

## Southwater Country Park: Visitor research and engagement Final Report



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## Executive summary

This report presents the findings from our research carried out for Southwater Country Park over the Summer of 2022, to help build the evidence base to support the development of a future masterplan for the park. We carried out a detailed primary research exercise with visitors to the park, including an onsite fieldwork session.

The online survey and face-to-face research generated a strong response with 1,477 completed questionnaires representing more than 4,000 people (4,062). The report presents the overall data, as well as filtered information, showing the difference in responses between local residents (those living within 15-minutes drivetime of the country park) and those living further away (outside of the immediate 15-minute drivetime). The majority of respondents (64%) live within 15 minutes of the park.

The research provides important information on visitor profile, patterns of visitation and visitor motivations. It also shows the main reasons for visiting. The primary reason for local residents visiting is for mainly quiet recreation including going for a walk and enjoying the fresh air or walking the dog). Whereas the primary reason for those living further away is to use the Dinosaur Island play area which is a big pull factor and is a very popular aspect of the park. Otherwise, the main reason for visiting is spread across a number of factors including meeting up with friends or relatives, exercising, taking part in watersports and visiting the Paddling Beach.

The survey also shows how respondents rate the experience and component elements.

The overall experience receives a favourable rating from more than 80% of respondents, with some 17.6% believing it to be excellent, a further 34.5% as very good and 30.4% as good (totalling 82.5%). The combined overall scores for good, very good and excellent which shows a positive profile (i.e., above 50%) for all the main categories, other than the toilets and changing rooms. The natural setting and wildlife and the play area generate the highest positive ratings.

The balance is seen to be appropriate by a large majority of people but there is support for further environmental and wildlife protection, conservation work and habitat improvements which will also act as an enhanced educational resource.

The priority areas for future enhancement, include improved toilet provision and a range of aspects relating to the natural environment including more information, low key events,

educational activities and additional wildlife watching areas. Enhancements to the catering offer would also be well received although current satisfaction levels are reasonable.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Brief

Planning Solutions Consulting Limited has been commissioned to carry out primary research at Southwater Country Park. The purpose of the research is to help build the evidence base to support the development of a future masterplan for Southwater Country Park.

### 1.2 Approach

In terms of the primary research there were three main strands of the research programme:

- An online survey which was promoted by Horsham District Council – the survey was live from Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022
- 13 onsite fieldwork sessions were also delivered over the summer period, to engage directly with visitors
- Four sessions were held onsite to specifically engage with younger children and their families who visit Southwater Country Park

## 2.0 Summary of visitor research

### 2.1 Online survey and face-to-face interviews

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

The online survey and face-to-face research generated a strong response with some 1,477<sup>1</sup> completed questionnaires representing more than 4,000 people (4,062), based on the average group size of approximately 2.75 persons among respondents. The survey was live between the end of July 2022 and the end of September 2022 and was promoted by Horsham District Council on and off site. The number of participants mean the results of the survey are robust, although obviously only reflect the views of those that chose to take part and may not be representative of all visitors to the Park.

In the research information below, we show the main findings. Where there is a significant difference between local residents (those living within 15-minutes drivetime of the country park) and those living further away (outside of the immediate 15-minute drivetime), we include the respective charts showing the breakdown in the main body of the report, with the corresponding overall data charts in the Appendices.

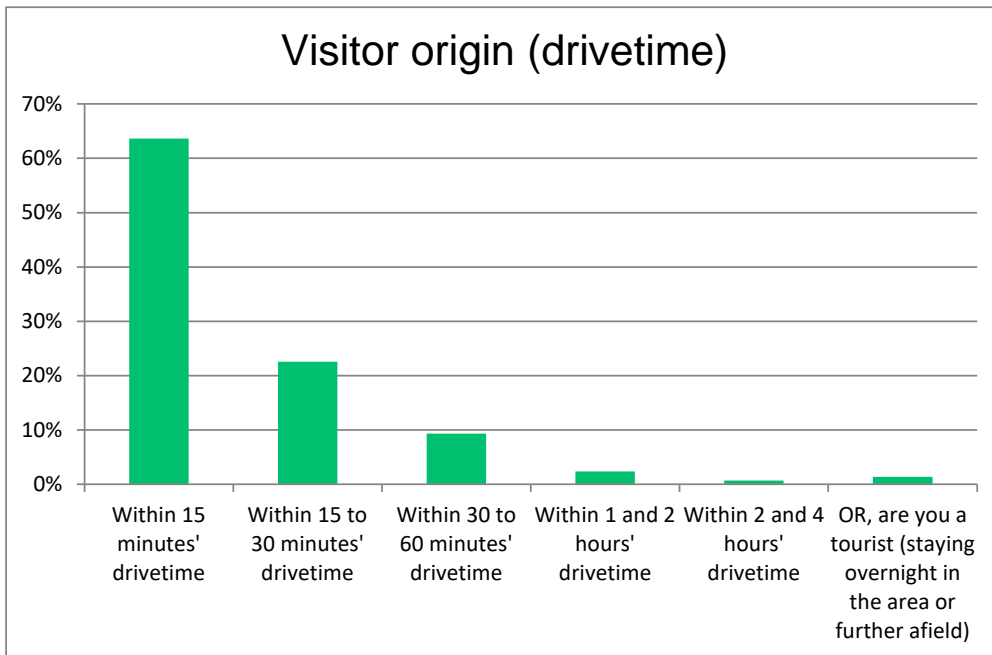
### 2.2 Visitor profile

#### Origin

As shown in Table 1, 64% of participants live within 15-minutes drivetime of Southwater Country Park and more than 86% of participants live within the overall 30-minute drivetime catchment of the country park. A low proportion, 9%, live between 30 and 60-minute drivetime from the country park, very few live beyond one hour (3.1%) and 1.4% are tourists.

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<sup>1</sup> 307 of these were completed face to face on site



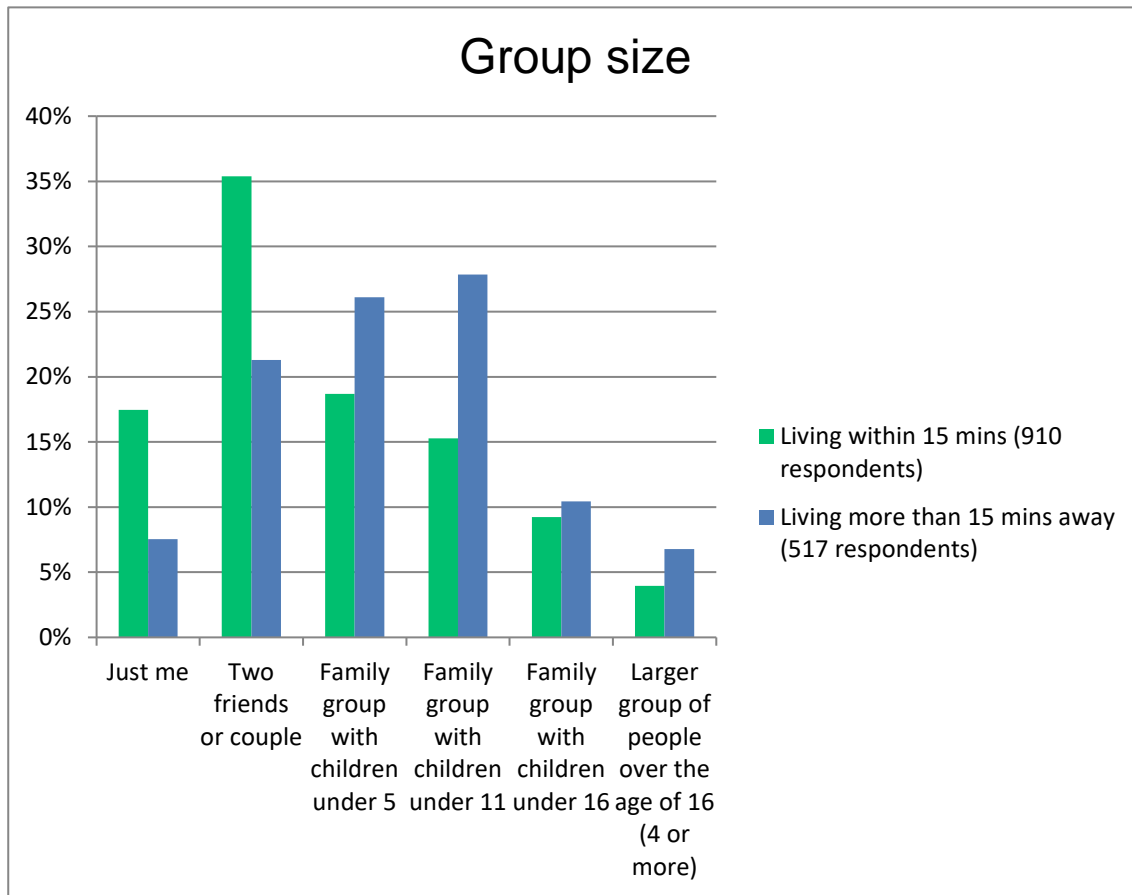
*Table 1: Visitor origin (all respondents)*

#### Group size

The average group size is 2.75 for the whole sample. Overall, families represent approximately half of all users in total, albeit in the survey, this is broken down into sub-categories according to the age of the children. Second to family groups are those in couples or pairs of friends which account for just over 30% of all visits. The overall data on group size is shown as Table A in Appendix One.

Table 2 shows the group size according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.





*Table 2: Group size (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

The chart clearly shows that more than 50% of local visitors are in groups of two or just visiting alone. Those living further away have a greater tendency to visit in family groups with children or in larger groups.

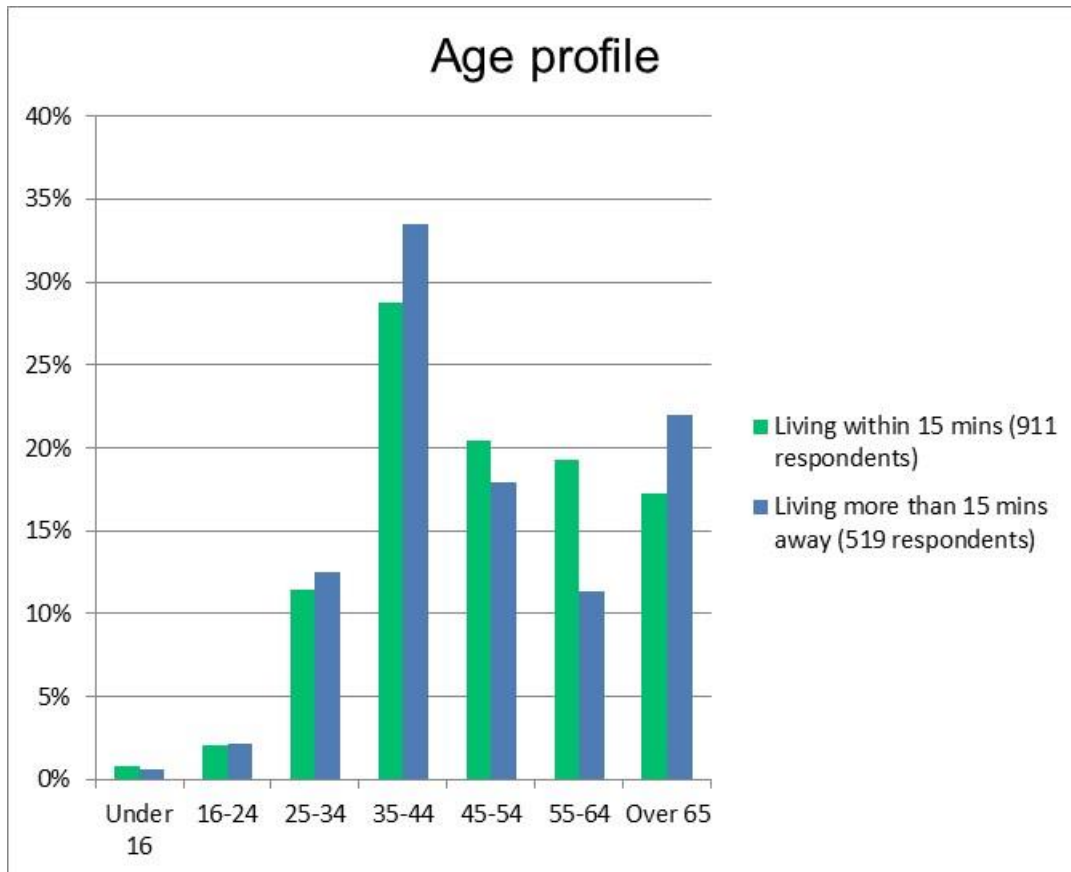
It is interesting to note that the greatest number of visitors, both local residents and those from further away are those who come with children under the age of 16.

It appears that the visitors living further away are more likely to be participating in an excursion or day out to the park (than local residents living within 15 minutes of the park) and are more likely to stay longer at the park (please refer to Table 7).

#### Age profile

The age profile for the whole survey sample is shown as Table B in Appendix One. In terms of the profile of respondents, there is a strong proportion of respondents in the main age range for adults with young families (just over 30% are aged between 35 and 44). Clearly very few under 16's have completed the survey themselves. The over 65's represent an important audience with approximately 1 in 5 respondents in this age range. This is a

potentially important audience for off-peak use during midweek periods and outside the school holidays.



*Table 3: Age profile (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

As shown in Table 3 above, the high number of those further away within the 35-44 age group suggests this is a strong place to visit for families living outside the immediate area.

Most visitors are in employment or retired. There are relatively few who are unemployed or unable to work. Further detail is shown in Appendix Two.

### 2.2.1 Visitation patterns

#### Frequency of visits

There is a strong degree of repeat visits to the park, especially by local visitors. Clearly, there are a number of regular local dog-walkers, but it still demonstrates that the park represents an important part of local people’s leisure time activities. The overall data is shown as Table C in Appendix One.

Table 4 shows the frequency of visits according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.

