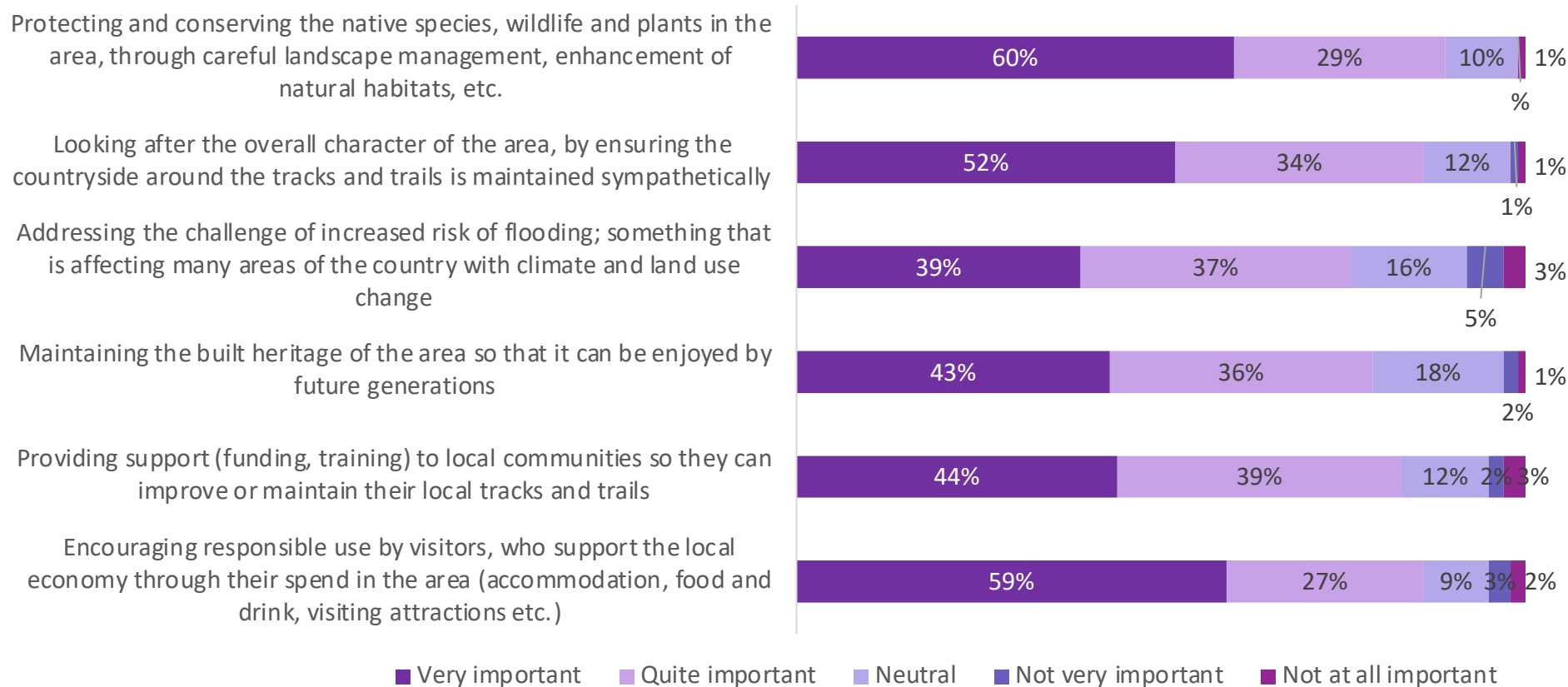
Strategy Outcomes

The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage.



Strategy Outcomes

- Both ‘protection and conservation of native species wildlife and plants’ and ‘encouraging responsible use’ are the two most important outcomes among those taking part in the consultation.
- Only 39% think that ‘addressing the challenge of increased flooding’ is very important



The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage. How important do you think it is for each of these to be included in the strategy?

Topics and Themes

Feedback from consultation participants



- This section of the report includes a summary of the topics and themes raised by people taking part in the consultation.
- Not every comment and perspective is included in this document, but has been reviewed and considered in its compilation.
- The focus of analysis has been to represent, as fully as possible, the range of opinions shared and to highlight where there is consistency and where there are conflicting views
- Each overarching theme includes details of the perspectives shared by consultees, along with some examples of actual comments made by individuals. These comments have been selected purely as illustrative and their inclusion does not imply any greater weight has been given to these over comments not included

- There is recognition that conservation is the primary statutory purpose of the AONB (National Landscape), acknowledgement of the collaborative efforts with DEFRA for wildlife conservation, along with the importance of maintaining green spaces.
- There is strong support for protecting the landscape:
 - Advocacy for greater protection of AONBs (National Landscapes), closer to the standards of National Parks.
 - Emphasis on understanding the importance of AONBs (National Landscapes) beyond recreation, as vital for protecting the environment.
 - Appreciation of the increased risks from weather extremes
 - Emphasis on preserving natural areas for wildlife, fungi, and native plants, with support for protecting animals and trees
 - Balancing environmental biodiversity and protection against climate change and human habitation.
 - Opposition to over-management, such as excessive signposting and unnecessary land interventions
 - Protecting natural environments, habitats, and historical features including waterways is a priority.
 - Careful improvement of trails and regular clearance of fallen trees and maintaining trails without over-sanitization.

