Community Engagement and Advocacy Report

Support Staffordshire

"Wherever you are, there's green spaces and the water, they are linked, and you are always close to something."

~ Etruria Canal Festival

Paul L.G. Morris

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who took part in the community engagement, from giving comments and ideas, to welcoming us at your groups and events. We appreciate all the time and attention you gave us. Without you, we could not have discovered so much useful information on what matters to people in our local communities.

Contents

Introduction

Transforming the Trent Headwaters is an 18-month feasibility study funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The aims of the project are to:

1. Establish the geographical area for the Trent Headwaters and themes for improvements to enhance habitats to benefit wildlife, landscape heritage and people.
2. Engage local communities and partners to better understand the needs, priorities and opportunities within the project area.
3. Develop a partnership across the Trent Headwaters area of local environmental charities, voluntary sector organisations, universities, local councils and relevant others working together to raise funding.
4. Create outline projects for development that respond to the opportunities and priorities identified, with the intention that these will be delivered by the collective partnership.

This report is written to inform the Transforming the Trent Headwaters feasibility project and help fulfil the second aim.

The project has undertaken an in-depth study with three core components:
- Cultural heritage
- Natural heritage
- Community engagement and advocacy

The area covered in the project reaches from Biddulph Moor, through Stoke-on-Trent and across to Keele bank and the eastern side of Newcastle under Lyme (urban and suburban), ending at Trentham (suburban).
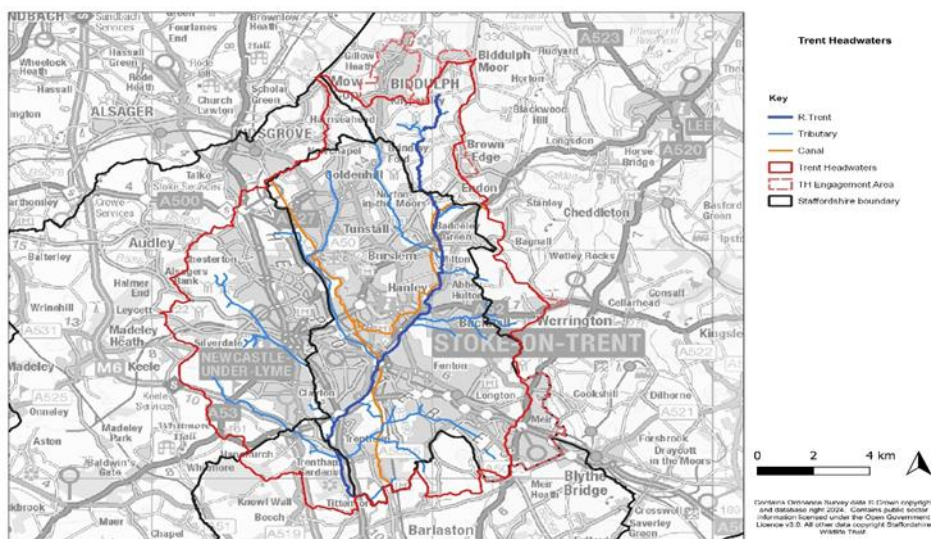

Figure 1: Map of the Trent Headwaters project area

Community Background

Stoke-on-Trent makes up 52% of the project area and is mostly urban while the areas of Newcastle under Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands that are covered by the project are a mix of urban, suburban and rural environments. Particular localities within the project area are recognised as dealing with one or more forms of deprivation such as lower-than-average income, education and literacy levels, health outcomes, access to services and digital communications[1].

Table 1 shows some comparison data between the districts, but this does not mirror the project area, as Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands Council districts include communities that live outside the project area. The topics chosen for comparison cover a range of issues that have some relevance for the project, however other comparison data is available through the same links in the references.

Table 1: Office for National Statistics Comparison data for Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle under Lyme

Factor	National Average	Staffordshire Moorlands[2]	Stoke-on-Trent[3]	Newcastle under Lyme[4]
Employment Rate	76.8%	80.9%	75%	89.6%
Claimant Count	3.2%	2.2%	6.1%	3.2%
Gross Disposable Household Income	£21 359	£20 962	£15 900	£19 836
GCSE English and Maths/100 000 people	76.1%	75.9%	66.9%	71.9%
No qualifications	6.6%	16.6%	8.4%	No data
Adult obesity	26.8%	27.6%	34.7%	30.1%
Child obesity Year 6	21%	21%	26.5%	24.9%
Preventable cardiovascular mortality/100 000 people	28.6	28.6	42	33.9
Female Healthy Life Expectancy years	60.7	No data	55	No data
Male Healthy Life Expectancy years	60.6	No data	56.2	No data
Life Satisfaction/10	7.5	7.5	7.2	7.6
Greenhouse gas emissions tCO$_2$/person	4.7	11.8	4.3	6.0
Gigabit capable broadband	86.3%	70.6%	95.1%	82.2%

Time to travel to employment by public transport/walking	11.5 mins	16.3 mins	11.4 mins	13.4 mins
Sport facilities/ 10 000 people	18.6	21.5	13.9	18.7
Museums/100 000 people (visits%)	4.2 (42%)	9.4 (40%)	3.5 (33%)	4.1 (42%)
Visited a heritage site	67%	64%	51%	61%
Engaged with the arts	91%	92%	86%	90%
Local Authority Ranking Most Income Deprivation/316		221 (2/59 neighbourhoods)[5]	25 (72/159 neighbourhoods)[6]	159 (9/80 neighbourhoods)[7]

Statistics vary by source and across time, however the general picture remains the same. The employment rate in Stoke-on-Trent is below the national average, with Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle being above the national average. Locally, it is easy to think of Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle under Lyme as being relatively better off areas, however all these areas have below average disposable income with Stoke-on-Trent being much lower than average. Stoke-on-Trent has significantly greater deprivation than either Newcastle or Staffordshire Moorlands, but it is important to remember that statistical averages in "better off" areas can mask individuals lived experience of deprivation in any area and, while the elements of rural and urban deprivation may differ, the impacts on individuals can be similar.

Locally, health issues such as obesity and preventable cardiovascular mortality are at best average for Staffordshire Moorlands or at worst greater than the national average. Healthy life expectancy in Stoke-on-Trent is approximately four to five years below the national average for both men and women. Life satisfaction was close to average for all areas although slightly lower for people living in Stoke-on-Trent.

The availability of gigabyte capable broadband is better than average in Stoke-on-Trent although that does not mean that everyone has access or can use it. During a training session on health literacy by Staffordshire County Council it was noted that 5G coverage gets worse the further from the mast a person's mobile phone is. As the local 5G mast is based on the Wirral, a lot of people in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent live within the last mile of 5G coverage, adversely affecting the service and connectivity.

People living in Staffordshire Moorlands have more sports and museum facilities per person, but may not live near them and, in fact, visits to museums were close to the national average and not above it. Visits to museums or galleries were below average for Stoke-on-Trent and there are fewer museums in the area than the national average. Unsurprisingly, public or active travel in Staffordshire Moorlands takes longer and the figure for Newcastle under Lyme includes the more rural areas outside the project area. Visits to a heritage site are below average in all areas but particularly in Stoke-on-Trent.

Ethnic diversity across the project area ranges from 97.7% white British/Irish/English /Welsh/Scottish in some political wards to small percentages of people who identify as being of Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, African, Caribbean, Irish, Roma, Traveller, other white or mixed heritage[8]. The cultural heritage mix across wards does vary greatly, with some being very varied and others predominately white British. 91.17% of people in Stoke-on-Trent speak English as their first language, which means just over 8% of people use another language at home, although they may be fluent in English as well[8]. During the community engagement phase one person from the More in Common Network commented that 47 different languages were spoken locally. According to the 2021 census 85.6% of people in Stoke-on-Trent were born in England, with Pakistan as the second most common country of birth (2.3%). Poland and Romania made up 1.2% and 1.5% of countries of birth respectively[9].

The Survey of Adult Skills 2023 notes that 18% of adults in England have a low level of literacy meaning they would struggle to complete reading tasks with longer texts and distracting information[10]. This is the equivalent of the reading ability expected of a 5- to 7-year-old child. Literacy is defined as being able to access, understand, evaluate and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential to participate in society. Higher literacy skills are associated with being in work or a student, higher educational achievement, not having a health condition or disability, being born in the UK and learning English as a child. The Survey of Adult Skills 2023 also noted that the older people are the lower the literacy scores tend to be. It is not clear if this was due to outdated teaching methods in childhood, cognitive decline or reduced need to use literacy skills after retiring from work.

Although it has not been possible to find information on literacy rates relevant to the Trent Headwaters area, the Learning and Work Institute provides information on essential skills (literacy and numeracy). This indicates that 23% of people in Staffordshire Moorlands, 23.8% of people in Stoke-on-Trent and 23.5% of people in Newcastle under Lyme lack the lack the essentials skills needed to manage literacy, numeracy and would therefore struggle with digital and financial skills, health literacy and citizenship[11]. Those people are more likely to be excluded from finding and keeping work, accessing public services (including health services), making use of advice and information, using digital means to stay in contact with others, make bookings or order shopping online.