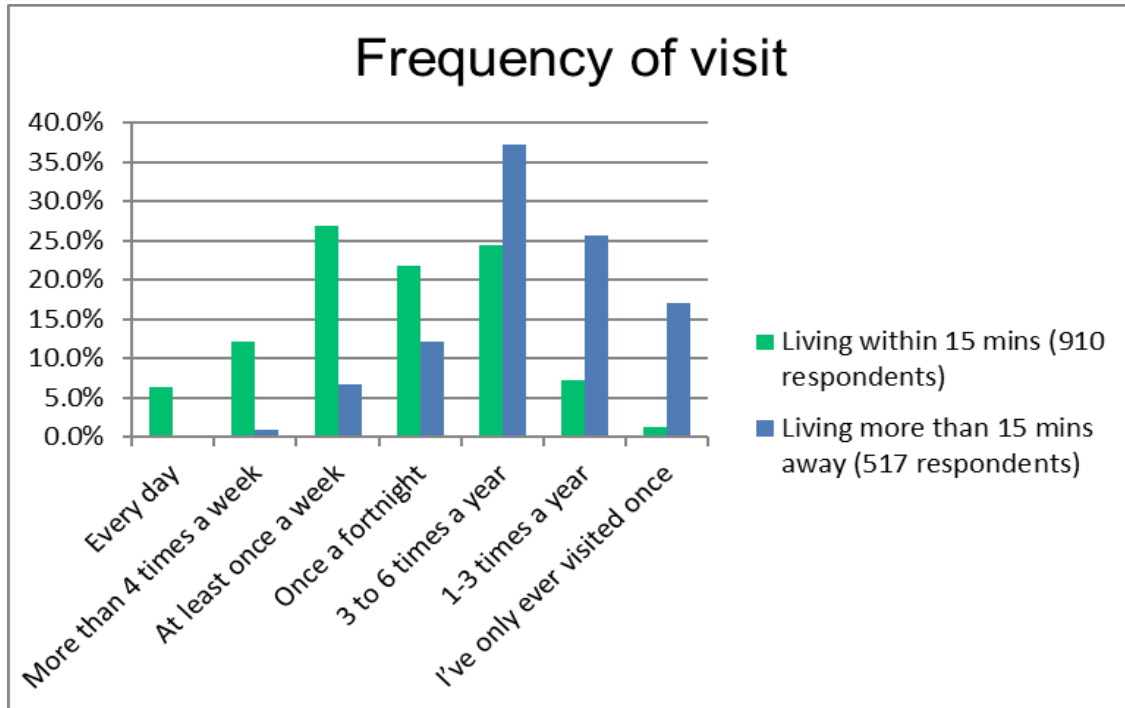


Table 4: Frequency of visit (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)

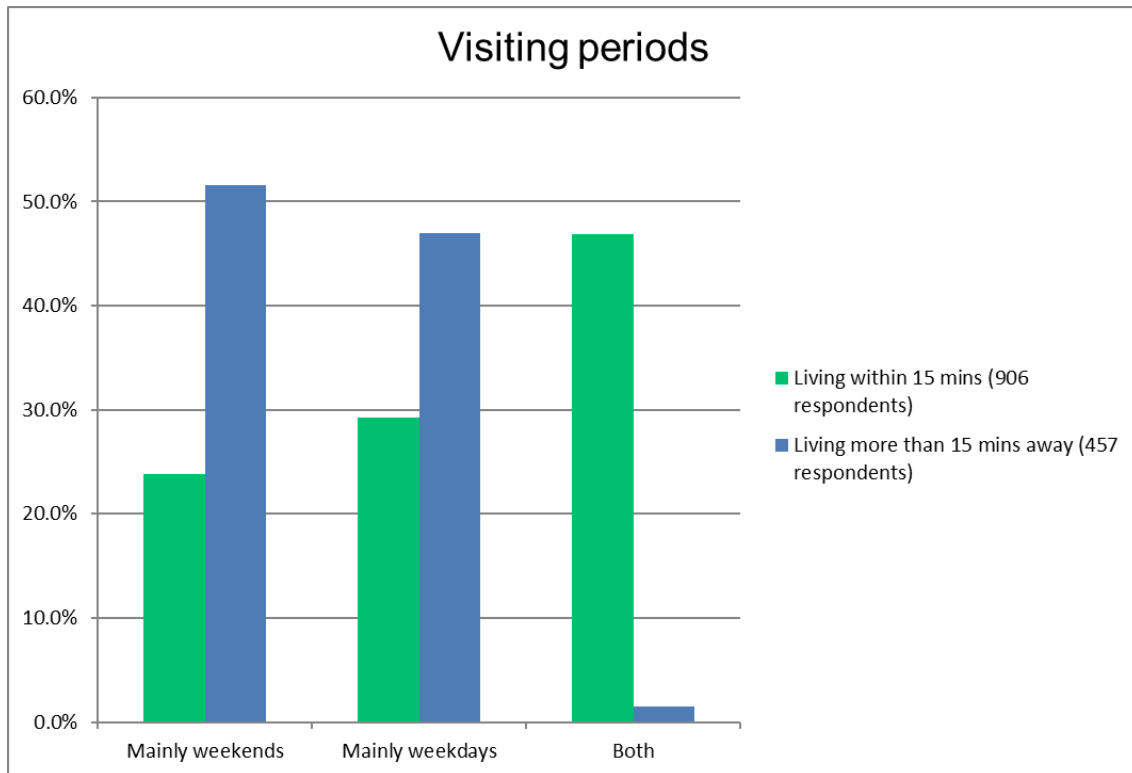
The propensity to visit more frequently is higher among those who live more locally. For example, 45% of respondents who live locally visit at least once a week. Conversely, those living further away visit less often, for example only 8% visit at least once a week.

Nevertheless, a large proportion of those living further away visit on multiple occasions per year, with some 37% visiting between three and six times annually.

### Visiting periods

In terms of visiting periods, there is a notable difference between local residents' visiting patterns and those visiting from further afield, with local residents visiting throughout the week. Please see Table D in Appendix One for the whole survey sample. The weekend days do attract higher levels of visitation per day but many people visit across the whole week.

Table 5 breaks the visiting patterns down according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.

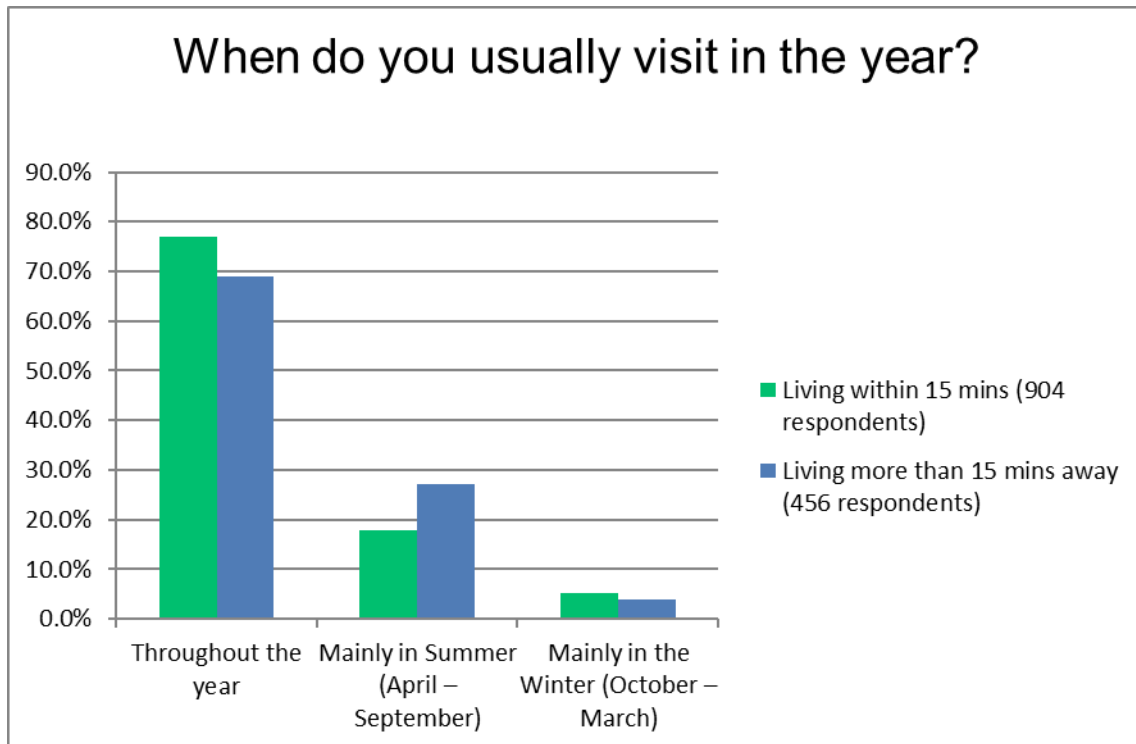


*Table 5: Visiting periods (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

### Seasonality of visits

Southwater Country Park is an important outdoor facility year-round for both local residents and people living further away, with 70% of respondents visiting throughout the year. The summer months see extra visitors, especially those coming from further afield. Please see Table E in Appendix One for the whole survey sample.

Table 6 breaks the visitation patterns down according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.

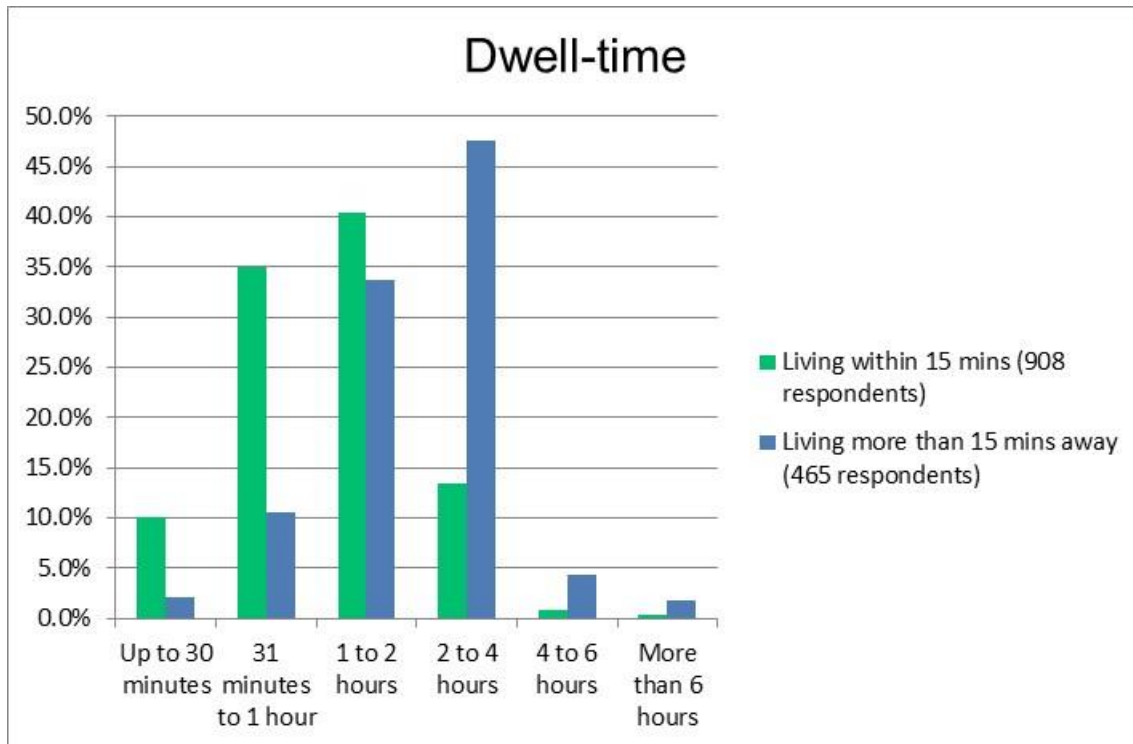


*Table 6: Seasonality of visits (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

#### Dwell-time and time of visit

For the whole sample (shown as Table F in Appendix One), the overall average dwell-time is over 1 hour 40 minutes (101 minutes) which reflects the wide range of activities and facilities on offer. The highest proportion of visitors stay on site for between 1 and 2 hours (38%). Relatively few respondents stay less than 30 minutes (7.5%) or more than 4 hours (2.8%).

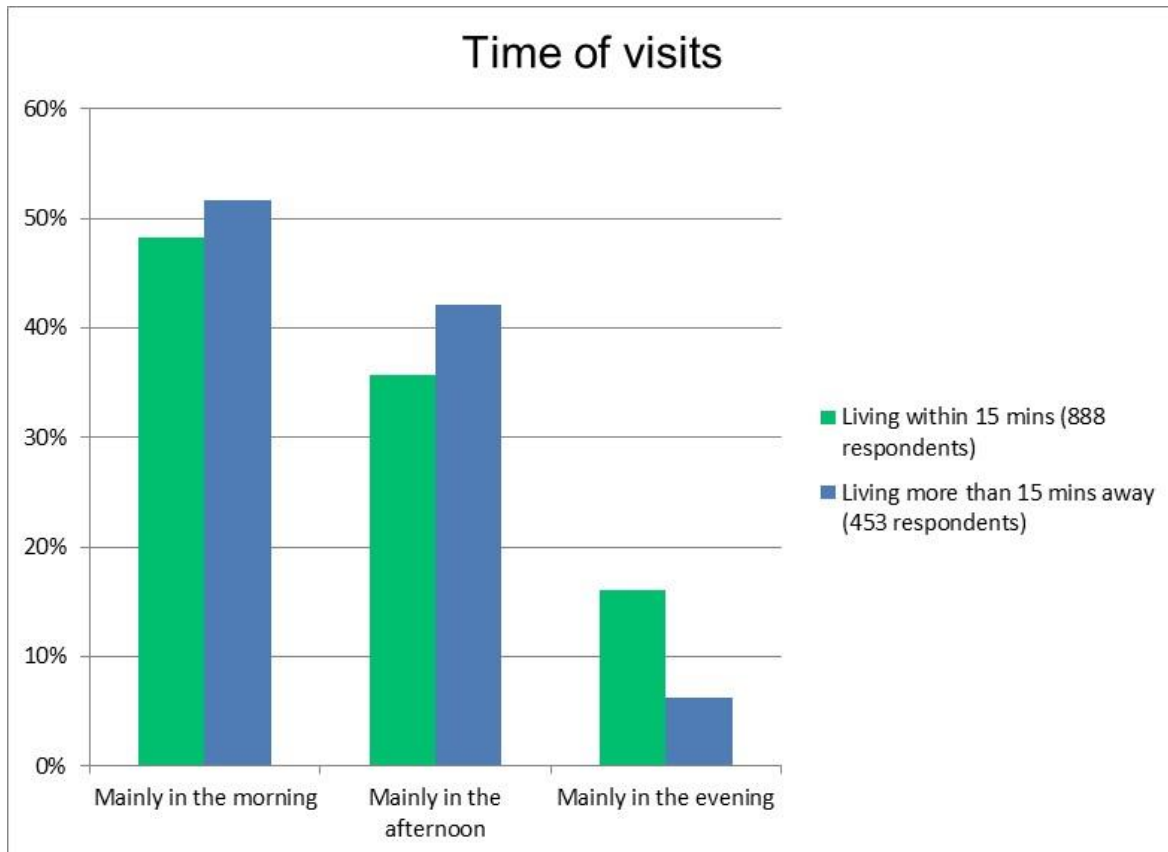
Table 7 breaks down the visiting patterns according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.