Example Comments

“The statutory purpose of the AONB is the conservation and enhancement of nature, leisure does not feature, unlike National Parks.”

“Flooding and extremes of weather are only going to increase, and using green infrastructure at an early point will go some way to mitigating the risks to the land. If local communities, including cycling, walking and trail riding/trekking clubs, are given support and the option to work with the AONB in maintaining routes, then all will benefit.”

“Acceptance that the singular purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance nature, not leisure.”

“Not to treat the AONB as if it were a theme park with its success measured only in footfall. Preservation without degradation is vital for future generations”

“Leaving large areas natural and for wildlife, so not over-managing and 'humanising' the area with signposts and unnecessary land management - it spoils the environment visually and undermines the natural environment.”

“We should prioritise the protection of natural environments and habitats above all else. The Wye Valley is not a playground for people, it is a vitally important habitat for many, many birds, animals and insects. If providing greater access means increasing the footfall of people into sensitive areas then it absolutely must be avoided.”

‘Built heritage’ is not always understood as a descriptor and the structures of tracks and walls are not always recognised

- There is some recognition of the cultural and historical significance of tracks and trails and a desire to increase that understanding
- Calls for sensitivity to heritage features, including burial grounds, ancient ponds, and forgotten places of worship.
- For some, built heritage is not as important as the natural environment
- When commented on, historic buildings are generally felt to be outside of the remit of this strategy/the AONB (National Landscape)
- Those who recognise the heritage of the walls:
 - Lay blame for their destruction in various places (natural erosion, large machinery, trail bikes etc.)
 - Hope for their restoration, though recognise the natural and practical challenges in doing this
- The tracks themselves are noted for their historic significance and the role they played in supporting the landscape and industry in the area
 - Some then link this to the materials used on the tracks and the need to not change
 - The need to maintain the tracks so that they can continue to support the landscape is noted

Example Comments

“The tracks were built hundreds of years ago and incorporated many structural elements to help with drainage. These have been long neglected but could be easily and cheaply reinstated without damaging the character of the area. This would go a long way to ensure the sustainability of the paths, provided ongoing work was done on a timely basis.”

“Built heritage just not quite as important to me as natural features and wildlife.”

“Highways seems to support the damaging effect and support destroying historical features in our area. They refuse to tackle nonce and environmental pollution created by the trail bikes and 4x4s.”

“Maintaining / improving ecology and the built environment is very important as that is what the area so special and attract the visitors / users”

“I will often spend time when in the area cleaning out ancient drains to help keep water off the tracks. I would be happy to do volunteer days to repair fallen dry stone walls.”

“It has been said that this track was believed to be a medieval pilgrimage trail to St Davids the track clearly has historic old walls either side so cannot be widened for vehicle access. The track near Whitelye has clearly been laid with stones/cobbles in areas but this has now been disrupted, by motorbikes.”

“Monmouthshire’s ancient tracks which are lined with stone walls and zig-zag up the hillsides, (for example several paths up both sides of Whitebrook) have been destroyed by mechanised vehicles”

While there is widespread support for interventions to protect the environment, there are also those who support a less active approach:

- Allow natural evolution to suit current usage and recognise the evolving nature of tracks and trails and their use over time
- Some resistance to human intervention with a preference to leave tracks and trails as they are, sometimes expressed from a conservation perspective and sometimes for user enjoyment (particularly wheeled vehicle users)
- Some awareness that the area's features result from generations of industrial activities
- Advocates for allowing natural habitats to evolve without extensive human intervention, emphasising the inevitability of erosion and the conservation of the natural character.
- Emphasis on respecting the area's beauty and leaving no trace.
- The need for a balance between maintaining access to trails and conserving the natural environment, addressing concerns about erosion and water damage.
- Some resistance to improving paths and signage.
- Opposition to unnecessary human intervention with preference for a light-touch approach.

Example Comments

“The character and make-up of the lanes in their worn and rugged state which evolves over the years with usual usage”

*“Tracks need to be left natural and to evolve but blockages and fallen trees need to be removed.
Trying to divert watercourse off the trail is important”*

“Tracks have survived/developed over 100s of years - they will continue to naturally evolve. Leave them alone

“The natural nature of the lanes is their attraction, human intervention would change the experience.”

