

High Weald AONB Unit Report

www.highweald.org



Public Understanding and Engagement Questionnaire 2017

Results

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February 2018



The High Weald: an outstanding medieval landscape

Our Research Programme

Furthering understanding of one of England's finest landscapes

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is **one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe**. The management objectives for the AONB are based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the area – that is, the components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald recognisably distinct for at least the last 700 years and will continue to define it in the future.

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways:** ancient routeways (now roads, tracks and paths) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These routeways are often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland:** a great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath:** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by – and forming a mosaic with – hedgerows and small woodlands. These field systems are typically used for livestock grazing, small holdings, and mixed farming, within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and inned river valleys.

As the High Weald Partnership's specialist team, the AONB Unit, we work to develop understanding of these key components – their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss – by undertaking our own research, or by commissioning independent reports. This enables us to develop an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and other AONB policy and guidance.

Our research also informs how the High Weald landscape contributes to and is valued by society – in terms of food, energy, water provision, flood protection, recreation, biodiversity and scenic quality – without damaging its natural beauty.



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Abstract

The High Weald is a special landscape and was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by the government in 1983. This survey sought to explore what aspects of the High Weald the public find particularly beautiful and how they most like to enjoy the area. Questions on the public's values, perceptions of the biggest threats and desired improvements were posed and results were counted and analysed. The survey was distributed through a weblink via social media, email, enews and through distribution via organisational stakeholders, including the areas local authorities. A total of 294 people completed the survey. Of these 294, the largest proportion were aged between 45 - 64, however respondents did span all given age categories.

Running themes were evident throughout the survey results and highlighted the enjoyment gained through just being within the landscape and the countryside and the sensory experiences – through sights, sounds and smells – that people valued most. Walking through the countryside was a key mechanism through which most people gain enjoyment, and public footpaths were the most used form of access. The threat of increased building developments and urban expansion was of great concern to the vast majority of people and restrictions on developments were the most popular way to improve and conserve the High Weald countryside.

The results and information received in this survey will inform the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024 as well as other policy consultations that affect the AONB. This will enable the High Weald AONB Unit and others to develop better policy to conserve and enhance what makes the High Weald AONB special whilst enabling its community and economy to thrive.

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Countryside values

Question 1: What in the High Weald countryside do you most value?

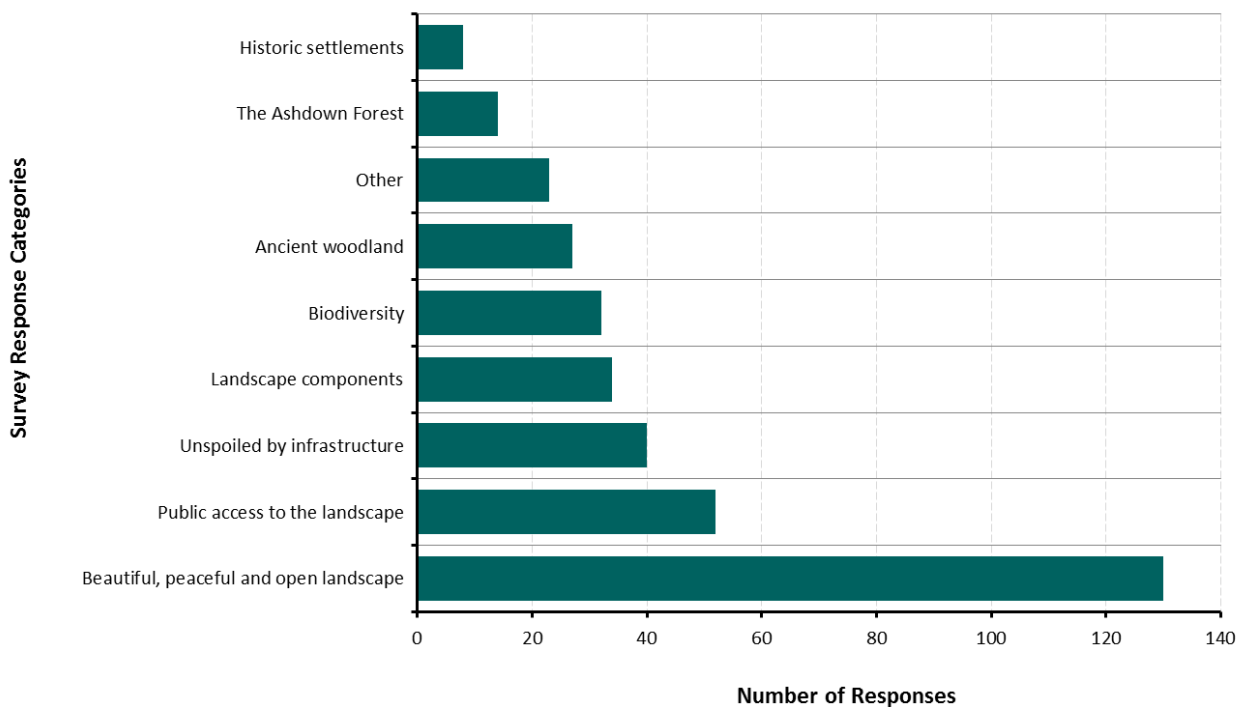
This question was answered in the form of open text and produced a total of 360 responses. For clarification, the category named “landscape components” comprises features that are fundamental in defining the character of the area, such as irregular field patterns, gills and sunken routeways. Whilst ancient woodland and historic settlements are also key components of the High Weald landscape, they received enough popularity to warrant separate categories.



Figure 1. Infographic presenting the most commonly appearing words in responses to Question 1

Within the High Weald countryside, the beautiful, peaceful and open landscape is most valued with 36% of respondents emphasising their views on this. Particular reference was frequently made to the sensory components of the landscape, including the smells, sounds and sights. This response was commonly associated with public access to the landscape which, with 14% of responses, is also highly valued. Public access was frequently specified as being public footpaths and bridleways.

What in the High Weald countryside do you most value?



“Being able to walk the public footpaths and view the stunning landscapes.”

The nature of the High Weald being unspoiled by infrastructure was most valued by 11% of survey respondents, whilst 10% of respondents most valued the landscape components. Biodiversity, defined as the variety of plant and animal species within in an environment, was deemed of similar value to these categories, with 9% of respondents stating that the biodiversity of the High Weald countryside is what they value most.

Ancient woodland was a recurrent response and is most valued by 7% of respondents, whilst 4% most valued the Ashdown Forest. Separate to the landscape components, historic settlements scattered across the landscape are deemed the most valued element of the High Weald countryside by 3% of the population. The remaining 6% of responses were categorised as other and comprised responses including: the communities, its proximity to London and the coast, Bewl Water and being within nature.

“Good quality of life whilst working in urban and rural employment.”

Question 2: What do you think is the most beautiful about the High Weald?

This question was answered in the form of open text producing a total of 367 responses falling within the same categories defined in Question 1.

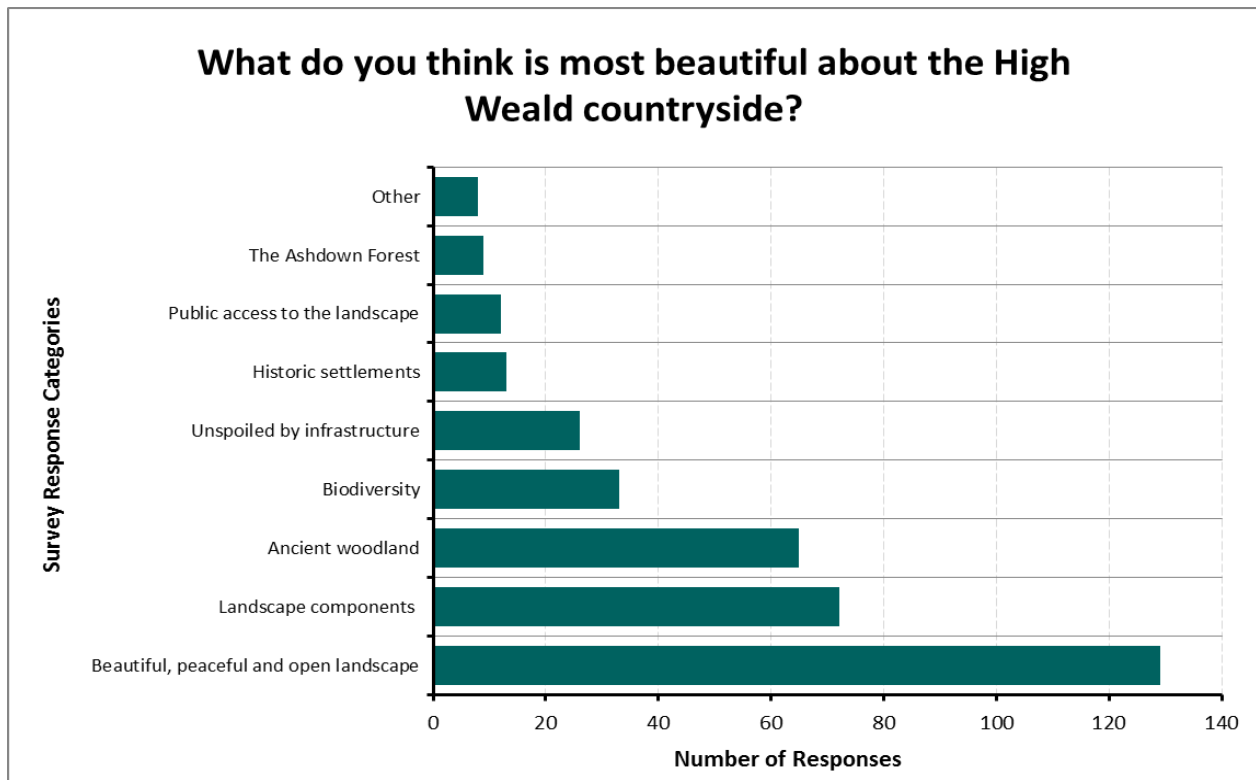


Figure 3. Presentation of results received from Question 2

The majority of respondents (35% of answers) also find the beautiful, peaceful and open landscape the most beautiful, as well as the most valued, thing about the High Weald countryside. The landscape components, such as the gills, irregular field patterns and rolling hills are also thought to be most beautiful by 19% of respondents. This is closely followed by ancient woodland, which is the most beautiful thing about the High Weald countryside to 17% of respondents.

9% of respondents think the biodiversity is the most beautiful and the most valued element of the High Weald countryside and its unspoiled nature makes it most beautiful in the view of 7% of respondents. Fewer respondents (4%) found public access to the landscape most beautiful than those who most valued it (14%) and another 4% of people found the historic settlements the most beautiful thing about the High Weald countryside. The Ashdown Forest was deemed most beautiful by 3% of the survey respondents, whilst 2% specified other options, such as the seasonal changes and agricultural activity.

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“Its patchwork of villages, woods, fields and heaths overlaying interesting geology and archaeology.”

Question 3: How appealing are the following options to you?

There were a total of 294 answers per category that were given on a graduated scale with five possible answers: Not At All, Not Particularly, Neither Appealing Nor Unappealing, Slightly Appealing and Very Appealing.

The categories are as follows:

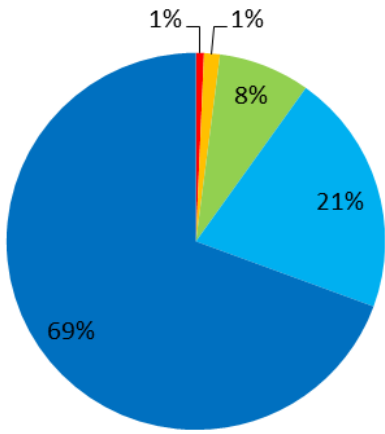
- a) Chance to get close to nature
- b) Extensive footpaths
- c) Dark skies
- d) Farming
- e) Historic parks and gardens
- f) Scenery / views
- g) Traditional buildings
- h) Tranquillity

The majority of people – 93% of respondents – expressed that they found the scenery / views very appealing. The tranquillity of the High Weald and the chance to get close to nature were also found to be very appealing by a large number (86% respectively) of the survey respondents. Nobody found tranquillity and scenery to be neither not at all appealing nor not particularly appealing inferring that these two options are overall the most appealing to people.