*Table 7: Dwell-time (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

Table 7 clearly shows that a higher proportion of those living further away stay longer at the park. The average dwell-time of the respondents living further away is 2 hours 21 minutes (141 minutes), almost an hour more on average than local users (82 minutes).

With the average dwell-time reaching this level, it does highlight the importance of onsite service provision such as catering (refreshments) to meet the essential needs of park users. The fact that most visitors arrive in the morning (see Table 8) suggests that visits extend over the lunchtime period. Evening visits are mostly from locals.

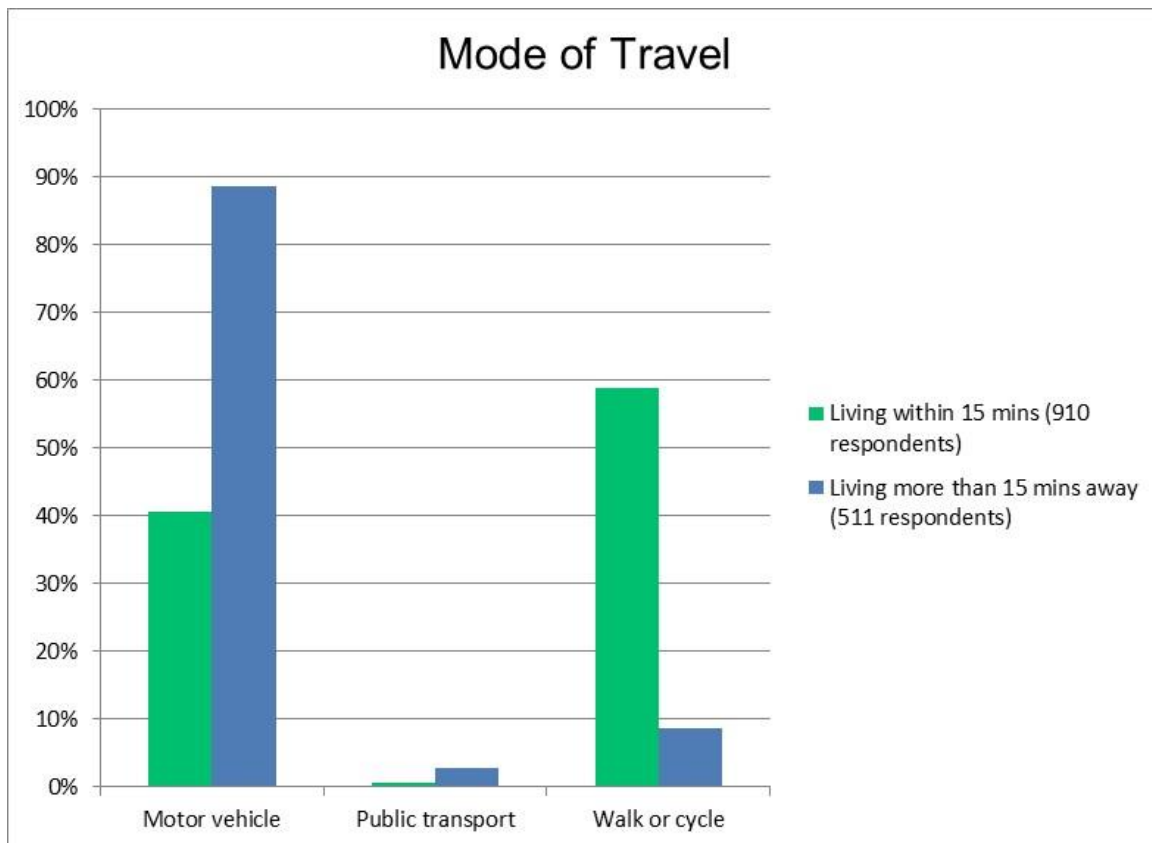


*Table 8: Time of visits (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

Please see Table G in Appendix One for the whole survey sample.

#### Mode of travel

In terms of mode of travel, the majority of visitors arrive by car although clearly, given its location close to residential areas and its position adjacent to Downlink, there is a significant volume of arrivals on foot or by bike. Most visitors arriving by bike or on foot are local. Arrivals by those using public transport remains low at just over 1% (please see Table 9).



*Table 9: Mode of travel (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

Please see Table H in Appendix One for the whole survey sample.

### 2.3 Visitor motivations and preferences

For local people the most common reason for visiting is for quiet recreation, but second is a visit to Dinosaur Island play area. For visitors from further afield, Dinosaur Island play area is the main attraction and is a very popular aspect of the park.

Otherwise, the main reason for visiting is spread across a number of factors including meeting up with friends or relatives, exercising, taking part in watersports and visiting the Paddling Beach (please see further detail in Table J, Appendix One).

The motivations to visit vary according to how often people visit, which is to be expected. For example, of those that visit every day, just over 40% are coming to the park to walk their dog (even though dog walkers make up only 12.9% of total respondents). Similarly, among those who visit 3-6 times a year, the main reason for visiting for some 33% is Dinosaur Island play area which represents the main reason for only 23% in the overall survey.



Table 10 breaks down the visiting patterns for the main categories according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes. This shows further variations in visitor motivations according to place of residence:

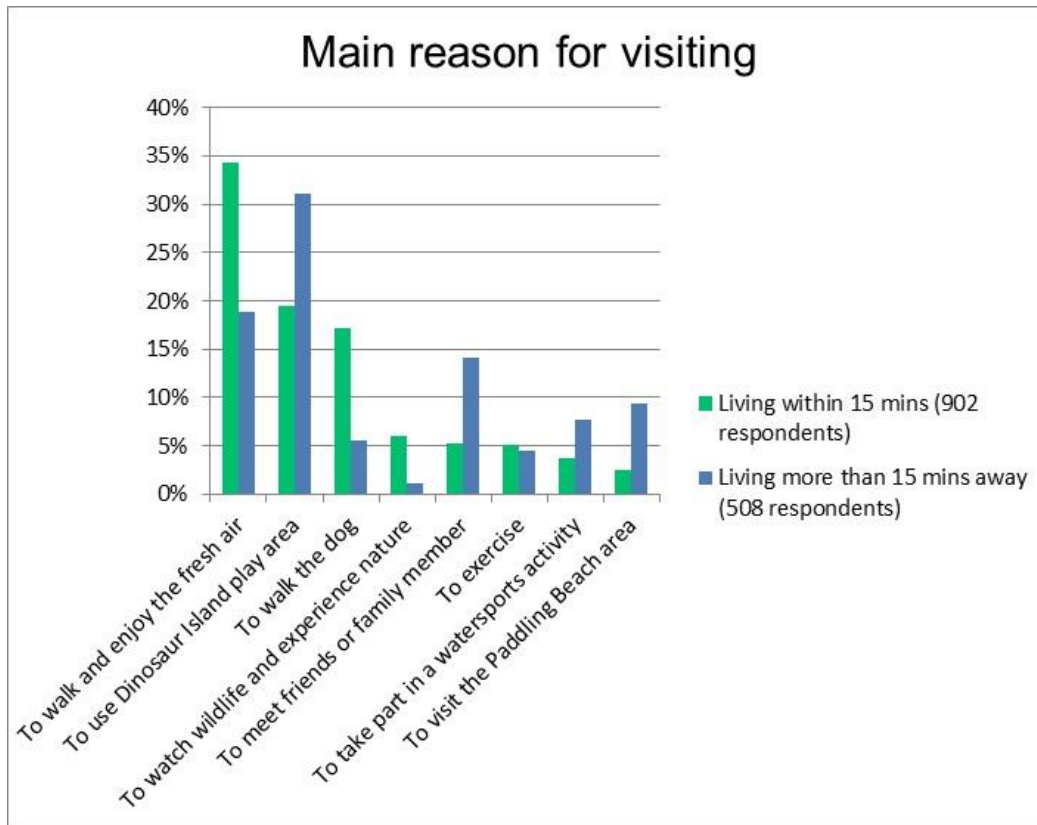


Table 10: Main reason for visiting (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)

For those living further away, the play area is a very important draw and these respondents are also more likely to take part in a watersports' activity (more than twice as likely as those within 15 minutes) and to visit the paddling beach (nearly four times more likely).

The respondents living further away are also more likely to use the park as a place to meet up with friends or a family member rather than just to walk and enjoy the fresh air (which perhaps they can do more easily elsewhere, closer to where they live).

The full data for the whole sample is shown as Table J in Appendix One.

### Different areas of the park

Whilst more than half of people (56.3%) visit areas of the park away from the main hub, more than one in four do not (27.0%) and 1 in 6 are not even aware that the park extends across a wider area. This presents a possible opportunity to encourage a greater spread of

visitors beyond the main hub areas. For the whole sample (shown as Table K in Appendix One).

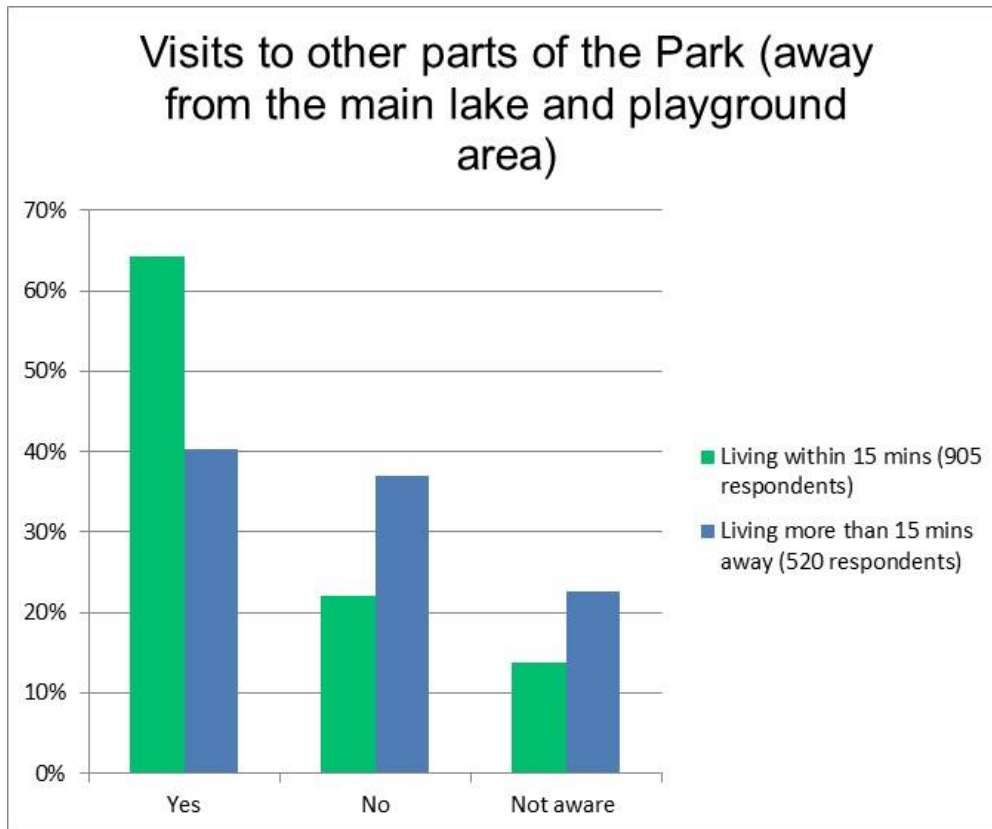


Table 11: Focus areas of visits (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there appears to be a lower familiarity and knowledge of the site layout among those living further away. The lower awareness may point to a need for better information / signposting for visitors in this regard. This may also help with the desire for more areas for wildlife (please also refer to tables 19 and 20), by illustrating the size and layout of the whole park.

## 2.4 Rating the visitor experience

The survey has provided rating responses for the overall country park as well as for component elements of the visitor offer. The full table for the whole sample is shown as Table L (with a summary as Table M) in Appendix One.

In terms of the percentage response for each category, it is important to consider these in relation to the number of responses provided as some people either **did not use or were not aware** of the facility listed or had low response rates. The number of responses to each

aspect (which is shown in the final column of Table 12) and the percentages shown for each category apply only to those respondents who gave a rating. For example, 1,458 gave a rating for the natural setting and wildlife whereas only 415 gave a rating for the Watersports' Centre. The percentage figures shown relates to the number of those who experienced and rated each category.

In Table 12, we show the main categories of the visitor experience, ranked in order of the proportion of respondents providing a rating of excellent, very good or good (i.e. this excludes people who didn't use the facility).

For the whole survey sample, the overall experience receives a strong favourable rating from more than half of respondents, with some 17.6% believing it to be excellent, a further 34.5% as very good and 30.4% as good (totalling 82.5%). The table also shows the combined overall scores for good, very good and excellent which shows a positive profile (i.e., above 50%) for all the main categories, other than the toilets and changing rooms.