“I believe that it is important to maintain environmental biodiversity and protect the area from the effects of climate change and human habitation as well as balancing the needs of local people who use the area and ensuring responsible behaviour”

“The areas features are the result of generations of industrial activities, very little is natural landscape. Conservation of the current status should be taken with a pinch of salt.”

- Concerns are raised around the current maintenance of tracks and trails. These are often linked to suitability for different types of usage rather than the environmental or heritage sustainability. Themes mentioned include:
 - The importance of regular maintenance for safety and usability
 - General calls for consistent and/or improved maintenance, especially in areas of high use
 - Overgrown tracks, fallen logs, dead trees etc. hindering access
 - Issues with slippery surface
 - Poorly maintained, damaged stiles and gates
 - A perception, particularly among trail bike riders/4x4 users of poor maintenance by relevant authorities. This leads to concerns that the lack of maintenance may make tracks impassable and potentially then leads to a loss of the right of way
 - There are some references to erosion of tracks and the need to take action to prevent further erosion
 - Importance of reflecting the significance of routes through appropriate maintenance.
- For trail bike riders in particular the difficult terrain is part of the appeal. Lesser emphasis among this group on improving surfaces, with water damage and flooding seen as less problematic for most trail riders.
- Whilst some wheeled-users enjoy the challenge of unsurfaced routes, there is recognition that this means they may not be fully accessible for all users
- Solutions vary often depending on the type of use:
 - Some users are looking for variation in surfaces to cater for all use cases
 - Some wish to avoid use of hard surfaces
 - Trail bike riders/4x4 users call for better maintenance, in particular around preservation of Greenways
 - Stress on responsible use and maintenance for open access to all users.
 - Calls for regular inspections, monitoring, and timely removal of obstructions to ensure track and trail usability.

Example Comments

“Access to tracks and trails should be maintained. Low level maintenance to keep accessible and prevent deteriorating but current variety of types and condition of tracks and trails is what make the area so special.”

“Maintenance that reflects importance of routes i.e. Offa’s Dyke is an important route that looks abandoned in areas (especially where it passes residential areas). This must make a poor impression on visitors.”

“Some of the increased risk of flooding is due to lack of maintenance currently, and will get worse with climate change, but not the whole story.”

“Make maintenance more consistent: one area may have work carried out and be left beautiful, clean and natural, like no one has been there. Another might be left almost unusable through branches, scattered trees, and chasmic tracks left in the earth.”

“I’m familiar with a lot of the paths and the main issues are maintenance, in particular where there are safety issues such as very wet paths close to the river, slippery paths on ascent and descent - poor maintenance of steps.”

The role of landowners is raised by consultees in a variety of ways:

- Landowners are sometimes blamed for blocking tracks either intentionally, or through lack of maintenance, for example through broken gates or stiles, fallen trees etc.
- Comments include suggestion that it is landowners who cause damage to the tracks and trails through their use of farm machinery

There is support for responsible management of public rights of way by landowners, especially farmers.

Some consultees are unsure of landowner involvement in track & trail maintenance, with comments that it is a sole or shared responsibility either for landowners and/or other authorities (local or national)

Where there is an assumption of landowner accountability, it is suggested that

- The potential benefits for both locals and visitors, is communicated
- Landowners may require (additional) financial support to deliver on their responsibilities
- There is a need to support landowners to address conflicts and protect the environment.

Example Comments

“Most surface damage is caused by landowners using Tractors and / or heavy machinery for wood cutting and should be regulated by permit.”

“Landowners play an important role but they need the respect of the general public.”

“A lot of landowners can be quite difficult when it comes to rights of way across their land, so any support during these hard financial times will go a long way to helping them accept the public has a right to be there”

“In the area I live there are a lot of enforcement issues with many paths inaccessible as they have been blocked by landowners”

“I think landowners need support to understand their responsibilities regarding PRow as well as some oversight to ensure that they are meeting those responsibilities - locally we have examples of paths blocked by hedges, tied up gates, electric fences across footpaths, broken stiles and bridges”

“Concerns of landowners about increased use of footpaths on their land”

“Landowners need to be kept informed of the value of tracks and trails and the benefits of keeping them in good order so the public can safely cross their land with minimal impact”

There are fundamentally different perspectives within the consultation responses:

