

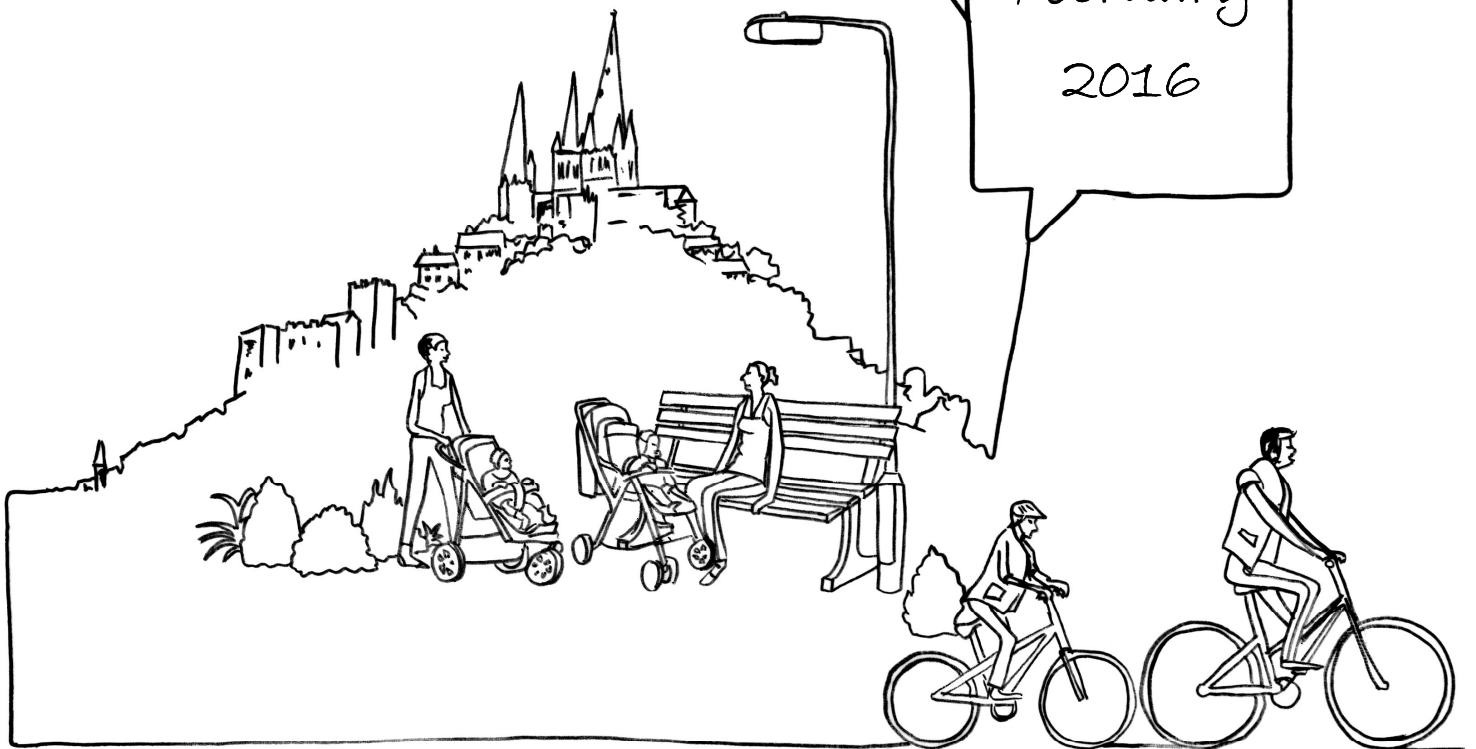
Countryside Estates Consultation

Report of Results

Insight, Planning & Performance Team

Report of the results

February
2016



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DOCUMENT DETAILS

Title	Countryside Estates Consultation—Report of Results.
Date created	February 2016
Description	The purpose of this document is to illustrate the results of the Countryside Estates Consultation. The consultation seeks to understand current visitor patterns and to identify those facilities which are important to people. It also analyses people's views on the Council's proposals for its future Countryside Estate and articulates the likely impacts that these proposals may have.
Produced by	Heather Collier, Research Coordinator, Insight, Planning and Performance Team, Staffordshire County Council. Tel: 01785 277450 Email: heather.collier@staffordshire.gov.uk
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Visiting countryside estates

The majority¹ (97%) had visited one or more of Staffordshire’s countryside estates in the last 12 months. All sites had been visited during the last 12 months. Cannock Chase Country Park was the most visited, 73% had been there in the last year and nearly all (72%) were regular visitors.

Most other sites were also visited regularly. Some of the smaller sites were used by fewer respondents but in most cases these were still used regularly. Exceptions to this included Hanbury Common which was visited by few respondents and on an infrequent basis.

The main reasons for wanting to use countryside parks was for walking (85%), to enjoy wildlife and heritage (65%) or to use the visitor centres and cafes (40%).

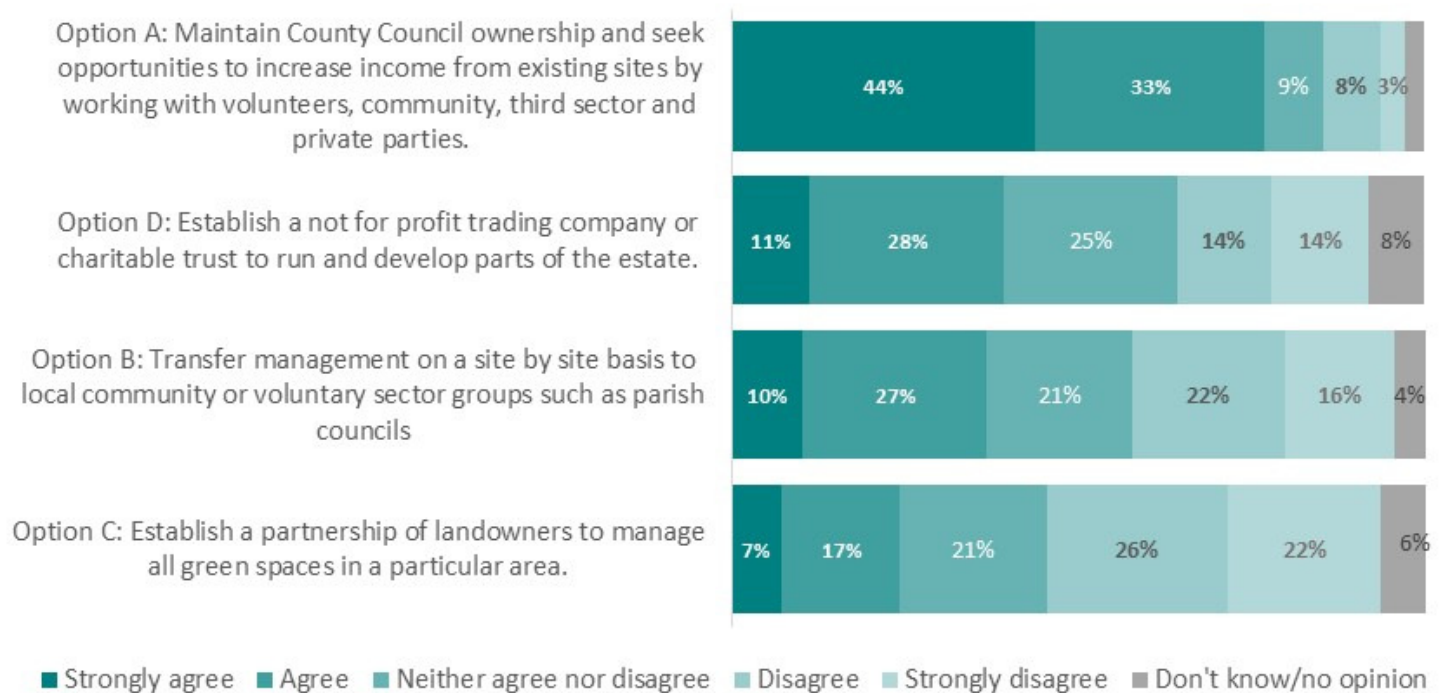
1.2 The proposals

To protect the use of countryside parks for current and future generations, the County Council needs to seek out new and affordable ways of managing its countryside estate. Respondents were invited to express their views on four proposals and to share other suggestions which they may have.