Rating the experience of the offer and facilities							
Rating the experience of the offer and facilities (all responses)	Excellent		Very good		Total (combined excellent and very good)	Total (combined excellent, very good and good)	Responded / used facility
The natural setting and wildlife	30.9%	451	34.8%	507	65.7%	88.4%	1,458
Visit to the Dinosaur Island Play Area	27.5%	274	32.8%	326	60.3%	86.9%	995
Paths / accessibility and moving around the site	22.2%	323	32.3%	471	54.5%	86.5%	1,457
Overall experience	17.6%	236	34.5%	463	52.1%	82.5%	1,342
The Watersports Centre - quality of experience	20.2%	84	30.6%	127	50.8%	77.1%	415
Visit to the paddling beach	17.2%	104	18.7%	113	35.9%	57.6%	604
Experience of paddling beach booking system	20.5%	96	13.7%	64	34.2%	44.7%	468
The Café – appeal and setting	11.6%	155	20.8%	279	32.4%	64.0%	1,340
Toilets and Changing Rooms	4.7%	54	12.2%	141	16.9%	42.7%	1,154

*Table 12: Rating the experience of the offer and facilities (all respondents)*

The park's natural setting and the wildlife generate positive ratings with more than 88% of participants rating it as either excellent, very good or good.

The play area and the quality of the paths and accessibility around the site also generate scores above 85% (excellent, very good or good) and the quality of the watersports' experience also scores above 75%.

The appeal and setting of the café generate a positive score of 64%. The café also received similar positive ratings (61%) for its menu range and price.

<b>Rating the experience of the offer and facilities</b>				
<b>Rating the experience of the offer and facilities (all responses)</b>	<b>Combined excellent, very good and good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Combined poor and very poor</b>	<b>Responded / used facility</b>
The natural setting and wildlife	88.4%	8.8%	2.8%	1,458
Visit to the Dinosaur Island Play Area	86.9%	9.6%	3.4%	995
Paths / accessibility and moving around the site	86.5%	9.7%	3.8%	1,457
Overall experience	82.5%	13.9%	3.6%	1,342
The Watersports Centre - quality of experience	77.1%	12.8%	10.1%	415
Your visit to the paddling beach	57.6%	14.4%	28.0%	604
Experience of paddling beach booking system	44.7%	9.0%	46.4%	468
The Café – appeal and setting	64.0%	24.8%	11.3%	1,340
Toilets and Changing Rooms	42.7%	29.3%	28.0%	1,154

*Table 12a: Comparative responses on rating the experience of the offer and facilities (all respondents)*

Other facilities received more mixed reviews. More than 55% of those that did respond, considered the paddling beach experience to be excellent, very good or good. 28% of respondents that had used the facility felt it was poor or very poor. The booking system for the paddling beach is seen as poor or very poor by just under half of the users (48.4%) but nearly as many respondents (44.7%) thought it was excellent, very good or good. It is important to note that this is based on a lower sample size as less than a third of total respondents had used the paddling beach booking system (468 people responded in total to this question, so 217 people gave a negative response, 209 a positive one, and 42 felt it was 'average').

The fishing lakes had a positive rating by 51.2% of the 248 respondents but were seen as poor or very poor by about a quarter of those who used it (24.2%). Again, the total responses to this question were low – 248.

The toilets and changing rooms were viewed positively by 42% of respondents, a further 29.3% felt they were ‘average’ and 28% felt they were poor or very poor. (See 2.1.7. Future priorities for support).

Table 13 shows the breakdown of ratings for the main categories according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes.

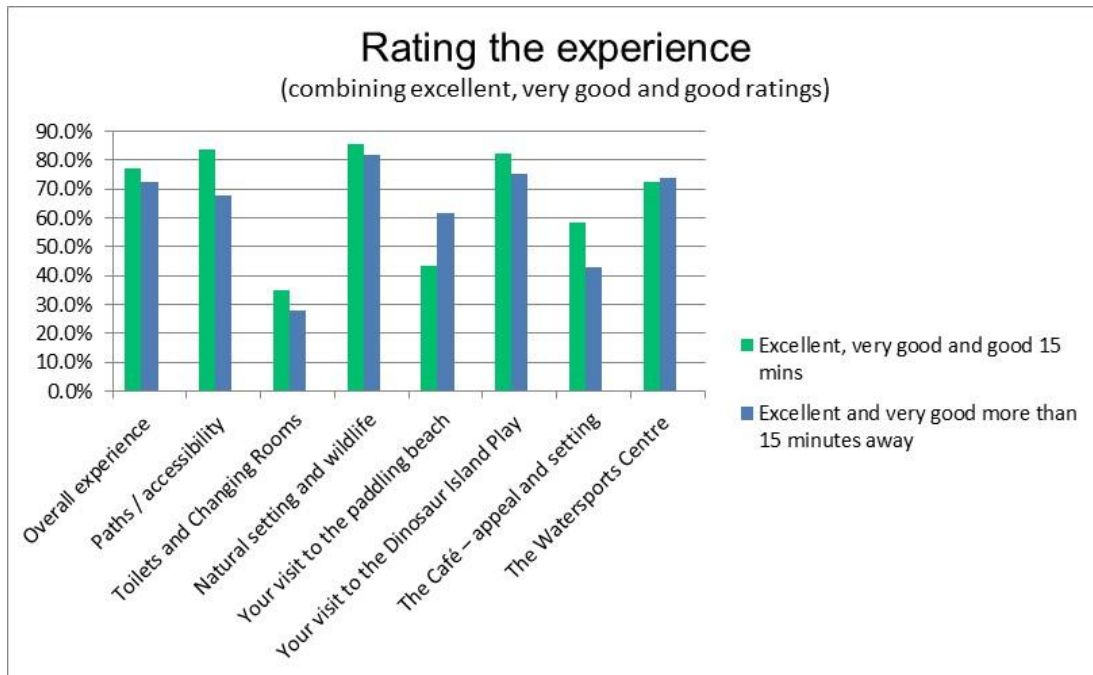


Table 13: Rating the experience (breakdown between local residents and those living further away)

Across all of the categories shown, those living further away provide significantly higher scores (combining the excellent, very good and good ratings) for all elements of the experience shown, demonstrating more positive approval ratings than those living within 15 minutes.

Table 14 confirms the sample size and response rates for the different categories of facility across both catchment filters.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Total responses show slight variations on filtered data due to different number of responses to each question considered

Sample size for rating responses (excellent and very good)	Up to 15 mins			More than 15 minutes		
	Combined excellent, very good and good		Total No of respondents	Combined excellent, very good and good		Total No of respondents
	%	Number		%	Number	
Overall experience	77.4	634	819	92.2	450	488
Paths / accessibility and moving around the site	83.7	760	908	92.5	471	509
Toilets and Changing Rooms	34.8	251	721	57.4	230	401
The natural setting and wildlife	85.6	776	907	94.3	482	511
Your visit to the paddling beach	43.2	160	370	83.6	183	219
Your visit to the Dinosaur Island Play Area	82.5	490	594	94.6	353	373
The Café – appeal and setting	58.7	498	849	74.6	340	456
The Watersports Centre - quality of experience	72.3	209	289	91.2	104	114

Table 14: Response levels to each category / facility rated

Tables 15, 16 and 17 show the breakdown of responses based upon where visitors live, referring to the paddling beach experience and its booking system.

Rating the experience of the offer and facilities (Up to 15 minute catchment filter)												
	Excellent		Very good		Good		Average		Poor		Very poor	
Your visit to the paddling beach (370 respondents)	7.8%	29	13.2%	49	22.2%	82	18.4%	68	15.1%	56	23.2%	86
Your experience of paddling beach booking system (286 respondents)	7.0%	20	10.5%	30	9.4%	27	8.0%	23	20.3%	58	44.8%	128
Rating the experience of the offer and facilities (More than 15 minute catchment filter)												
	Excellent		Very good		Good		Average		Poor		Very poor	
Your visit to the paddling beach (219 respondents)	34.2%	75	27.4%	60	21.9%	48	8.2%	18	3.2%	7	5.0%	11
Your experience of paddling beach booking system (168 respondents)	45.2%	76	19.0%	32	11.9%	20	10.1%	17	7.1%	12	6.5%	11

Table 15: Rating the paddling beach and its booking system

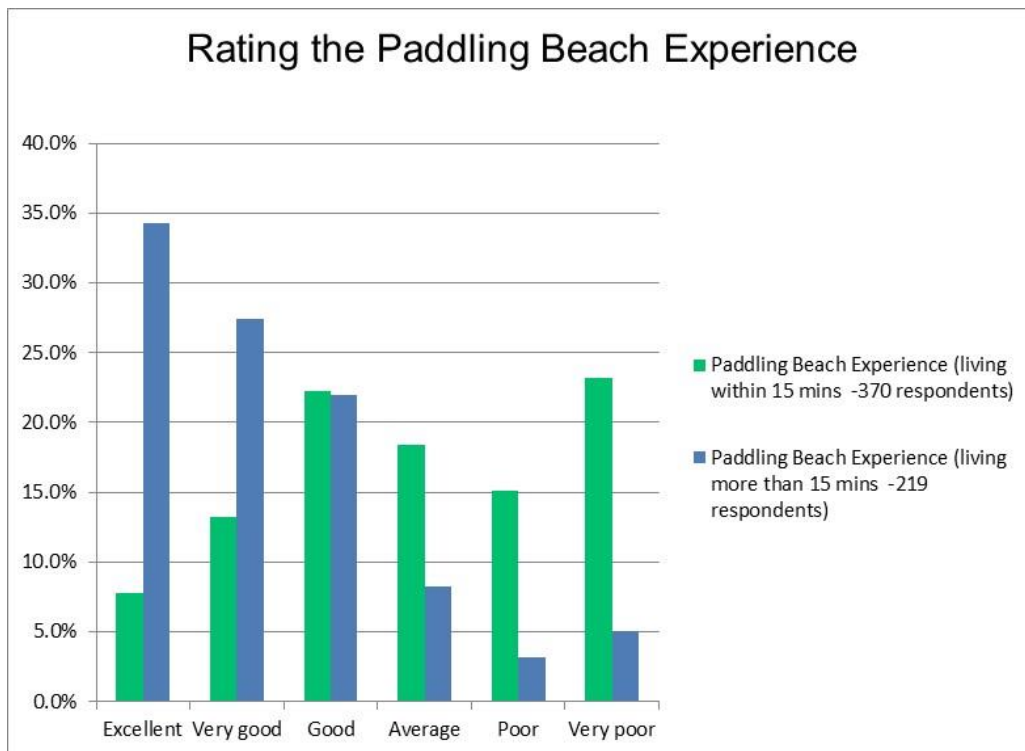


Table 16: Rating the paddling beach experience (breakdown between local residents and those living further away)

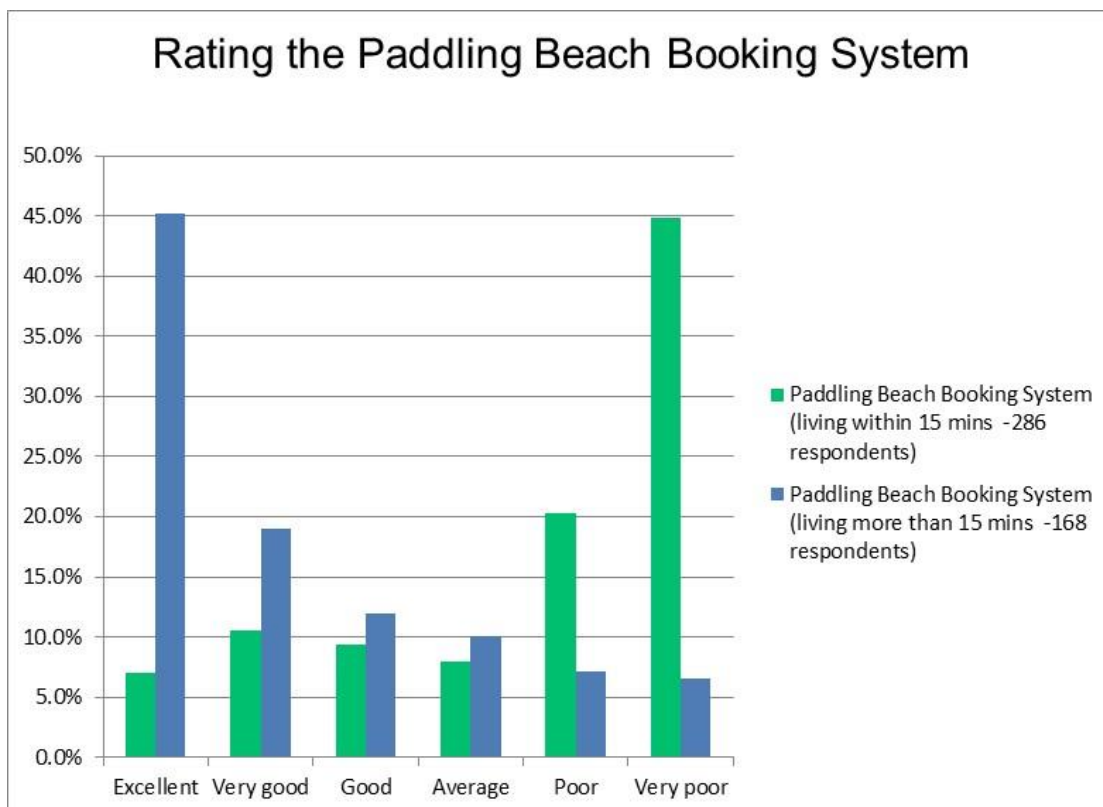


Table 17: Rating the paddling beach booking system (breakdown between local residents and those living further away)

Both the paddling beach experience and the booking system receive more favourable ratings from those living more than 15 minutes away from the park.

### Visitor perceptions

As shown in Table 18, nearly three quarters of all respondents feel that the visit represents value for money.