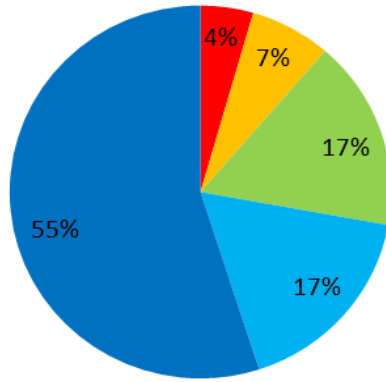
Dark skies were thought to be not at all appealing or not particularly appealing by 11% of respondents – the highest percentage for these categories. Farming and historic sites were also deemed of low appeal by larger numbers of people and very appealing by 50% or less respondents. Relatively high percentages (17% - 18%) of people also expressed a neutral feeling towards dark skies, farming and historic sites.

Respondents appeared to show similar levels of appeal towards traditional buildings and extensive footpaths with approximately 90% stating they found these either very or slightly appealing, whilst on 1-2% of respondents found them either not at all or not particularly appealing.

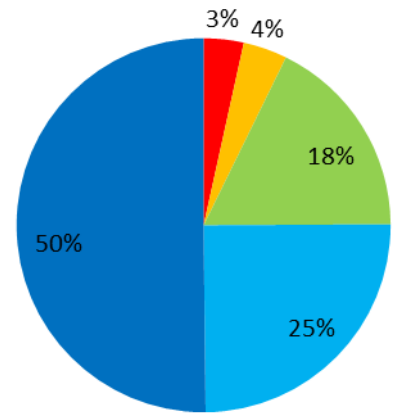
Overall, very few numbers of respondents suggested any lack of appeal towards any of the categories and the very appealing option dominated, by 44% or higher, in all categories.



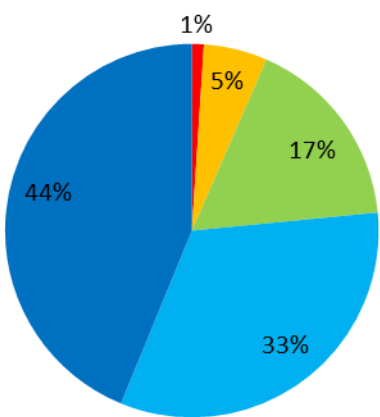
Extensive Footpaths



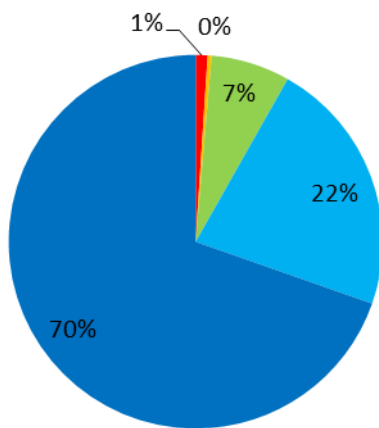
Dark Skies



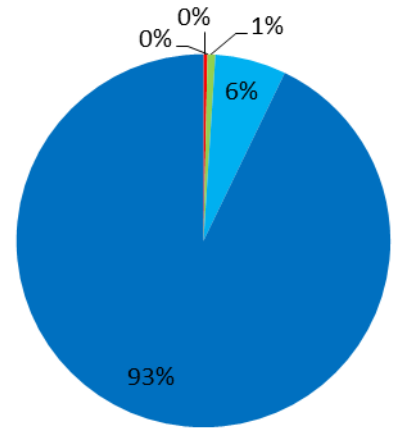
Farming



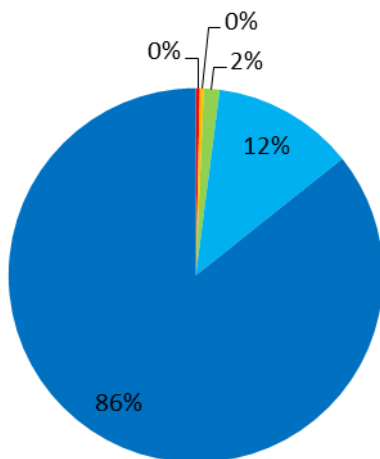
Historic Sites



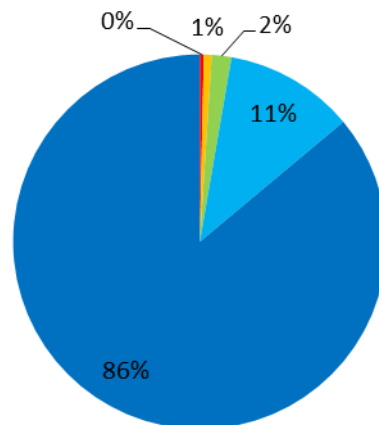
Traditional Buildings



Scenery



Tranquillity



Chance to get close to nature

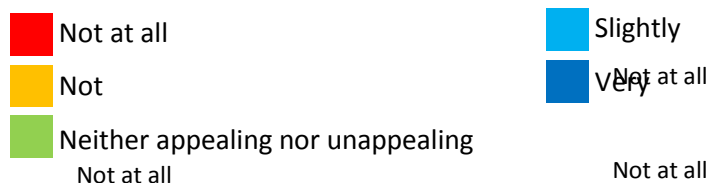


Figure 4. Presentation of results from Question 3

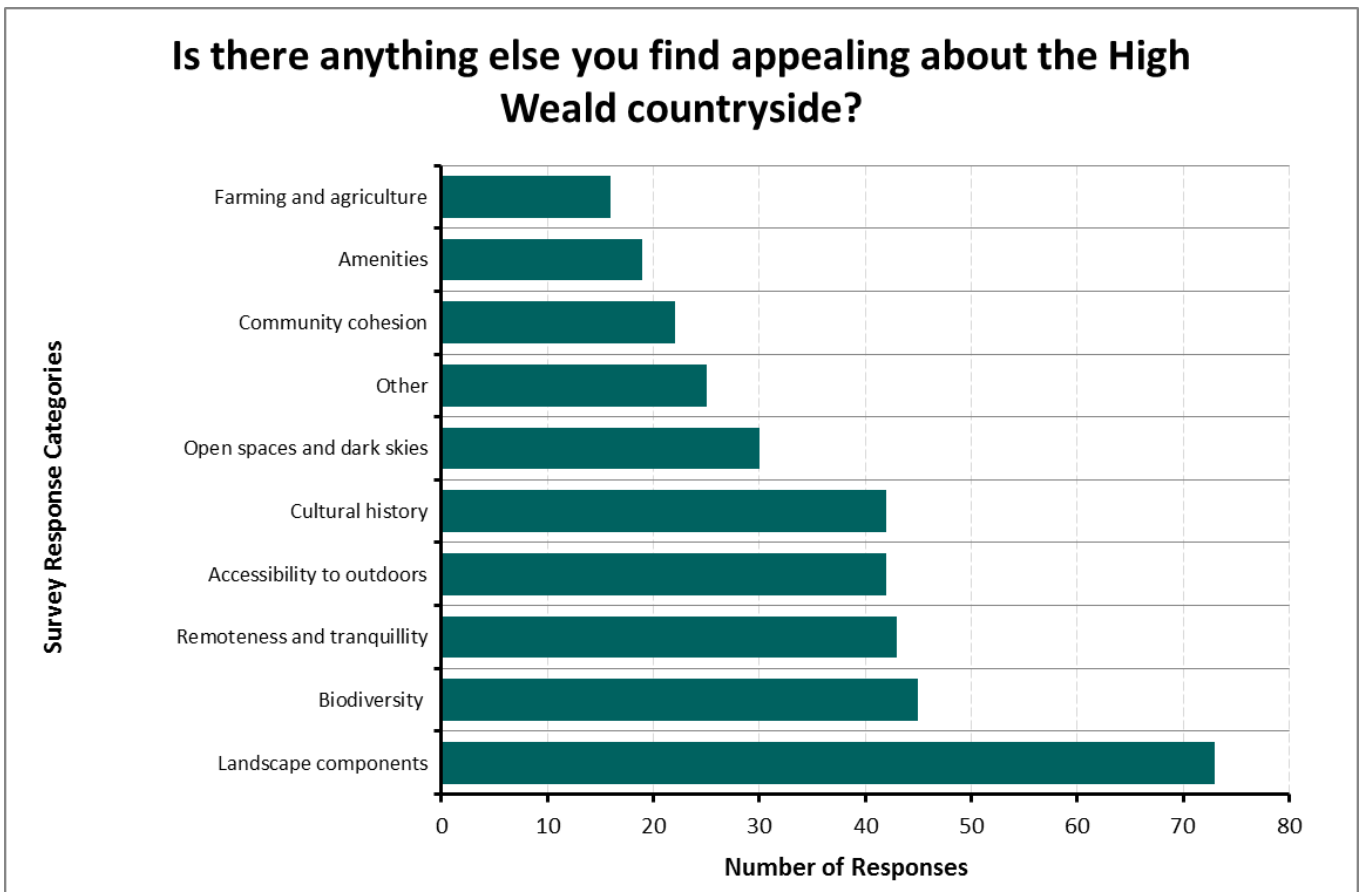


Figure 6. Presentation results from Question 4

The category describing the sense of remoteness and tranquillity refers particularly to the personal experience of those within the countryside. Individual answers stated the appeal of the High Weald countryside in escaping from the busy urban life, finding peace, and improving mental health, whereas the category titled open spaces and dark skies, encompasses responses about the physical landscape, such as the open expanses, rolling hills and dark skies. Remoteness and tranquillity was seen as appealing by 4% more people than those who specified their appeal towards open spaces and dark skies.

“Reminders of the High Weald’s history, such as hammerponds.”

Amenities, community cohesion, farming and agriculture also received similar amounts of interest with 5% - 6% of respondents saying they found these appealing. 7% of people found other things appealing, such as country sports, traditional architecture and education.

Overall, the survey respondents showed a huge variety in what they find additionally appealing in the High Weald countryside. These results show that the wider landscape and experience within this wider landscape were most appealing, with further recognition into the historical significance of the area.

“Solitude, peace and quiet.”

Question 5: How much do you agree with the High Weald character statement?

“The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a historic countryside of rolling hills, draped by small irregularly-shaped fields and abundant woods, shaws (linear woodland strips) and hedges, and scattered with farmsteads and ancient routeways.”

