



Visitor Survey Results Summary



Bird Wise North Kent

March 2025

Introduction

The original Footprint Ecology visitor surveys undertaken in 2012 provided evidence that informed the 6km zone of influence used in the North Kent SAMMS Strategy published in 2014. The surveys demonstrated that 75% of the visitors they surveyed during the winter had travelled within 6 kilometres to visit their chosen destination to undertake recreational activity.

Throughout 2024 the Bird Wise Rangers have been undertaking visitor surveys using the same methodology as the original Footprint surveys, within the technology and capacity available.

This report provides a summary of these results and some comparisons with the original Footprint surveys to highlight areas of change.

A copy of the questions asked in the survey are attached in the item 3 appendix.

Methodology

A total of 272 surveys were completed between January 2024 and February 2025. Surveys were undertaken in person with the rangers handing participants a printed set of questions and recording their answers using Microsoft Forms.

Participants were selected at random and given the option of taking part. The refusal rate was 18% and the site with the highest level of refusals was Cliffe Pools with a refusal rate of 50%.

Surveys took place throughout the year and at all locations we cover across North Kent. The number of surveys completed at each location reflects the number of visitors we engage with at each site.

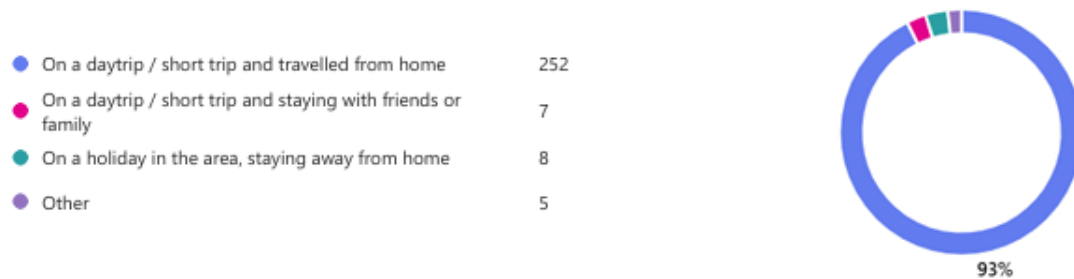
The questions asked were based on the original Footprint methodology but only those which could be analysed within our own team's capacity. For instance, Footprint had originally given GPS trackers to respondents to track the routes they took on site but as we don't have access to that technology or analysis software, we did not include that question.

Respondents were asked to provide the post code they had travelled from to allow us to calculate the distance travelled to reach the site. Some respondents were reluctant to give this information so in these instances only the first part of the post code was provided.

The only demographic data recorded was whether the respondent was male or female to ensure an even spread. No personal or identifying data was collected to ensure compliance with GDPR.