Over three quarters (77%) agreed with Option A, maintaining County Council ownership and seeking opportunities to increase income from existing sites by working with volunteers, community, third sector and private parties. Respondents who agreed with this option did so because they felt it was important to have a trusted and accountable body in charge of decision making.

Just under one quarter (24%) agreed with Option C, establishing a partnership of landowners to manage green spaces in a particular area. A minority of the additional respondents felt that options C and D could work well together.

Figure 1.1: Agreement with the County Council’s proposals



¹ Responses in the executive summary are mainly based on those views shared by survey respondents. Where other responses are included, these are referenced and refer to those people who participated in drop in sessions, meetings or sent in letters/emails.

1.3 Future service provision

Considered most important for future service provision was the management of wildlife/heritage (98%), maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, cycling trails and car parking (98%) and the provision of accessible tracks/facilities (97%). When questioned on what was most in need of improvement, respondents felt that countryside sites needed to be more accessible. This included improving “*access by public transport*”, providing “*more accessible tracks*” as well as “*an integrated approach to cycle and pedestrian access*”.

1.4 Impact of the proposals

The largest proportion of respondents (52%) felt that the current proposals would have some impact on them and their families future use of countryside estates. Smaller proportions of people felt they would be unaffected (26%) or significantly affected (22%) by the changes.

Key issues/concerns included the ability to maintain standards, the possibility of rising costs e.g. for car parking or cafes and payment for access. These tended to be issues for all respondents regardless of the level of impact they felt the proposals would have upon them.

1.5 Safeguarding future provision

Respondents’ views were equally split between those who were in agreement that the County’s proposals would safeguard the future of the countryside estate (34%) and those neither agreeing nor disagreeing that this was the case (33%). A further 19% disagreed and 14% did not know or were not sure. Commonly mentioned comments included that:

- “*The reality is efficiencies need to be made and if transferring management is the way to do this to protect the estates then it’s a necessity*”.
- “*Until a decision has been made as to which proposal is to be commenced no-one can make an accurate assessment and answer this question*”.

1.6 Other ideas

Throughout the consultation, some respondents expressed concerns about potential charges or price increases. However, when asked to identify other ways in which the County Council could improve the countryside estate, respondents suggested that charging for services could be a good option. Suggestions included charging for “*access*”, “*increasing charges for refreshments*” and “*car parking charges*”. Holding “*events/activities*” which provided “*income generation*” was also a popular suggestion.

1.7 Working with other organisations

Respondents were invited to indicate which organisations they felt should be involved with the management of the countryside estate in the future. 82% agreed national charitable organisations should be involved in the management of countryside estates. 60% of respondents also agreed that local community groups or friends groups should be involved.

1.8 Working with volunteers, charitable, voluntary and private organisations in the future

A total of 138 respondents indicated that they would be interested in working with the County Council in a range of ways in the future.

86 were individuals who were interested in volunteering. The following were also interested in working with the County Council to secure the future sustainability of its countryside estate; 63 individual/groups, 15 third sector organisations and 6 private organisations.

- Those who registered an interest in volunteering were willing to participate in a range of capacities, These included site maintenance, development, management and participation in educational initiatives.
- Individuals/groups offered support with policy and partnerships development, bidding for funding, the provision of funding and sharing advice on the feasibility of commercial activity.
- Third sector organisations expressed an interest in working with the County Council to maintain current relationships and to offer further help. They also offered to provide partnership support and assistance with recruitment, training and the provision of volunteers. Encouraging healthier lifestyles was important to this group who offered to promote sites to encourage greater visitor numbers.
- Private organisations were interested in maintaining current support and in potentially working collectively to develop a community management of shared assets organisation. Some also offered the services of their volunteers and suggested that they would be interested in encouraging the development of new activities.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Staffordshire County Council's countryside estate comprises of six main country parks, nine picnic places and three greenways. In previous years, these have been managed by the County Council with some voluntary support.

Current financial pressures however, now means that the County Council need to seek out new and affordable ways of managing it's countryside estate, to protect it for current and future generations.

Whilst it is clear that all sites will continue to remain under County Council ownership, the Council are looking for new ways to manage them. This could involve other organisations or local groups of interested people helping with the management of some sites.

This consultation is seeking to understand the views of all interested parties on the Council's proposals. This includes the likely impact that the changes would have on different groups of people.

In addition, views on current usage and experience of the sites have also been explored. The consultation also sought to encourage both volunteers and charitable, voluntary and private organisations to consider working with the County Council to manage it's countryside estate in the future.

This report contains the details of the feedback provided by all interested parties. These views will be considered by the Council's Cabinet and taken into account as part of the decision-making process.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The consultation ran for a twelve week period from the 2nd November 2015 to 24th January 2016. Residents, visitors, volunteers, community, voluntary and private organisations as well as other interested parties were encouraged to share their views.

Participation was encouraged through both an online and a paper survey which were designed by staff in Insight, Planning and Performance, Communications and Place. These were accompanied with additional information including frequently asked questions and other ways in which people could participate in the consultation, such as drop in sessions.

Drop in sessions were held at a number of key visitor centres around the county. These included Cannock Chase, Chasewater, Apedale and Greenway Bank Country Parks, also Consall Nature Centre. In addition, Rangers and Information Assistants, employed in visitor sites, also actively engaged and encouraged visitor participation. Posters promoting the consultation were also displayed in key locations.

Email and letter responses were also encouraged through a dedicated email box.

Face to face briefings were held with key stakeholders such as district and parish councils, elected members, District Commissioning Leads, VAST, Staffordshire Buddies, key friends and pressure groups.

To maximise the opportunity for involvement, the consultation was also promoted via press releases to all media outlets across Staffordshire.

Additional involvement of young people was also promoted through social media. These included posts/ tweets on Facebook and Twitter.

2.3 RESPONSES

In total, 555 interested parties shared their views during the 12 week consultation period. Participants included residents, volunteers, community, voluntary and private organisations.

The majority of those taking part, did so via the survey. In total, 456 people responded in this way. The survey results are statistically representative of the Staffordshire population at the 95% confidence level².

99 chose to engage in the consultation process through other channels;

- 25 participated through drop in sessions and meetings. Those attending the drop in sessions were visitors to the countryside sites. Meetings were also held with those individuals and groups who were interested in working with the County Council to secure the future sustainability of its countryside estate. These included meetings with parish councils.
- 19 letters/emails were received from a wide variety of respondent types. These included parish councils, local MP's, residents, organisations, district councils and staff from Staffordshire County Council who have environmental expertise.
- 55 young people also engaged via Facebook and Twitter. On this occasion, however, they did not choose to share their views on the consultation.

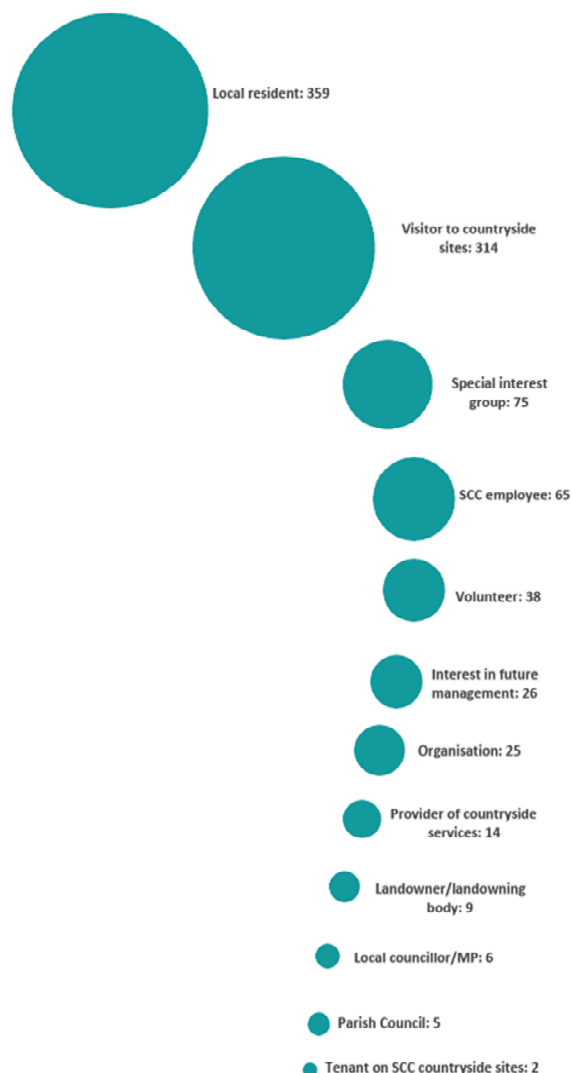
The views of those respondents who engaged in the consultation through letters, emails and drop in sessions have been included in the relevant sections, alongside the survey responses.