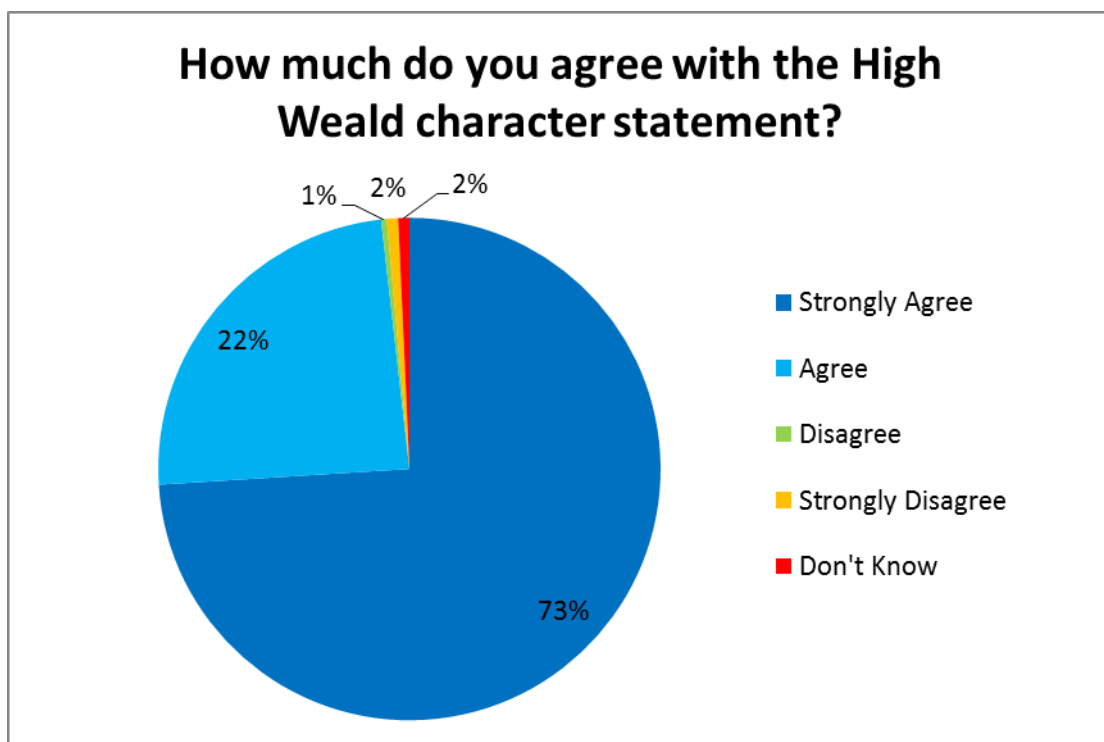


Figure 7. Presentation of results from Question 5

This question received a total of 277 answers. The vast majority of people strongly agree with the High Weald character statement and a total of 95% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Significantly fewer people did not agree, with 2% of people – equating to 2 people – strongly disagreed, and 1% of people disagreed. 2% of people also stated that they did not know how much they agreed or disagreed with the High Weald character statement.

In the view of the majority of people, the High Weald character statement appears to appropriately describe the landscape and its characteristics.

Enjoying the area

Question 6: How do you most like to enjoy the countryside?

This question was answered on a 5-point agree to disagree scale across ten categories. Approximately 278 people provided an answer within each category; however some categories were answered by more people and others, less.

52% of people agree that they enjoy the countryside walking with a dog.

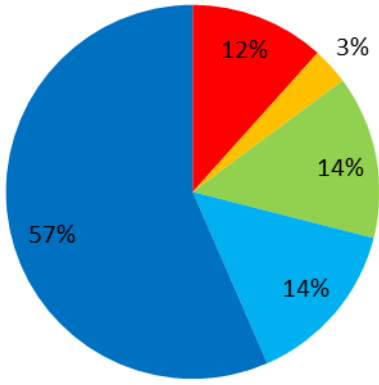
Responses to this question were extremely varied. For example, the two categories with the highest percentages of agreement are walking through the countryside with a dog, and without a dog (52% and 57% respectively). The majority of people, with 97% popularity, stated that they disagreed with the statement “I do not enjoy the countryside”, whilst 7 respondents stated that they do not enjoy the countryside.

Fewer people enjoy the countryside from the water or the saddle of the horse, with only 21% and 19% respectively either agreeing or slightly agreeing with these statements. They also received less positive reactions with 21% and 19% of people either agreeing or slightly agreeing. Cycling through the countryside also showed a particularly varied response; however the majority at 29% said that they disagreed with the statement that they most enjoy the countryside when cycling through it. Similarly, fewer people showed any form of agreement with this statement with only 32% either agreeing or slightly agreeing.

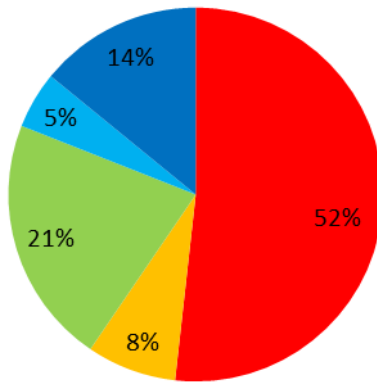
The responses given to enjoying the countryside from the window of a car were extremely varied, however the majority, with 28%, did say they slightly agreed with this statement. This was closely followed by 26% of respondents who said they neither agree, nor disagree that they enjoy the countryside from the window of a car. A total of 29% either disagreed or slightly disagreed.

97% of people agree that they do enjoy the countryside.

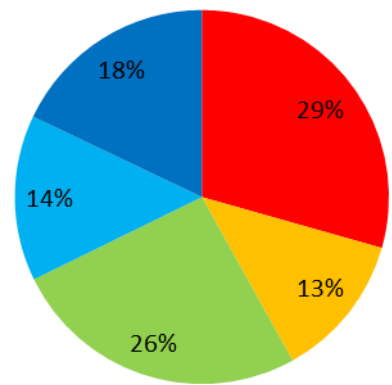
There were noticeably high percentages of respondents who disagreed and slightly disagreed with specific hobbies as a means to enjoy the countryside, such as cycling, horse riding or from the water. This is perhaps indicative that individuals feel strongly about the impacts of the above activities, as opposed to a personal disinterest. This is supported by the results from the “working on the land” and “fairs, festivals etc.” categories where the largest percentage of people stated that they neither agree nor disagree. Where people may not actively engage with activities, they do not show disagreement that they do not enjoy the High Weald countryside through them.



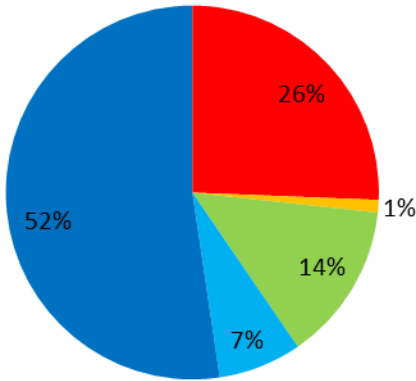
Walking without a dog



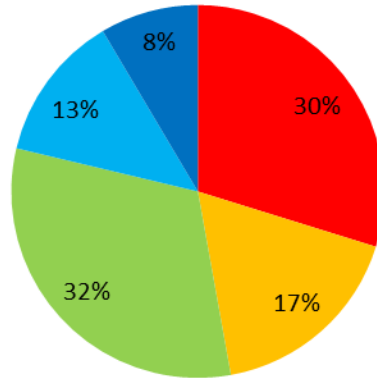
From the saddle of a horse



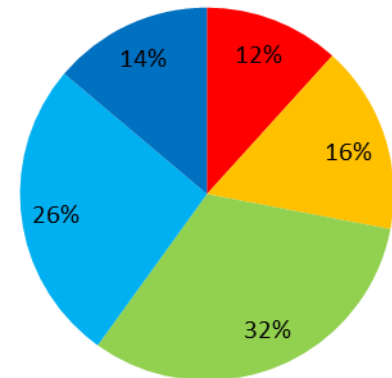
Cycling through it



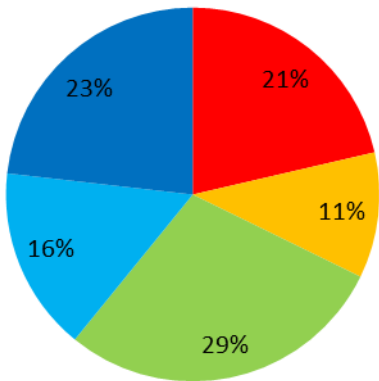
Walking with a dog



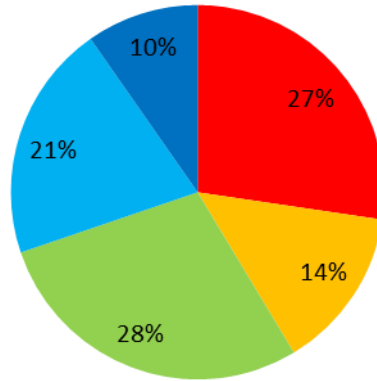
From the water



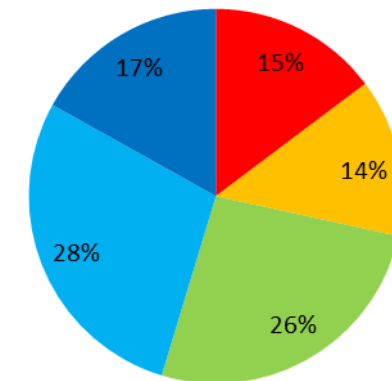
Fairs, festivals etc.



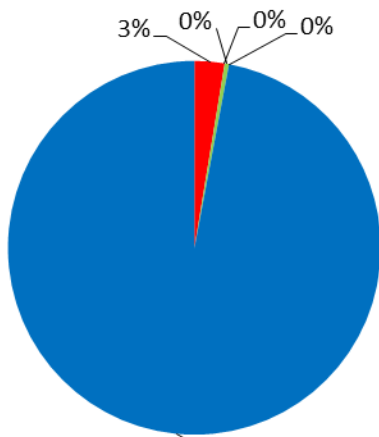
Working on it



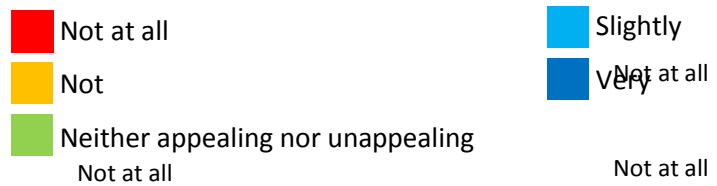
Magazines, books, film



From the window of a car



I enjoy the countryside



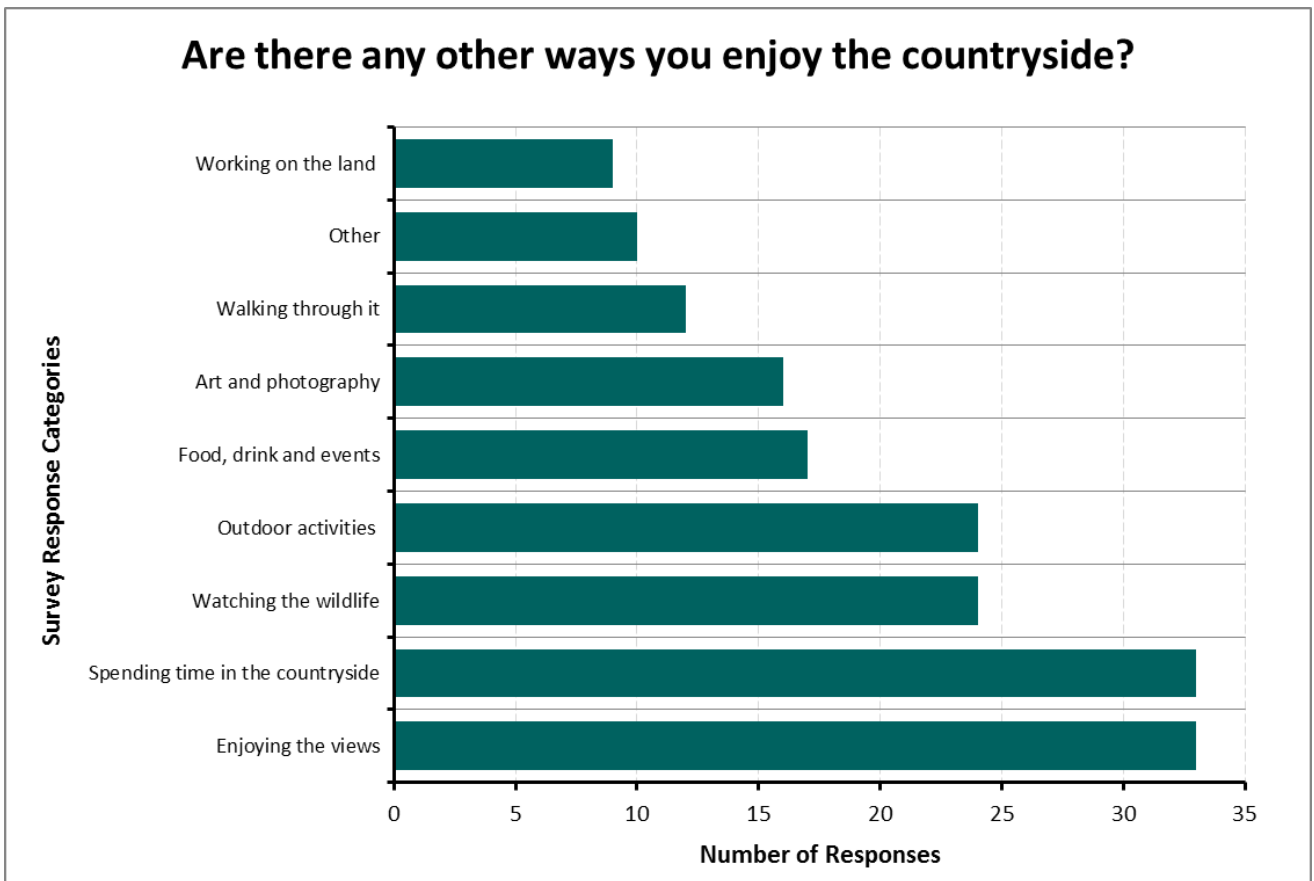


Figure 10. Presentation of results from Question 7

10% of respondents expressed that they enjoy the countryside through food, drink and events, and a further 9% enjoy it through art and photography. Many responses combined photography with wildlife watching outlining that they often used photography as a means to watch the wildlife. Walking through the countryside was a popular form of enjoyment to 7% of the survey respondents, and 4% of respondents enjoying the countryside by working on it. Many respondents (6%) expressed that they enjoy the countryside by other means, including foraging, looking at maps, and practical conservation.