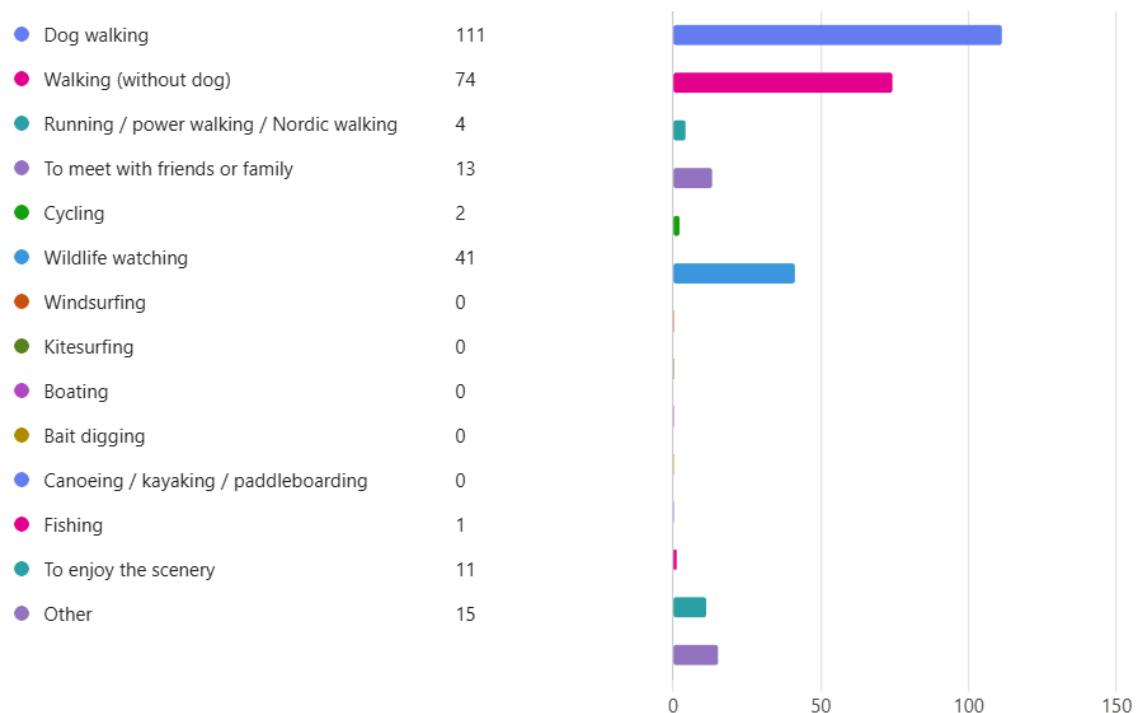
Results and Comparisons

Q1. Which of the following best describes your situation today? (select 1 option only)



93% of respondents had travelled from home. This compares with 96% in the original surveys. 7% were staying with friends or family and 3% on holiday and staying away from home. This is higher than the original surveys and can be attributed to the difference in survey period with our surveys also taking place throughout the summer holiday season.

Q2. What is the main activity you are undertaking today? (select 1 option only)

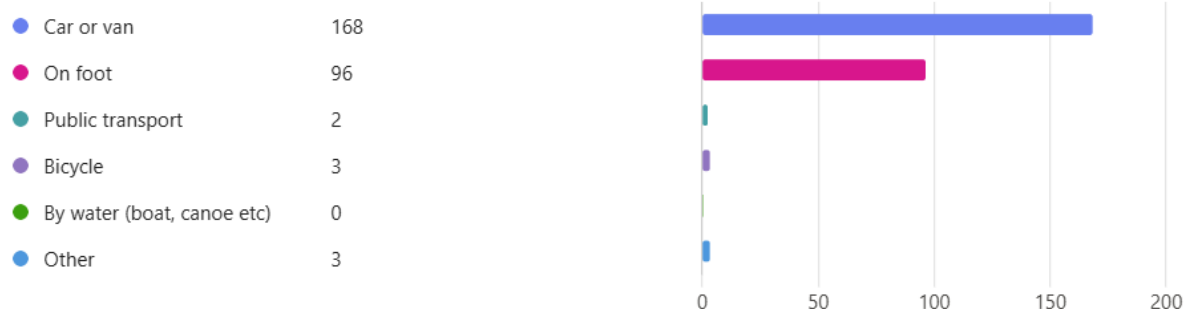


Dog walking was the most popular activity followed by walking without a dog and wildlife watching. A comparison to the original surveys is provided in the table overleaf.

Activity	No of responses (2012)	% of responses (2012)	No of responses (2025)	% of responses (2025)
Dog walking	323	62	111	41
Walking	119	23	74	27
Wildlife Watching	19	4	41	15
Cycling	16	3	2	1
Bait digging	11	2	0	0
Jogging / power / Nordic walking	9	2	4	1
Outing with family / children	8	2	0	0
Other	8	2	15	6
Fishing	3	1	1	0
See the sea and enjoy the scenery	3	1	11	4
Boating	1	0	0	0
Meet up with friends or family	1	0	13	5
Total	521		272	

The results demonstrate that the percentage of dog walkers has decreased and the percentage of those walking without a dog or wildlife watching has increased. The lack of respondents engaging in water-based activities reflects where the surveys were conducted, being at access points used mainly by people on foot. We recommend that separate surveys are conducted in future to ascertain behaviour of visitors participating in recreational activities on the water.

Q3. How did you travel here today? (select 1 option only)



62% of respondents travelled to site by car or van which is almost the same as the original survey at 63%. 35% arrived on foot compared to 34% in 2012 and those answering 'other' included holiday coach and motorcycle. This demonstrates there has been no change in modes of transport since the original surveys.