Understanding community profiles and needs can help to inform project planning and development. It is a starting point for what needs to be considered when working with people and communities although there needs to be scope to adapt and build on that knowledge. Most people have connections to different relevant communities at different times of day, week, month (family, friends, work, hobbies and interests, neighbours and places, lifestyles, cultural heritage, faith, ethnicity etc.) and the mix for each person in combination with health, income, skills, knowledge, resources, disability, education, literacy etc. makes everyone unique. There is no "one size fits all" approach to engagement that will be effective and inclusive of all people in any single community, much less across a project area as wide as Transforming The Trent Headwaters.

Engagement approaches that are effective for some people need to be checked, reconsidered and adapted to be inclusive for other people and communities.

A number of national funding sources are available because of the national acknowledgement of the difficulties facing local people (Arts Council, Levelling Up, Literacy Trust funding, National Lottery, Sport England etc.). The funding does support a range of community groups in various neighbourhoods and many people are proud and passionate about their local area, community, history and culture.

Many of the successful community organisations are led by people who have a grass-roots approach, creating community and social cohesion through the way they work. Examples of this include, but are not limited to the Portland Inn Project, Middleport Matters, Meir Matters, Temple Street Methodist Church. A number of local organisations have been set up and are being run by people from within the community, with experience (lived or otherwise), witnessing the practical impact of policy and funding changes in their communities and environments and working determinedly over years to counteract negative impacts (for example Cobridge CIC, Chesterton Chatty Café, Expert Citizens CIC). Many local community organisations were set up to provide or link in with social, well-being and welfare support and advice (dDeaflinks, Tri-Services Veterans, Young at Heart). There is a strong community arts network in the area (such as B-Arts, Urban Wilderness, Outside). In practice, effective community organisations work in a range of ways, ideally their presence survives cycles and changes of funding, while personal and societal benefits overlap.

Community leaders in these organisations have become a trusted presence having earned that position over lengthy periods of time, showing their commitment and integrity in the way they work, through continued efforts of genuine inclusion, reaching out to people, asking, listening, acknowledging, adapting and developing to engage people and sustain the commitment. Many of these groups are run and advised by groups of local people, working "with and within" and not "for". There is an increasing awareness of the benefits of co-creation and co-production for genuinely sharing control of community issues and approaches to solutions by empowering people in communities to identify, choose and define issues and aims, then make decisions on the approach along the way. People bring their lived experience, knowledge, skills and share these in the process but as they think about and identify the issues and approaches, there is a greater ownership of, investment in, and commitment to the solutions. Co-production takes time, challenges assumptions and may not lead to the outcomes anticipated, it is a way of working and the benefits are in the experience of and commitment to the process rather than achieving predetermined outputs.

People who attend these community groups appear to be mostly (but not exclusively) people who live locally, who found a group reliably welcoming and came to value the social connection and sense of purpose (Reaching North Staffs, Walk Talk Action among others). Some of those regular attendees have become volunteers, developing connections, skills and confidence. When truly engaged and involved in community

organisations, people's knowledge and skills can make the difference between an organisation or project that leaves a legacy or folds when funding ends.

There is a wealth of evidence in health and social science literature showing that people with greater access to healthier lifestyles, better living and working conditions, easier access to health services, reliable transport and so forth tend to be people with higher incomes, better education etc. Factors such as socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity and disability in turn affect people's access to income, education and health outcomes. In 2025 Krenz and Amann found that young children, people from ethnic minorities and lower income groups in London experienced higher urban temperatures due to living in areas of greater deprivation and urban heat island effect than wealthier, predominantly white income groups[12]. People with health conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory conditions are adversely affected by higher temperatures and some medications are less effective in high temperatures or even reduce a physiological ability to cope with high temperatures[13]. Within the Trent Headwaters area, the indices of multiple deprivation map[14] and the Tree Equity map[15] closely follow areas of highest urban temperatures[16] showing that people living in more deprived areas are more likely to be at risk from the health impacts of summer heatwaves and are least likely to be able to afford ways to keep cool.

The Mental Health Foundation published a report in 2021 drawing on a wide range of research and conducting their own survey into mental well-being and nature connection. People with greater access to good quality green spaces (green, serene and biodiverse) have greater mental health benefits than people who have either less access or poor-quality spaces. Safety and accessibility were also significant factors[17]. People with higher levels of nature connection tend to have lower levels of depression and anxiety, furthermore the quality of nature connection was more significant to improving mental well-being than the quantity of time spent in nature[18].

Referring back to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and Tree Equity maps it comes as no surprise that people on lower incomes, whether due to single or overlapping reasons are more likely to live in areas of greater deprivation and therefore be the people with the greatest barriers to overcome and the least access to personal and community resources to improve their mental well-being. The local statistics relating to physical and mental health show there is both a need and opportunity to find realistic ways of improving people's health, ones that are enjoyable, affordable, accessible and can be included in daily life on a long term, sustainable basis. Such approaches are more aligned to local planning and green social prescribing than to NHS intervention.

White et al. (2019) analysed data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment survey and concluded that physical health benefits from engaging in nature are greater for people spending 2 hours in nature every week through the year, peaking at approximately 3 to 5 hours a week[19]. Natural England commissioned research to find out which groups of people were able to spend 2 hours or more in nature each week and therefore more likely to benefit from being in nature. The resulting Adult People and Nature Survey found that the people able to spend 2 hours or more in nature were more

likely to be older (55+), men, white, not living in a deprived neighbourhood, in good health, employed or retired[20]. The local demographic data suggests that most of the people in the Trent Headwaters area do not fit all of these elements and therefore there are significant numbers of people locally who are likely to experience one or more additional barriers to being in nature and experiencing the benefits. While having people and natural environments nearby is a great resource within the project area, there is clearly more to being engaged with nature than simply living near green spaces and watery places. A wide variety of accessibility issues were raised in the comments people gave us and have been dealt with in more detail towards the end of the report. There are people from a range of backgrounds in all the communities locally, so having a range of flexible approaches for community engagement is more likely to be effective.

Research shows that spending time in nature is linked to higher rates of engaging with some form of nature conservation or environmental care. This has been found apply to wilder areas as well as urban parks[21]. There are many different forms of nature connection (using different senses, emotions, positive experiences, learning, arts, sports or technology-based activities etc.) and so approaches should be diverse, adaptable and inclusive to reach as many people as possible. Broadening the pool of people to engage with may be expected to help to share the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors in nature along with finding ways to care about the natural environment on the doorstep. The project area is mainly an urban environment but one that has a great deal of official and unofficial green space. Get to the rise of a hill, from spring to early autumn and you will be greeted by greenery somewhere in the view, including within the city. The Trent Headwaters area has a wonderful resource of people and spaces that can be better connected, with people benefiting nature and nature benefiting people.

Lidice Garden Hanley; A view from Birches Head; A view above Trent Vale

What We Were Asked To Do

The community engagement and advocacy workers were asked to

- Find out what matters to local people when they think of green spaces and watery places.
- Share relevant information on natural and cultural heritage themes that came up from meeting local people.
- Talk to people who may not have been asked for their opinions on the environment.
- Spend time in community settings and reach 50 community groups.
- Attend local meetings and go to 20 events.
- Reach out to people who may not be connected to groups.

How We Did It

The community engagement and advocacy work had four days a week shared between two workers, one from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and one from Support Staffordshire. We were active on this engagement from May 2024 to December 2024 although we have been to groups and events since then. We each went to different groups and events most of the time, to reach more people and communities. We occasionally worked together to help and support each other, check we were working in compatible ways and asking the same questions. We were keen to let the issues that mattered to local people come through our work and we did not want to make any assumptions about what issues were relevant to local people, or to identify and define any issues ahead of meeting people. There is further discussion of what we asked below.

We were asked to reach communities who did not consider themselves to be primarily nature conservation groups. Experience from Transforming The Trent Valley scheme (2019-2024) was that groups that did not have a primary conservation or nature engagement aim had been harder to reach. We took our engagement to people through community organisations and events hosted by others rather than ask people to come to us. We chose this approach to try and reach people who might not think of themselves as being interested in or have time for a nature-based activity into their day-to-day life and to reach people who might struggle to get to our events for one reason or another.

We identified groups mostly through networking with locality connectors, social prescribers and searching on Facebook as this is where most community events and groups have a presence. We contacted community organisations at the heart of a local community, faith groups, welfare projects, support groups, arts organisations, sports clubs, walking groups, nature groups and frankly any group that would have us that we could get to in the time available. We sat indoors, chatted over tea and toast, got involved in activities, stood up and gave brief talks, went on walks, helped in community gardens and washed-up dishes.

We went to events for the public indoors and outdoors, families and children, events for health and well-being, encouraging children to read, local festivals, markets and networking events. We tried to reach people and groups that might have been missed in the past by nature conservation projects as well as talking to groups involved in nature. We used photographs, maps, post it notes, activities for children, including a river game, pinecones to handle and handed out identification guides.