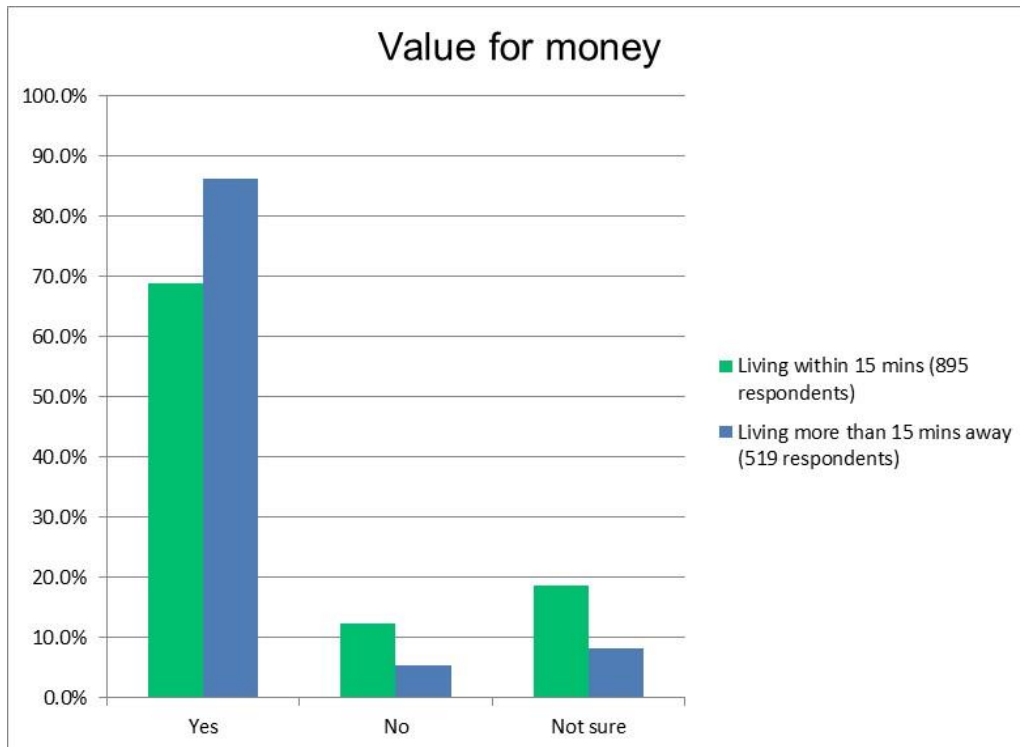


Table 18: Value for money (breakdown between local residents and those living further away)

The full table for the whole sample is shown as Table N in Appendix One.

## 2.5 The balance between recreational uses and the natural environment

Achieving the right balance between recreational activities and the environment and wildlife is a major consideration for any future proposals for Southwater Country Park.

The responses received demonstrate that from the whole sample (please see Table P in Appendix One), more than two-thirds of all respondents consider that the balance is right and the twin purpose of managing greenspace and the quality of the natural environment is currently being delivered appropriately. It is nevertheless important to recognise that just over a quarter of all respondents would like to see further consideration given to wildlife protection and habitat management.



Table 19 shows the responses broken down into whether people live locally or further afield.

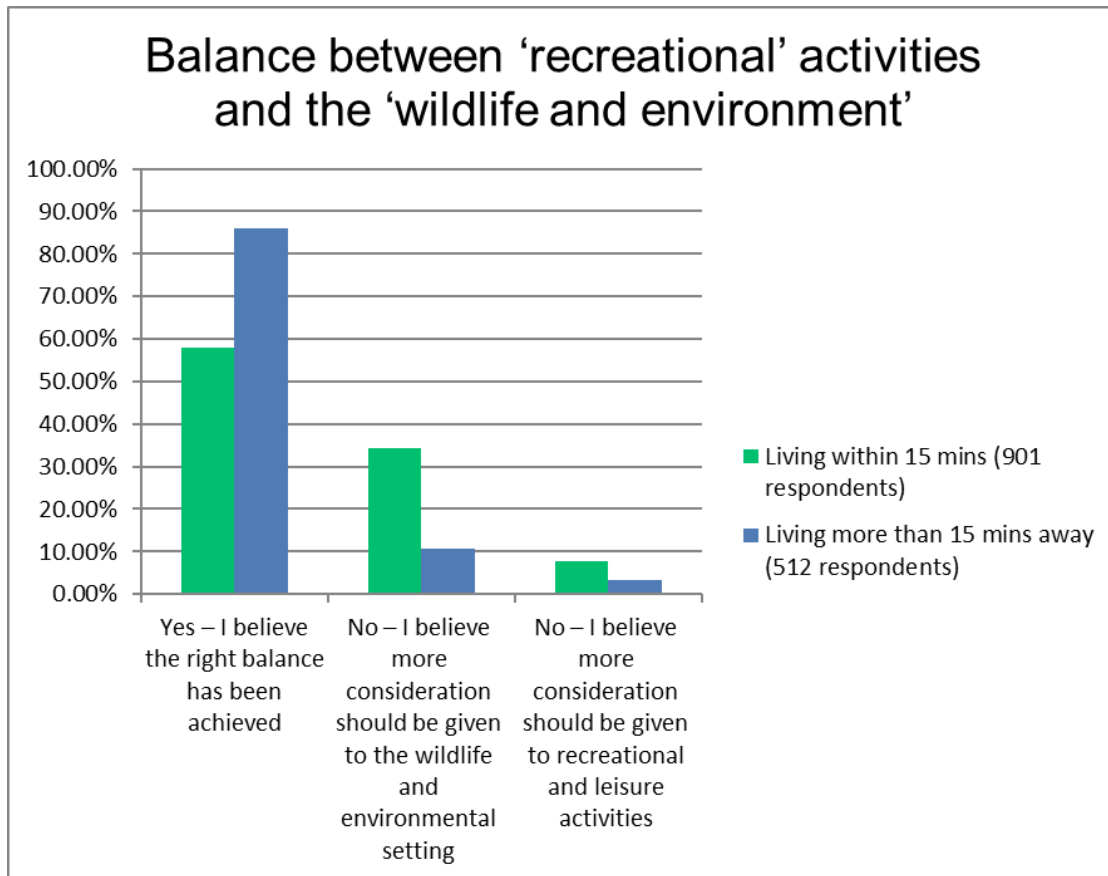


Table 19: Feedback on the balance between priority objectives

## 2.6 Future aspirations

The overall results on future aspirations are shown in Table 20.

Future aspirations for Southwater Country Park			
	Essential	Desirable	Not necessary
More areas given over to nature and quiet enjoyment	30.4%	45.5%	24.1%
Enhanced food and drink offer	28.1%	37.5%	34.3%
More facilities for teenagers	16.0%	40.0%	44.1%
More children's play facilities	12.5%	29.7%	57.8%
Hosting community, cultural and artistic events	12.3%	47.0%	40.7%
Offering evening activities	11.5%	45.3%	43.2%
More watersport activities	8.5%	31.7%	59.8%
More land-based sporting /adventure activities	7.6%	37.1%	55.3%
Providing opportunities for overnight stays	2.7%	15.0%	82.3%
Providing shopping and retail	2.0%	7.1%	90.9%

*Table 20: Future aspirations (whole survey sample)*

It is clear from the survey how valuable the quality of the natural environment of the park is and how important it is for visitors' enjoyment and quality of experience. As mentioned, two thirds of respondents believe there is already a good balance at the park between the natural environment and leisure pursuits. However, when asked if they would like to see more improvements to the natural areas and for nature and quiet enjoyment to be given a higher priority with more additional space or zones, more than 75% of respondents responded positively (either essential (30%) or desirable (45%)).

There is some support to provide more facilities which would suit the teenage audience and also to further enhance the play facilities which is clearly one of the main attractors of the park.

Some respondents are concerned that, as the park is modest in size and covers a relatively small area, it would not be able to absorb more commercial activities without detriment to the wildlife, natural environment and quality of the experience.

Getting the right balance between providing the right facilities for teenagers and not encouraging anti-social behaviour is recognised as a challenge for the park by some respondents.

Other aspects widely considered as desirable include further community events and possibly offering evening activities. More watersports activities and more land-based activities are not deemed necessary by more than a half of respondents.

At the other end of the scale, opportunities for overnight stays and provision of retail offer gain very limited support with a strong majority not believing these aspects to be appropriate nor necessary.

Table 21 breaks down the future aspirations according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes which shows further variations in visitor motivations according to place of residence.

Future aspirations	Up to 15 minutes			More than 15 minutes		
	Essential	Desirable	Not necessary	Essential	Desirable	Not necessary
More areas given over to nature and quiet enjoyment	36.0%	44.6%	19.4%	19.0%	47.4%	33.6%
Enhanced food and drink offer	31.4%	37.4%	31.2%	22.7%	38.5%	38.7%
More facilities for teenagers	18.0%	40.1%	41.9%	12.8%	40.4%	46.8%
Hosting community, cultural and artistic events	14.8%	47.4%	37.8%	8.2%	47.3%	44.5%
Offering evening activities	13.7%	45.3%	41.0%	7.9%	46.1%	46.1%
More children's play facilities	11.3%	26.2%	62.5%	15.5%	36.8%	47.7%
More watersport activities	9.9%	32.1%	58.1%	6.4%	32.0%	61.6%
More land-based sporting /adventure activities	8.3%	35.2%	56.5%	6.6%	41.7%	51.7%
Providing opportunities for overnight stays	3.0%	11.8%	85.2%	2.4%	21.0%	76.6%
Providing shopping and retail	1.6%	8.3%	90.1%	2.8%	5.4%	91.9%

*Table 21: Future aspirations (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

Support for further natural zones or areas is highest among local respondents. Those further away have a higher level of support for children's play, in particular, although there is still a high proportion (almost half at 47.7%) among this group living more than 15 minutes away who do not deem this as necessary.

## 2.7 Future priorities for support

In terms of priority areas for support, apart from the fishing which is a more specialist area of use, all aspects were answered by at least 96% of survey respondents. Table 22 highlights the different aspects for future consideration in the order of those categories which receive support from all respondents.

	Strongly support	Support	Sub total (support)	Neutral	Oppose	Strongly oppose
Improved toilet provision	44.6%	36.2%	<b>80.7%</b>	17.7%	0.8%	0.8%
More information about nature and wildlife	30.3%	45.3%	<b>75.7%</b>	23.4%	0.6%	0.4%
Additional seating and picnic areas	27.2%	42.8%	<b>69.9%</b>	23.1%	4.9%	2.1%
Low-key events / activities e.g. nature walk, bush craft skills	26.6%	42.9%	<b>69.4%</b>	26.0%	3.4%	1.2%
Educational activities	23.9%	43.4%	<b>67.3%</b>	29.1%	2.3%	1.3%
Additional areas for watching wildlife (bird hides)	28.7%	38.0%	<b>66.7%</b>	30.1%	1.8%	1.3%
Extra catering facilities	24.4%	30.9%	<b>55.3%</b>	31.6%	9.2%	3.9%
Changes to current catering offer	20.7%	28.5%	<b>49.2%</b>	44.6%	4.4%	1.8%
Improvements to accessibility	15.5%	28.6%	<b>44.1%</b>	52.5%	2.5%	0.9%
Improved car parking	15.6%	26.4%	<b>41.9%</b>	46.4%	6.5%	5.2%
Activity area for dogs	16.2%	19.4%	<b>35.6%</b>	40.5%	12.4%	11.6%
Indoor activities eg indoor play offer	15.0%	17.5%	<b>32.5%</b>	35.1%	17.0%	15.4%
Improved fishing facilities at Lennoxwood Lake	10.4%	12.7%	<b>23.1%</b>	69.3%	3.2%	4.5%
Improved fishing facilities at Castlewood Lake	9.0%	12.1%	<b>21.1%</b>	71.0%	3.5%	4.5%

*Table 22: Priority areas for support (whole sample)*

Improved toilet provision receives the highest priority, and the comments also add weight to this aspect as a key enhancement supported by a high proportion of users.

A range of aspects relating to the natural environment including more information, low key events, educational activities and additional wildlife watching areas all receive strong support.

Enhancements to the catering offer would also be well received by a significant proportion of respondents. 93.8% of respondents favour or do not oppose changes to the catering offer with some 55% indicating they would like to see extra catering facilities and about a half (49.2%) support changes to the current catering area.

There is a lower level of support for indoor play and activity areas for dogs and indeed these two categories receive the highest level of stated opposition (32% and 24%).

It is important to counter the above by acknowledging that many people are happy with the park how it is.

Table 23 breaks down the priority areas for support according to whether people live within or beyond 15 minutes which shows further variations in visitor motivations according to place of residence.

Priority areas for support						
Priority areas for support	Up to 15 minutes			More than 15 minutes		
	Strongly support	Support	Sub total (support)	Strongly support	Support	Sub total (support)
Improved toilet provision	43.4%	38.4%	<b>81.7%</b>	47.7%	32.2%	<b>79.9%</b>
More information about nature and wildlife	33.2%	46.1%	<b>79.3%</b>	23.9%	45.0%	<b>68.9%</b>
Low-key events / activities e.g. nature walk, bush craft	28.7%	44.0%	<b>72.6%</b>	23.5%	40.9%	<b>64.4%</b>
Additional areas for watching wildlife (bird hides)	31.3%	40.6%	<b>71.9%</b>	22.7%	34.0%	<b>56.7%</b>
Additional seating and picnic areas	26.0%	44.5%	<b>70.5%</b>	29.4%	40.4%	<b>69.8%</b>
Educational activities	25.2%	45.1%	<b>70.3%</b>	21.0%	41.6%	<b>62.6%</b>
Extra catering facilities	23.6%	31.6%	<b>55.2%</b>	26.1%	30.1%	<b>56.2%</b>
Changes to current catering offer	21.4%	29.4%	<b>50.7%</b>	20.0%	27.2%	<b>47.2%</b>
Improvements to accessibility	16.1%	28.2%	<b>44.4%</b>	13.4%	30.7%	<b>44.1%</b>
Improved car parking	13.2%	26.3%	<b>39.5%</b>	20.6%	28.0%	<b>48.7%</b>
Activity area for dogs	18.8%	20.7%	<b>39.5%</b>	11.8%	18.0%	<b>29.8%</b>
Indoor activities eg indoor play offer	13.5%	15.3%	<b>28.8%</b>	18.4%	22.2%	<b>40.6%</b>
Improved fishing facilities at Lennoxwood Lake	11.8%	13.9%	<b>25.7%</b>	7.1%	10.9%	<b>18.0%</b>
Improved fishing facilities at Castlewood Lake	10.3%	13.4%	<b>23.7%</b>	6.0%	10.1%	<b>16.0%</b>

*Table 23: Priority areas for support (breakdown between local visitors and those living further away)*

In general, the hierarchy of support is similar across the two respondent profiles although the degree of support tends to be higher for most categories among the local audience. The 'Top 6' areas for support are the same for each group, albeit the categories are placed in a slightly different order within those living more than 15 minutes away for whom additional seating and picnic areas is their second highest priority area.