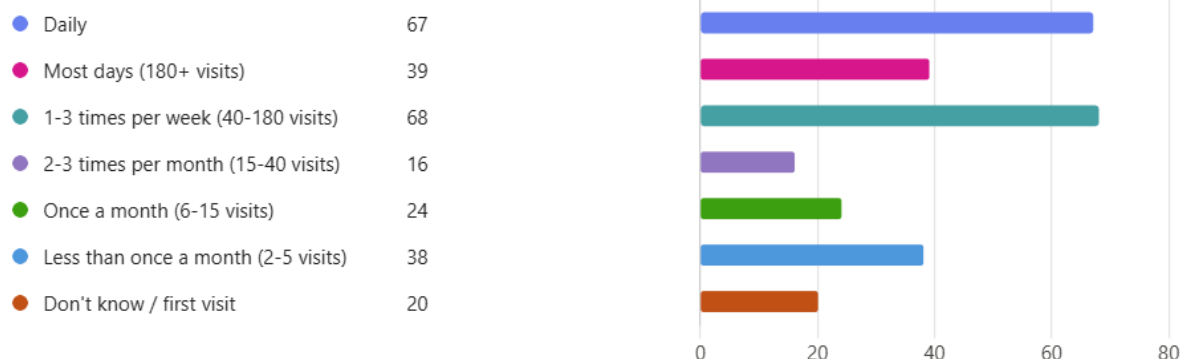
Q4. How long have you spent, or will you spend here today?



For this question there has been a change in the time spent on site. In 2012, 57% of respondents spent less than one hour and 30% spent 1-2 hours whereas now we are seeing people generally spending longer on site.

This could be explained as the original footprint data did not include those people who answered they were on holiday or staying with friends. Also, their surveys were only conducted in winter when people generally spend less time outdoors.

Q5. Over the past 12 months, how often have you visited this part of the coastline?



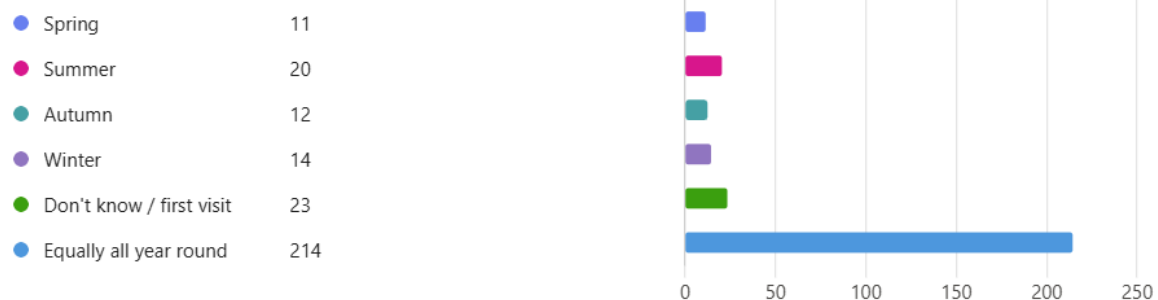
25% of respondents visited daily compared to 26% in 2012. Those answering as most days were 14% in 2025 and 18% in 2012 and more people answered they visit 1-3 times per week with 25% in 2025 compared to 23% in 2012. This shows there has not been a statistically significant change in visitor behaviour for this question.

Q6. Do you tend to visit this part of the coastline at a particular time of day? (Multiple answers ok)

Time of day	2025 responses %	2012 responses %
Morning	42%	39%
Afternoon	33%	37%
No preference	25%	24%

There has been a very slight increase in the percentage of visitors preferring morning visits to the coast. This may reflect a change in working patterns following the Covid-19 pandemic with more people working from home. Overall, there is no statistically significant change in visitor patterns.

Q7. Do you tend to visit this area more at a particular time of year? (multiple answers ok)



The vast majority (73%) of respondents indicated that they visit the site equally all year round, which is an increase compared to 61% in 2012. This is significant for Bird Wise as it supports our activity on site year-round and allows us to reach regular visitors to coastal sites regardless of the season.