- Those who wish to restrict access to some or all routes. This opinion may be motivated by
 - A desire to protect the environment
 - To reduce/eliminate what is perceived to be unacceptable behaviour
 - A belief that some current usage is illegal
 - Concerns about attracting more visitors than the area can support.
 - A wish to balance the needs of locals and visitors.
- Emphasis on responsible and sustainable use, encouraging walking and cycling over excessive car use.
- Some want to, at a minimum maintain, and ideally increase, access rights to more routes. This view is often linked to:
 - A perceived lack of access generally (not just within the Lower Wye Valley)
 - A wish to be away from roads
 - A way for those with accessibility requirements to be able to enjoy the area
- A permits system is suggested for regulating access on sensitive lanes, balancing policing to prevent minority actions affecting the majority.
- Calls for designated areas for motorbike trails to prevent damage to other tracks
 - Support for more tracks and trails with a focus on suitable areas for different users.
 - Calls for proper planning to avoid creating paths leading to inaccessible sections, highlighting the importance of strategic development.
 - Prioritisation of the importance of tracks for motorcycle riders.

Example Comments

“Limiting horses and 4x4s in the wetter months of the year would protect the tracks”

“Careful limits put on any new tourism/ commercial ventures in or near presently natural environments.”

“Limit the access of dogs, ensure they are on leads so that wildlife is not harassed.”

“There should be no restrictions to motorcycle access to current legal routes - these have already been reduced significantly by the council and are considered precious by responsible trail riders.”

“Seasonal restrictions are applicable to individual trails with less sustainable surfaces to prevent deterioration.

“Access to woodland by trail bikers/ cyclists / any vehicles needs to be prevented.”

“People shouldn't be allowed access if they can't behave respectfully/responsibly”

“Trying to stop scramblers who make some of the paths so muddy they become inaccessible and dangerous to walkers or horse riders”

“Importantly, some of these routes allow vehicular access which enables participation of those who are unable to enjoy the area on foot, horse or bicycle.”

Some of the comments relate to reclassifying routes and changes to route designations.

- Advocacy for legal restrictions on motorized vehicle use in areas causing damage, including suggestions that...
 - Council and government bodies could re-designate tracks that cause difficulty for other users or during certain times
 - Unclassified county roads could be reclassified to footpaths or bridleways to deter off-roaders and reduce pollution e.g. Proposal to change the track from Tintern to Whitelye to prohibit motorized vehicles due to narrow paths and negative impact.
- Community councils should be actively involved in raising awareness, hosting meetings, and working with residents
- Collaboration with NRW, MCC, and National Landscapes to tackle issues collectively
- Importance of communication between authorities and the public regarding trail conditions
- Opening up new and linking existing trails to make the best use of what's already there before further development

Example Comments

“More access for legal motorcycle trail riding to help us all appreciate and enjoy the health benefits of this beautiful part of our world.”

“Opening up forestry tracks to legal off road vehicle use”

“Reclassify all Unclassified County Roads to footpaths or bridleways aiming to stop off-roaders, especially motorcycles, which cause huge amounts of damage, pollution both from oil spills and run-off from badly eroded tracks.”

“Reclassification of certain tracks and trails to improve access provision for equestrian and cycle users.”

“More continuous paths for cycling - especially along the route of the old railway line upstream of Tintern”

Restrictions have often been shown to simply put pressure in other areas. By restricting one track more people will use a neighbouring track or worse will form an unofficial track.”

Asking for voluntary restraint on use of some tracks at certain times of the year. If there are perceived issues with certain trail use then highlight this with clear well-placed signage. People are always more reasonable and willing to compromise their behaviour in response to well-reasoned information that they can understand how it might apply to them and their actions.”

There is widespread recognition that different user groups have different needs and wishes for the tracks and trails.

- In some instances this leads to user groups feeling aggrieved and unsupported.
- Various user groups apportion blame on others
- Often there appears a lack of empathy or understanding of other user groups' perspectives

There is also a willingness to work together and for the various user groups to find solutions that work for all

- There is recognition that this require compromise and may not lead to perfect outcomes for all

Example Comments

"All the separate groups need to come together around the table - perhaps the local councillors could reach out to organise this."

"The only thing I feel could be improved is collaboration and co-operation between all user groups to foster a tolerant and mutually beneficial relationship"

"Collaboration and respect for each other through you. You are to conduit through which we can gather and educate, enforce and respect and support each other"

"The goal is shared, if compromise is needed this can only be established by asking each of the various groups/stakeholders"

"I would suggest that ALL interested parties must be prepared to compromise, for it would be impractical if not impossible, to expect anything less. But inclusive consultations, with effective communications and strong leadership, should see a workable and sustainable solution(s)."

"By respecting the fact these are ancient access areas where many benefit and enjoy, so work together"

"People need to work together and understand one another, ramblers, horse riders, motorcyclists, cyclists, be kind and understanding and understand the rights of way so no untoward confrontation, just respect"

Emphasis often on educating users about rights of way and the belief that early communication will avoid conflicts

- Calls for an online page for information about access rights
- Highlights the importance of educating users on rights of way, proposing user events and improved education of local councillors
- Suggestions advocating for education and awareness campaigns
- Calls for regular face-to-face meetings, unbiased user group meetings, and open dialogues.