“Taking the family out to climb trees, run around in fresh air and experience the abundance of insects and wildlife.”

Question 8: How much do you agree with the following statement?

"I have enough access to the countryside within 2 miles from my home"

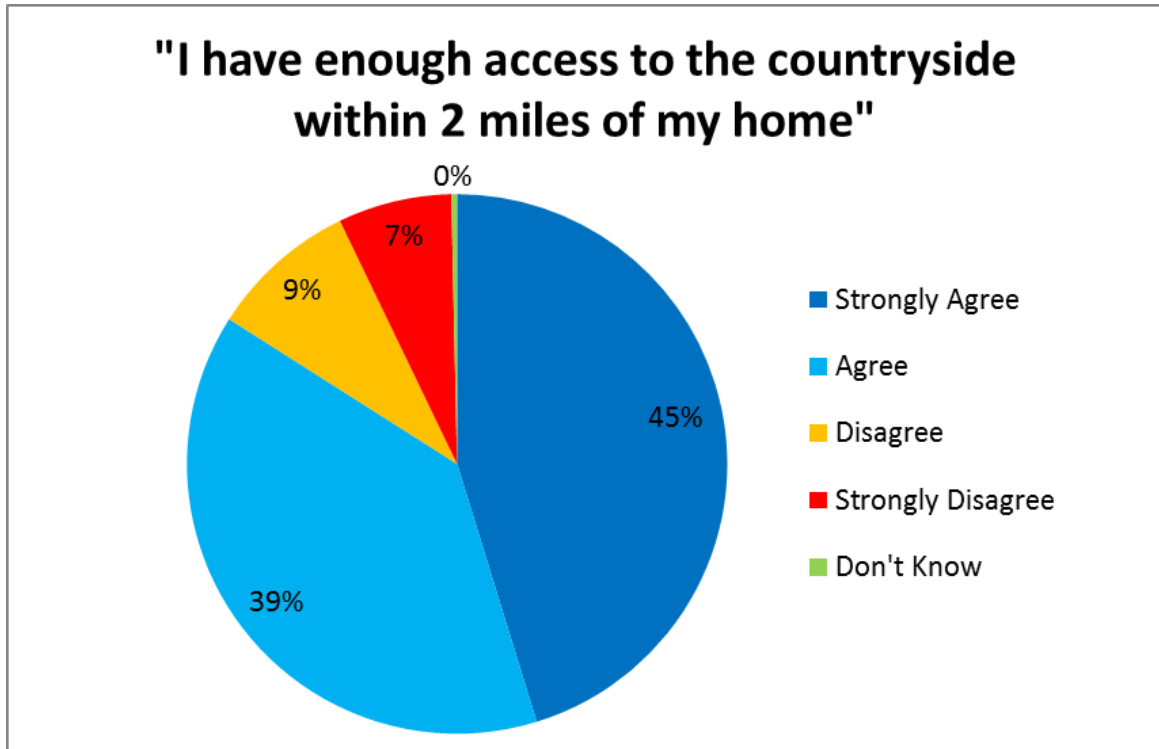


Figure 11. Presentation of results from Question 8

45% of people strongly agree that they have enough access to the countryside within 2 miles of their home.

This question was answered on a five point agree – disagree scale. In total, 84% - equating to 237 out of 294 respondents – said they either “agree” or “strongly agree” that they had enough access to the countryside within 2 miles of their home.

The majority of people (45%) strongly agree with this statement, followed by 39% of people who agreed with it. >1% of people - or 1 respondent - said they did not know if this was the case, and a total of 16% of people either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Overall, most people have suitable accessibility to the countryside close to their home.

Question 9: If you would like more access, what kind of access would you prefer?

Answers to this question could be selected from five possible options. As respondents could pick more than one option, there were a total of 477 answers.

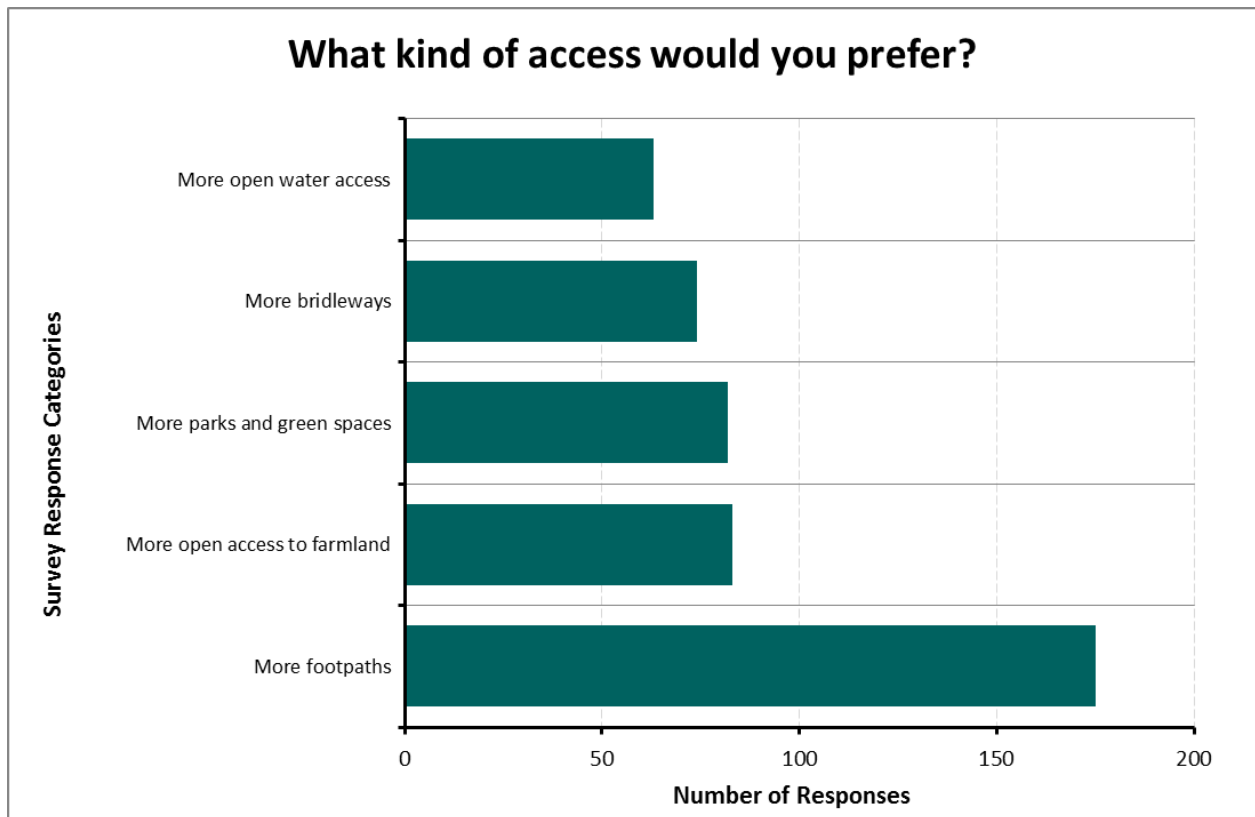


Figure 12. Presentation of results from Question 9

The majority of respondents – at 37% - said they would prefer greater access through increased numbers of footpaths. This option was the most popular by almost 100 responses. Other options were more closely related in terms of popularity, with between 13% and 18% of respondents selecting each option. 18% of respondents – equating to 83 answers – said that they were prefer more access in the form of greater open access to farmland. This was more popular with 1% of respondents than more parks and green spaces.

37% of people would prefer greater access to the countryside through increased numbers of footpaths.

More bridleways was a favoured form of access by 15% of people, whilst more open water access was favoured by 13% of people. These less popular options are likely a reflection of the number of people who engage in hobbies requiring access through these means.

Question 10: Are there any other ways to improve access?

This question required open text answers and received 80 responses. There were a number of additional ways to improve access that were suggested by respondents through this question – all of which received a relatively even spread of popularity.

17% of people suggest that better maintenance of existing public footpaths would improve access to the countryside.

The majority of people - by a small margin – suggested that better maintenance of existing public footpaths would improve access to the High Weald countryside. Increased and safer cycle routes were also suggested as a way to improve access by 15% of people. Better public transport and lower traffic speeds also received high numbers of responses – both with 13% of responses – whilst, 10% of people suggested that it should be left as it is. Better disabled access and increased access to farmland were both favoured by 7% of people. 5% of respondents wanted more car parks in the countryside and 3% of respondents wanted to see improved access to the countryside by greater community engagement activities and events. The remaining 10% of respondents suggested improved access through other means including: wild camping sites, gates to replace stiles, and a blanket use of leads when walking dogs.

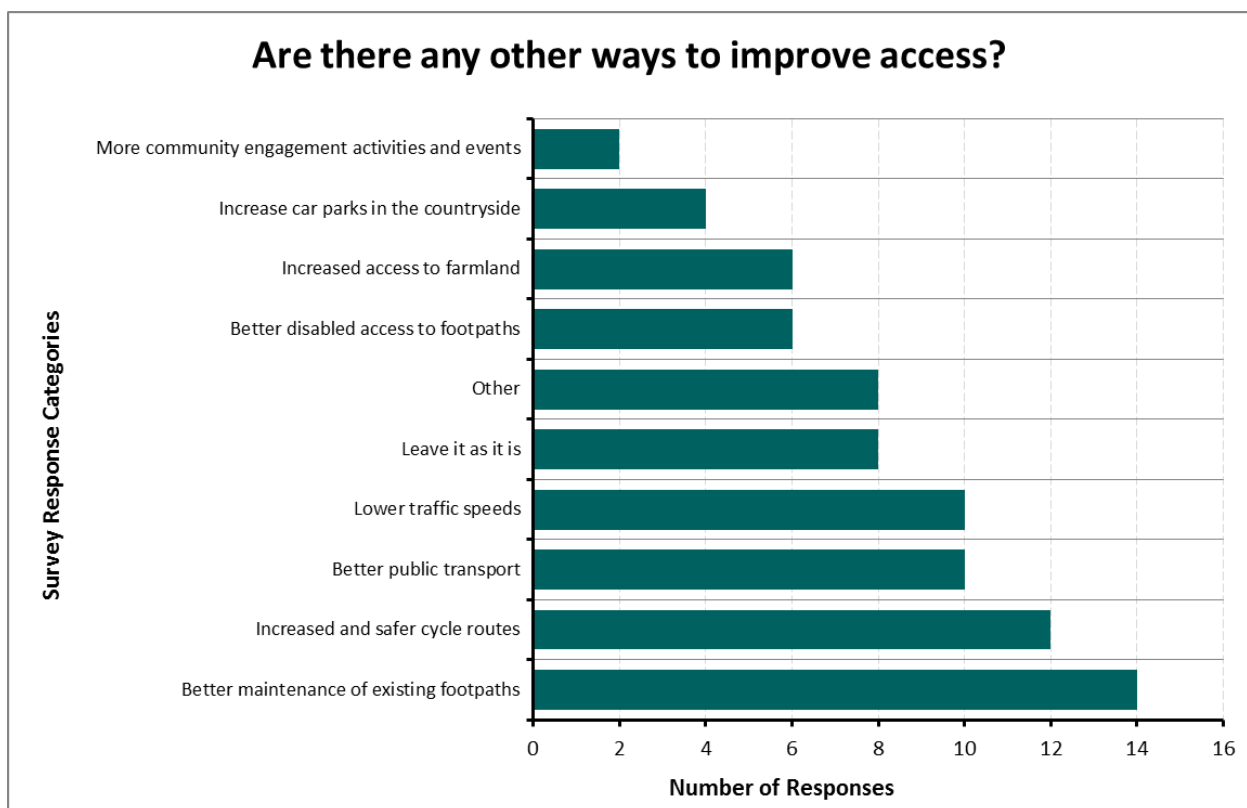


Figure 13. Presentation of results from Question 12

Question 13 and 14: Have you ever sought information on your local countryside? If yes, what information have you sought?