Q8. What is your main reason for visiting this site today? (Choose maximum of 2 options only)

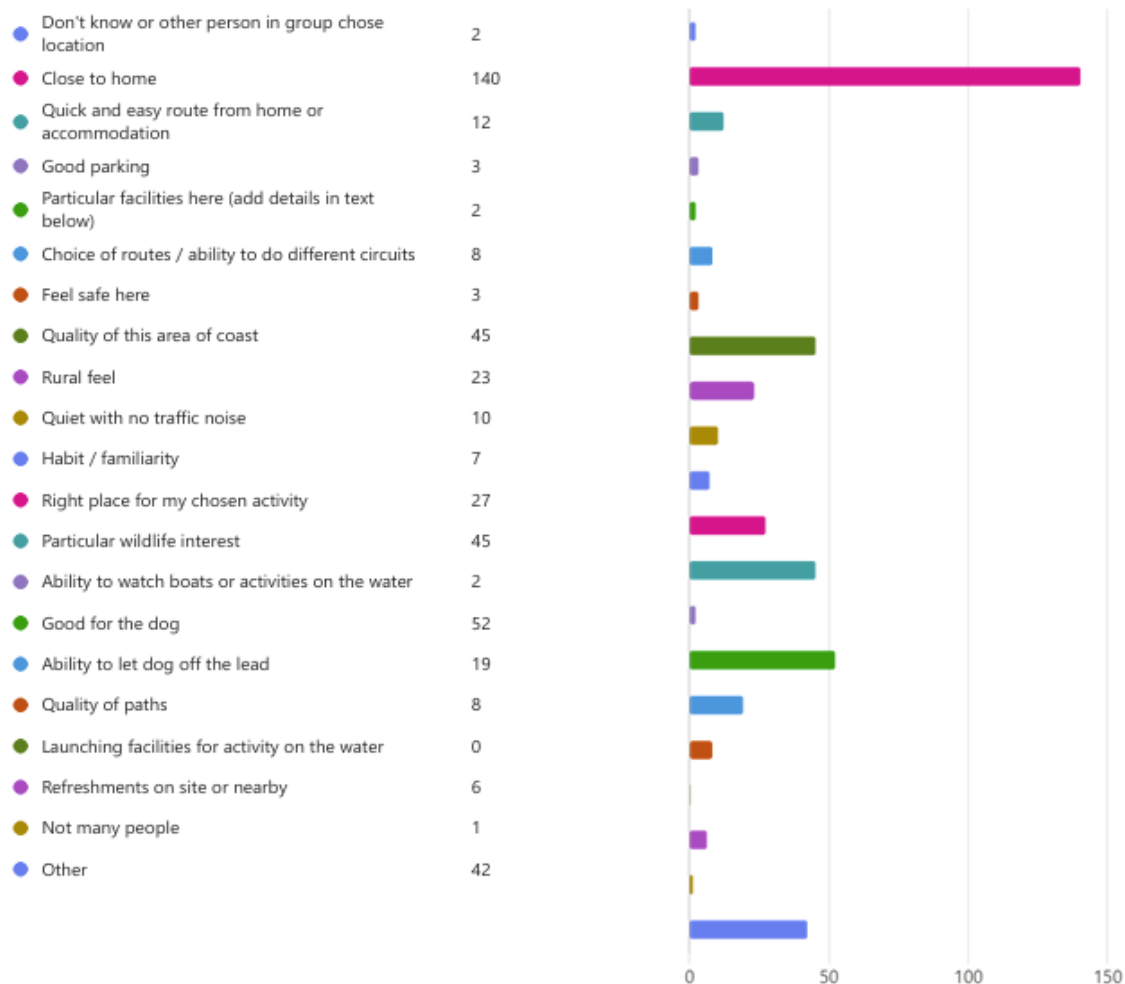
Visitors were asked why they had chosen that site for their recreational activities from a range reasons.

The most popular motivation selected was that it was close to home as stated by 31% of visitors, compared to 28% in 2012. Other reasons selected with comparison to the 2012 results: good for the dog 11% (down from 26% in 2012), particular wildlife interest 10% (up from 3% in 2012), quality of this area of coast 10% (up from 4% in 2012).

This year only 6% of respondents chose the right place for their activity compared to 12% in 2012.