We counted events as networking meeting and opportunities, annual or seasonal events hosted by one organisation but usually inviting several other organisations to have a stall or activity. We counted groups as people who would be likely to recognise each other and go to a community venue regularly at the same time most weeks.

We went to:

- 44 groups
- 56 events.

40 of these groups were new to the Transforming The Trent Headwaters team, having been out of area for the previous Transforming The Trent Valley scheme. A full list of the community groups and events we attended can be found at **Appendix A**.

Overall, we got:

- 1,069 comments
- 210 people comment cards fully or partly filled in

Who Did We Connect With?

We reached families with pre-school children to older people living in the community. We did not reach people in care homes or unable to get out of their homes. Some people told us of their disabilities, long term health conditions and short to medium term recovery from operations or health conditions. We talked to people with mental health conditions, long or short term. We spoke to people with learning disabilities, autism and other forms of neurodiversity. We did not reach people with significant cognitive deterioration or who were severely mentally unwell. We spent time with people recovering from addiction, but not actively addicted. We talked to a few people who were long-term homeless and sleeping rough or had experienced homelessness.

We chatted with people from a range of ethnicities; most people had English as a first language, but some did not. We met people who had lived all their lives in the area, some who had moved around the area and people who were once or recently newcomers to the area. We did connect with some young adults seeking safety in the area, either moving away from abusive family situations within the UK or seeking asylum from abroad.

Figure 2: Comment card responses to "How long have you lived in the area?"

We met men and women and people who told us they were transgender or non-binary. We met people from the LGBTQ+ community. We did not ask about faith background although some people were wearing clothing or items reflecting a particular religion. We did feel that we had not connected particularly well with groups and organisations from non-Christian faiths, possibly as several culturally specific events took place before we could either apply to attend or we did not have the resources to attend. From individual conversations we have had with people from ethnically diverse communities we think it is likely that the interest in nature is there in all communities (although not necessarily in all individuals) but further work would be needed to identify appropriate ways of engaging, which barriers are more daunting and what approaches would be more welcome.

We chose not to ask people for details on age, gender, ethnicity etc. in the conversations as we felt this would be off-putting when chatting with people in an informal way. We did

not ask for personal details as this was not needed for the work. Where possible we recorded broad age range, gender and ethnic background but we could not do this for everyone we spoke to, therefore this information cannot be relied on for statistical analysis. The comment cards did give people an option to share their age.
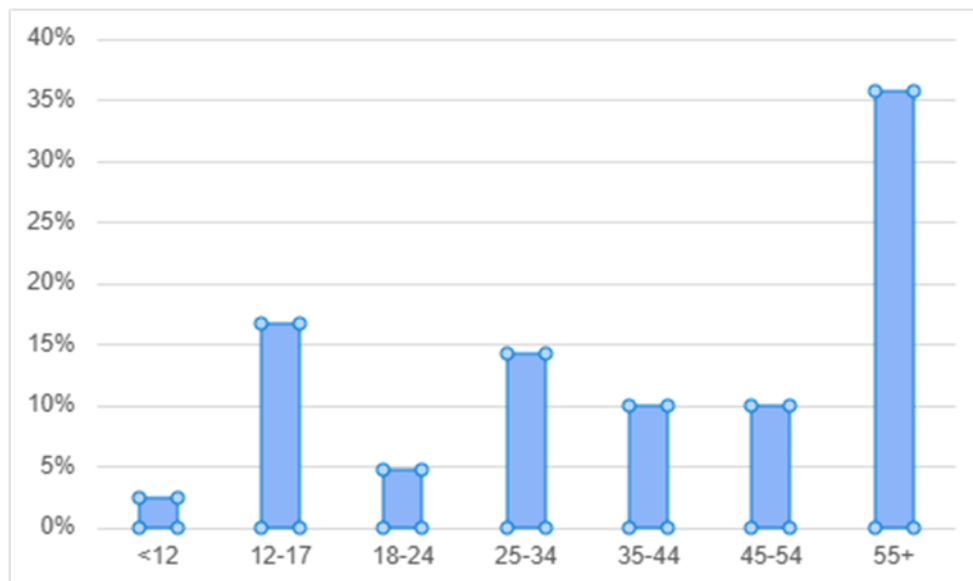
Figure 3: Ages of people filling in comment cards.

What Did We Ask?

We asked open questions through conversations. The key questions were:

> "What local green spaces matter to you?"

> "What local watery spaces matter to you?"

We chose to find out and follow what mattered to people, to tell us things we hadn't thought about and give us ideas and information that might help future community engagement. Although we wanted to guide the questions at the beginning into the local natural and cultural landscape heritage, we did not want to press the idea that nature should matter, and if it didn't matter to people, we were interested to hear about that too. The benefits of a chat were that we could change our language to suit different people, reach people who may not be comfortable reading and writing, follow up interesting comments. The drawback was that we might go off topic and forget certain questions. We made a note of the conversations and summarised these for entry into a database. A full list of conversational questions can be found at **Appendix B**. We asked the two main questions every time, but the replies could change the direction of the conversation, so remaining questions were more a guideline.

We sent the summary of each group or event comments back to each community organisation so they would know the issues that mattered and could follow up as they chose. We wanted to ensure that we were being open and honest and giving back to the communities who had been willing and able to work with us. As the project is a feasibility

study at this stage, we could not promise that we could follow up on the issues raised, although we sincerely hope that the effort and contribution put in by the community will be fruitful.

We created a comment card with a mix of open and closed questions to prompt replies to reach people less comfortable with chatting to us but who were comfortable with reading and writing. The comment card can be found at **Appendix C**. The comment cards were given out and some people chose to use these rather than chat or complete them and chat. We tried to create a QR link to an online version of the questionnaire, but this did not work effectively. We had blank cards for people to write additional comments which were added to the conversation data. We had an email address and a Facebook page, each getting one comment.
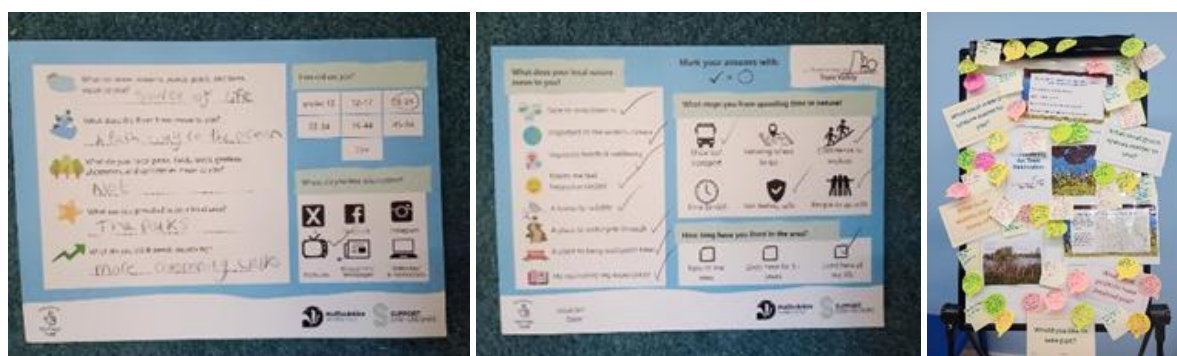
Comment cards: front and back; flipchart with comments

How we recorded all the comments

We added all the comments we got from May 2024 to December 2024 into a database. We grouped the comments into keyword themes to help analyse the data. For example, "We like walking in the park" was linked to three different keyword themes:

-        "We" - Companionship
-        "Walking" – Accessibility
-        "Park" – Green Space

We kept a broad view of the keyword themes and a note of their definitions to guide us in the classification. We initially had more keywords as we did not know how many themes would be significant and come up repeatedly, however we have since merged some of the keywords where separate categories were not useful in understanding the data. Keyword themes and the definitions can be found at **Appendix D**.

We did not ask people to separate their comments into positives and negatives as we did not want to risk misrepresenting comments by classifying them out of context. For example, "*I like otters*" was counted in the wildlife theme along with "*I don't like spiders*". Other comments such as "*We have lots of hidden green spaces*" were open to interpretation; was that a good thing to the person or a bad thing? We added all the comments from the response cards into another page on the database. We had hoped

to analyse the spoken comments in more detail, but we have had problems sharing the data and functionality of the spreadsheet between organisations.