Example Comments

“Education of dog owners about their responsibilities when out with their dogs.

Education of mountain bikers about the difference between public footpaths and bridleways. “

“There should be education around the damage that dogs off leads can do to the natural environment to make owners realise this”

“Awareness of who can use them. The benefits they bring to the local community “

“Education is important in order for people to understand the changes that need to happen in order for the environment to thrive and be healthy.”

“Education, through considerate signs and information boards would be helpful to all groups.”

“It’s important that the environment is protected and that people who are using it are able to get enough information about what they have to do in order to protect the tracks and trails they intend on using”

“The outcomes should include the benefits to users of the trails not just the local community.”

“The need for sharing information and knowledge is the key factor behind this new approach and it should help to improve understanding in the future”

Routes that are open to a wide range of users, raise some concerns around safety and how best to enable multi-usage

- There are concerns about the danger of allowing both pedestrian access and motorized sports riding on narrow tracks.
- There are also concerns about off-road motorbikes causing damage to tracks and disturbing residents.

Many suggestions are made around actions (those linked to managing use are covered earlier in this report), but other ideas include:

- Limits to the speed users can go on
- Establishing/promoting a 'Code of Conduct'.

Signage is a frequently mentioned topic, though from differing perspectives and with different views on the 'right' action to take

- Right to use – often voiced by trail bike riders or 4x4 drivers who wish other users to be more aware that vehicle users have a right to use tracks and trails. There are concerns that others believe their use is illegal and they would like signage to address that
- User Etiquette – signs and information that give advice on 'desirable behaviours' and how to interact with other user groups
- Wayfinding - to help visitors navigate the area

Whilst more signage is often requested, there is also feedback that the area should not be overburdened with signs. Reasons for this are typically environmental or aesthetic.

Example Comments

"Inform and educate both agencies and users as well as working closely together to help ensure safety and protection of the environment and the public"

"Responsible behaviours is important for health and safety of all users. On a recent visit I had misfortune to fall but group of cyclists stopped to offer support, how kind and makes one feel safe"

"Trail bicycles are also becoming a problem as they travel in groups at speed on small tracks and are unable to brake for a pedestrian in their way. I don't know the law, but there should be a speed limit (enforced) for everyone of 5mph and education for cyclists that for safety pedestrians have right of way"

"Speed ,dismounting, classification of routes , changing routes , route safety, some give and take"

"An etiquette standard so everyone understand the expected behaviours and necessary respect for other users. "

"Adequate signage and public awareness that some of the rough tracks in the Wye valley are in fact public roads with a long history of such status."

"Proper signage so all groups of users know it legal use."

"I am always disappointed to see unnecessary signage being put up in natural areas such as woodlands, and landscapes being managed in a way that spoils the area. The local area is used a lot by visiting Duke of Edinburgh students - they enjoy map reading in a natural setting and the opportunity to be in the wild."

"Educational signs to inform users of other users' rights of ways"

"Large plastic signs do not enhance the environment. They spoil it and turn rural into urban. Just stop!"

"Users with wheels can be encouraged via signs to stop, give way and speak thereby helping to allay the fear of horses meeting them."

Various suggestions are made around the involvement of volunteers and/or the local community to maintain the area:

- Suggested that local involvement is needed for maintenance of unsurfaced tracks & trails that may erode naturally
- Proposal to involve local people in activities like coppicing and maintenance, offering them wood from cleared areas.
- Calls for engagement with local groups and recognition of individual contributions to conservation.
- Encourage local communities to form groups for track maintenance.
- Proposals for awards and grants to acknowledge and support those contributing to conservation efforts.
- Community councils and maintenance groups working on public rights of way.
- Support for local volunteer path care groups
- Some user groups (including trail riders and 4x4 users) suggest voluntary resources can be used to support those with an existing responsibility for maintenance (land owners, local authorities etc.)
- Various expressions of willingness to volunteer for trail maintenance, advocating for better advertisements to promote awareness.
- Suggestion of more encouragement for more volunteer opportunities, emphasising the importance of involving local communities, schools, and youth.

Example Comments

“As a TRF member I am happy to volunteer for maintenance work through them.”

“The groups causing the most impact should be encouraged to help more with volunteering to maintain the tracks and trails.”

“I would volunteer to help”

“Water erosion is a major problem and I'm sure volunteer groups could be arranged for some maintenance. Most people enjoy a day out in the countryside.”