These results suggest that proximity to home is still the most important consideration when choosing a location for recreational activities but that the quality of coast and access to wildlife are more key factors now than previously thought.

The full results are shown in the following table.



Q9. Aside from this location, which of the following North Kent sites do you visit on a regular basis (at least six times a year) select all that apply.

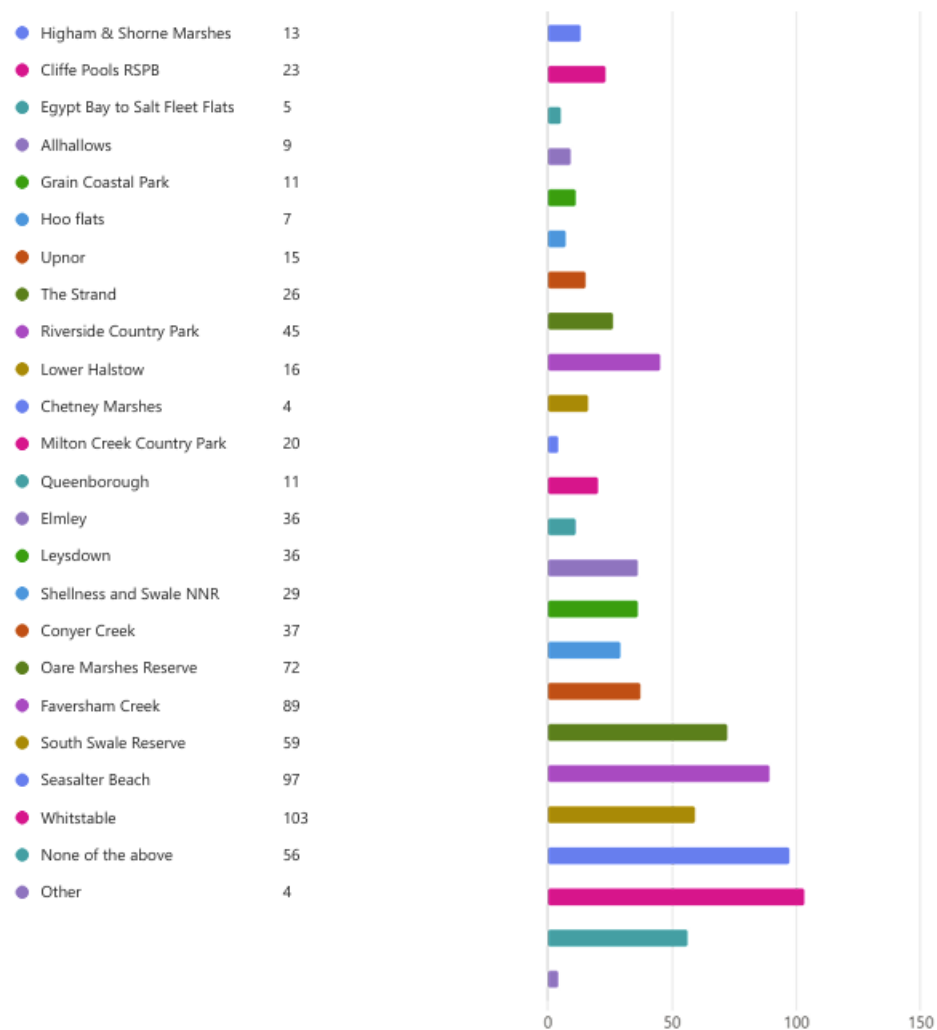
Whitstable (13%), Seasalter (12%) and Faversham (11%) were the most popular sites selected by respondents which is unsurprising given these are the locations where the most surveys were completed.

All the sites identified were selected by at least 4 respondents.

Chetney Marshes and Egypt Bay were selected by only 1% of respondents which is unsurprising given these are our most remote sites in North Kent.