What People Told Us

We have taken the main themes and discussed these below. Accessibility was a key issue, and we have discussed that in greater detail further on in the report.
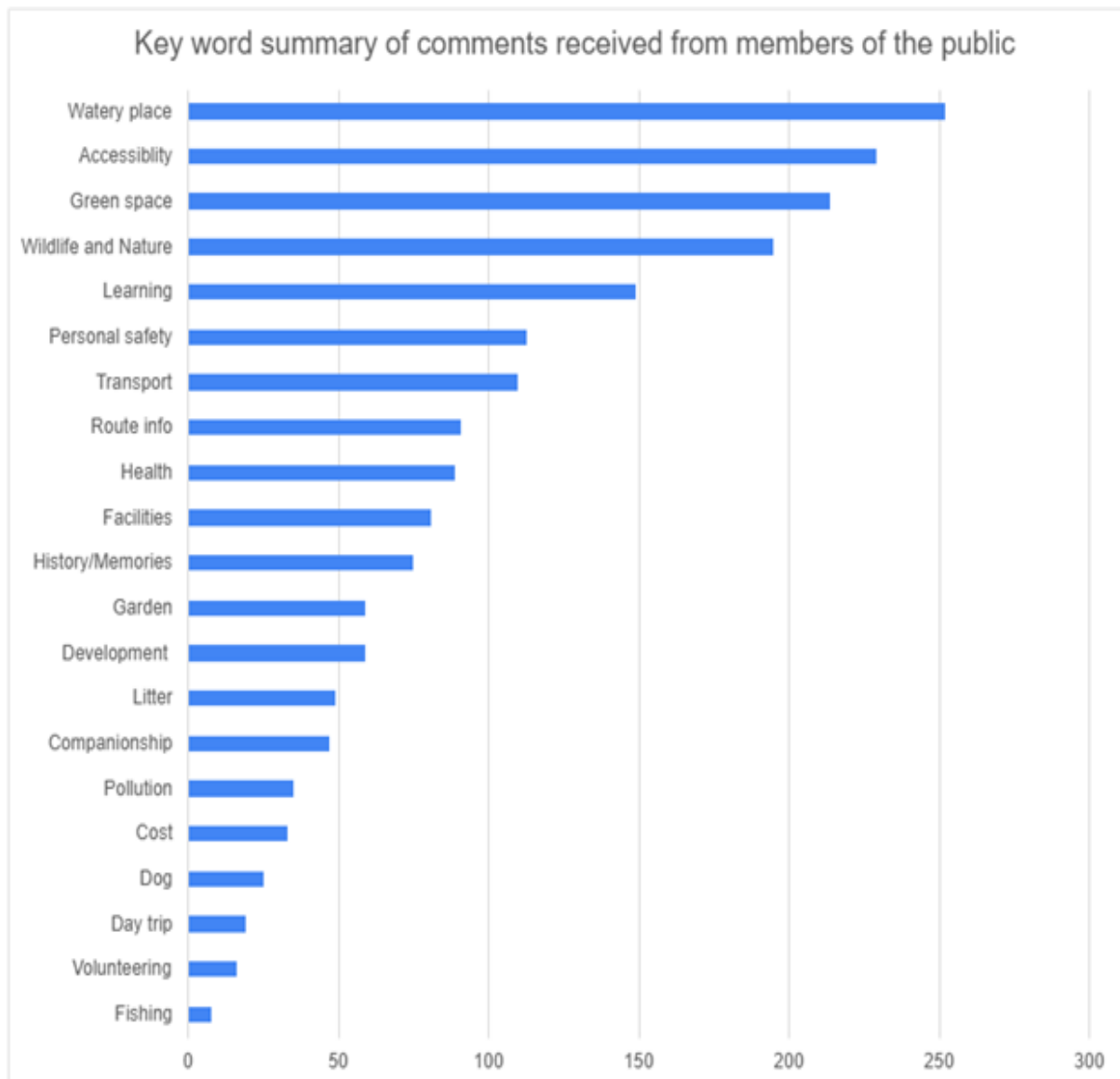
Figure 4: Keyword themes used to analyse the spoken comments

Watery Places

> "*The Trent, it needs nature.*"
> ~ Hanley Market

We wanted to know what people thought about rivers and brooks, canals, pools, ponds and lakes. Although future phases of the project will focus on the River Trent and its

headwaters, we wanted to know what was meaningful to local people so that we could tailor work to current levels of interest and knowledge.

We chose not to use the term "blue space" as this might not be meaningful and could be confused with the phrase "blue sky thinking". In the conversations 24% spoke of watery places.

Hanley Park Lake

The comment cards asked people what rivers, streams, ponds, pools and lakes meant to them and the answers reflected them being habitats for wildlife, peaceful and natural.

Figure 5: What Do Rivers, Streams, Pools, Ponds And Lakes Mean To You? Top 20 words used to reply.

We were interested in which watery places came to people's minds in the conversations.

Figure 6: Watery places mentioned in conversation by frequency (thanks to Abigail Yates Student Volunteer for creating the word cloud).

Although the River Trent was mentioned, canals were equally significant in people's replies. Historically, the canals were built because the Trent does not have enough depth to be navigable so close to the source. Most of the local canals flow close to the route of either the river or local brooks, but as the canals were built with towpaths, they are more accessible and probably better known as a result.

Many people expressed curiosity about the River Trent. A few people had a lot of knowledge about the Trent, notably people who had either worked, played along or studied its course. Some people were not aware that the Trent is a river that flows through the area and a lot of people asked where it flows.

> *"Where is the Trent? I've lived here all my life, and I don't know. I have seen it at Trentham but where does it come from and where does it go afterwards?"*
> ~ Walk Talk Action

> *"I never knew Stoke-on-Trent was named after a river. I've lived here 8 years and never knew that".*
> ~ Birches Head Get Growing.

> *"Where does the Trent flow?"*
> ~ Urban Wilderness CIC

Trent and canal feeder below Knypersley Reservoir; Trent at Norton Green; Trent near Joiner's Square.

Loss of connection with the river was commented on, particularly in relation to physical access being blocked by buildings and/or barriers to stop anti-social behaviour and to some extent by overgrown paths.

> *"We used to be able to get down to the Trent here, it flows behind Fishpond Way, but the council blocked the alleys up to stop anti-social behaviour…It's a shame because you have to walk all the way around to get to here and I can't walk that far anymore."*
> ~ Young at Heart, Abbey Hulton

> *"Stoke-on-Trent? You can't get on the Trent in Stoke, access to the river is poor."*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

> *"The footpaths along the river (Hanford, Michelin footbridge) need cutting back or it will get overgrown and stop people using the paths."*
> ~ Closer to Home, Stoke South

> *"I don't think I've been to a river."*
> ~ Young girl, Better Together, Trent Vale

The comment cards asked; "What does the River Trent mean to you?" The comments were more varied and ambivalent than the comments about unspecified watery places. While wildlife remained a key concept, water itself was a stronger theme. The sense that the Trent is a local, city river came through, with some people being unsure about some aspect of the river or noting that the river meant nothing to them. History and heritage did come up as meaningful ideas in relation to the Trent.
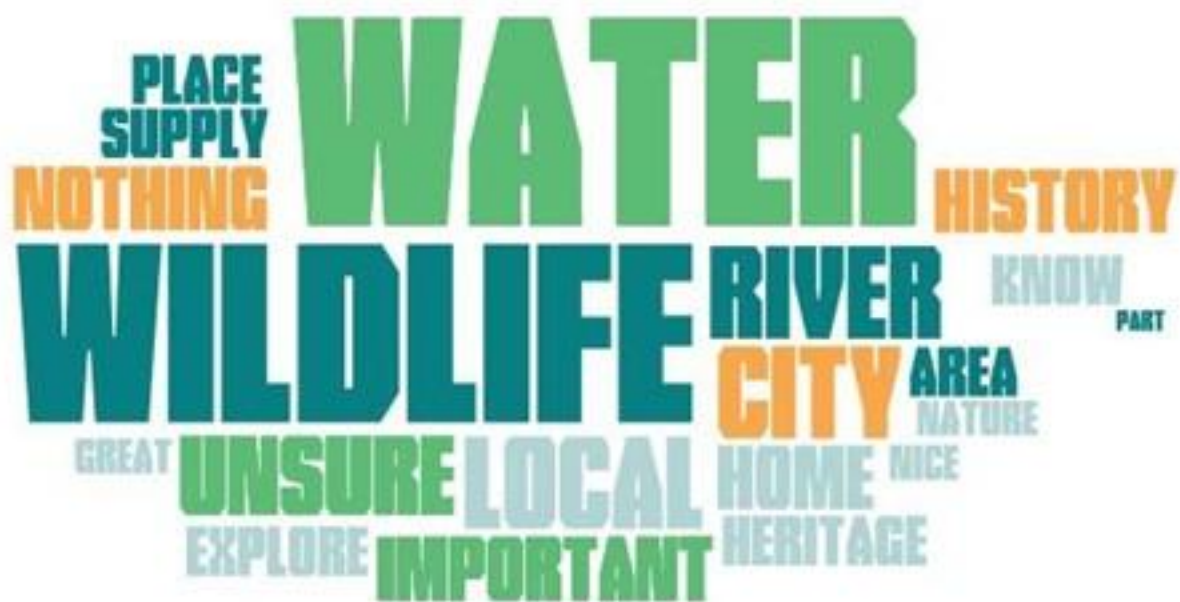
Figure 7: What Does The River Trent Mean To You? Top 20 words used in replies.