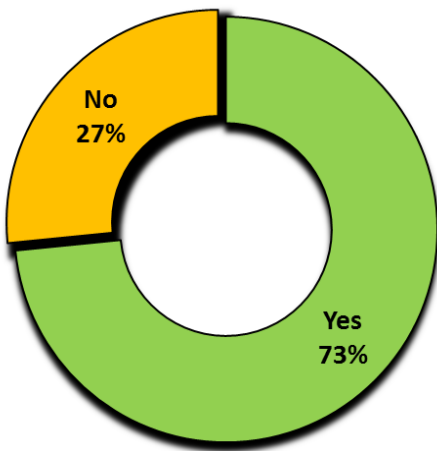


Figure 14. Presentation of results from Question 13

Question 13 required either a yes or no answer and received a total of 286 responses. Question 14 provided the opportunity for additional open text answers to accompany the responses to Question 13 and, as a result, there were a total of 262 responses.

Over 50% of respondents said that they have sought information on walking routes in the local countryside. 40% fewer people sought land management advice on the countryside. This ranged from meadow creation and woodland management to deer culling and wildlife enhancement.

Information on the High Weald landscape - including its character components - was sought after by 10% of respondents. 7% of people looked for information on areas of interest and local events, whilst 6% of people sought information on both Public Rights of Way access laws and maps of the area. Planning advice was sought by 2% of survey respondents (equating to 7 people), and 1% of respondents sought other types of information including.

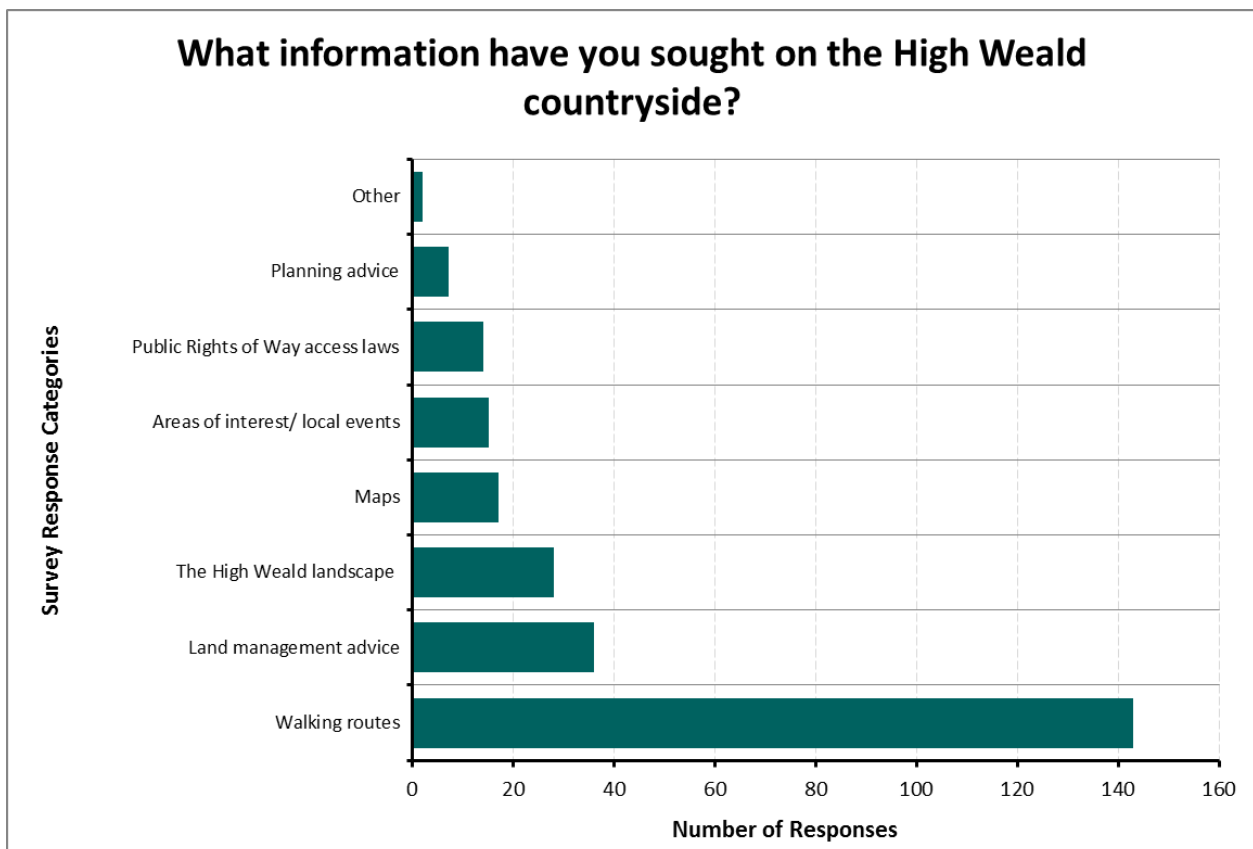


Figure 15. Presentation of results from Question 14

Question 15: What guidance would be most useful to you?

20% of people suggest that guidance on exploring the High Weald would be most useful.

This answer required respondents to pick from 7 predefined options. As more than one category could be picked, there were a total of 893 answers. In comparison to previous questions, responses here receive a fairly even amount of popularity. With this in mind, 20% of respondents suggested that guidance on exploring the High Weald would be most useful to them. This was closely followed by 19% of respondents (equating to 171 people) who said that information on native species would be beneficial to them.

Guidance on using Public Rights of Way and AONB legislation and planning were deemed to be useful pieces of information to 16% and 15% of people respectively. 13% of respondents would like to see guidance on how to manage wildlife habitats and 11% of respondents would like information providing an introduction to the High Weald. Design guidance was suggested as the most useful guidance by 6% of respondents, however in other open text answers, responses have questioned what the term “design guidance” means.

Information on native species would be useful for 19% of respondents.