² This means that if the surveys were repeated, in 95 out of 100 cases, the same responses would be achieved. Survey responses have a confidence interval of +/-4.5% meaning that the percentage response given to any question could fall up to 4.5% higher or 10% lower than the actual response given. A confidence interval of +/-3 to 4% is fairly typical for a robust survey.

2.4 PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- ⇒ The largest majority of respondents described themselves as local residents (359) or visitors to countryside sites (314). 313 respondents (70%) were regular visitors, accessing sites at least once a month or more frequently³.
- ⇒ 26 indicated they were responding to the survey as an individual/group or organisation interested in being involved in the future management of countryside sites. When questioned further, a total of 136 indicated an interest in working with the County Council in the future either as an individual, third sector or private sector organisation.
- ⇒ The survey results were representative of the Staffordshire population by gender. 52% of respondents were male and 48% were female.
- ⇒ Responses were also representative of 25-44 year olds. They were however over representative of those aged 45-74 and under representative of the youngest and oldest age groups (under 18s and 75+ year olds)³.
- ⇒ 10% of survey respondents had a disability. This is significantly lower than the number of people in Staffordshire as a whole who have a disability (19%)⁴.
- ⇒ Responses were received from seven of the eight Staffordshire districts. The highest response was from Stafford (134 responses) and the lowest response was from East Staffordshire (12 responses). No responses were recorded from Tamworth. The results cannot be considered statistically robust at the district level and therefore analysis at this level has not been included in this report.
- ⇒ Responses have been analysed by key demographics where the number of responses is sufficient and where there are clear differences of opinion.

Figure 2.1: Respondent type



³ Analysis by respondent type does suggest there may be differences of opinion by type. However, a breakdown of these views has not been included in the report because response numbers for some respondent types are relatively low and therefore they may not be representative of the wider population which they seek to represent. Further research would be necessary to clarify the viewpoints of different respondent types.

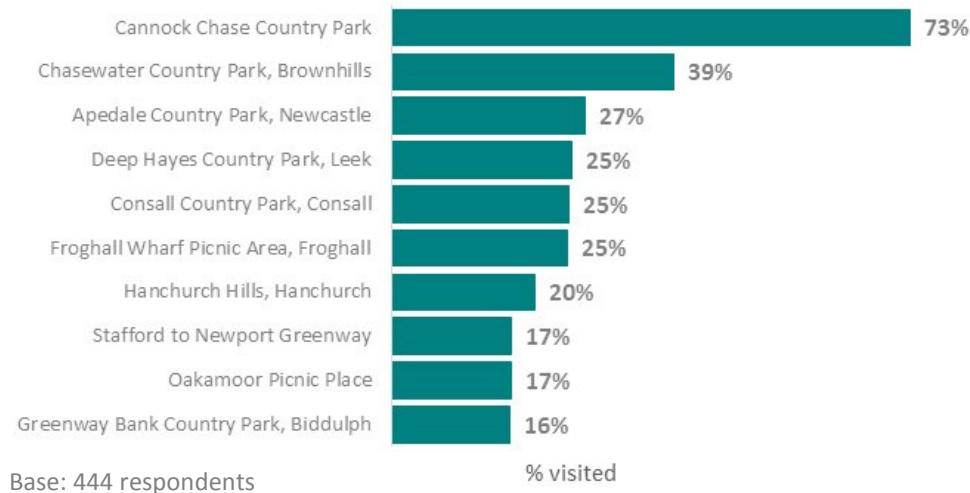
⁴ Research commissioned by DEFRA on diversity highlights that young people, disabled people and people from black and ethnic minority groups are under-represented users of the countryside and green outdoor spaces, What About Us, Diversity Review, Challenging Perceptions: Under represented Visitor Needs, July 2005.

3. VISITORS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE⁵

3.1 Countryside sites visited in the last 12 months

444 respondents have visited one or more of Staffordshire’s countryside estates in the last 12 months. Cannock Chase Country Park was the most visited of all the sites. 73% or 322 respondents had visited this site in the last 12 months. The sites which have been used the most by respondents in the last 12 months are documented in the graphic below.

Figure 3.1: Countryside sites which had been visited in the last 12 months



All other sites had been used by 60 or less respondents in the last year; Oakamoor to Denstone Greenway (59), Leek to Rushton Greenway (44), Sevens Road Picnic Area, Cannock Wood (42), Branston (38), Hatherton Reservoir, Cheslyn Hay (30), Chillington Picnic Area, Nr Brewood (19), Wimblebury Mound Picnic Area (15), Broad Lane, Essington (14), Hanbury Common, (13), Brownshore Pools Picnic area, Essington (11), Fair Oak Picnic Area, Essington (10).

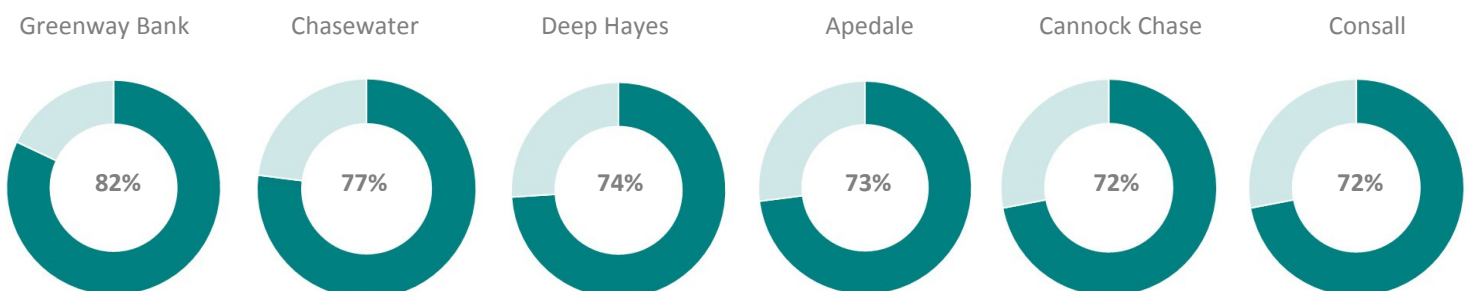
3.2 Frequency of visiting countryside sites.

The majority of respondents (70%) were regular visitors at countryside sites, citing that they tended to visit them at least a few times a month or more often. By site, the percentage of visitors who were regular users tended to vary between 38% and 100%.

The six main countryside parks all had high numbers of regular visitors. These ranged from 82% in Greenway Bank Country Park to 72% in Cannock Chase Country Park and Consall Country Park (72%).

Overall visitor usage numbers were lowest at Hanbury Common and the majority of these users (62%) used the site infrequently, either a few times a year or less often. Visitor numbers were also low at Brownshore Pools and Fair Oak Picnic Area. All visitors to these sites were however regular.