Fishing

Fishing was mentioned by 0.7% of people. We did meet up with Stoke-on-Trent Angling Society. Comments about fish were included in wildlife below. There were two mentions of trout and one of catfish from other members of the public.

Smithpool Fenton, Millpond below Knypersley Reservoir

Green Spaces

> *"The six towns, the green spaces are the gaps between the towns, it's a unique feature of the history of Stoke-on-Trent"*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

We asked about green spaces, and we explained these could be public, private or community gardens, allotments, nature reserves, parks, woods, cemeteries, rough ground, anywhere that plants grow. Almost everyone appreciated something outdoors in the natural world although people's knowledge, interest and access varied widely. There was pride in the better-known urban parks (Hanley, Victoria, Longton, Lyme Valley etc) and mention of country parks such as Silverdale and Greenway. There were fewer mentions green spaces such as Cobridge Park, Ferndown Nature Reserve, Fen Park, with

some people saying they didn't know the names of parks close to home or where they were.

20% of people mentioned a green space.

> "I never thought of Stoke as green, but from Asda at Wolstanton, if you look across it really does look green."
> ~ Chesterton Chatty Café.

> "Central Forest Park…great for walking…lucky to have greenspaces nearby."
> ~ Cobridge CIC

> "There's a lot of hidden gems around here. We go all over Knypersley Pool, the Grange, we live at Biddulph."
> ~ Greenway Bank Visitor Centre

View from behind Wolstanton retail park overlooking Stoke-on-Trent.

The comment cards asked people "What do your local parks, fields, trees, gardens, allotments and cemeteries mean to you?" and the word cloud below shows the keywords in the answers given.

Figure 8: What Do Your Local Parks, Fields, Trees, Gardens, Allotments and Cemeteries Mean To You? Top 20 words used in reply.

The comment cards asked, "What does your local nature mean to you?" People could tick as many or few options as they liked.

Table 2: comment card replies, "What does your local nature mean to you?"

What does your local Nature mean to you?	
Nice to look at/listen to	76%
Important to the world's climate	68%
Improves Health & wellbeing	74%
Makes me feel happy/connected	73%
A home for wildlife	76%
A place to walk/cycle through	71%
A place to hang out	62%
My memories/my experiences	56%

"Magic happens every time I go into Lyme Valley Park, whether it's a butterfly or the woman feeding the crow."
~ Newcastle Market

"We have ADHD, me and him (young son), we're outdoors a lot and we love it. He can burn off some energy outdoors. We walk through Park Hall to get to school and it's wonderful to see the ducks, the leaves on the trees".
~ Literacy Trust event, Bentilee

"This means a huge amount to me...we couldn't afford a house with a garden, so we were so lucky to be able to get somewhere near the Chatterley Whitfield nature reserve. I couldn't believe it when the work in the community garden started. I need space...being outdoors, in space makes all the difference."
~ Festival Stoke/Greening Ford Green, Bradeley.

Lyme Valley Park; Cherry blossom at Keele; Kingswood, Trentham

While most groups we contacted did not have a primary purpose of nature conservation, almost every group and event had people interested in, or engaged with nature, from

nurturing tomato plants on windowsills, having a community garden or allotment, to keen wildlife photographers, using natural objects to connect with nature through craft. A number of community organisations hosting foodbanks also had some form of community allotment or growing space as a way of enabling people to grow healthy food cheaply, in addition to the social and health benefits from shared outdoor activity.

Gardens

Garden comments referred to private gardens and allotments and were mentioned in conversation by 5% of people. These comments centred on gardens as places for wildlife, calm and growing food but there were comments about the lack of allotments and gardens.

"We have wild lawn and mown lawn. The wild lawn has native plants and we get grasshoppers, wasps, butterflies, it bring so much joy to see them."
~ B-Arts Climate Café

"There's no community garden and I don't know of one around here"
~ Meir Matters

"There's a pond in my back garden...I watch the frogs and toads. I think there has been interbreeding."
~ Reaching North Staffs, Brampton

"I have two allotments, I grow tomatoes, courgettes, the beans are over now. I have a flat and no garden so the allotment and getting outside is important to me."
~ Closer To Home Stoke South

"I love wildlife, we have a wildlife garden, but I don't know what plants to grow. Do the supermarket plants get treated with pesticides? That worries me... I'd love to get the children outdoors more and away from their screens."
~ Reaching North Staffs, Hanley

Our Space Woodland Garden; Birches Head Get Growing; Greening Ford Green/Bradeley

Wildlife and Nature

People spoke with pride about spotting wildlife and being out in nature (18%). Wildlife was counted as naming specific creatures while nature comments were non-specific. We excluded comments about pets and animals in captivity.

"There was a hedgehog living under my wheelchair ramp."
~ Our Space, Newcastle under Lyme

"There are herons in Hanley Forest Park, they have been seen in Northwood too."
~ Ford Green Hall, Spring Fair

There was a strong appreciation of urban wildlife when it was seen and many people spoke of or showed us photographs of the wildlife they had seen. Larger creatures were mentioned more often, possibly being easier to spot, photograph and recognise.

"I've turned to wildlife photography, I can't walk so far now, and I was looking around for something I could do that got me out. I find the camouflage training really useful, so the birds and wildlife don't get disturbed so much. There should be a river Trent wildlife photography competition."
~ Tri-Services Veterans, Hanley

"There are foxes and badgers at Etruria and Hartshill."
~ Etruria Canal Festival

"I've seen dragonflies, a newt and even a Golden Pheasant (photo), we live around here in Cobridge."
~ Cobridge CIC

Bee on wych elm; marsh marigold; water mint; natural objects to handle at Greenway Bank

Plants were mentioned much less than wildlife, although trees and wildflowers got some appreciative comments. Less appreciative comments were about invasive non-native species such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed, in particular how these are being recorded and managed.

Some people spoke of nature and wildlife as being something that happens far away or on special trips.

"They are taking wildlife away from the jungle and all."
~ Hanley Market

"You have to get into a car to reach greenspaces around here. My daughter is disabled. We love the Churnet Valley and Consall Valley. It's got to be easy to access, or we won't go. I need someone to know about a place already and it has to be free."
~ Meir Matters

Some people were very aware of the changes to wildlife and natural spaces over time. More of these comments were made by older people comparing what they find now with what they saw as children as they have a longer time span for comparisons. The greening of the city with the rewilding of spoil heaps and reduced air pollution was mentioned by a range of people.

"So much of it has changed since I was a child, then it was grey everywhere you looked. Now there's so much green."
~ Birches Head Get Growing (Potter and Natter)

"Fenton is the greenest town. I come from Fenton, but they have built on so many fields since I was a child. I see kingfishers, orange tip butterflies, dragonflies, I recognise them from when I was a paintress in the pot banks, decorating the ware."
~ B-Arts Climate Café

"There used to be a lovely field near me, but they cut down all the trees and are building more houses on it, the wildlife lose their homes."
~ Project Indi

It was noticeable that the loss of wildlife and habitats was mentioned in relation to areas where the more rural environment borders or is beyond the urban areas (Bagnall, Mill Hayes). Other people spoke of the small streams starting to dry up or loss of patches of wetland.

"We've lost a lot of skylarks and lapwings since the 1970s."
~ Hanley Market.

"When I was a child, the brook ran behind our house, and we would get sticklebacks from the river. It's composted up now and there's no water, but it is still moist there."
~ Young at Heart, Abbey Hulton

Pollution and Development

Pollution and development were mentioned 5.5% and 3% respectively. Pollution was mentioned both as a historic and current risk, with development being spoken of as a

current and future risk. Most concern about pollution was regarding water pollution although air pollution was also mentioned (cars and factories). This may have been because we were asking about watery places but also there has been more concern about the state of rivers expressed in the national media in recent years. Light and noise pollution were not mentioned directly although a couple of children mentioned the night sky seen from Park Hall Country Park. Concerns about development ranged from the loss of habitats for wildlife and people to enjoy and the ability of sewage infrastructure to cope.

> *"The new housing estate along Birches Head Road, Abbey Hulton and the sewage. We already have sewage overflow into the river before they built that. We don't just need that estate to have enough sewage tank capacity, we need it to have enough to cope with the excess that was already there as well as the sewage the new estate will bring. The smell along that stretch of the Trent is awful."*
> ~ Young at Heart, Abbey Hulton

> *"It's a shame about the council selling off the site at Berry Hill, it's a stop off for migrating birds. People in Berry Hill may not realise the value of that land for migrating birds."*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

There were wide differences of opinion on whether the Trent and its tributaries were more or less polluted than in the past. The photograph illustrates the visual impact of discoloured water and the scope for confusion between natural iron oxide, pollution or both.

History, Memories and Culture

Many people were proud of the local history around canals, pot banks and built heritage and people who lived here a long-time spoke of personal or family connections to the traditional local industries. Some disappointment and concern was expressed in the decline of the area, sometimes expressed as loss of access to nature and brooks, loss of childhood freedoms and the decline of shops in town centres. Most negative comments seemed to relate to a desire for improvements, often referencing the past, possibly as the most available and understandable comparison.