“Continue to support local groups of volunteers who maintain footpaths with funding through Trellech United Community Council.”

“Both the above organisations [TRF & GLASS] have volunteers who have and will assist in conserving and maintaining the legal network or tracks and trails working with local authorities.”

“Volunteers are out there if those in need knew who to ask.”

“Establish working groups that promote the ideas, maintain the tracks & trails & encourage visiting parties to respect the efforts /contributions that local volunteers are willing to provide”

Various suggestions are made around the financial aspects of the area, both as a contributor to the local economy and the need to fund necessary work in the area:

- Recommendation that fundraising be done to fund signage, including contributions from organisations like TRF.
- Advocates for clear communication of issues, emphasizes maintaining trail interest for visitors and supporting local businesses.
- Suggests working with organizations like GLASS and similar groups, acknowledges the positive impact of diverse usage on the local economy.
- Calls for adequate funding and support from local councils.
- *Tourism and Economic Contribution:* Highlights the economic benefits of tourism, proposes tolls or taxes on users for trail maintenance, and suggests collaboration among user groups.
- *Local Business and Community Support:* Encourages users to support local businesses, advocates for the local council and community to maintain trails sympathetically.
- Assess community assets and resilience before development of any plans/ new infrastructure.

Example Comments

“Inclusion of the community to take responsibility is absolutely key to success”

“Responsible tourism should benefit the local community and businesses, particularly when many are struggling at the moment.”

“Awareness of who can use them. The benefits they bring to the local community”

“When we visit we spend a lot of money in the local community. I think it is the responsibility of the local council & to some degree the community to maintain the lanes in a sympathetic manner”

“Without careful management an important resource could be lost, impoverishing the local community and deterring visitors”

“Provide support and if possible, grants or funding for local community groups to help their efforts to repair and maintain the paths”

“The outcomes should include the benefits to users of the trails not just the local community.”

“Through education and involvement of the wider community...”

“My personal action is that I visit the area ,I always visit the cafes, shops and pubs. I have no problem with paying parking charges.”

There is some discussion around facilities for visitors including:

- Calls for better parking facilities for horseboxes and trailers.
- Suggestions for designated areas for motorbike trails.
- Comments on the need for bins and responsible litter disposal.
- Prioritisation of some routes to encourage visitors to stick to just a few routes

Example Comments

“Clear signage and enforcement to stop groups of camper vans parking in carparks at the entrances to tracks and trails overnight (Whitestone, Ninewells, Beacon View), which prevent other users from parking and can be intimidating for other users accessing the tracks and trails on foot.”

“Most arrive by car so parking- perhaps small but frequent and safe off-road parking would help”

“A few well defined "honeypot" zones where some easy access, well sign-posted circular trails lead from good parking facilities with toilets and picnic areas, whilst leaving the bulk of the area unmanaged other than a bare minimum to prevent complete degradation.”

“From my experience there appears to be an a huge network of tracks and trails going through the woodland etc... They can be accessed easily through car parks and the road network due to the nature of the villages and hamlets, makes it easy to access areas by road.”

“More parking at woodland entrance”

“Better parking facilities for Horsebox’s and trailers. Having corals in the area would benefit horse and riders who have travelled far and who are making a weekend stay in the area.”

There is some feedback around the level of involvement of various private and public organisations:

- Calls for involvement of local government bodies, emphasises a joined-up approach involving highways departments.
- Suggests collaboration with national organisations for broader support and strategy development.
- Recognition of the need for compromises between user groups and emphasises inclusive consultations for sustainable solutions.

Example Comments

“The root of issues on Green Roads is that the Highways Authority has NEVER 'asserted and protected [the rights of the users]’ as is their DUTY. So, no Roads have ever been properly signed, and virtually no-one knows that they are Roads - all portrayed wrongly as 'paths’.”

“Legally responsible parties actively engage with maintenance responsibilities”

“These tracks and trails have existed for hundreds of years but successive council's and other bodies have failed, through ignorance it deliberate act, to fulfil their duties to maintain them.£

“As a member of the TRF (Trail Riders Fellowship), we actively maintain the trails , removing fallen trees , slides etc with the co-operation of local councils.”

“Better liaison with County, Town and Community Councils - and NRW, who look after paths, tracks and rights of way through their land.”