Figure 3.2: % who were regular visitors of the county’s countryside parks

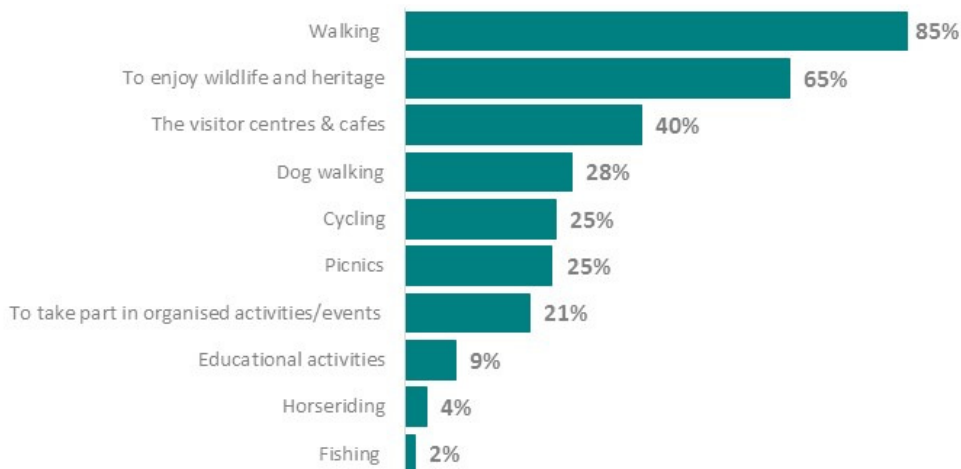


⁵ The questions in this section were asked to survey respondents only and therefore the answers in this section relate specifically to the answers provided from this respondent group.

3.3 Reasons for using countryside parks

It was most common for respondents to say that they had used countryside parks for walking (85%), to enjoy wildlife and heritage (65%) or to use the visitor centres and cafes (40%). These were the three most popular reasons for using all parks, including the County's six main countryside parks.


Figure 3.3: Reasons for using countryside parks




Base: 451 respondents

Differences in views by person type

There were different reasons for using countryside sites by person type. Local residents followed by visitors were the two groups most likely to say they used countryside sites for all the reasons listed in the graphic above.

 Male respondents were most likely to use countryside parks for each of the following; walking, cycling, fishing, to enjoy the wildlife and to take part in organised activities/events.

 Females however, were more likely to use them for dog walking, horse riding and educational activities.

By age group, it is those between the ages of 35-74 or 45-74 who are most likely to say they visit countryside parks to use a wide range of services. These are outlined below.

Aged 35-74: Common uses are walking, dog walking, cycling.

Aged 45-74: Common uses are taking part in organised activities/events, the visitor centres and cafes.



3.4 Encouraging the use of countryside parks

A relatively small proportion of respondents (7% or 33 respondents) provided suggestions for encouraging the greater use of country parks in the future.

Accessibility was a common theme amongst these respondents and views for example included that respondents would use parks more if improved access was made to public transport links and if an integrated approach to cycle paths and pedestrian access was developed.

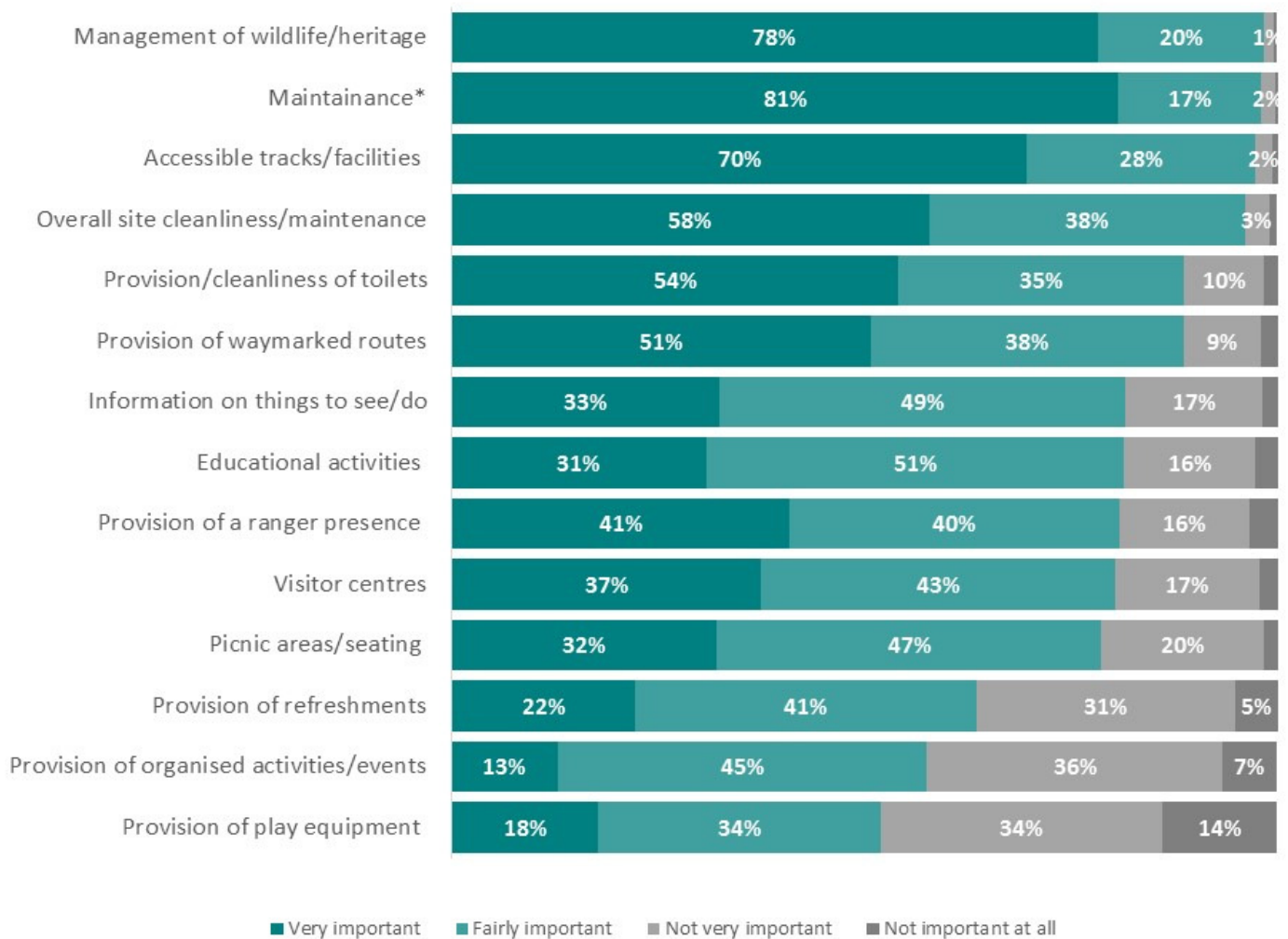
Some respondents expressed a concern that access could become limited to only those who could afford it in the future.

3.5 The importance of facilities within countryside parks

All facilities were considered to be important to 50% of respondents or more. Management of wildlife/heritage and maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, cycling trails and car parking areas were considered most important, with 98% saying both of these were very or fairly important. Considered least important was the provision of play equipment, provision of organised activities/events and the provision of refreshments.

Respondents three most important facilities overall; management of wildlife/heritage, maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, cycling trails and car parking areas and accessible tracks facilities are also the three most important priorities in the County's six main country parks.