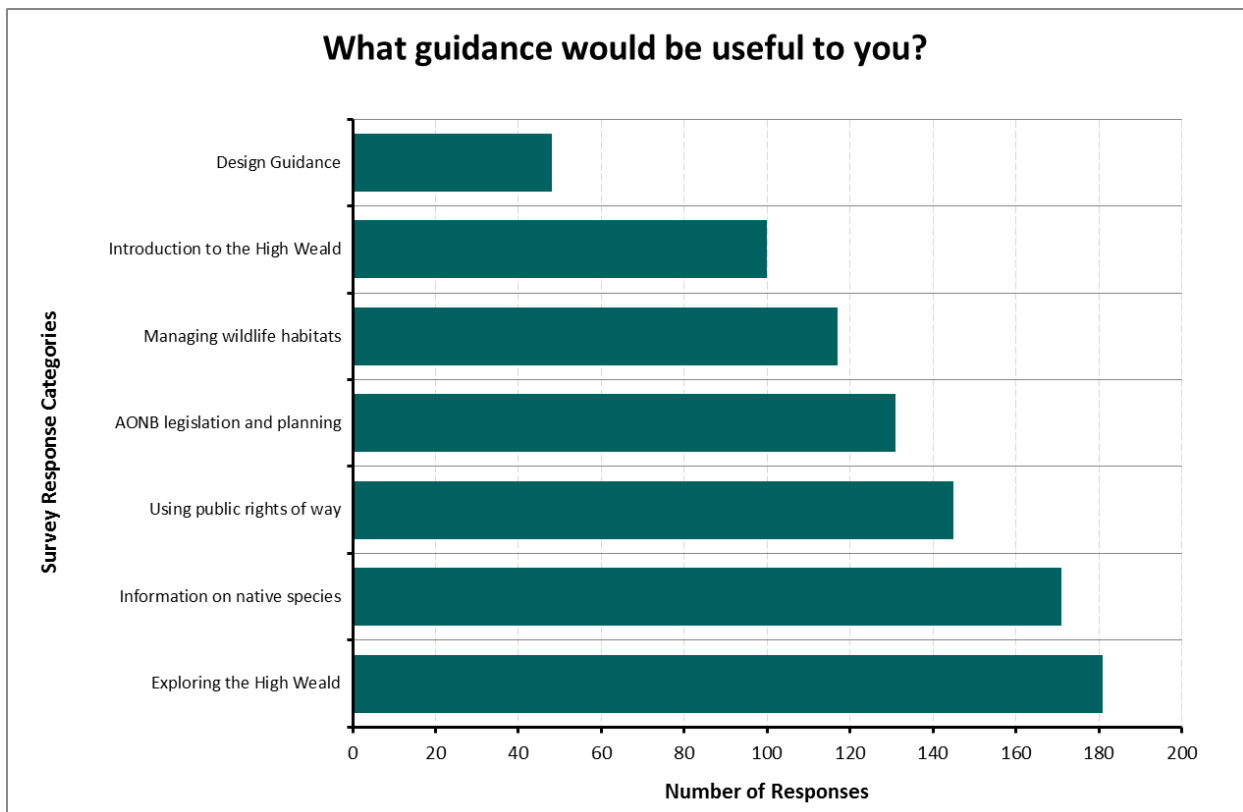


Figure 16. Presentation of results in Question 15

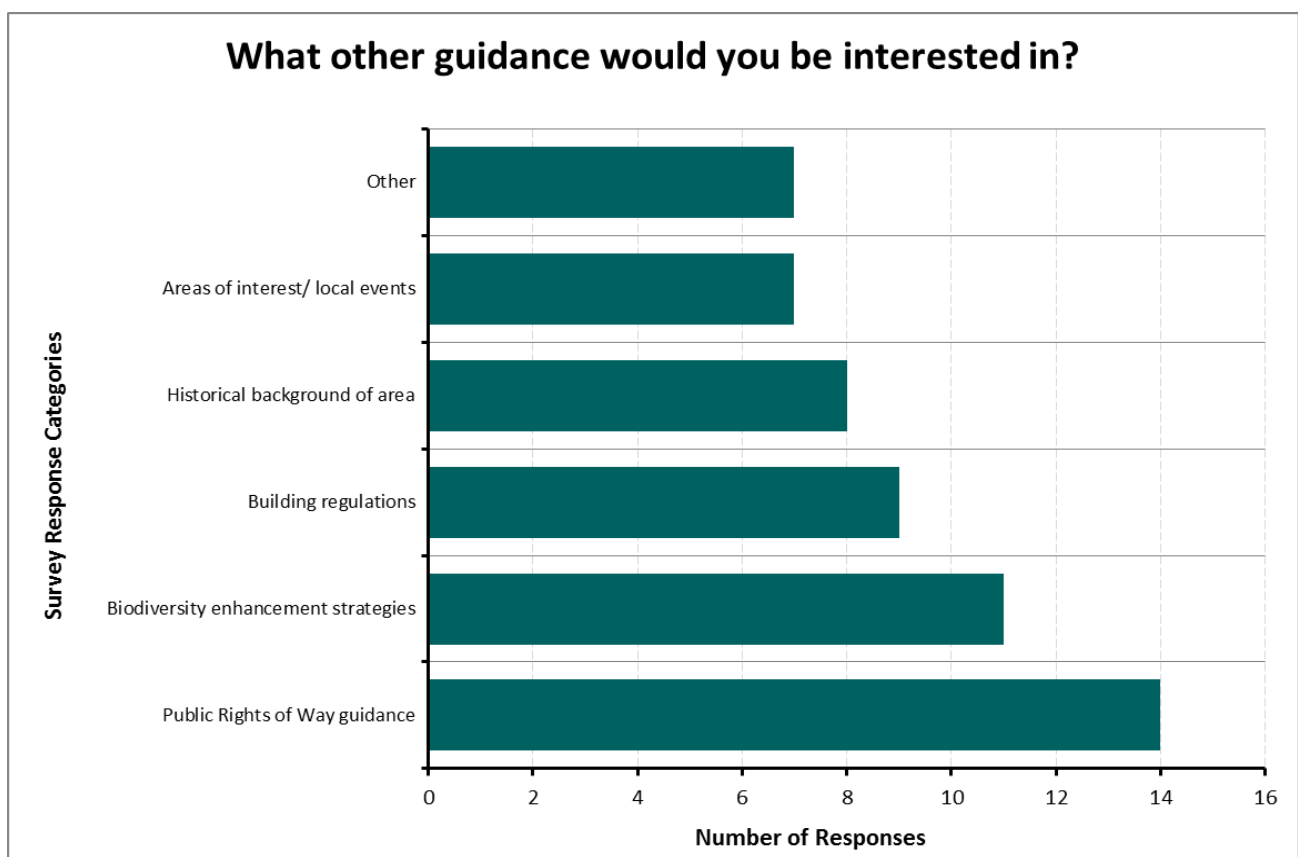
Question 16: Is there any additional guidance you would be interested in?

This question allowed for open text responses and received a total of 56 answers. Many responses to this question reiterated the options set out in Question 15 inferring that they are particularly sought after.

25% of people would be interested in guidance on Public Rights of Way.

One quarter of respondents to this question suggested guidance on Public Rights of Way would be useful to them. Using Public Rights of Way guidance was deemed useful to 16% of people in Question 15, and so could suggest that it is a particularly popular piece of guidance. Biodiversity enhancement strategies were deemed to be an interesting form of guidance to 20% of respondents.

Building regulation guidance was of interest to 17% of the survey respondents, whilst 14% suggested that information on the historical background of the area would be most useful. Information on areas of interest and local events was of interest to 12% of people, and a further 12% of people suggested that other forms of guidance would be more useful. These included: volunteering opportunities in the High Weald and information on areas with disabled access.



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Figure 17. Presentation of results in Question 16

Conserving and enhancing the area

Question 17: As a resident, consumer and taxpayer, what do you want from the High Weald countryside?

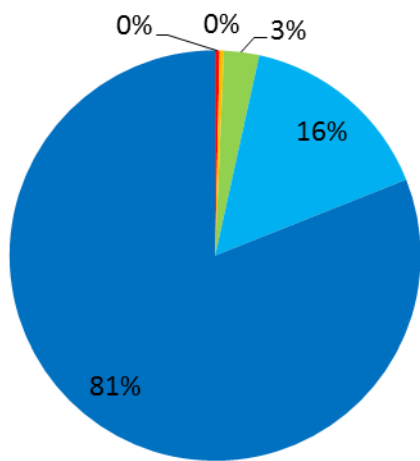
This question was answered on a 5-point scale with the following options of priority rating: low priority, not particularly, neutral, slightly, and high priority. There were six categories from which options could be selected and approximately 278 people provided an answer within each category; however some categories were answered by more people and others, less.

The key services that people want from the High Weald countryside are landscape conservation and scenery, with 91% of respondents deeming it a high priority. Wildlife conservation is also largely important and was voted as a high priority by 81% of people. None of the survey respondents said that these categories are of low priority or that they did not particularly want this from the High Weald countryside, further emphasising their importance within the countryside.

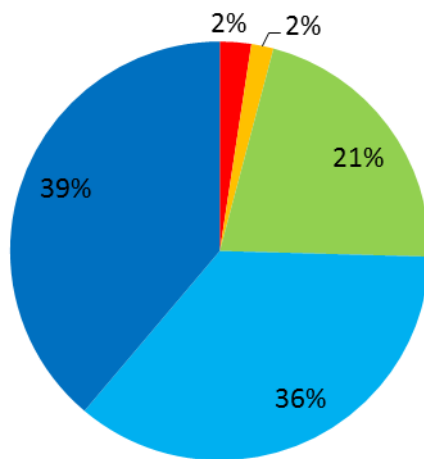
Many people also wanted water conservation from the High Weald countryside, with a total of 82% of respondents saying they either slightly wanted it or that it was a high priority. 14% of people were neutral towards water conservation, however much fewer people (4%) said it was of low priority or not particularly a priority. These results would suggest that it is the third most sought after service of the High Weald countryside.

Leisure and recreation obtained similar results to those of the water conservation category. Very few people said they saw leisure and recreation as a low priority or not particularly a priority, however there was a greater percentage of people (21%) who were neutral towards it. A total of 75% of people said that this was either a slightly or high priority to them, although the number of people who deemed it a high priority is 13% lower than water conservation.

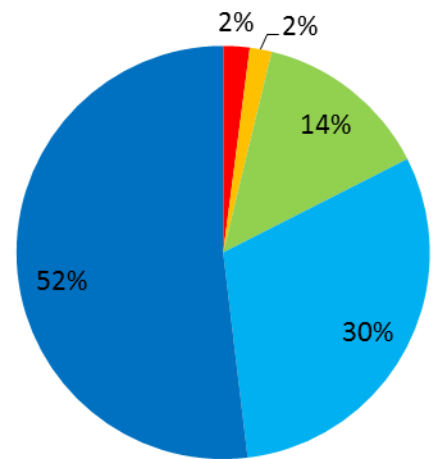
Respondents gave significantly more varied responses to both food and timber, with a relatively even spread of priority status between people. Large numbers of people were impartial to the want of timber and food from the High Weald countryside, with 31% and 25% of people, respectively, selecting the neutral option. Less than half of the respondents said they saw timber as a slightly or high priority, and only 22% of people saw food as a high priority.



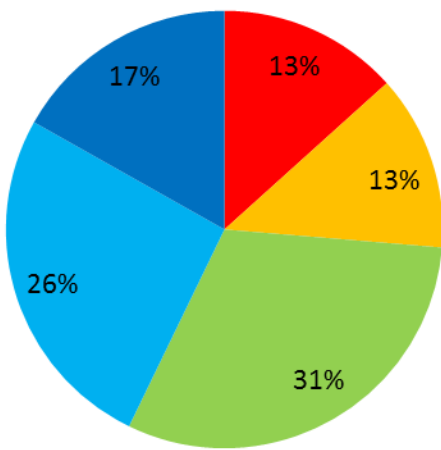
Wildlife conservation



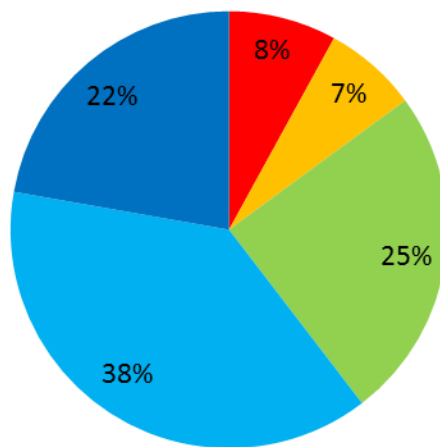
Leisure and recreation



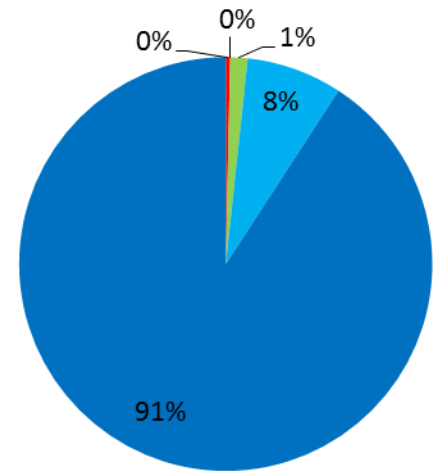
Water conservation



Timber



Food



Landscape conservation and scenery



Figure 18. Presentation of results from Question 17

Question 18: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Each of these statements provided five potential options – along an ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ scale - for respondents to choose from resulting in a total of 293 answers for each.

Disagree Slightly disagree Neither agree nor disagree Slightly agree Agree

“Beautiful countryside should be protected from damage by law.”

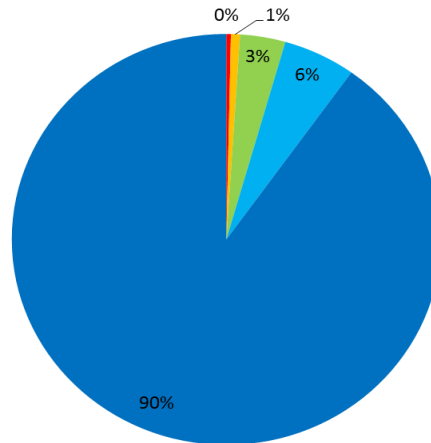


Figure 19. Presentation of results from Question 18a

The majority of respondents (90% equating to 264 people) agreed with the statement that the countryside should be protected by law. Whilst nobody explicitly disagreed with the statement, 1% of respondents – equating to 2 people – did slightly disagree with it.

A greater number of people (93% equating to 274 people) agreed with the statement “The High Weald countryside is beautiful”. Nobody neither disagreed nor slightly disagreed with this statement, and 6% of respondents slightly agreed.

“The High Weald countryside is beautiful.”

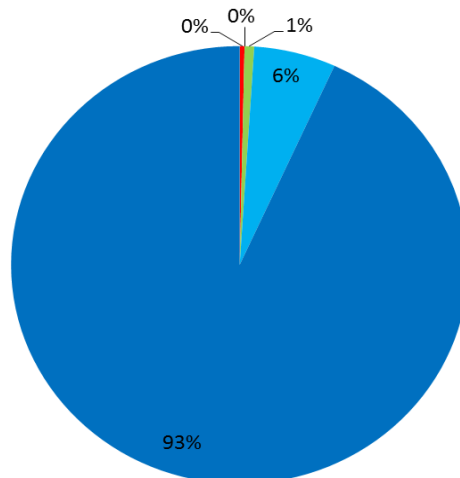


Figure 20. Presentation of results from Question 18b

Question 19: What would you pay per year to help conserve AONBs?

A total of 287 people responded to this question where there were 5 possible options to select from.

61% of people would pay £5 per year to help conserve AONBs.

The large majority of people at 61% (equating to 175 respondents) said that they would pay £5 per year to help conserve AONBs. A further 40 people (14%) who completed this survey would pay £2.50 to help conserve AONBs. This was closely followed by 10% of survey respondents, equating to 27 people, who would not pay anything.

8% of survey respondents said that they would pay 50p to help conserve AONBs, whilst 7% of people would pay 20p. Whilst the large majority (75%) of survey respondents would pay £2.50 or over to help conserve AONBs, a significant proportion of people (25%) would pay 50p or less, with the third highest proportion of people stating that they would not pay anything towards the conservation of AONBs.