“Am involved in our newly formed rights of way group in Llanishen and we are in discussion with Monmouthshire council to set up a plan of works to maintain our local path network”

Community Drop-in Sessions Themes and Topics

Feedback from those who attended the community drop-in sessions



The main themes raised by those attending the drop-in sessions were:

- Concerns around **trail bike riders**.
 - **Antisocial behaviours:** Concerns around aggressive, intimidating behaviour from some trail bike riders.
 - **Illegal use:** Belief that some of the trail bikes are on some tracks illegally and concerns around trail bike riders straying from paths and riding through wooded areas.
 - **Increasing volume:** Those who have lived locally for a long time, report an increasing number of trail bikes, both more frequent usage and bigger groups of trail bike riders
 - **Pollution** in terms of both **Noise** and **Fumes**,
 - **Erosion and environmental damage** perceived to be being done to the tracks themselves and the wildlife
- **Dogs** not under control and/or not being kept on leads on paths crossing private land (despite signs)
- **Litter, BBQs** etc. and **wild campers** in the area
- Lack of **signs** and in some instances damage to/removal of signs
- **Deer:** an increasing number of deer in the area is problematic and it is not clear to attendees who to report to, or whose responsibility a cull would be
- **Blocked paths**, fly-tipping, fallen trees etc. Again, lack of understanding of who to report to and concerns around the length of time for issues to be resolved

Other topics raised via completed **feedback forms** from the drop-in sessions

- Some concern over the response volume to the consultation, a perceived lack of communication within the local community of the consultation and the drop-in's and a desire for the sessions to have been more 'formal'
- Several offers to provide support/resources as needed
- A plea for more public toilets and litter bins
- Acknowledgement that the discussion around the strategy is a good thing and pleased that it is happening, but some scepticism around where actions will/can be taken to resolve local concerns
- Some concerns around the friction that exists between user groups and local residents and the challenge that presents for finding resolution
- A wish for integration of the Highways Department in the initiative to cover UCRs
- An expectation of more focus on agriculture and forestry in the strategy
- A request for greater consideration of wheelchair users and those with limited mobility

Appendix – Online Consultation



Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails

Working Together to create an Action Plan for Recreational Access in Monmouthshire's e's Wye Valley

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit are working on a new strategy and action plan, to help provide the best experience for all those that enjoy the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB. The aim of the work is to develop the most practical ways of supporting the requirements of all types of users, while protecting the natural and built environment for current and future generations.

As part of the initiative we are carrying out a public consultation to ensure the views of stakeholders, local residents, users of and visitors to the tracks and trails of the Wye Valley AONB in Monmouthshire are taken into consideration when developing the strategy and action plan. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) commissioned Tomorrow's Tourism to help us with the development of the action plan for recreational access in Monmouthshire's Wye Valley. XV Insight are working as part of the Tomorrow's Tourism team to assist with the consultation process.

[Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) relating to the consultation can be seen here.](#)

An overview of the [scope and topic areas covered by the consultation can be seen here.](#)

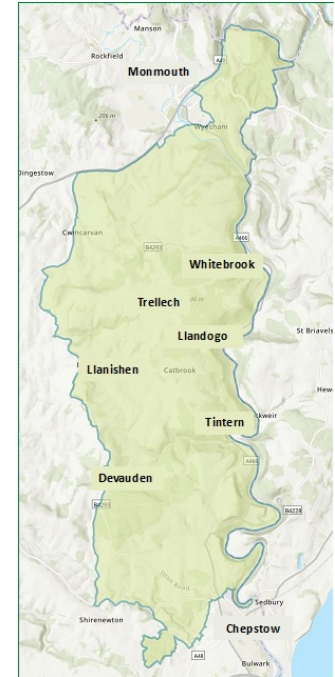
Your responses are anonymous unless you choose to share your personal details with us.

- Our privacy notice can be read [here](#)
- All questions are optional, they are provided to help the consultation gather your views on all the relevant topics. If you require assistance with this form please email lowerwyevalley@tomorrowstourism.com
- Throughout this questionnaire "tracks and trails" mean the suite of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and forestry tracks, permissive paths, as well as unpaved Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)

1. What is your connection with the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB? (Tick all that apply)

- Live here
- Work here
- Visit here frequently
- Visit here occasionally
- Work for an organisation with an interest or involvement in the area*
- Volunteer with an organisation with an interest or involvement in the area*

* Which organisation(s) are you involved with?



The Online Survey

Do you currently use the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

How often do you typically use the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB?

- Daily or almost daily
- Several times a week
- Several times a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less

What are the main reasons you currently use the tracks and trails?

- 'Commuting' to work, school, college etc. on foot/cycle etc.
- For leisure
- For work/volunteering (restoration, maintenance etc.)
- Other (please specify)

In your view what makes the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails so special?

And what do you think could be improved around the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails?

The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and importantly, through the consultation process. How important do you feel each of these priorities are?

You can read more about the [scope and topic areas here](#)

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Responding to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion					
Creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Wye Valley AONB's tracks and trails					
Encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours					
Provide support to landowners in the area to maintain tracks and trails in a way that ensures both good access for users and protects the environment and heritage of the area					

Why do you say that?