Figure 3.4: The importance of facilities within countryside parks



* Maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, cycling trails and car parking areas

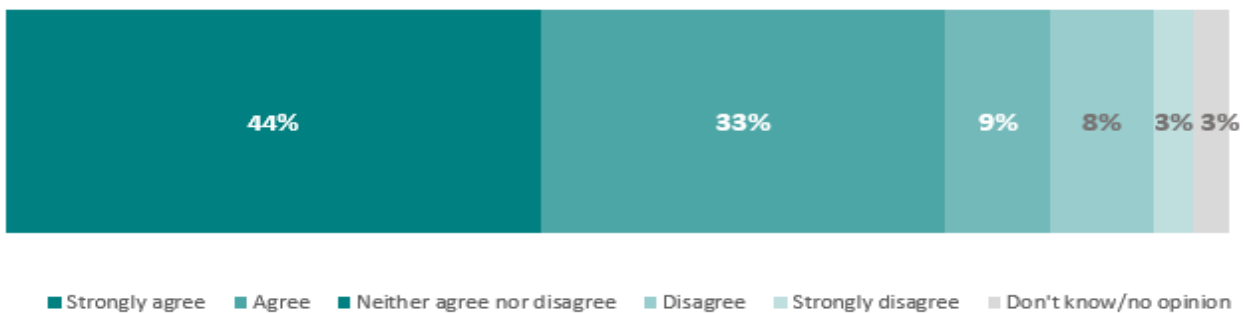
4. THE PROPOSALS⁶

4.1 Option A: Maintain County Council ownership and seek opportunities to increase income from existing sites by working with volunteers, community, third sector and private parties.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this option could be a suitable way of managing our larger sites?

Consultation responses: There was a high level of agreement with Option A. 77% agreed it was a suitable way of managing the County’s largest countryside sites. Respondents replying by letter/email, also expressed strong support for this option.

Figure 4.1: Views on Option A



Comments

Through their comments, respondents explained why they felt it was important for the County Council to maintain ownership of its larger sites. These included the importance of having a trusted and accountable body who would make good decisions on behalf of the electorate. Commonly mentioned comments reflected through survey and other correspondences received are documented below.

- *“It keeps the site with an accountable service provider with the knowledge and experience of staff with a long term vision of the importance of management upon the site”.*
- It is key to *“protect the natural environment”* and *“access to public areas”* and this should be undertaken by *“a qualified and accountable body”*.
- *“Local Authorities need to protect the countryside by being ultimately responsible to its electors for the long term health of these areas”.*
- *“The County Council should maintain ownership and have a strong presence with any outside interested parties, to be able to monitor their activities, and have the facility to terminate any agreements if they are not working effectively”.*
- *“The environment would be protected by the County Council but have the ability to attract funding opportunities. It also offers volunteers and community groups a greater voice/role”.*

⁶These responses include survey responses and also comments and views shared from additional contributors via letters/emails, drop-ins and meetings.

An exploration of the letters and emails received also revealed some individual comments for consideration. These included:

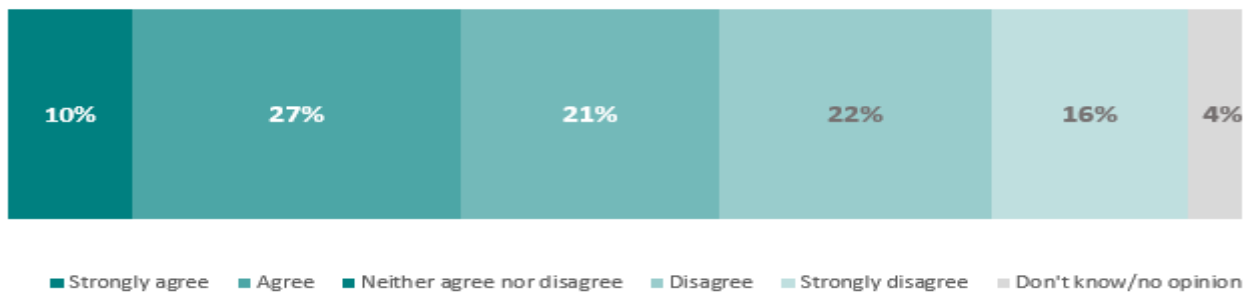
- One respondent expressing strong support for Option A but recognising that other parties may have access to *“funding streams”*. For this reason, the respondent felt it would be sensible to *“bring them on board but limit the autonomy that such groups or organisations would have”* over countryside sites. *“Private partners would need to sign up to the fact that sites are owned by the public, for the public”*.
- Another respondent emphasised that whilst they supported this option, they were unsupportive of *“an increase in the charges for events because of the potential negative impact on numbers of people participating in the sport”*.
- Another *“supported the partnership approach and recognised that we can achieve more by acting in strong partnerships rather than through actions taken in isolation”*.

4.2 Option B: Transfer management on a site by site basis to local community or voluntary sector groups such as parish councils.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this option could be a suitable way of managing sites?

Consultation responses: Views on this proposal were relatively mixed with 37% of survey respondents expressing agreement with the proposal and 38% disagreeing with it. There was some support for this option from respondents replying by letter/email.

Figure 4.2: Views on Option B



Comments

Respondents in agreement with this proposal tended to agree that this option could work well for smaller sites as these would be easier to manage by local groups of interested people. Commonly expressed comments are documented below.

- *“Smaller sites are easier for the community to manage. They are also usually used more by the local community and so probably better looked after”.*
- *“I think this would be suitable for the picnic sites, less so for the other sites”.*
- *“The areas would be in the hands of people/groups with the best interests of them in mind”.*

An exploration of the letters/emails reflects one parish councils interest in assuming the responsibility for “a smaller site”, with the “assistance from local community groups”.

Another respondent was supportive of this option, with “some reservations”. They felt they could see this option working “very well in some areas” but highlighted the potential issues that can arise if volunteers decide to step down from their position. Support was provided for this option so long as “sensible safeguards were put in place”.

Respondents in disagreement tended to be concerned about “potential variable standards of care between sites” and “the general expertise, resources and commitment which would be required to make this option a success”. Comments which are reflective of these main themes are outlined below.

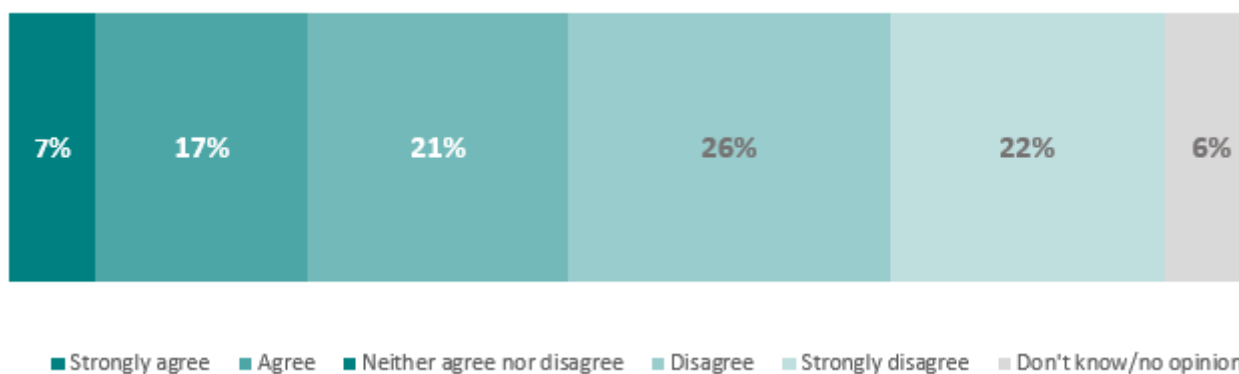
- *“Local Community and voluntary sectors do not have the resources or experience in managing important sites, they lack the experience to manage a site for nature conservation and this would be at the detriment to vulnerable habitats”.*
- *“Other groups do not have the resources or long-term commitment to the sites”.*
- *“There could be too much diversity in standard from one site to another”.*
- *“I do feel we will not get the same standard of care”.*

4.3 Option C: Establish a partnership of landowners to manage all green spaces in a particular area.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this option could be a suitable way of managing a cluster of sites within a specific area?

Consultation responses: Just under one quarter of respondents (24%) were in agreement with this proposal, the largest majority, 48% were in disagreement. There was limited support for this option from respondents replying by letter/email.

Figure 4.3: Views on Option C



Comments

Through their comments, respondents expressed their reservations about the motives and long term sustainability of this option for the management of “clusters of sites within specific areas”. Comments which are reflective of these concerns are outlined below.