## 3.0 Feedback from engagement with younger children

### 3.1 Introduction

As part of the programme, onsite research was carried out specifically targeting children who visit Southwater Country Park. Sessions were held on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>, Monday 8<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2022 and just over 150 children took part in the research.

To encourage young children to participate, a craft activity was offered as part of the ‘research session’ and a gazebo was used as a central point and to provide shade/shelter (this was located in the dinosaur playground on the first three days and in front of the café area on the final day).





*Craft activities and the 'research gazebo'*

### 3.2 Age breakdown

We set out in the table below a breakdown of the age range of the children who participated in the sessions:

Age	%
1 to 2	9.33%
3 to 5	35.33%
6 to 10	44.00%
11 to 15	11.33%

### 3.3 The overall experience

Participants (younger children) were asked to rate their overall experience at Southwater Country Park (with five being a positive score) and the results are set out in the table on the following page. **91% of participants rated their visit as either four or five (i.e., very positive/good).**

Rating	%
(0=poor, 5=very good)	
0	1.45%
1	0.00%
2	1.45%
3	5.80%
4	39.13%
5	52.17%

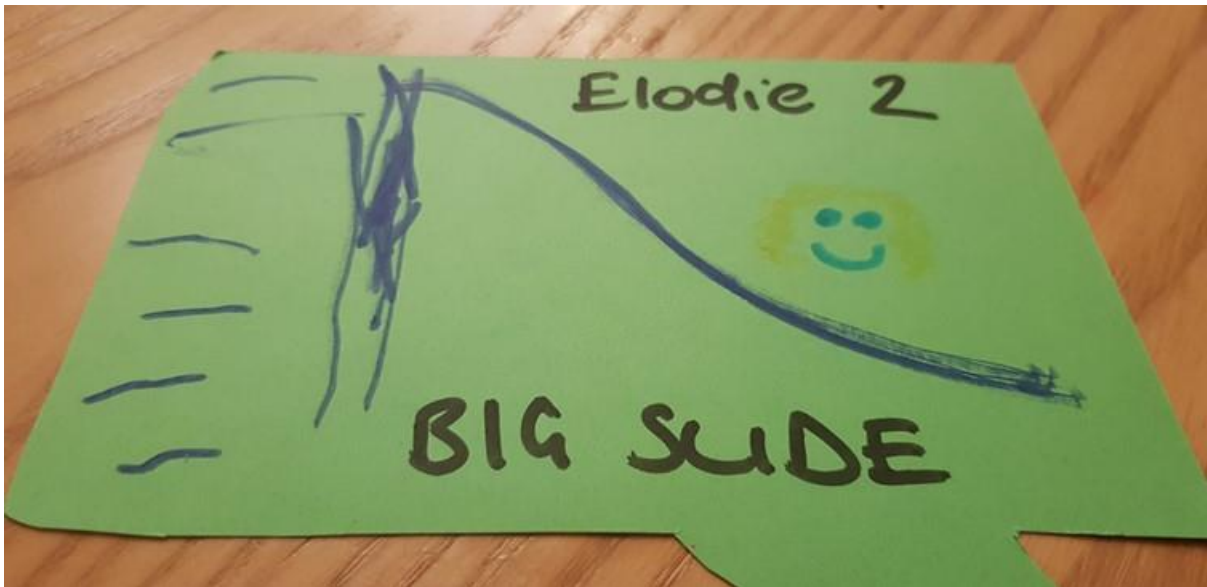
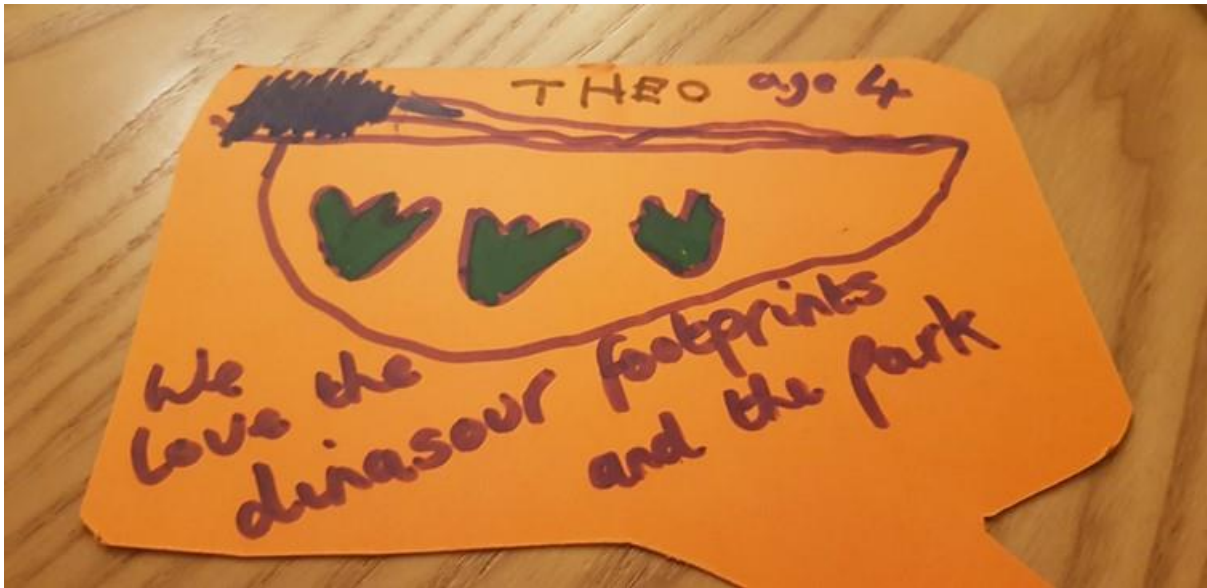
### 3.4 What children loved about their visit to Southwater Country Park

Children were asked what they 'loved' about their visit to Southwater Country Park. The Dinosaur Island play area generated the highest number of mentions by a significant margin - it was mentioned over 80 times by participating children and their parents. The summary table below sets out the number of times specific elements of the visitor offer at Southwater Country Park were mentioned:

Element of the visit	Times mentioned
Playground	87
Beach (including paddling)	13
Catering	11
Wildlife	10
Walking around	8
Natural setting (including presence of water)	7
Pedalos/kayaks	6
Cleanliness	6

Several other positive elements of the visit to Southwater Country Park were also mentioned, including getting away from friends and their phone, the variety of things to do within the country park, the staff. Each of these were mentioned between 1 and 4 times by participants.





*Elements of Southwater Country Park which children loved about their visit*

### 3.5 Was there anything participants did not like during their visit?

It was important to understand what participating children did not like during their visit to Southwater Country Park. In the table on the following page, we set out the number of times that individual areas / elements within the country park were mentioned by participating children and during conversations with their parents.

It is important to note, “nothing” was mentioned 26 times by participants (i.e., there was nothing that they did not like).

Element of the visit	Times mentioned
Nothing	26
Toilets	18
Play offer	18
Beach	12
Lack of shade	11
Café	6

In respect of toilets, this was mainly based around the lack of toilets near the playground. Concerns related to the play area included the slide being too big and slow, the zip wire not being fast enough, not being able to bring dogs into an area within the playground (it is difficult to see children from outside of the playground area), the dinosaur bones being too big in the sandpit, only one entrance to the playground and the busyness of the playground during the school holiday periods. The lack of shade was also highlighted.

There are some limited concerns related to the beach including not knowing how to book or if people needed to book (4), closing the beach at night (2) and not being able to paddle (1).

A number of other elements were also mentioned (each between 1 and 4 times each). For example, poor weather (4), car parking (3), behaviour of visitors – people breaking the rules (2), litter (2), mud (2), dogs not being allowed off their lead (2), used to be free car parking (1) and the card system not working (1).

### 3.6 What would make the visit more enjoyable?

Participants (children and parents) were also asked about what would make their visit more enjoyable and the responses are set out in the table overleaf.

There was a particular focus on improvements to or around Dinosaur Island play area

Both providing **additional shade** at the playground (and café) along with improving the play offer were mentioned the highest number of times. In respect of the **play offer**, this centred around introducing additional swings for toddlers and play equipment for children under 90cm in height. A faster and higher zipline, sensory play, more climbing equipment, monkey bars and an improved slide were mentioned. Additional dinosaur bones in the

sandpit and ‘dinosaurs that are big and moving’ along with real dinosaurs were mentioned too!

As in 3.5 above, provision of **toilets** at or nearby the playground facility was flagged, as was having a refreshment kiosk nearby, rather than having to go down to the main centre.

Enhancing the visitor experience	Times mentioned
Additional / enhanced play offer	24
Additional shade in playground or near café	23
Water related opportunities	14
Improve beach experience (booking)	13
Visitor infrastructure 'brilliant basics'	12
Provision of toilets	9
Introduction of a refreshment kiosk or similar at the playground	8
Nothing	7
Dogs related ideas	7
Additional events / activities	5
Crazy golf / skate park / area for football	5
Inflatable play	5
Country park app	4
Splash park / pool / pad	4
Dinosaur trail (trail for children)	3
Arts	3

Suggested opportunities related to the ‘**water**’ included introducing pond dipping, bringing back the opportunity to kayak without having to pay, using toy boats on the lake (although there is a model boating club), additional activities introduced on the lake, allowing people the opportunity to swim and introducing a slide into the water.

Closely related to the water usage are opportunities to enhance **the 'beach experience.'** This mainly focussed on raising awareness (including additional signage) about the requirement to book online to enable access to the beach. The role of the countryside wardens seemed to be a little confusing to some people as they are not lifeguards (feedback from research field-worker).

Getting the 'basics' right is essential in terms of the baseline **visitor infrastructure** which was mentioned by a number of participants. This centres around providing additional benches, tables, appropriate surfacing of paths, the provision of a water fountain and the right number of bins.

## 4.0 Summary comments

**In terms of the main implications from the wider research, the key findings are as follows:**

- The balance is seen to be appropriate by a large majority of people but there is support for further environmental and wildlife protection, conservation work and habitat improvements which will also act as an enhanced educational resource
- There is quite a variation in the rating scores for different component elements at Southwater Country Park, but the responses do highlight a need to enhance key aspects of the existing facilities including toilets, the so-called ‘brilliant basics’
- Play is a popular feature and there needs to be regular investment in maintenance
- The main changes people want to see relate to upgrading or replacing the toilets, an additional toilet provision near the play area and an opportunity to improve the existing catering offer further and extending the range of the play facilities for younger audiences

**Overall**, there is a need to preserve the feeling of the park. To avoid piecemeal development, a comprehensive holistic plan is required to consider the appropriate facilities, backed up by a resource plan which will be fit for purpose in relation to any new proposals.

## Appendix One: Detailed research tables

Table A: Group size (whole sample)

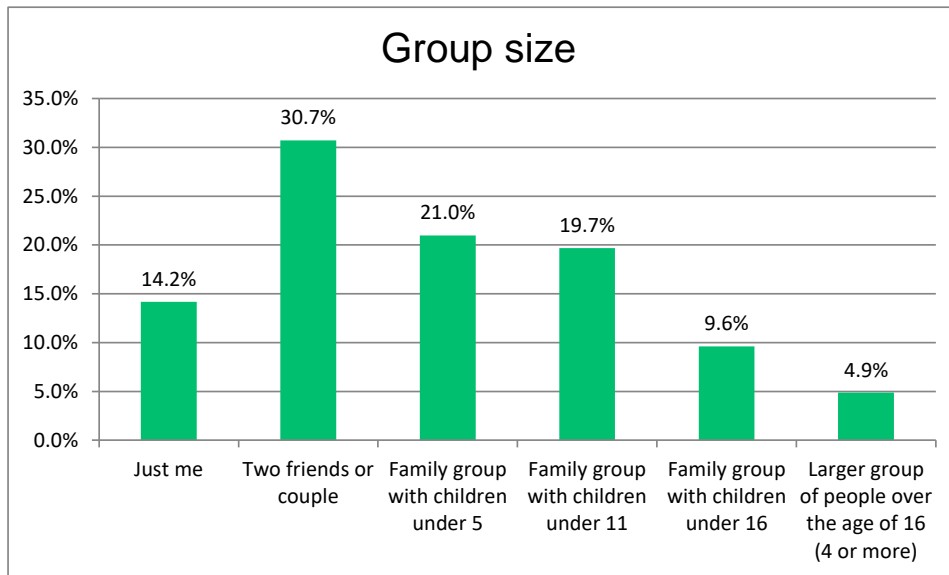
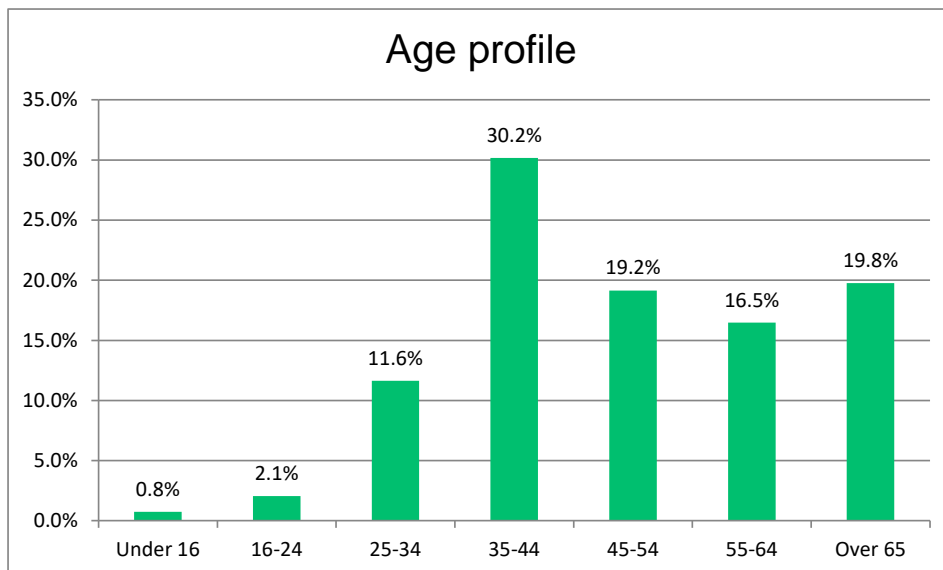
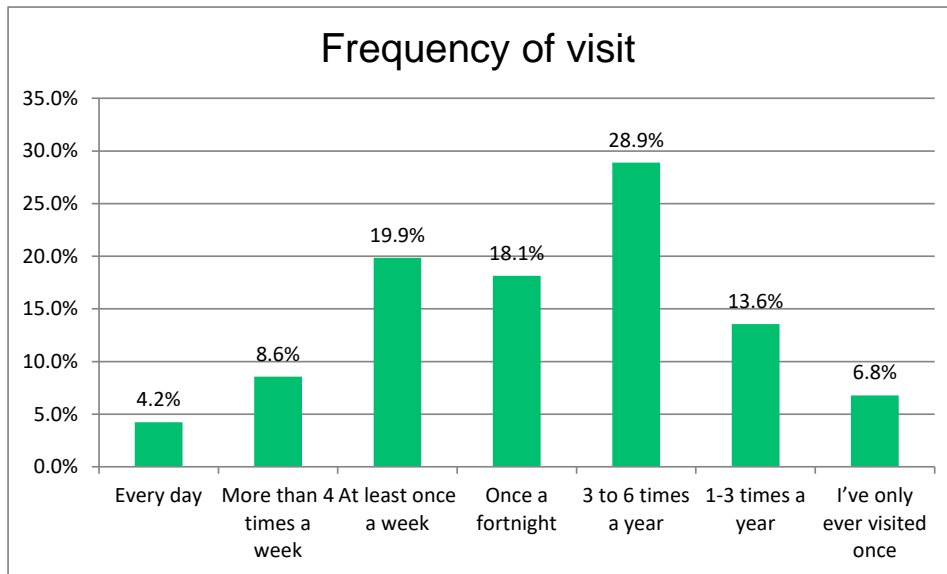