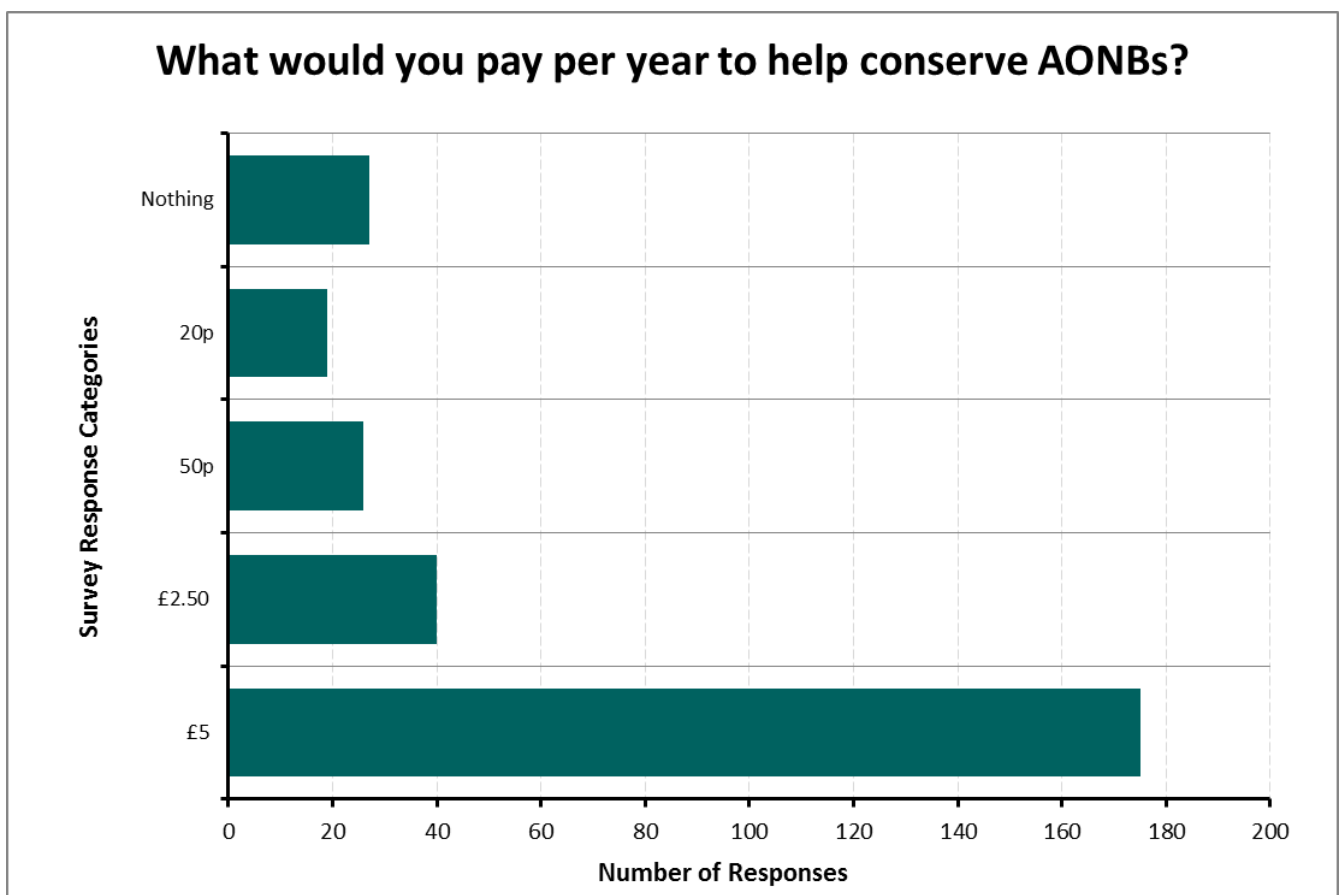


Figure 21. Presentation of results in Question 19

Question 20: What would you like to see happen in the next 5 years to look after and improve the High Weald countryside?

This question provided the opportunity for three open text answers per respondent resulting in a total of 491 answers. For clarification, the category titled “Increased governmental support of AONBs” refers to both financial and legal aspects.

19% of people would like to see conservation of flora and fauna in the next 5 years.

The large majority of people (30% equating to 172 people) felt that tighter planning regulations would improve and look after the High Weald countryside. Conservation of flora and fauna – with frequent reference to rewilding schemes – was also popular amongst survey respondents with 19% of people stating they would like to see this happen in the next 5 years.

49 people (equating to 10% of respondents) wanted greater access to the countryside. This was highlighted as being through more regular and consistent public transport and increases in the number of car parks in the countryside. It should also be noted that many peoples responses conflicted this and instead expressed that they did not believe there should be more car parks in the countryside.

9% of respondents stated that tighter controls of traffic speeds and volumes will better look after and improve the High Weald countryside in the next 5 years. Many responses here referred particularly to better policing of current speed controls. This category was closely followed by improvements in maintenance of Public Rights of Way – which were said to look after and improve the High Weald countryside in the next 5 years by 8% of respondents, equating to 38 people.

Better community engagement would like to be seen in the next 5 years by 7% of survey respondents. Responses within this category made particular reference to outreach with local schools, a communication network of landowners and greater volunteering opportunities. A further 6% of landowners suggested that more advice to landowners would help to look after and improve the High Weald countryside in the next 5 years.

“Development which is more in keeping with the surrounding areas.”

“Greater education to ensure that future generations continue to appreciate it.”

28 people (equating to 4% of respondents) said that increased governmental support of AONBs over the next 5 years would help to look after and improve the High Weald countryside. An additional 3% of survey respondents would like to see reductions in litter and fly tipping – with frequent reference to better policing of fly tipping, in particular.

The remaining 4% of respondents suggested other means to look after and improve the High Weald countryside. These included: restrictions on the expansion of Gatwick airport and reductions in the number of planes following flight paths over the AONB; reductions in light pollution; and blanket bans on hunting and shooting.

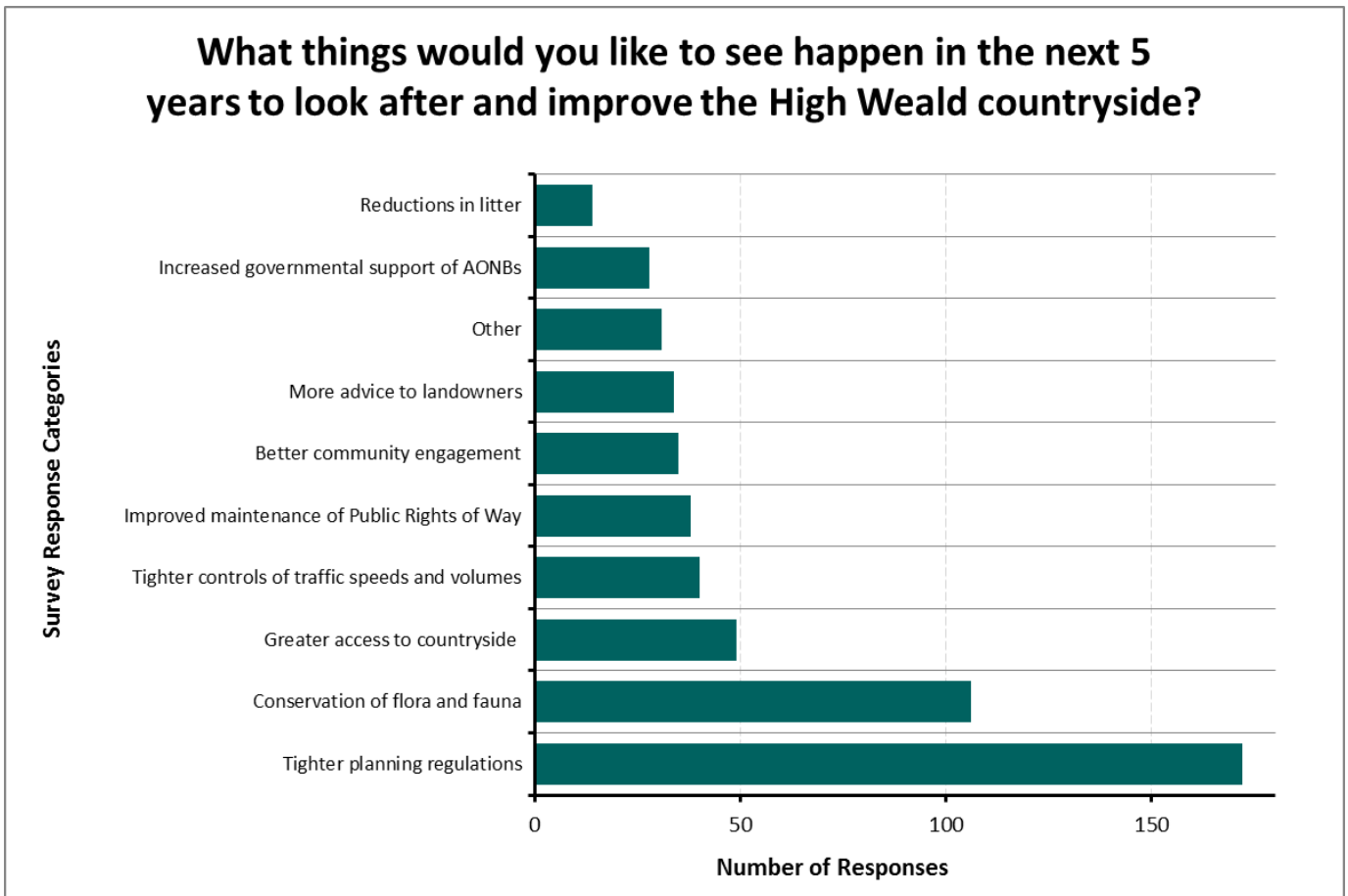


Figure 22. Presentation of results in Question 20

total responses. This was closely associated with inappropriate countryside behaviour, which was said to be the biggest threat to the High Weald countryside by 8% of survey respondents. Responses that fell within this category included those such as: lack of control over dogs, littering and vandalism.

“The overplanting of non-native conifer species for timber, rather than native specimens which have far more amenity and wildlife value.”

Pollution is seen to be the biggest threat to looking after and improving the High Weald countryside to 7% of the survey respondents (equating to 42 people). This included air, water and noise pollution – particularly from overhead planes. A further 5% of people said they thought that inappropriate land management techniques – such as farming with chemicals and poorly timed cutting of hedgerows and meadows – were the biggest threats to looking after and improving the High Weald countryside. An additional 4% of respondents believed habitat loss to be the biggest threat to the High Weald countryside, and 2% of respondents showed concern towards the impacts of climate change.

The remaining 6% of people stated other threats to looking after and improving the High Weald countryside. These include those such as: flooding, fracking and rapid population growth.