- *“As a public body SCC’s responsibilities and priorities differ from private landowners. What may start out as an equitable arrangement may disintegrate when other options for land use arise”.*
- *“The management would be too far removed from public control”.*
- *“Third parties may have vested interests counter to preserving our natural spaces”.*
- *“There is a risk that these locations be used to generate an income, making them unaffordable to visit. Those that are honeypots will be well maintained to keep the visitors going, those less well attended will lose out”.*

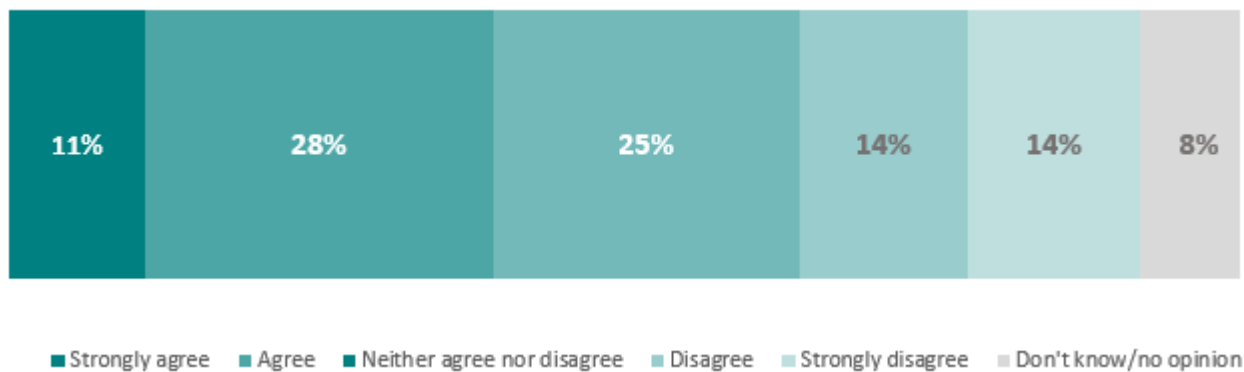
An exploration of the additional responses including letters/emails, drop in and meetings reflects minimal support for this option. One stakeholder was supportive of this option. They felt that this may be “the most appropriate option for delivery” and provided details of a potential vehicle for delivery.

4.4 Option D: Establish a not for profit trading company or charitable trust to run and develop parts of the estate.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this option could be a suitable way of running and developing some parts of the estate?

Consultation responses: 39% were in agreement with this proposal. This proposal received a high proportion of neutral responses.

Figure 4.4: Views on Option D



Comments

Respondents comments were reflective of the faith they would place in a not for profit or a charity organisation to manage sites in the best interests of wildlife and the people of Staffordshire. Respondents were also supportive of the benefits of charitable status both for the facilities and for attracting volunteers. Comments which were reflective of these viewpoints are outlined below.

- *“This is a satisfactory alternative to option A. This would be the best option, the trust would be guardians of the areas and would want it to succeed rather than fail so they can then purchase it”.*
- *“This option has the potential to attract additional grants and funding not available to the County Council and with the right partners such as the Woodland Trust or Mercia Forest Trust they would be able to gain additional assistance and management skills”.*
- *“The added income from having charitable status could be used for the benefit of the facilities”.*
- *“A charity can generate more money and probably attract more volunteer workers”.*
- Consideration should be given to *“integrating Option D with Option C”.*

Whilst respondents were more likely to be supportive of this option, some expressed caution:

- There should be some caveats so that the County Council could *“buy back the land”* if this approach was *“deemed to be unsuccessful”*.
- *“The management would be too far removed from public control”.*

5. OVERALL VIEWS ON THE PROPOSALS

Respondents were invited to indicate which organisations they felt should be involved with the management of the countryside estate in the future. Respondents were most likely to agree that national charitable organisations such as the RSPB or the Wildlife Trusts should be involved with this. They were least likely to feel that district councils should undertake this role.

5.1: % who feel that organisations should be involved in the future management of the countryside estate



Respondents were encouraged to provide some context to help explain their views on the above organisations. These have been summarised below.

National charitable organisations: Respondents comments on these were largely reflective of the comments respondents shared about Option D. These highlighted their safeguarding role, their wealth of skills and experience as well as the benefits such as funding and volunteers which established charitable organisations could attract. Some respondents also articulated that national charitable organisations would be the most suitable alternative for looking after those estates which included areas of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Local community groups: Respondents felt this would work if there was a body of people who were interested in proving support and if they had a genuine interest/concern for the site. Respondents felt that local people/users of local sites usually have a good idea of what is best and could bring passion and new ideas into the provision of country estates. Some respondents felt that this option would work well if it was combined with organisations who bring expertise in land management.

Parish councils: There were relatively few comments which focused directly on parish councils. Those that were received included that parish councils could manage small sites successfully.

District Councils: 43% of respondents indicated that district councils should be involved with the management of the countryside estate in the future. As with parish councils, there were relatively few comments which focused directly on district councils. Those that did, provided similar comments to those that were received about parish councils. For example, district councils would be good at managing the less intensive sites, such as picnic areas. More generic comments recognised that all groups could have a useful role to play in the management of the countryside estate in the future.

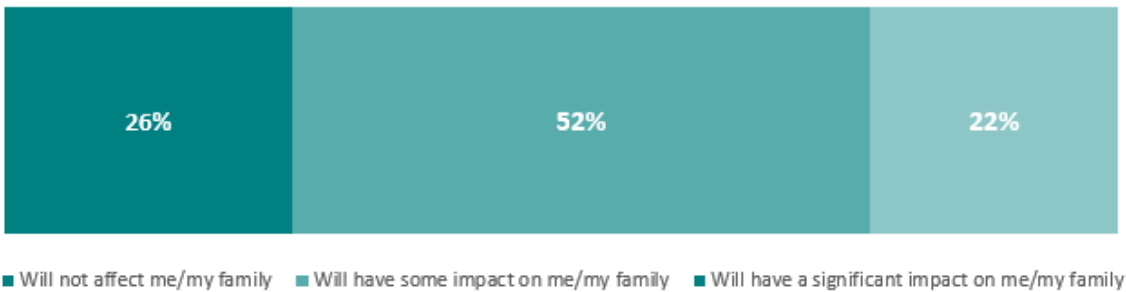
- *“All groups might have something to offer. Any one of these groups would uphold the standards required”.*
- *“Any group should be able to be involved, so long as they have a genuine interest and concern for the sites. They should present a clear business case that is not just focused on profit making, but on conservation and maintenance”.*
- *“A mix of all of these needs to be utilised BUT with an overarching body that sets strategy and receives and reviews their reports”.*

6. IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSALS

6.1 Impact of the proposed changes

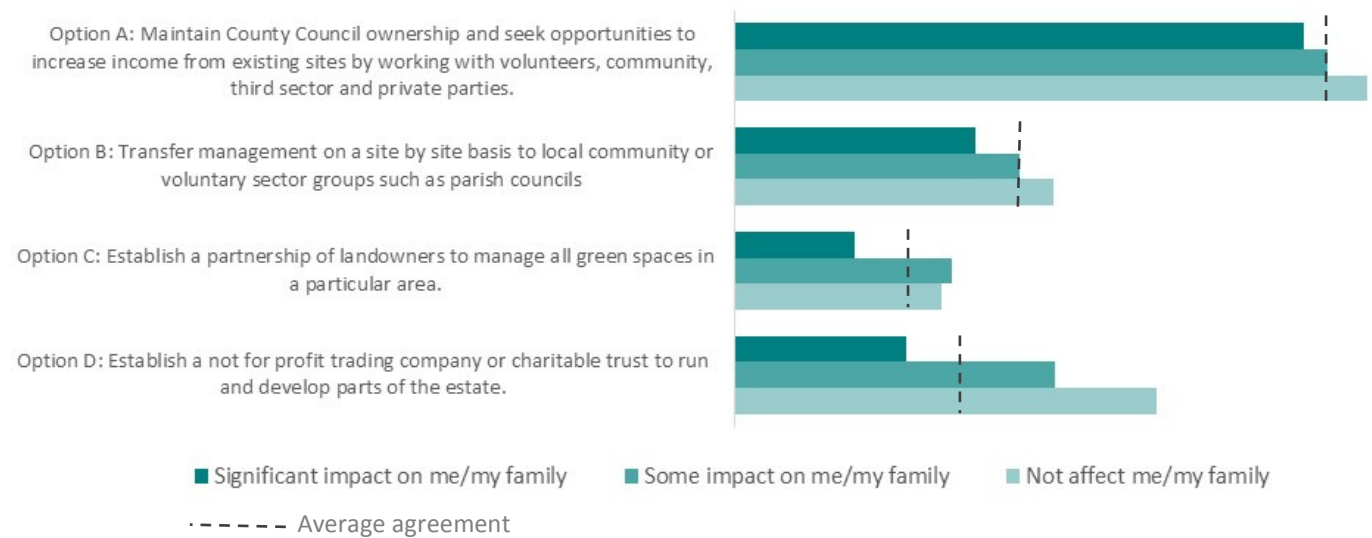
The largest proportion of respondents felt that the current proposals would have some impact on them and their families future use of countryside estates. Smaller proportions of people felt they would be unaffected or significantly affected by the changes.