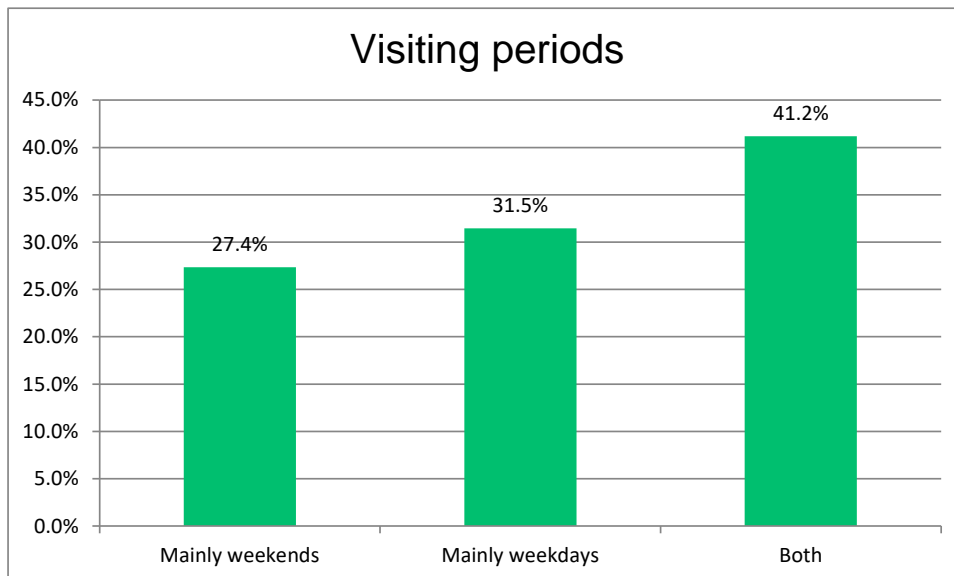
Table B: Age profile (whole sample)



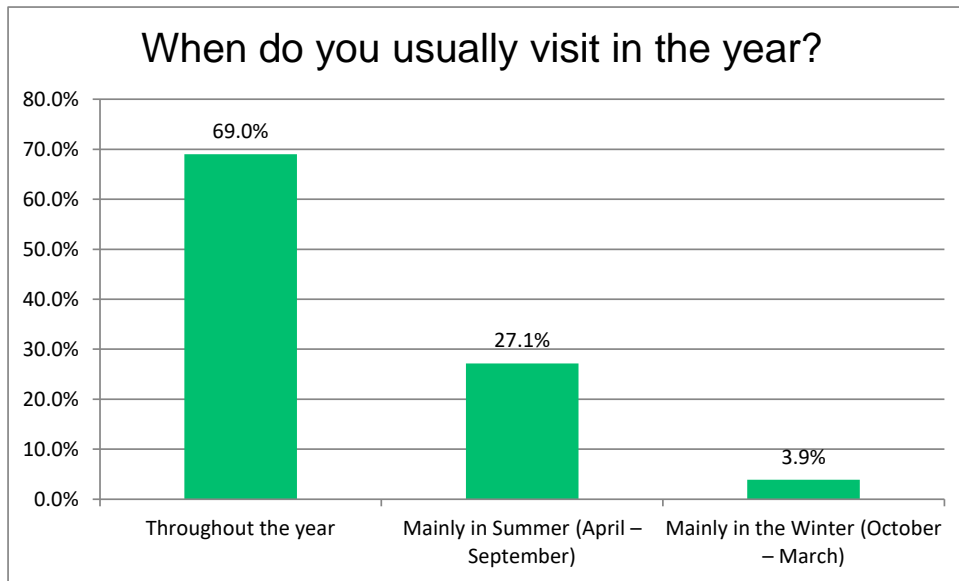
*Table C: Frequency of visits (whole sample)*



*Table D: Visiting periods (whole sample)*



*Table E: When visiting in the year (whole sample)*



*Table F: Dwelltime (whole sample)*

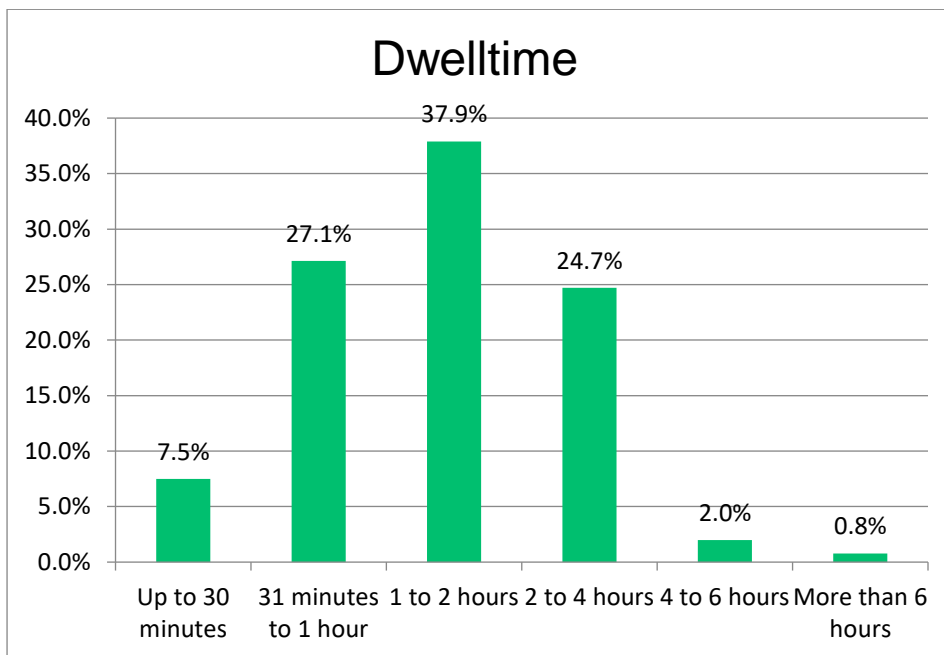




Table G: Time of visits (whole sample)

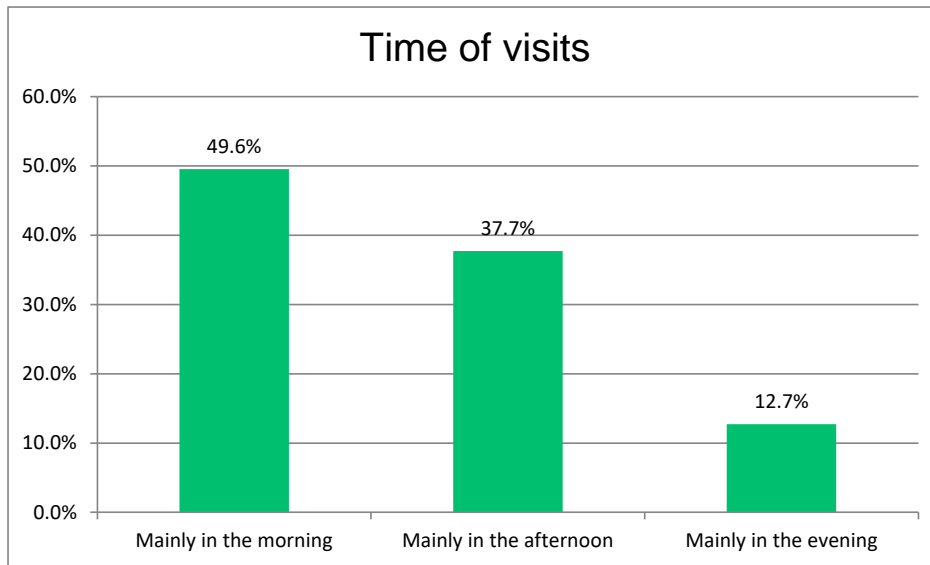
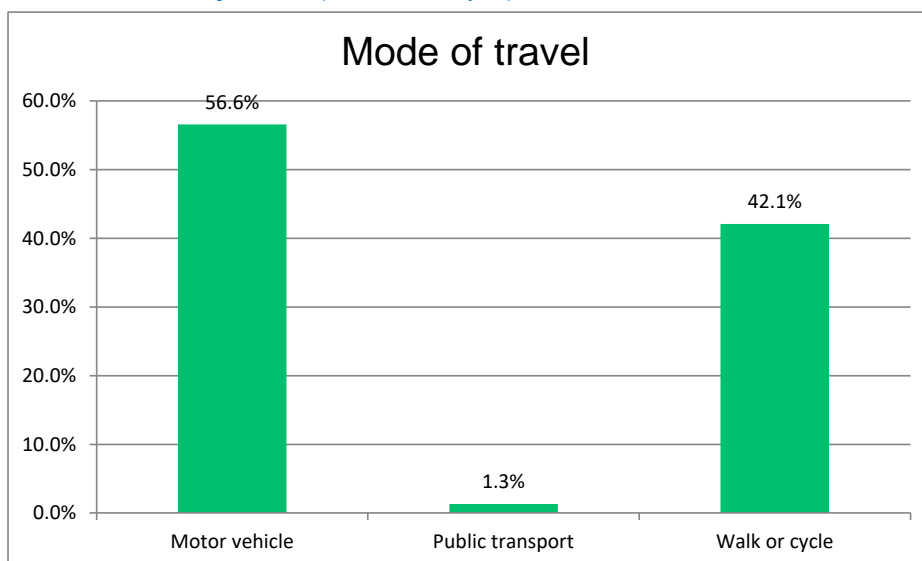
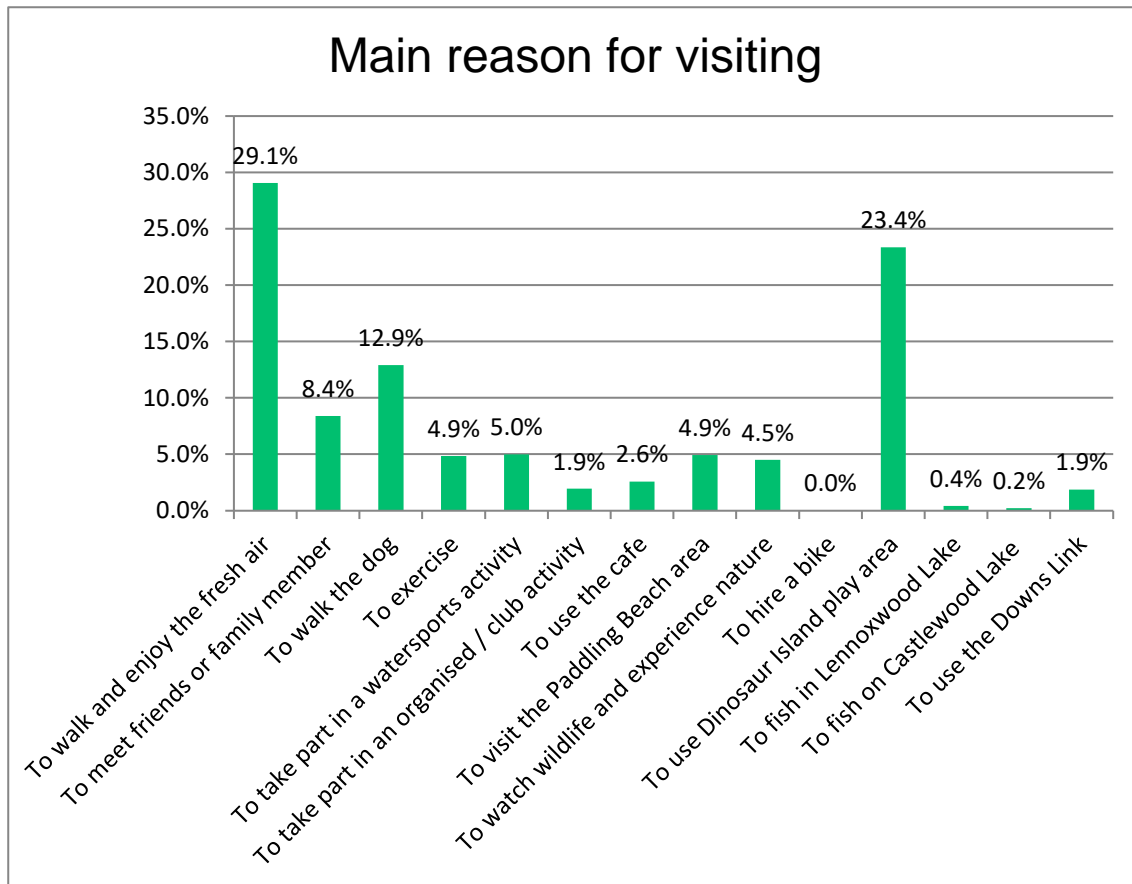