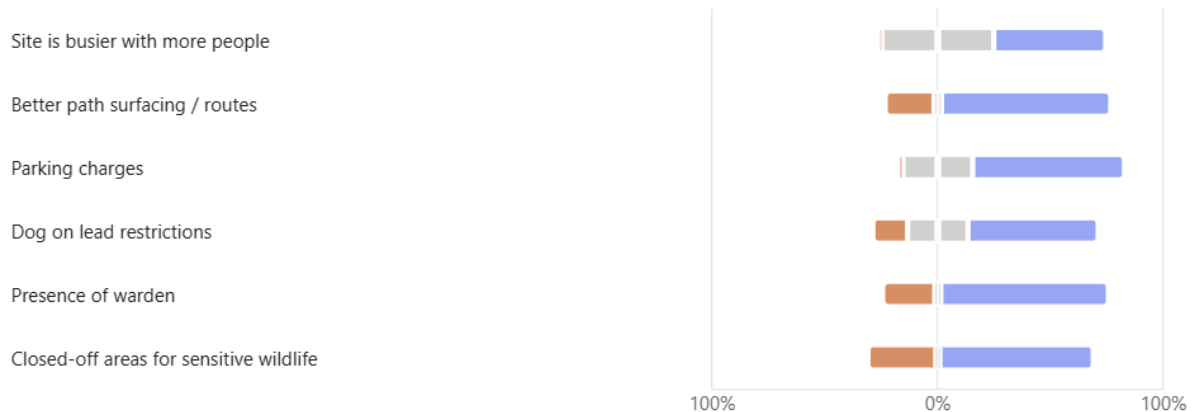
The list suggests that people are still most likely to visit locations with facilities such as availability of food, parking and toilets. It also shows that our Rangers are spending the correct amount of time at locations according to how busy they are likely to be.

The full results are shown on in the table below.



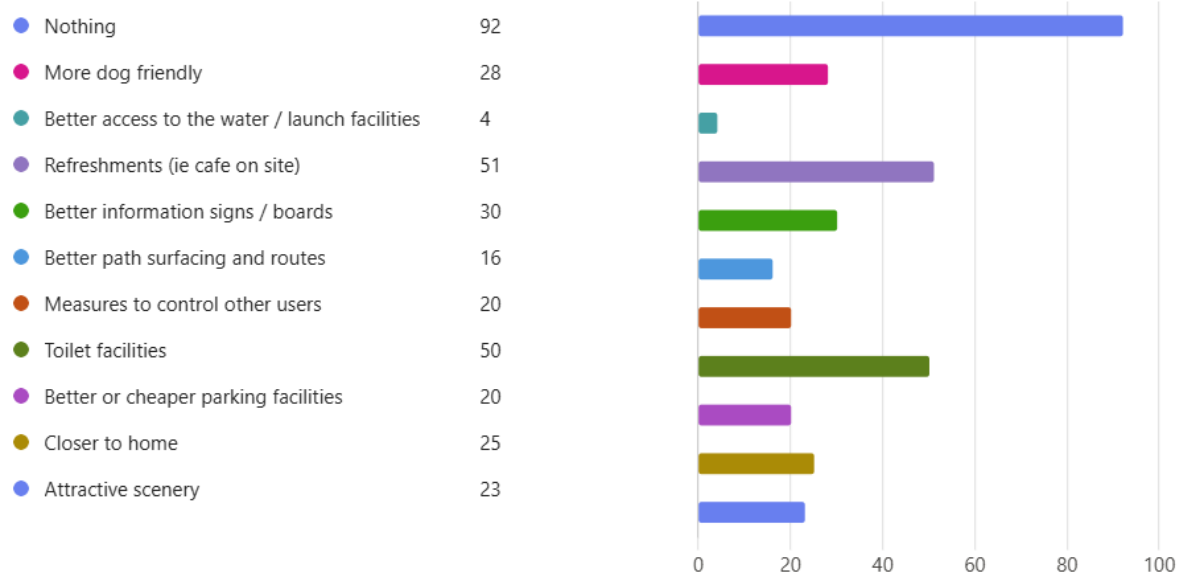
Q10. In terms of this location, if the following changes were made would you spend more or less time here? (Select 1 option per statement)

More Less Neither / don't know



These results suggest that most potential changes on site would have little or no impact on the frequency of their visits. Interestingly, closed-off areas for sensitive wildlife attracted a higher percentage of visitors indicating they would spend more time on site at 30% compared to only 3% in 2012. This can be explained by the higher percentage of visitors indicating that their main reason for visiting the site was a particular wildlife interest. The general business of a site had the highest impact on visitor frequency with 50% saying they would visit less frequently compared with 32% in 2012, suggesting that visitors appreciate the space offered by coastal locations.