River Trent memories were often but not always associated with Bucknall Sands. Memories of fields, waterways and exploring nature were usually linked to childhood play, possibly due to a combination of outdoor spaces close to home, time, freedom and companionship. 56% of response cards noted the value of nature linked with memories. One man spoke of growing up by the smell from the bones processed at Jesse Shirley's Bone and Flint Mill in Etruria, other people mentioned playing or swimming in waterways, being unaware or heedless of risks from pollution.

People asked about the ancient history of the Trent and there was curiosity about what the area would have looked like before the pottery industry developed. Several people knew that old mining landscapes had been turned into parks and nature reserves, but fewer people knew about the history of the local lakes and pools. Quite a few people mentioned the old transport systems (trams, mine railways and the loop line) and how parts of the routes had been developed for walking and cycling.

Medieval and Roman history was of interest to some people, often related to their local area (Abbey Hulton for Medieval interest and Chesterton/Newcastle for Roman interest). One man said he had learned about a Roman Road at Bagnall when at school and walked the part of the route.

There were brief mentions of historical flood events (1927 Bagnall/Milton area) and the Big Freeze of 1963.

> *"What ancient woodlands are in the area?"*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

> *"It would be great to have history walks about the nature reserves, what they used to be and how they became what they are now. What was Westport Lake before it was a lake? Older people might know and be able to tell you more about it."*
> ~ Reaching North Staffs, Hanley

"I live in the Meir now, I used to live around here, near Festival Park. I used to love that. I like being out, the history and the gardens. My Mum told me about the gardens there."
~ Cobridge CIC

"The old mines are now parks."
~ Project Indi

One of the team took part in an Urban Wilderness event in May 2025 and although no comments were formally recorded (being past the data collection period) it is worth noting that several people with Caribbean or Middle Eastern heritage commented that cultural attitudes to being outdoors have been shaped by ways of coping with very hot weather.

People were proud of Etruria Canal Festival and one or two asked if there could be a river festival.

Learning

We grouped comments about all forms of learning, requests for information, citizen science and education together. This included suggestions for interpretation boards or other forms of information. 12% of people expressed some curiosity whether it was finding out about the Trent, wildlife, green spaces or watery places. People wanted to find out more for their own interest and there was an awareness that the younger generations need the chance to learn through playing and exploring nature locally. Some children spoke of future careers as vets or in environmental sciences. Some groups were primarily social/welfare support groups and were really keen to have a chance to find out more about the Trent and local nature.

"I moved here, my husband is from here, but he knows less about the canals and parks than I do, … I'd like to know where to go for a walk along the canals and parks and so on, what wildlife to look out for, maybe there should be some boards with information."
~ Reaching North Staffs, Hanley

"Do we get otters in the Trent?"
~ Newcastle market.

"Can't see under water… sign boards along canals 'what's there and where to look'."
~ Blurton Community Lounge

"Citizen science is my passion; I love the house martins and swifts. We have a wildlife garden and pond."
~ Birches Head Get Growing, Potter and Natter.

"Wildlife talks for people like us".
~ Project Indi

"They should be using small, shallow areas, close to where the river can overflow and just make mini wetlands, a different habitat, where kids can explore and see frogs and dragonflies and things."
~ Reaching North Staffs, Biddulph

"We need to get the parents engaged, if they aren't interested then the children don't know about animals. I work in a school, and we take the children to a farm once a year. Some of the children don't recognise a horse, they think it's a unicorn."
~ B-Arts, Climate Café

Transforming The Trent Headwaters at Staffordshire Invertebrate Fair

Volunteering

Several people (1.5%) commented on the need for volunteers to clear paths and this came up across the whole project area. There was noticeable pride among people who did volunteer for helping others and for the mutual support and sense of achievement this can bring. Some people commented that they were interested in taking part but not ready due to life circumstances (ill health, surgery, priorities such as finding a place to live). The issue of needing to encourage new people to volunteer came up in different groups and settings.

"I love the simplicity of being outdoors, you can't learn that being in a classroom. I volunteer at Westport Lake; l love the birds."
~ Co-op Academy Clarice Cliff

"Ramblers check paths but there's not enough people to check, it's a constant requirement to keep brambles at bay. More volunteers needed."
~ Biddulph Library Coffee Morning

"Need more volunteers to support people with needs outdoors"
~Project Indi

"We need a regular volunteer force, the towpath along the Trent near Boothen is appallingly overgrown. I can't do it anymore because of my knees. If it's kept clear enough you can see kingfishers, mallards, mandarin ducks, a heron."
~ Literacy Trust event, Bentilee

"Support to encourage more people to lead local groups, risk of groups folding when active committee people can no longer continue."
~ Ford Green Hall

"Beverley Drive has a brook… As a kid (I) used to play (there). Needs tidying, it would be a lot nicer. Perhaps a volunteer team of local people to help tidy."
~ Bentilee Community Lounge

A couple of people using wheelchairs spoke of being interested in volunteering and that they take part in national citizen science surveys from their garden, but that it takes too much planning and co-ordination of support to get to public parks and nature reserves.

A number of people expressed interest in litter picking and some asked how to report litter and fly-tipping. Although litter picking is not a Trent Headwaters project aim in itself, it can be a way of engaging people in being outdoors and starting the journey towards other forms of nature engagement.

"We don't have an outdoor space here, but it would be great to have an outdoor activity we could offer, like litter-picking. It's sociable and helps people get involved and helps the community."
~ Stoke Addiction Recovery Service

"I'd be interested in a litter picking group around Chell Heath/Chatterley Whitfield. I need to feel safe, in company."
~ Ford Green Hall

Many of the community groups and organisations locally engage people in activities and events. As relationships and trust is built up on both sides, regular participants may become volunteers in an organisation. It is an approach that aims to empower people, build confidence, social connection and pride in local achievements. It may be worth adding that, as projects tend to have time limited funding, some volunteers may prefer a loyalty to an organisation that continues beyond a particular funding period. Working alongside community organisations and sharing volunteer effort and success may be more sustainable for long-term benefits for wildlife, environment and people within local communities.

Advocacy and Accessibility

This section of the report relates to accessibility in all the forms mentioned during the conversations. Comments related to accessibility made up the second largest group of comments (21.4%). Had we included all aspects of accessibility into one category this would have been the largest category by far (74%) but we wanted to keep the informative detail to help guide the partnership on aspects to consider when engaging with people and communities. It is worth bearing in mind that we did not ask directly about access. We have only included comments raised during our work, so aspects of accessibility that were not mentioned have not been included in the report.

Natural England has produced a series of "Included Outside" evidence briefings which explore the experiences of particular groups of people engaging with nature. We have summarised the Natural England findings here for ease of reading as they are relevant to many of the comments below, however our data was collected before reading the Natural England reports. We did not seek demographic data from people taking part however almost all of the issues noted by Natural England were raised by local people talking to us. It is important to remember that the difficulties mentioned are in addition to people's ordinary lives as parents and family members, employees, friends, enthusiasts and group members, members of the public etc.

People with disabilities encountered additional difficulties engaging in nature due to

- Extra time, effort and organisation needed with all arrangements
- Less access to private transport
- Risks of unreliable or inaccessible public transport
- Expense (accessible transport, care worker costs, outdoor equipment etc.)
- Limited accessibility of sites and facilities
- Additional vulnerability (anxiety, health impact of over-exertion/weather, equipment failure)
- Reactions, comments and behaviour of other people, assumptions and stereotyping by others (well-meaning or otherwise)
- Lack of genuine representation and inclusion, patronising and tokenistic approaches[20]

Older people can experience additional difficulties engaging in nature due to

- Extra care responsibilities (e.g. partners, grandchildren, other family members)
- Extra care and support needs and resulting costs
- Adjusting to limitations in health, mobility, driving ability, lifestyle, moving home
- Coping with bereavement and reduced social circles
- Reduced income or poverty
- Loss of confidence and low mood, increased sense of vulnerability
- Reduced availability of accessible and affordable transport (including getting equipment on and off)[21]

People from ethnic minority backgrounds can experience additional difficulties engaging in nature due to

- Experiences of racism when spending time in nature, including being targeted for visible differences, being made to feel unwelcome in various ways
- The additional burden of finding ways of reducing exposure to racial harassment, often leading to decisions to spend time and effort in safer activities and environments (including volunteering elsewhere).
- Cultural differences in how and when time is spent in natural environments, customs and practices differing between cultures, knowing what is considered acceptable in new settings and activities.
- Cultural differences in perceptions of risks within natural environments (including risks from dogs)
- Encounters with colonial legacies[22]

People living in low-income areas can experience additional difficulties engaging in nature due to

- Less access to private gardens and outdoor spaces
- Less high-quality green space in local areas
- Less access to affordable, reliable private transport
- Costs and time involved in connecting public transport
- Costs of membership, entrance fees, refreshments and activities
- Costs of clothing and equipment suitable for weather conditions
- Risks of spending resources (time, money and effort) weighed against risks of not enjoying the experience (discomfort, stress, boredom)
- Risks associated with poor quality green spaces (lack of maintenance, risks of anti-social behaviour, crime, threat, previous bad experiences, risk of air pollution close to busy roads)
- Lack of knowledge and information about nature spaces
- Gentrification of nature spaces and feeling such spaces are "not for us"
- Relevance of nature versus other life pressures[23]

The demographic information about people living in the Trent Headwaters area shows that the accessibility issues above affect many people locally and in fact the comments given below confirm this. While the research tends to deal with characteristics singly, in fact many people experience factors that overlap and these can substantially increase the difficulties people face in their daily lives when engaging with or in nature. Many of the comments given to us in the engagement reflected a number of issues that mattered to each person within a few sentences.