Figure 6.1: The impact of the proposed changes



The graph below reflects that agreement with each of the proposals is lower amongst those who felt they would most likely be significantly impacted by the proposals. Conversely, who would not be affected were more likely to be in agreement with each of the proposals. The greatest variations in views was in relation to option D.

Figure 6.2: % who agreed with each of the options by the impact which each of the changes would have upon them



Comments

Comments from respondents showed that regardless of the level of impact, the issues/concerns raised were generally the same. Key issues/concerns included the ability to maintain standards, the possibility of rising costs e.g. for car parking or cafes and payment for access. It was respondents reactions to these issues/concerns that varied greatly.

The majority of respondents who felt that there would be some impact upon them (52% said this) felt that the above issues could be concerns, but this would largely depend on the final decisions taken by the County Council.

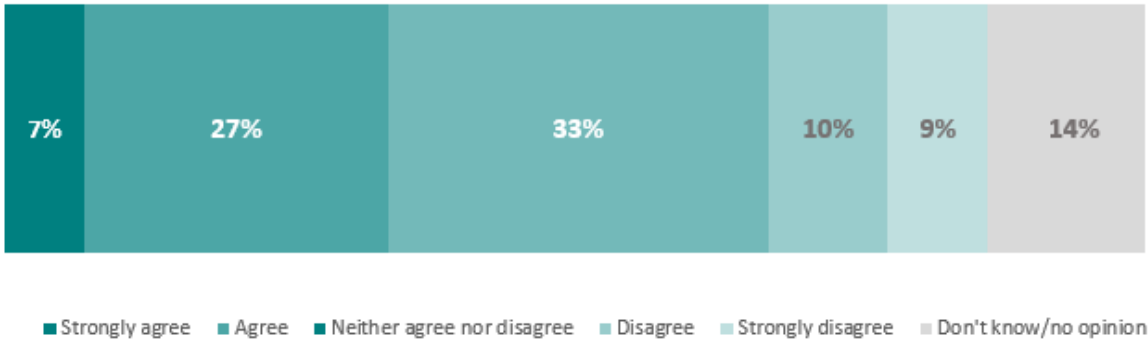
Over one quarter (26%) did not feel that they or their family would be affected at all by the proposals and these respondents said that they would continue to use the facilities regardless of who runs them and regardless of any change to them. If access was restricted this group would still feel unaffected and would seek out alternative facilities which met their needs.

Over one fifth (22%) felt that they would be significantly affected by the proposals. These respondents tended to be regular, daily users who would be impacted most if there were increases to charges or if access was restricted over time. Also people with key areas of interest e.g. bird watching, were concerned about the impact on wildlife and the future ability to continue to effectively manage countryside sites.

6.2 Safeguarding the future countryside estate

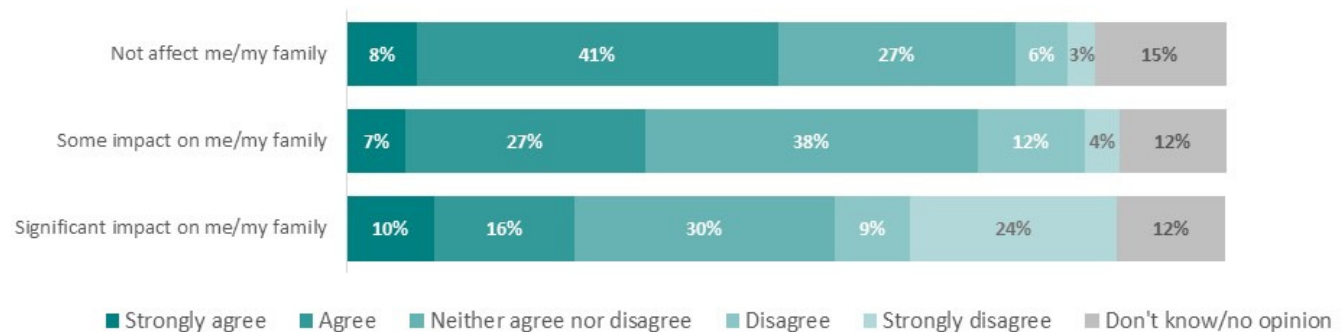
Respondents views were equally split between agreeing that the proposals would safeguard the future of the County's countryside estate (34%) and neither agreeing nor disagreeing that this was the case (33%). Just under one fifth of respondents were in disagreement.

Figure 6.3: Views on whether the proposals will safeguard the future of the County's countryside estate



Those respondents who felt they would not be affected by the current proposals were most likely to agree that the proposals would safeguard the future of the County's countryside estate (49% agreed). Conversely, those who felt that the proposals would have a significant impact on them or their family were least likely to agree that the proposals would safeguard the future of the estate (26% agreed).

Figure 6.4: Views on whether the proposals will safeguard the future of the County's countryside estate by the level of impact the proposed changes will have upon them



Comments

One third agreed that the proposals would safeguard the future of the County's estate and these respondents tended to recognise the financial pressures which the County Council were facing and felt that it was better to act now to ensure the sustainability of sites for future generations. Respondents comments which were reflective of these points are outlined below.

- *"The reality is efficiencies need to be made and if transferring management is the way to do this to protect the estates then it's a necessity".*
- *"It is better to act now than to react in future years when funding has all but disappeared and there is little scope for any new arrangements to be put in place".*
- *"These sites are significant in making Staffordshire a great place to live - they should be nurtured and safeguarded for future generations to enjoy".*

One third of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposals and these respondents felt it was difficult to have a view on whether the proposals would safeguard the future estate until a final decision had been made on which options would given further consideration. Some respondents also felt they needed more information before they could provide an opinion.

- *"Until a decision has been made as to which proposal is to be commenced no-one can make an accurate assessment and answer this question".*
- *"Depends exactly what happens in the future, whichever option is chosen. The options are too vague to assess their outcomes and implication".*