Q11. What features would be necessary to make an alternative site more attractive to you instead of this one? (select maximum of 2 options only)



Many respondents indicated that nothing would attract them to an alternative site, suggesting it would be difficult to deflect visitors to other sites. The key features that could make a site more attractive were refreshments and toilet facilities, both at 14%.

This aligns with the responses seen in questions 9 and 10 which illustrate that sites with facilities are more attractive but that changes are unlikely to affect frequency of visit.

Q12. Do you have any comments about this site?

217 responses were received to this question. Whilst it is difficult to analyse every qualitative response, key themes were noted.

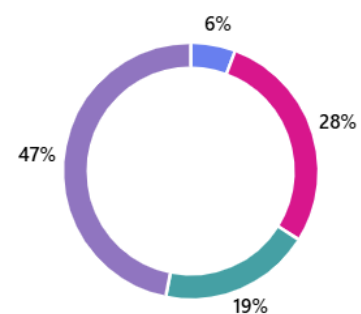
Most comments praised the calmness and tranquillity of the sites and expressed positive feelings about the quality of nature on view.

The main negative theme was concentrated on litter with requests for more bins for general and dog waste on the sites.

Other comments included more seating, better signage, dislike of Oyster beds at Whitstable, and poor condition of paths in winter.

Q13. Before meeting us today, were you aware of Bird Wise North Kent? (select all that apply)

● Yes, I follow on social media	18
● Yes, previously met staff	90
● Yes, have seen signage on site	61
● No	149



This question was added to the survey to understand whether respondents were engaging with Bird Wise North Kent. 53% of respondents had heard of the project and had some engagement with staff or our social media.

These findings are positive but 47% were not aware of us, indicating that we need to do more publicity to reach wider audiences.

Location of surveys undertaken

The table below shows where surveys were completed, the number at each, from highest to lowest and the percentage of refusals.

Site Name	District	Number of surveys completed	Refusal rate %
Whitstable	Canterbury	61	26
Riverside Country Park	Medway	56	9
Oare Marshes Reserve	Swale	37	0
Grain Coastal Park	Medway	21	15
Leysdown	Swale	12	0
Lower Halstow	Swale	12	31
South Swale Reserve	Canterbury	12	0
Faversham Creek	Swale	10	33
Seasalter Beach	Canterbury	10	17
Cliffe Pools RSPB	Medway	8	50
Milton Creek Country Park	Swale	8	0
Queenborough	Swale	8	17
Conyer Creek	Swale	5	0
Higham & Shorne Marshes	Gravesham	4	0
Hoo flats	Medway	3	0
Shellness and Swale NNR	Swale	3	0
Allhallows	Medway	1	0
Upnor	Medway	1	0

There were four potential locations where no surveys were completed. These were Egypt Bay to Salt Fleet Flats in Medway and Chetney Marshes in Swale which are particularly remote locations that our Rangers visit infrequently, and no visitors were seen during the visits there. Also, Elmley Nature Reserve was included in the potential list, but our engagement has not covered that site this year as access is professionally managed by the reserve, so we are not currently needed there. The Strand in Gillingham was also not included as efforts were focused on the wider area of Riverside Country Park.

Timing of surveys undertaken

The original Footprint surveys were conducted during January and February 2021 and involved a concentrated period using multiple surveyors. Due to the capacity of our small team, our surveys took place throughout the entire year during normal site visits by our Rangers. Recording the season that surveys took place allows us to refine the data sets to see if people travel from further afield at different times of the year and to which locations.

The 2025 visitor surveys were undertaken as follows:

Season	Number of surveys completed
Spring	25
Summer	72
Autumn	60
Winter	115

As the SAMMS projects exist primarily to mitigate the impact of recreational disturbance on over wintering bird populations in North Kent, most surveys took place in autumn and winter (65%) with 35% in spring and summer.

Distances travelled to visit each site.

Respondents were asked to provide their postcode to allow us to calculate the distance travelled by them to each site. The purpose of this was to compare the average distance travelled by all respondents to the original data collected by Footprint which informed the 6km zone of influence.

The data was passed to the GIS team at Medway Council to calculate the linear distance from each respondent postcode to the site where the survey was conducted.