Active Travel, Physical and Sensory Access

Active travel was mentioned in 18% of comments, often in terms of the personal benefits of walking and cycling but also playing and swimming. There were some people asking about the safety and rights around swimming in canals, lakes and the river. People spoke of walking in urban parks or going further afield to larger country parks. Several people spoke about enjoying getting out for regular walks because they had a dog.

Michelin Bridge over the River Trent at Hanford

"Up Sandyford Hill way, where the gas tanks were, we used to play in the long grass and walk under the trees in the shade when it was hot, we played rounders. My brothers took us. You could feel the breeze and there was no dog poo."
~ Project Indi

"Encouraging more children to do local walks, scavenger hunts."
~ Etruria Canal Festival

"I love Bucknall Park, fresh air, nature, I used to kick a football around Lyme Valley Park when I was in the hostel there."
~ Hanley Indoor Market

"I can get from one end of the city to another using green spaces, just crossing a few roads. People don't know it's there. There's all sort of plants, wildflowers. I'm a runner, I like exploring the paths that aren't well-trodden, some are overgrown."
~ Fenton Church of The Nazarene

"I can't walk very far, walking used to be my hobby. I come here on the bus. I struggle to walk now, and I miss it."
~ Young at Heart, Kidsgrove

Physical access came up several conversations with reference to barriers to people with pushchairs, wheelchairs or low mobility. Slopes and uneven paths were commented on as were steps, but also the disappointment of places being described as accessible when people found they couldn't manage. Several people asked how they should report fallen trees, overgrown and damaged paths.

"At the Michelin Bridge, the footpath by the River Trent, it gets cut off around Hanford, it's hard to get to, needs to be connected and accessible."
~ Etruria Canal Festival

"Some of the banks are being eroded by the river here, it could threaten the footpath and then people won't be able to walk here."
~ Closer To Home Walks Stoke South

"What are you doing for the disabled? We need better access using a wheelchair or scooter."
~ Young at Heart, Kidsgrove

"It's hard to get around places if you have limited mobility and can't walk far, you need to know the distance, where you can stop, if there will be toilets."
~ North Midlands OLGBT+

"I use crutches, and a wheelchair so nowhere is really accessible. Silverdale isn't accessible though it says it is, it's too uphill."
~ Meir Matters

"You used to be able to walk from Norton Green up to Knypersley, a few times I was discouraged by cattle with young calves along the way. It was a beautiful walk going towards the head of the Trent. Perhaps ways of improving it."
~ TTTV Facebook page comment 07 September 2024

Overgrown path; fallen tree; rickety bridge

The need for sensory access was mentioned by a few people. People with limited or no vision spoke of needing to get to know a route before walking it alone or with a guide dog and the usefulness of spoken or audio-description. Poor lighting and uneven surfaces were also raised in conversation as barriers.

"Good to have sensory walks, possibly with audio-posts and maybe guided walks."
~ Appetite Consultation

"The canals in Kidsgrove, great for walking but we need information in Braille. It would be good to have sculptures you can touch and feel, sensory walks and information boards."
~ Appetite Consultation

"Things need to be multi-sensory, touch and feel, sight and sound. So those of us with sensory disabilities get more out of it."
~ Appetite consultation, Newcastle.

Some people spoke about the need for focus points on walks, such as a place to stop, a feature, sign or piece of art. These waypoints can help neurodiverse people focus and enjoy a walk by thinking of it in manageable sections.

Knowledge and Information on Routes

"We'd like to find out where to walk."
~ Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Bucknall Park

Knowledge and information are aspects of both accessibility and empowerment. People need to know what is out there or likely to be out there to have a good chance of finding it. It helps to have a good reason to look for and find anything new such as a place, a community or an interest. People spoke of their need for knowledge changing as their life circumstances and access to resources changed (having children, starting work, retiring, moving home, changes in health, giving up driving etc). Some local people mentioned moving within Stoke-on-Trent and not knowing their way around their new locality. Not knowing where to go was noted on 30% of response cards as a barrier to getting out into nature.

"I was new to the area 15 years ago and I didn't know what was around for years. I heard about Sneyd Hill on Radio Stoke and set out to look for it, it took some finding, it's not sign posted but the views when you get up there are stunning. It's a very green city".
~ Hanley Park Health Walk

"I've lived here for fifty years and never knew this (Whitfield Nature Reserve) was here. I only found out about it when my wife suggested I walk here for my health, now I come most days, I live within walking distance
~ Ford Green Lake (comment collected after December 2024).

Views from Grange Park; Fegg Hayes; Marshes Hill Common

15% of people completing the response cards noted lack of confidence to explore as an issue. Several cyclists noted the value of maps showing cycle paths and a number of people asked for maps or where they could get hold of maps. When talking to people who had moved into the area, it was noticeable they mostly spoke of using digital maps to find a recommended place, rather than exploring for the fun of it.

> "*I use photos from people's visits on Facebook to find new areas*".
> ~ B-Arts Climate Café.

The response cards asked how long people had lived in the area. From the response cards, 61% had lived in the area all their lives, 28% had lived in the area for 5+ years and 4% less than 5 years. Living in the area long term does not automatically give people knowledge of their area.

> "*I used to walk more but I can't do it now. I don't know where to go. I moved house and I don't know where my nearest park is now.*"
> ~ Temple Street Methodist Church, Fenton

> "*Where's Knypersley?*"
> ~ Hanley Indoor Market

> "*I moved here, my husband is from here, but he knows less about the canals and parks than I do, so I don't know much. His family didn't take him out as a kid; we were always outdoors where I grew up. I'd like to know where to go for a walk along the canals and parks and so on, what wildlife to look out for, maybe there should be some boards with information.*"
> ~ Reaching North Staffs (Hanley)

> "*I'm a dairy farmer; I know the paths near me but other paths? I haven't got a clue.*"
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

It is worth adding that some of the staff working in welfare support projects commented that their skills and knowledge are around benefits, housing, health and social issues etc. If they don't know about local green and watery places and how to get there (and some commented that they didn't know), they can't share this with people they are supporting.

Time to explore and appreciate outdoor places is rarely a priority within the scope of welfare projects, however being able to visit and appreciate these places can make a big difference to a person's mental and physical well-being.

Information on routes was mentioned in 8.5% of comments. Some people asked about places to walk from home, routes that linked parks and urban green spaces, signs, distances and times.

> *"Linking walking and cycle routes towards the north of the city."*
> ~ Ford Green Hall

> *"I use Google Maps to find places. I want to get to Berry Hill but I'm not sure how."*
> ~ B-Arts Climate Café

> *"We need connecting walking paths between the green spaces, with circular routes in all areas, map and accessible information."*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

> *"Having times on the walk signs as well as distance, that helps."*
> ~ Etruria Canal Festival

> *"What are most people looking for? A destination, a route or both? How can we improve the route to a green/watery space? Smile stone trails? A green vein map of spaces and routes?"*
> ~ Green Conversation, Hanley

Knowledge of Locations and Facilities

People often wanted to know what to expect before they go to a place that is new to them; where it is, how to get there, what is there, whether there are toilets, parking, a café, what to do there or look for. Some people asked what there was to see, do or find in parks and green spaces often comparing green spaces with formal attractions. If people don't know what to look for or how to look, they are less likely to appreciate what is there. Comments about facilities came up 7.6% of the time. 2% of comments were specifically about toilets which is not surprising given the population levels across the Trent Headwaters area. 3% of comments were about cafés or food.

(Fenton Town Hall Café)

"Knowing what's out there – sites."
~ Green Conversation, Hanley

"Green spaces where?"
~ Newcastle Market

"Important to know what to expect when you arrive - facilities, parking, accessible paths, range of short & long-distance walks, interesting natural and heritage features. Maps showing access points, places to visit nearby."
~ Green Conversation, Hanley

"We need more information to decide if it's worth going".
~ Appetite Consultation

"I go to the local park and there's nothing there."
~ Biddulph Town Hall

"When we plan trips out, we need to think of whether a place is flat, has places to sit, is the transport funded or affordable? The distance and can people take a carer?"
~ Young at Heart, Kidsgrove

"We need places with benches, I have young children, and they need to stop, and we need toilets. We need places we can bring our own snacks."
~ B-Arts, Climate Café

2% of people commented on the need for somewhere to stop and rest, either because they have small children, are recovering from an operation or have a long-term health condition limiting their mobility. Some people spoke about liking to have somewhere peaceful to sit outdoors for their sense of well-being.