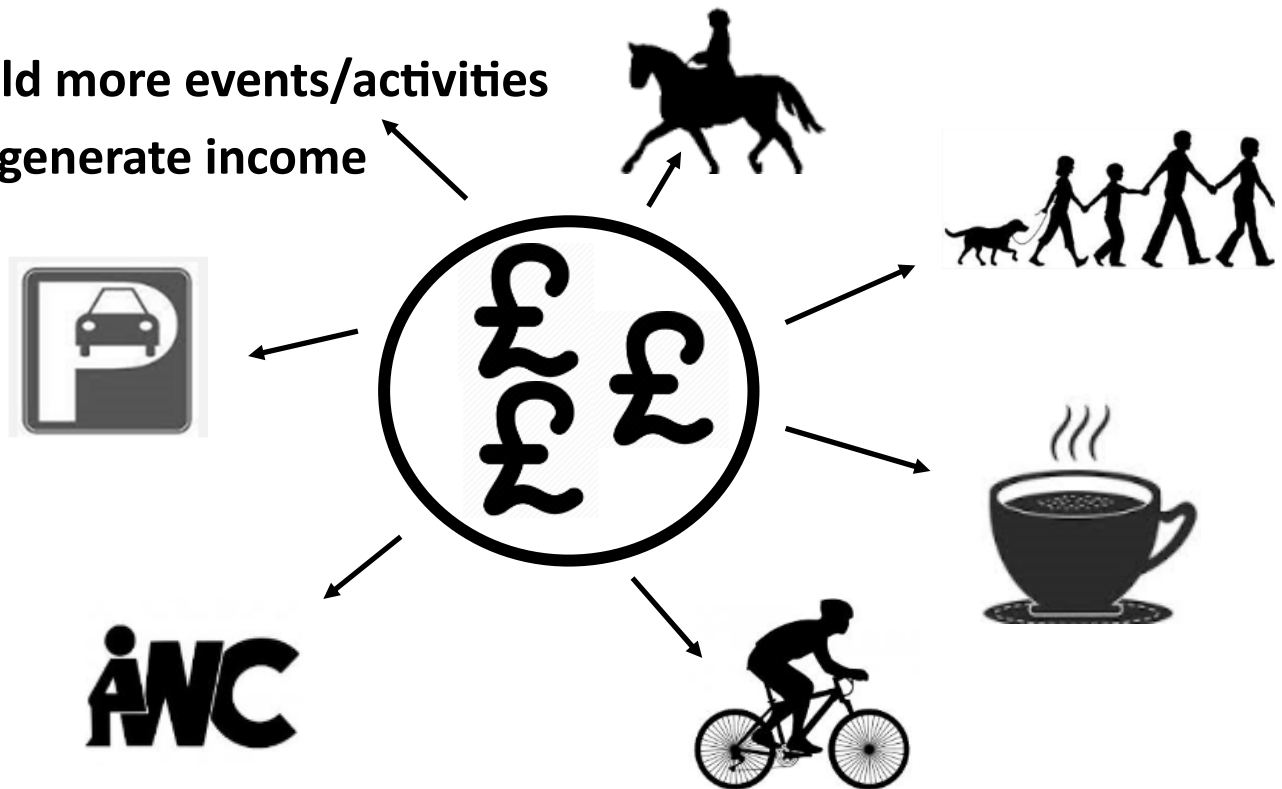
Nearly one fifth of respondents were in disagreement with the proposals (19%). Like those who were in agreement, these respondents also spoke about financial pressures. However, those in disagreement expressed their unhappiness about changes to funding. They also expressed their concerns about potentially shifting responsibility away from the County Council without a clear vision of how the estate should look in the future.

- *"Again we have yet more money cuts affecting the people who pay in!"*
- *Staffordshire County Council has not articulated a vision for the countryside estate so it is difficult to offer an opinion as to whether any proposals will safeguard the countryside estate.*

7. OTHER IDEAS

Throughout the consultation, some respondents have expressed concerns about potential charges or price increases. However, when asked to identify other ways in which the County Council could improve the countryside estate, respondents suggested that charging for services would be a good option. Suggestions included charging for access, increasing charges for refreshments and car parking charges. Holding events/activities which provided income generation was also a popular suggestion. Charges which were acceptable with respondents are outlined below.

Hold more events/activities to generate income



8. WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS, CHARITABLE AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Volunteers and charitable, voluntary and private organisations who would be interested in working with the County Council in the future were invited to identify their interest and to outline the type of involvement they would like to have with the countryside estate. 138 in total, registered an interest in being involved, in one or more ways.

8.1 Individuals interested in volunteering on the County Council's country estate

86 individuals registered an interest in volunteering. Older respondents were more likely to be interested in volunteering. Respondents who were interested highlighted a wide range of activities they would like to be involved in. These included; training, education, managerial support, learning skills, helping to maintain sites, educating people, conservation, wildlife projects, formulating innovative ideas for future sustainability, being involved in clean up/litter clearing initiatives, encouraging crafts, management of trees/woodlands, footpath work, ranger, cycle route design, monitoring wildlife and plant identification.

8.2 Individuals/groups interested in working with the County Council to secure the future sustainability of it's country estate

63 identified themselves as a group or individual interested in working with the County to secure the future of countryside estates. One third of these were also interested in volunteering and therefore offered to be involved in many of the above volunteering activities.

In addition, these respondents offered to share their skills and expertise in the following areas; policy development, partnership development, feasibility of commercial activity, bidding for funding, and in the management of local groups. One respondent also offered to fund occasional projects within their local area and another discussed opportunities to work closely with parish councils.

8.3 Third sector organisations interested in working with the County Council to secure the future sustainability of it's country estate

15 were a third sector organisation. Third sector organisations had various reasons for wanting to work with the County Council to secure the future estate and these included; seeking to maintain the current relationship with the County Council, offering to support through being a partnership co-ordinator, supporting with the recruitment, training and provision of volunteers and promoting the use of sites to encourage active and healthier lifestyles.

Other third sector organisations were interested in helping to ensure species maintenance, cycle track maintenance and the involvement of key groups for example those who are unemployed due to ill health or disability or those with learning disabilities.

8.4 Private organisations interested in working with the County Council to secure the future sustainability of it's country estate

6 private organisations registered their interest in working with the County Council. These included; potentially working collectively through a community management of shared assets organisation and an expression of interest in continuing to provide existing support. Other organisations expressed their interest in offering to encourage the development of new activities or to offer their services or the services of their volunteers.

9. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- The consultation results reflect that the main countryside sites are well used. The six main country parks all had high numbers of regular visitors—these ranged from 82% using Greenway Bank Country Park regularly to 72% using Cannock Chase Country Park and Consall Country Park on a regular basis.
- The majority of respondents (77%) agreed with Option A, maintaining County Council ownership and seeking opportunities to increase income from existing sites by working with volunteers, community, third sector and private parties.
- The types of organisations and people favoured to become involved in the future management of the countryside estate included national charitable organisations and local community groups and friends groups. 82% agreed national charitable organisations should become involved in the future management and 60% also agreed that local community groups or friends groups should be involved. It was felt that both groups had plenty to offer with the former group being able to offer expertise, volunteers and access to funding and the latter, passion, new ideas and local knowledge.
- Interest in working with the County Council to secure the future of countryside sites was also expressed with some respondents expressing an interest in being involved in multiple capacities. In total, 138 registered their interest and of these, 86 would be interested in volunteering, 63 were an individual/group seeking to work with the County Council to secure its future, 15 were third sector organisations and 6 were private organisations. Harnessing the interest of these individuals and groups will be key to safeguarding the future of the County's countryside estate.

APPENDIX I: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Gender

	Survey responses		MYE 2014
	No.	%	%
Male	228	52%	50%
Female	213	48%	50%

Age

	Survey responses		MYE 2014
	No.	%	%
Under 18	3	1%	20%
18-24	7	2%	8%
25-34	39	9%	11%
35-44	57	13%	12%
45-54	98	22%	15%
55-64	104	24%	13%
65-74	113	26%	12%
75+	21	5%	9%

Disability

	Survey responses		Census 2011 comparison
	No.	%	%
Yes	43	10%	19%
No	390	90%	81%

Ethnicity

	Survey responses		Census 2011 comparison
	No.	%	%
White	424	96.4%	95.8%
Mixed/Multiple	0	0%	1.1%
Asian/Asian British	1	0.2%	2.4%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0	0%	0.6%
Other	0	0%	0.2%
Prefer not to say	15	3.4%	N/A

District of residence

	Survey responses		Census 2011 comparison
	No.	%	%
Cannock Chase District	81	19%	11.5%
East Staffordshire District	12	3%	13.4%
Lichfield District	39	9%	11.9%
Newcastle-under-Lyme District	58	14%	14.7%
South Staffordshire District	41	10%	12.9%
Stafford District	134	32%	15.4%
Staffordshire Moorlands District	56	13%	11.4%
Tamworth District	0	0%	9.0%

4 responses were also received from residents living in Stoke-on-Trent