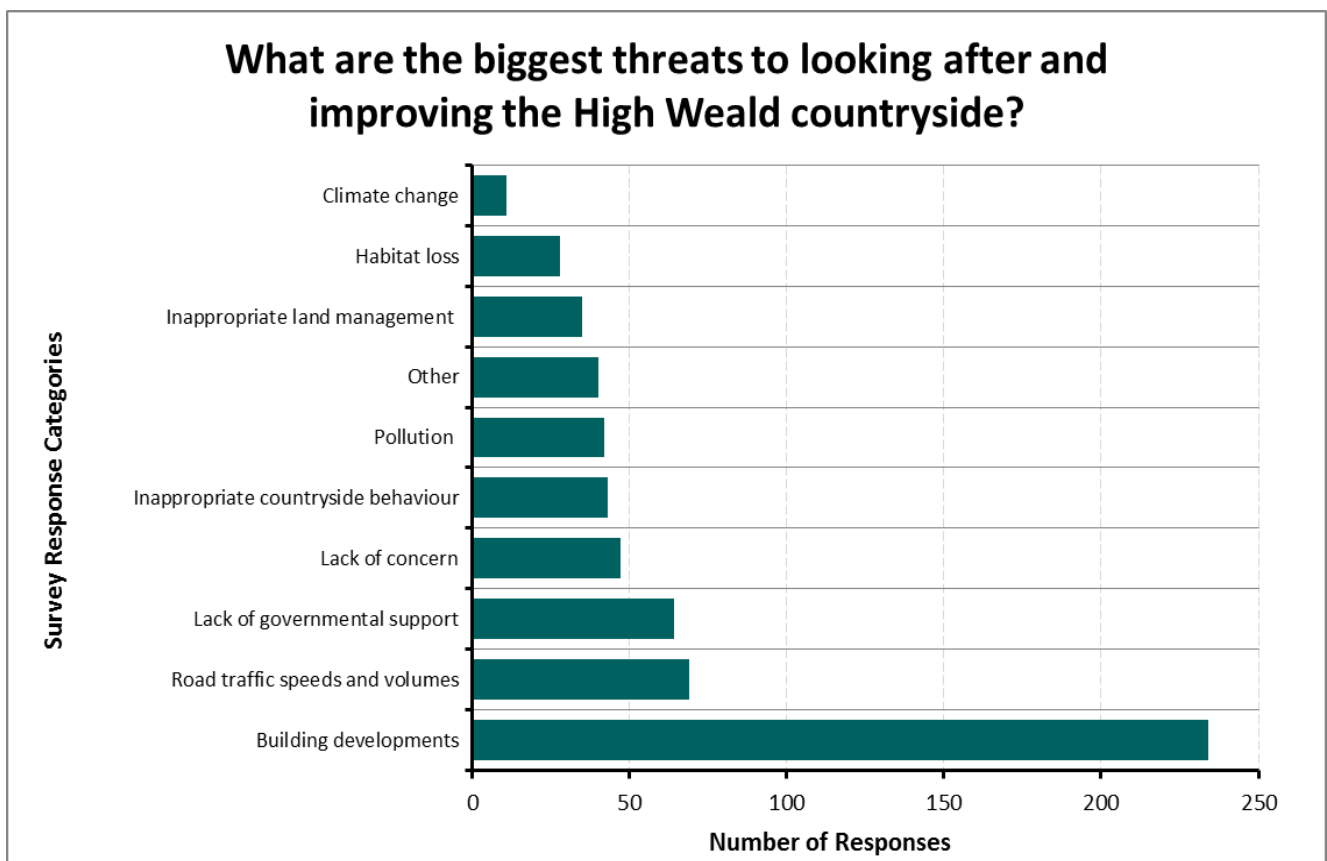


Figure 24. Presentation of results from Question 21

Conclusions

The beautiful, peaceful and open landscape was an ongoing theme throughout the questions on countryside values and enjoyment. Respondents emphasised their personal relationship with the landscape and the sensory experiences – through sights, sounds and smells – that they had in the countryside. This was reflected in what people valued most, what they most enjoyed and in what they found most appealing about the High Weald countryside. Public access to the landscape and the freedom to roam and enjoy the countryside with loved ones was also mentioned consistently throughout this element of the survey. The chance to get close to nature and wildlife and the appreciation of the biodiversity of the High Weald countryside has been a common occurrence. Respondents to the survey have also frequently stated the value and enjoyment they gain from the history of the area from traditional crafts and events to historic settlements and routeways. The majority of respondents agreed with the High Weald character statements and the components it noted.

It was made clear from this survey that the public enjoy the High Weald countryside through many varying activities, often showing opposition to certain activities and the impacts they have on communities and the landscape. It is evident that walking through the countryside – either with or without a dog – is most appealing and enjoyable to many people. This is also reflected in the types of access that respondents valued most. Access to the countryside was largely available for most people within the High Weald; however efforts to improve access through better maintenance of existing footpaths, increased and safer cycling routes, and better public transport were emphasised.

Building developments within the AONB were of concern to many people and gained high numbers of responses in questions relating to spoiled enjoyment of the High Weald countryside. Greater protection against development was also a highly popular response when looking at what would increase enjoyment of the High Weald countryside. This was closely followed by concerns over volumes and speeds of traffic which was highly referred to in terms of spoiled enjoyment and traffic restrictions and controls to improve enjoyment.

Almost three quarters of respondents had sought information on the High Weald countryside, with the majority of people seeking guidance on walking routes. Further guidance that was deemed useful to respondents included that on exploring the High Weald and Public Rights of Way laws and locations. Popularity for exploring and walking through the countryside is in line with responses relating to how people enjoy the area. Land management advice, conservation and biodiversity enhancement strategies were also pieces of information that were both highly sought after and further requested.

Landscape and wildlife conservation are of high priority to the vast majority of survey respondents. With over 90% of people agreeing that the High Weald countryside is both

beautiful and should be protected by law. The products and services provided by the countryside through food and timber were deemed substantially lower priority than any form of conservation of the landscape and its components. Over half of people who undertook this survey would pay £5 towards the conservation of AONBs.

The threat of building developments and urban expansion was of particular concern to people when contemplating the conservation of the High Weald countryside. In questions on way to improve the countryside and its biggest threats, the significantly highest proportion of respondents recognised the threat of building developments and wanted to see tighter planning regulations in the next 5 years. Road traffic speeds and volumes was also a highly consistent theme in this section of the survey. Lack of governmental support and apathy were also highly regarded as significant threats to the High Weald countryside.

Overall, it is clear that the countryside means a lot more to people than its practical and economic value and instead as a means of escape and relaxation to many. The ability to be within open, uninterrupted land which provides a sense of remoteness and tranquillity is important to people and is highly valued, and the threat of losing this to building developments is of great concern.

Appendix 1

Survey Methods

The public survey consisted of 21 questions which produced five possible forms of answers: *open text; options between 1 and 5; agree/disagree; specified options; and yes/no*. The method used to analyse the results therefore differed between each form of answer – each method is outlined below.

1. Open text answers -

Answers were grouped into categories. Categories were determined by the most common responses which were identified using a pilot table in Microsoft Excel. Once the categories were decided, each response was read and manually assigned to a category with some responses spanning multiple categories. For example, an answer which said “public footpath access to walk through the beautiful landscape” would be split into two categories: “public rights of way” and “beautiful open landscape”. The total number of answers in each category will therefore be greater than the number of people who gave responses. Answers that did not fall within the common response categories were put into a category defined as “Other”.

NB: *It should be noted that categories represent the most frequently occurring answers. Therefore, if a category has the lowest number of responses, this does not mean it is the least valued because it still obtained enough answers to warrant the creation of a category. Instead, the bar charts are more a ranked indication of the most valued categories.*

2. Options between 1 and 5 –

Each option specified in this question was separated as an individual category and results were calculated per category based on the associated value rating. The results were calculated by performing a simple count on Microsoft Excel.

3. Agree/disagree –

Responses to this form of question were analysed simply by count.

4. Selected options –

These answers were analysed in a similar way to open text answers, except that the categories were pre-defined and so eliminated the need for common response identification through use of a pilot table. Responses were therefore analysed by a simple count per category.

5. Yes/No answers –

Responses to this form of question were analysed simply by count.

A combination of bar, pie and doughnut charts have been used to visually present the data. Results have been analysed to depict the percentage of responses which shared certain views. In the case of open text answers, the data has been accompanied by response quotes to set some context to the results and to better portray individual views.

The 21 questions were subdivided into three sections: Countryside Values, Enjoying the Area, Conserving and Enhancing the area.

Appendix 2

Public Questionnaire Survey



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High Weald Public Understanding and Engagement Questionnaire

The High Weald is a special landscape and was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by the government in 1983.

This survey seeks to explore what aspects of the High Weald you find particularly beautiful and how you enjoy the area. This will enable us to develop better policy to conserve and enhance what makes the High Weald AONB special whilst enabling its community and economy to thrive.

The information will be used to inform the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 which will be published in March 2019.

This survey should take no more than 10 minutes; all completed forms will be entered into a draw to win two family tickets to the Spa Valley Railway (<https://www.spavalleyrailway.co.uk/>), one of the High Weald's most popular heritage attractions.

Thank you for your help.

What in the High Weald countryside do you most value?

What do you think is most beautiful about the High Weald countryside?

How appealing are the following to you? (1= not at all, 2= not particularly, 3= neither appealing nor unappealing, 4= slightly and 5= very appealing)

A chance to get close to nature

1 2 3 4 5

An extensive footpath network

1 2 3 4 5

Dark skies

1 2 3 4 5

Farming activities (such as livestock grazing, haymaking, ploughing)

1 2 3 4 5

Historic Parks and Gardens

1 2 3 4 5

Scenery/views

1 2 3 4 5

Traditional buildings - oast houses, barns, churches and abbeys

1 2 3 4 5

Tranquility

1 2 3 4 5

Is there anything else you find appealing? (maximum of 3 suggestions)

"The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a historic countryside of rolling hills, draped by small irregularly-shaped fields and abundant woods, shaws (linear woodland strips) and hedges, and scattered with farmsteads and ancient routeways."

How much do you agree with the statement above?

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Enjoying the area

I like to enjoy the countryside most (1= disagree, 2= slightly disagree, 3= neither agree or disagree, 4= slightly agree, 5= agree):

Cycling through it

1 2 3 4 5

From events, fairs, festivals and exhibitions

1 2 3 4 5

From the saddle of a horse

1 2 3 4 5

From the water

1 2 3 4 5

From the window of a car

1 2 3 4 5

Through magazines, books and film

1 2 3 4 5

Walking without a dog

1 2 3 4 5

Walking with my dog

1 2 3 4 5

Working on it

1 2 3 4 5

I do not enjoy the countryside

1 2 3 4 5

Are there any other ways in which you enjoy the countryside?

How far do you agree with this statement? "I have enough access to the countryside within two miles of my home."

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

If you would like more access to the countryside, what kind of access would you prefer? Please tick all options that apply.

More footpaths More bridleways More open access to farmland More open water access More parks and green spaces

If there is another way to increase access, please specify

Is there anything that spoils your enjoyment of the High Weald? (please write a maximum of 3 things)

Is there anything that would increase your enjoyment of the High Weald countryside (maximum of 3 things)

Have you ever sought information on your local countryside (e.g. land management advice, walking routes, etc)?

Yes No

If yes, what information have you sought?

Would any of the following guidance be useful to you? Please tick all options that apply..

AONB legislation and planning Design guidance Exploring the High Weald Information on native species

Introduction to the High Weald Managing wildlife habitats Using public rights of way

Is there any other guidance you would be interested in?

Conserving and enhancing the area

As a resident, consumer and taxpayer, what do you want from the High Weald countryside? (1= low priority, 2= not particularly, 3= neutral, 4= slightly and 5= high priority)

Food

1 2 3 4 5

Landscape conservation and beautiful scenery

1 2 3 4 5

Leisure and recreation

1 2 3 4 5

Timber

1 2 3 4 5

Water conservation

1 2 3 4 5

Wildlife conservation

1 2 3 4 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1= disagree, 2= slightly disagree, 3= neither agree or disagree, 4= slightly agree and 5= agree)

"Beautiful countryside should be protected from damage by law."

1 2 3 4 5

"The High Weald countryside is beautiful."

1 2 3 4 5

Specific support to local authorities to help them conserve Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England cost approximately 12p per person per year. What would you be prepared to pay per year to help conserve these areas?

<20p 50p £2.50 £5 Nothing

What 3 things would you like to see happen in the next 5 years to look after and improve the High Weald countryside?

What are the 3 biggest threats to looking after and improving the High Weald countryside?

About you

First name

Surname

Email

Organisation (if applicable)

What is your age category?

- 0-15 16-19 20-29 30-44 45-64 65 and over

Are you a member of a local community or stakeholder group?

- Yes No

If yes, please indicate which type of group/organisation you are involved in

- Environmental/conservation organisation Heritage organisation Arts organisation Health organisation
School or youth groups Community groups Other

Your personal information will be kept private and held securely. By submitting information you are agreeing to High Weald JAC keeping you informed about the AONB Management Plan Review and other AONB news.

If you don't wish to be on our mailing list (you can unsubscribe at any time) please tick below.

- Tick here

Thank you for your help - now please click 'submit' to send your answers
submit

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