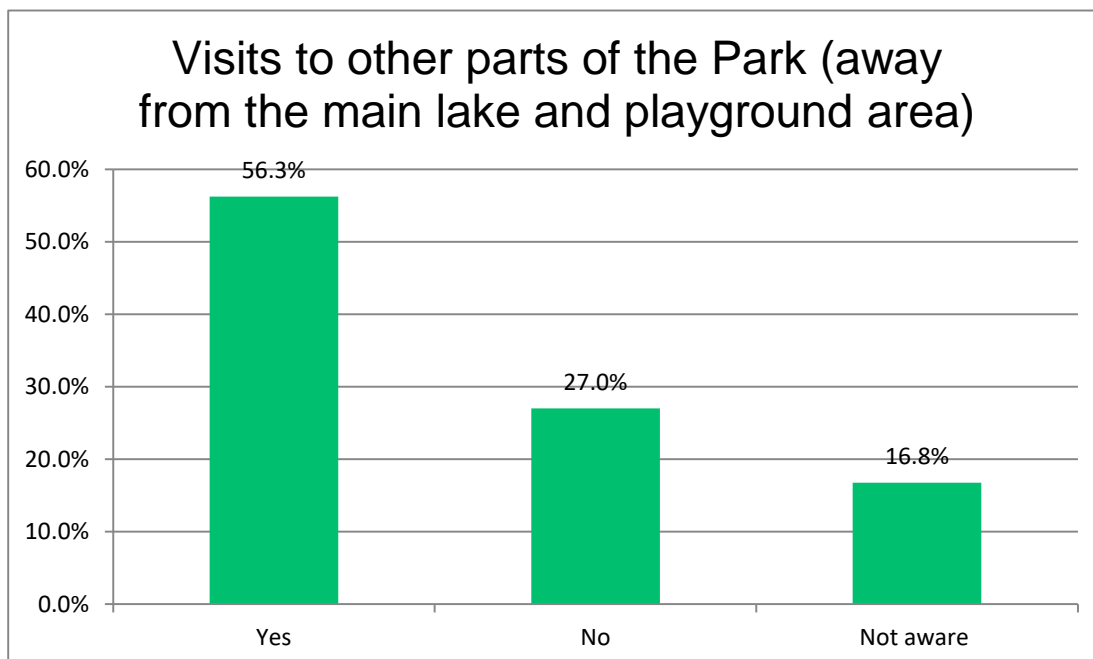
Table H: Mode of travel (whole sample)



*Table J: Main reason for visiting (whole sample)*



*Table K: Visits to other parts of the park (whole sample)*



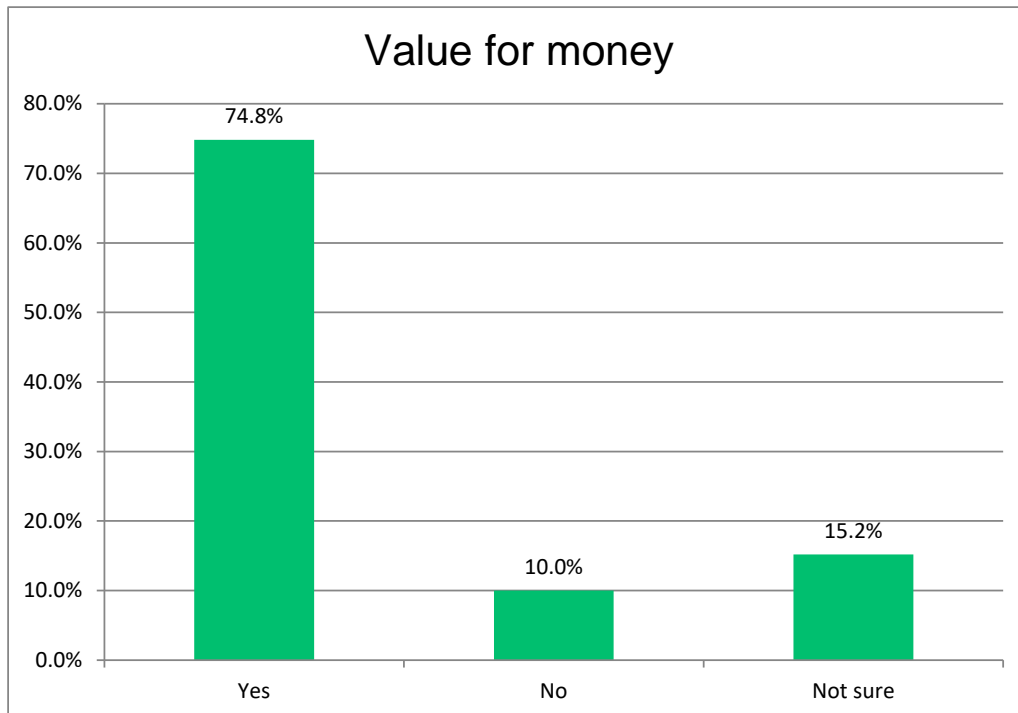
*Table L: Rating the experience (whole sample)*

Rating the experience of the offer and facilities													
	Excellent		Very good		Good		Average		Poor		Very poor		Responded / used facility
Overall experience	17.6%	236	34.5%	463	30.4%	408	13.9%	187	2.8%	38	0.7%	10	1342
Directions (signs) to the park	17.6%	230	30.4%	397	33.3%	435	14.0%	183	3.8%	49	0.8%	11	1305
Car parking and availability of spaces	17.7%	221	26.4%	329	31.8%	397	16.8%	209	5.3%	66	2.0%	25	1247
Sense of arrival and welcome	10.0%	135	19.3%	260	30.7%	412	31.0%	417	7.8%	105	1.1%	15	1344
On-site signage and information	12.4%	176	25.9%	367	32.9%	466	21.2%	301	5.7%	81	1.8%	26	1417
Paths / accessibility and moving around the site	22.2%	323	32.3%	471	32.0%	466	9.7%	142	2.6%	38	1.2%	17	1457
Cleanliness of site	15.2%	222	31.1%	453	28.8%	420	16.8%	245	6.0%	88	2.1%	30	1458
Toilets and Changing Rooms	4.7%	54	12.2%	141	25.8%	298	29.3%	338	20.0%	231	8.0%	92	1154
Provision of bins – rubbish / BBQ disposal / dog waste	9.8%	134	19.5%	265	28.3%	386	26.3%	358	12.0%	164	4.0%	55	1362
The natural setting and wildlife	30.9%	451	34.8%	507	22.7%	331	8.8%	128	2.0%	29	0.8%	12	1458
Your experience of paddling beach booking system	20.5%	96	13.7%	64	10.5%	49	9.0%	42	15.2%	71	31.2%	146	468
Your visit to the paddling beach	17.2%	104	18.7%	113	21.7%	131	14.4%	87	10.9%	66	17.1%	103	604
Your visit to the Dinosaur Island Play Area	27.5%	274	32.8%	326	26.6%	265	9.6%	96	2.7%	27	0.7%	7	995
The picnic and BBQ areas	12.0%	108	21.1%	189	31.8%	285	23.6%	212	8.8%	79	2.7%	24	897
The Café – range and price	10.7%	137	19.8%	254	30.8%	395	26.2%	336	9.7%	124	2.8%	36	1282
The Café – appeal and setting	11.6%	155	20.8%	279	31.6%	423	24.8%	332	8.9%	119	2.4%	32	1340
The Watersports Centre - quality of experience	20.2%	84	30.6%	127	26.3%	109	12.8%	53	5.3%	22	4.8%	20	415
The Watersports Centre- value for money	13.8%	57	17.9%	74	27.1%	112	21.7%	90	11.8%	49	7.7%	32	414
The fishing lakes	14.5%	36	16.5%	41	20.2%	50	24.6%	61	12.5%	31	11.7%	29	248
The bike hire (to use on Downs Link)	18.0%	20	19.8%	22	21.6%	24	22.5%	25	8.1%	9	9.9%	11	111
The access to the Downs Link	34.0%	328	32.5%	314	24.6%	238	7.0%	68	1.1%	11	0.7%	7	966

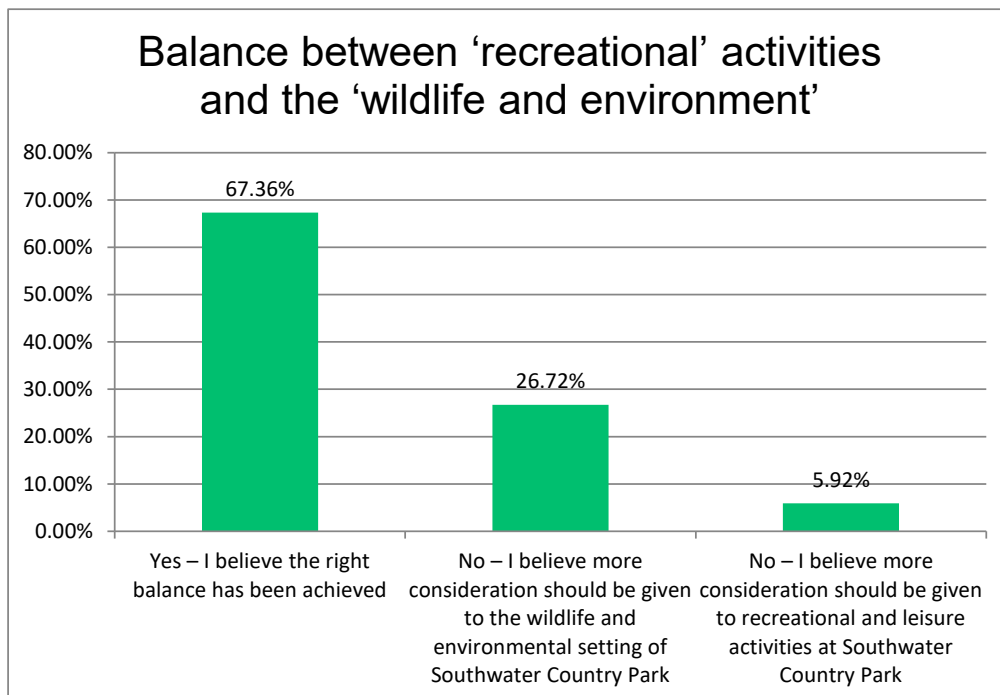
*Table M: Rating the experience (summary approval ratios, whole sample)*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Total (excellent, very good and good)
The access to the Downs Link	34.0%	32.5%	24.6%	<b>91.1%</b>
The natural setting and wildlife	30.9%	34.8%	22.7%	<b>88.4%</b>
Your visit to the Dinosaur Island Play Area	27.5%	32.8%	26.6%	<b>86.9%</b>
Paths / accessibility and moving around the site	22.2%	32.3%	32.0%	<b>86.5%</b>
<b>Overall experience</b>	17.6%	34.5%	30.4%	<b>82.5%</b>
Directions (signs) to the park	17.6%	30.4%	33.3%	<b>81.4%</b>
The Watersports Centre - quality of experience	20.2%	30.6%	26.3%	<b>77.1%</b>
Car parking and availability of spaces	17.7%	26.4%	31.8%	<b>75.9%</b>
Cleanliness of site	15.2%	31.1%	28.8%	<b>75.1%</b>
On-site signage and information	12.4%	25.9%	32.9%	<b>71.2%</b>
The picnic and BBQ areas	12.0%	21.1%	31.8%	<b>64.9%</b>
The Café – appeal and setting	11.6%	20.8%	31.6%	<b>64.0%</b>
The Café – range and price	10.7%	19.8%	30.8%	<b>61.3%</b>
Sense of arrival and welcome	10.0%	19.3%	30.7%	<b>60.0%</b>
The bike hire (to use on Downs Link)	18.0%	19.8%	21.6%	<b>59.5%</b>
The Watersports Centre- value for money	13.8%	17.9%	27.1%	<b>58.7%</b>
Provision of bins – rubbish / BBQ disposal / dog waste	9.8%	19.5%	28.3%	<b>57.6%</b>
Your visit to the paddling beach	17.2%	18.7%	21.7%	<b>57.6%</b>
The fishing lakes	14.5%	16.5%	20.2%	<b>51.2%</b>
Your experience of paddling beach booking system	20.5%	13.7%	10.5%	<b>44.7%</b>
Toilets and Changing Rooms	4.7%	12.2%	25.8%	<b>42.7%</b>

*Table N: Value for money (all respondents)*



*Table P: Feedback on the balance between priority objectives (whole sample)*



## Appendix Two: Additional tables

Table Q: Source of information

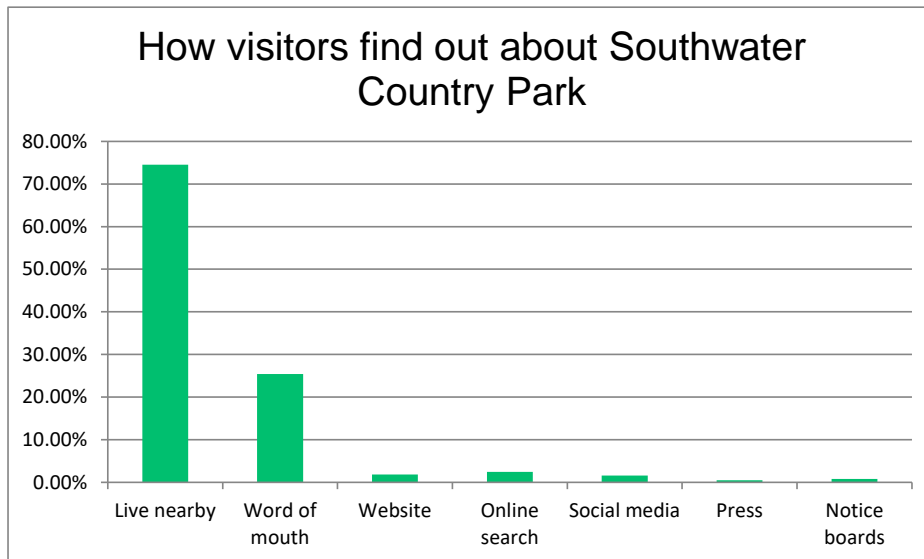


Table R: Employment status