Some respondents were reluctant to provide a full postcode so only gave the first half. This allowed us to identify which area they had travelled from but if this matched the first half of the site postcode, as was the case on several respondents, a distance of zero was calculated.

Using the full data, we can calculate the overall average distance for all respondents and to filter out specific groups to compare with the original Footprint data. The following tables provide a detailed breakdown based on different scenarios.

Table 1 – Average Distance Travelled to Each Site for all respondents all year round.

Site Name	Distance (KM)
Allhallows	0
Cliffe Pools RSPB	16
Conyer Creek	2
Faversham Creek	16
Grain Coastal Park	8
Higham & Shorne Marshes	4
Hoo flats	0
Leysdown	9
Lower Halstow	5
Milton Creek Country Park	1
Oare Marshes Reserve	17
Queenborough	3
Riverside Country Park	6
Seasalter Beach	16
Shellness and Swale NNR	33
South Swale Reserve	27
Upnor	1
Whitstable	31
Average	11

Table 1 demonstrates that some sites attract visitors from further afield due to the facilities available, the quality of wildlife interest on site and potential activities to be undertaken there. The large distance travelled to Shellness and South Swale supports

this as one respondent we spoke to regularly travels from South London to photograph birds there.

When analysing the data further, it was clear that 67% of respondents had travelled from within the 6km zone of influence. Although this was less than the 75% in the Footprint data, we must be aware that this is all year round and includes people on holiday as well as local residents. Using just the surveys completed in autumn and winter, the percentage of visitors travelling from within 6km is 72%.

To compare with the original Footprint data, it is necessary to focus only on the surveys undertaken in autumn and winter, and only those respondents travelling from their home for the day. Table 2 demonstrates this data:

Table 2 - Average Distance Travelled to Each Site for respondents on day trips travelling from home during autumn and winter.

Site Name	Average Distance (KM)
Allhallows	0
Cliffe Pools RSPB	14
Conyer Creek	2
Faversham Creek	2
Grain Coastal Park	6
Higham & Shorne Marshes	4
Hoo flats	0
Leysdown	7
Lower Halstow	5
Milton Creek Country Park	2
Oare Marshes Reserve	9
Queenborough	3
Riverside Country Park	5
Seasalter Beach	8
Shellness and Swale NNR	33
South Swale Reserve	4
Whitstable	5
Average	6

This data supports the 6km zone of influence on our over wintering bird populations at North Kent as the average distance travelled is 6km when taking all sites into consideration. Some of the respondents from Cliffe Pools were RSPB groups from other regions that had travelled there on organised day trips. The distance to Shellness and South Swale was explained on the previous page. We can see that during autumn and

winter seasons our coastal sites are being used primarily by local people, with the greatest differences noted at Whitstable, Seasalter and Faversham.

For comparison, the average distance travelled by holiday makers or those staying with friends all year round was 77km with the furthest distance travelled being a holiday maker from Sunderland staying in Whitstable. In spring and summer, holiday makers were only recorded at 5 sites: Faversham Creek, Leysdown, Oare Marshes, South Swale and Whitstable.

In warmer weather, people travel further with the average distance travelled by people visiting a site from their home during spring and summer at 11km.

Conclusions

Whilst there are some differences in the methodology between the original Footprint data and our own visitor surveys, this has provided a useful snapshot of how visitors are using coastal sites across the North Kent marshes.

From the surveys conducted in autumn and winter we can be confident that the 6km zone of influence that informs which dwellings contribute to the SAMMS tariff remains valid.

It is interesting to note that visitor behaviour has seen minor change in terms of choice of sites or frequency of visits. Minor shifts in the time that people visit the site or spend on site can potentially be attributed to changes post lockdown with more people working from home with greater flexibility. This helps us identify when our team are most effective on site.

Further analysis of the survey data can be conducted to establish which recreational activities people are willing to travel further to undertake, and what times different recreational activities are most likely to be undertaken. This can be done as time allows but for the purpose of this report, the analysis has provided a picture of how and when sites are being used, and which factors and facilities matter most, or least, to recreational visitors.

The data will be used to inform which sites our engagement activities are most beneficial, and which audiences we should be engaging with throughout the year.