Are there other things that you think should be prioritised?

The Online Survey

There are many different ways in which actions can be targeted to reduce the impact human users have on the AONB environment. Some of the ways being considered are:

- a. **Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails** to support their use and sustainability. This might include repairing existing surfaces, considering new options for resurfacing, managing the flow of water along and across the routes or other improvements so that they can be used more safely by people and to sustain the routes for future use
- b. **Improve the durability of the landscape**, for example through new natural flood management schemes, changes to management of the surrounding land to hold back water and control flows, new or reinstated walls and hedges and tree planting, designed to mitigate the impact of use of the tracks and trails
- c. **Managing use**, for example by restricting/encouraging use to the times of year/weather conditions when the least damage is done or restricting the types of use. In this scenario it is easy to think simply of restricting access to motorised vehicles, but consideration must also be given to the impact of large events or groups of walkers or runners can have, or cyclists following the same wheel track, or horses cutting into soft ground. There may be opportunities to manage use through voluntary agreements
- d. **Provide information** to help users understand the challenges and encourage the right behaviours. This maybe through more signage on tracks and trails including both way-finding and environment/heritage information, access to online resources, encouraging community involvement and volunteering opportunities etc.

How important do you think each of these are?

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails to support their use and sustainability					
Improve the durability of the landscape					
Managing use					
Provide information					

Why do you think that?

Are there other actions that you think could be taken?

The Online Survey

The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage. How important do you think each of these that might be included in the strategy?

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Protecting and conserving the native species, wildlife and plants in the area, through careful landscape management, enhancement of natural habitats, etc.					
Looking after the overall character of the area, by ensuring the countryside around the tracks and trails is maintained sympathetically					
Addressing the challenge of increased risk of flooding; something that is affecting many areas of the country with climate and land use change					
Maintaining the built heritage of the area so that it can be enjoyed by future generations					
Providing support (funding, training) to local communities so they can improve or maintain their local tracks and trails					
Encouraging responsible use by visitors, who support the local economy through their spend in the area (accommodation, food and drink, visiting attractions etc.)					

Why do you think that?

Are there other outcomes you would like the strategy to be focused on?

What can you do to help develop and deliver the strategy, whether that is through your personal actions, those of organisations you work or volunteer for or any groups you are a member of that use the Monmouthshire Wye Valley tracks and trails?

What do you think others need to do to help develop and deliver the strategy? Again, this may be individuals' behaviours, local organisations or membership groups that use the area?

The AONB Management Plan recognises that we all have a collective responsibility, including all who enjoy the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB, to conserve and enhance the environment for the future. (The AONB Management Plan can be [seen here](#))
How can all user groups best work together to ensure this?

What compromises might be needed?

Are there additional actions that the Wye Valley AONB Unit and partner organisations need to take to make the area accessible, while conserving and enhancing the environment for the future?

The Online Survey

How can the Wye Valley AONB Partnership best promote responsible behaviours among those who use the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire area?

How can the Wye Valley AONB Partnership best discourage unwanted behaviours among those who use the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire area?

It would be very helpful if you would answer the following questions in order to check we have spoken to a broad range of people. These questions are optional and your views will still be considered equally if you choose not to answer some or all of them.

Which if any of the following activities do you take part in in the countryside either in Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB and/or elsewhere in UK? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB	Elsewhere in the UK
Walking for leisure & wellbeing		
Walking dog(s)		
Horse riding		
Horse driving (carriage)		
Cycling (road)		
Cycling (off-road)		
Motorbike – trail riding		
Vehicle off-roading		
Orienteering		
Fishing		
Bird-watching		
Wildlife watching		
Heritage conservation		
Landscape conservation		
Wildlife conservation		
Green laning		
Other (write in)		

Are you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other (write in)
- Prefer not to say

What age are you?

- Under 25 yrs
- 25 – 34 yrs
- 35 – 44 yrs
- 45 – 54 yrs
- 55 – 64 yrs
- 65 – 74 yrs
- 75 yrs and over
- Prefer not to say

Do you have any of the following disabilities or conditions?
(tick all that apply)

- No, I don't have any of these disabilities or conditions
- Hearing
- Visual
- Physical
- Learning (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia)
- A mental health condition
- A long term health condition (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, fatigue etc.)
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

The Online Survey

Which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?

- Asian or British Asian
- Black or Black British
- Mixed ethnic background
- White British
- White - Gypsy / Romany / Traveller
- White - any other background
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Your response will be anonymous unless you choose to provide your contact details. This will be used for the purposes of the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails consultation only. We will not store or use this data for any other purpose without seeking further consent. Please refer to our privacy policy for more information. You can withdraw this consent at any time.

Name

Email

Phone Number

Address (including Postcode)