Picnic table at Knypersley Reservoir

"We walk a lot but it's harder since one of us has had an operation. We are a bit slower, need more places to stop and rest. It's part of recovering."
~ Cobridge CIC.

"There's different types of green space that appeal to different people. Some people like hills, fields, parks, a bench outdoors."
~ Chesterton Chatty Café

> *"We walk the canals; the scenery keeps us going. We need more little benches."*
> ~ Hanley Indoor Market

Health

Physical and/or mental health was mentioned in 8% of the conversations, while 1% of people put it on the response cards as something that made it difficult to get out in nature. Some people spoke of difficulties getting outdoors as their health declined due to long term conditions. Others spoke of changing the way they went outdoors, often becoming more reliant on the time and support of others with a once ordinary activity becoming an infrequent planned trip. People recovering from surgery and strokes spoke of going for shorter walks, with more stops along the way as they regained former strength and abilities.

> *"I don't get out much, I have PTSD from my army days. I have physical health problems too, I should get out more, but I don't do it."*
> ~ Walk Talk Action, Meir Heath

> *"It's good to have the park, I have had several operations and needed to get my weight down, manage my diabetes so I started coming along to these walks. I really enjoy them."*
> ~ Friends of Hanley Park, Health Walk

> *"Canals have really helped with (my) mental health and well-being."*
> ~ Blurton Community Lounge

> *"I used to live near Finney Gardens, I'd walk along the canals, along the Trent at Trentham. I use a wheelchair now and I need a carer. I can't risk my health over-exerting myself."*
> ~ Birches Head Get Growing

People commented on peace, space and natural sounds as benefiting their mental well-being. People appreciated the chance to be away from screens and sometimes to be alone. Other people enjoyed being active for physical health but also for mental well-being.

> *"I am walking this (weight) off, I walk anywhere, just go from the front door and I don't know where I'll end up".*
> ~ Newcastle Market

> *"I walk everywhere. I just find my way around. I need to walk for my mental health, it's good to get out into a park and just sit and be peaceful. It helps my anxiety. I don't always feel safe. I want to move from where I live."*
> ~ Urban Wilderness

"Longton Park is close to home for me. I do visit the canal, but the river is too far for me to get to, costs too much by taxi. It's very calming to be outdoors."
~ Fenton, Church of the Nazarene

Transport

During the conversations 10.3% of comments were about some form of transport (excluding bicycles which were counted in active travel above). 21% of response cards noted distance or transport as a barrier to spending time in nature. Buses were generally only considered as possible provided the could manage the walk to and from the bus stops. Changes of bus add time to a journey and that can become a barrier with increased time taken out of the day and the risk of missing a connection. Staff from the colleges and youth projects such as Cauldon College, Groundwork and YMCA all noted the need to use a minibus to get young people to green spaces for walks, interest or conservation volunteering. Some of the well-known green spaces and watery places bordering the city are difficult to reach without private transport and this discourages people with limited money or time from re-visiting places further afield in their own time. At Amity Hub we looked at how young people might get to Apedale Country Park or Barlaston Downs by public transport and found this would take a significant walk from the nearest bus stop, 17 minutes' walk for Apedale or 29 minutes' walk for Downs Banks each way, which in addition to the bus journey may make the travel longer than the time spent at a destination. Several adults with learning disabilities told me that they could not read or understand bus times tables and apps.

"I've been to Westport Lake. I was taken there two years ago by a charity I was involved with."
~ Reaching North Staffs, Hanley

"I can only get to the walks I can reach by bus."
~ Closer to Home Walks, South Stoke.

"I walk to get somewhere; I don't walk for pleasure. I walk the areas I know. I take a taxi or a bus to places I don't know. There's no buses between places; you have to go into Hanley and out again."
~ Cobridge CIC

"I'd love to go to the Brampton if I got a lift, it takes two buses from Chesterton."
~ Chesterton Chatty Café. (This person went on to explain that she cannot stand long enough to cope with waiting for bus connections, nor can she walk more than a few minutes to the bus stop).

"I used to go rambling every Thursday – but we needed a car to get there."
~ Project Indi

Parking was noted to be an issue for some, with parking charges leading to some people finding free parking nearby or not going.

Cost

The cost of going outdoors was mentioned in 3% of comments, mostly in terms of buying food or drinks, but also travel costs, entrance fees and activity fees. Very few people mentioned the cost of outdoor clothing and shoes but that might affect how much time people spend outside in cold or wet weather. Staff at Greenway Bank Visitor Centre did note that some people don't have the right clothing for the conditions. Several people commented that one drink was not expensive but drinks for a family might cost more than a meal at home. The cost of the information source was almost never mentioned, but not everyone has access to a smart phone or computer in an environment where a great deal of information is online. It is fair to say that the less funding a project has, the fewer resources can be put into advertising. Parks and walking routes that are not being championed by dedicated groups probably lose out most of all, yet they may be the green spaces close to home.

> *"I have a car and can get anywhere, but I can't afford entrance fees for all of us."*
> ~ Fenton Church of the Nazarene

> *"It's difficult to access information about outdoors, unless it costs a lot and then you can't afford it anyway."*
> ~ INTO Walk

> *"Do you know of free activities for children over the half term?"*
> ~ Fenton, Church of the Nazarene

> *"We (woman with children) need to be able to do things for free, but the more you get out, the more you find out what's there."*
> ~ Biddulph Town Hall

Time

Time was a big factor noted on the response cards with 38% of people noting it was difficult to find the time; however, it rarely came up in conversation. When people did mention time, it was mostly in relation to bus travel. One or two people noted that more the timing of event and activities might clash with work. Some people spoke of commitments caring for children or family members and that these took priority over time in nature. One woman using a wheelchair and staff supporting adults with learning disabilities commented on the additional effort needed to arrange support for activities in public spaces, which impacts on time as well.

Most if not all groups that we attended met at a regular and predictable time of the day, week or month, presumably to increase attendance as people build these into their regular weekly or monthly routine.

"I've got a bus pass, but I don't have time to get out, we don't have transport, my wife works, and I do the chores, then caring for a relative".
~ Hanley market

"My partner is interested in this sort of thing, but she works during the week."
~ Newcastle Market

Companionship and Support

Many people spoke of preferring to be outdoors with another person, for all the benefits of companionship and someone to chat with (13% of comments). Some people liked having companionship and meeting others, sharing in a task or activity that they wouldn't choose to do on their own in a public space. Not having someone to go with was in issue for 22% of the people filling in response cards. When asked what people were most proud of locally, one person at Project Indi replied, "*Best friends*".

(Closer to Home Walk from Meir)

"I would like to know where to walk and where parks and gardens are. I don't like to be on my own, I'd like to walk with other people, have the company. I have some health issues myself."
~ Cobridge CIC

"People use the canals more than the river. We walk the canals a lot as a family."
~ Etruria Canal Festival

"I've taken the kids wild swimming."
~ Hanley Indoor Market

"Here's nice (in the High-Street), meeting friends. I don't want to go into parks, not interested."
~ Newcastle Market

"We should be making these walks more inclusive."
~ Closer to Home Stoke South

The need for responsible carers came up in conversation with staff supporting adults with learning disabilities and teachers. Activities that can be offered in a safe known space, where risks can be more easily assessed and managed are more likely to go ahead than activities off site where more responsible adults are needed to provide support to

individuals and manage risks. Activities for children are often offered by organisations provided a family member or similar stays with the child. It was noticeable that older adults and people with more severe disabilities were dependent on the availability and willingness of family to get out into nature, particularly if they were not able to drive.

> *"I can only go places now if my family take me. I'm older and I've got arthritis... I can't walk in the parks now, there's nowhere to stop and rest."*
> ~ Newcastle Market

> *"I prefer paths to shops, and I like paths that are flatter. I've had two knee replacements and two hip replacements. It's nice to get out but you've got to take your time. You need companionship."*
> ~ Young at Heart, Kidsgrove

Personal safety

People across all groups mentioned personal safety when outdoors (10.6% of all spoken comments and 23% on response cards). People spoke of risks such as falls and trips, verbal abuse from others, being physically threatened or followed and risks from inconsiderate others. Homeless people understandably spoke of risks sleeping rough. Some of the riskier recollections were from women and/or people with a learning disability. A couple of women spoke of domestic abuse and it is worth adding that online safety when using wildlife monitoring, travel and information apps may need to be considered. A few comments were made about the need for knowledge and skills around water safety.

> *"Mud bikes, they race past so fast, nearly knocked my child over and when I called out, I only got a load of verbal abuse."*
> ~ Ford Green Hall

> *"On the bus, I didn't like it there was a woman swearing, she was drunk and there were children on the bus. She had a go at my friend for being black."*
> ~ Our Space

> *"It doesn't feel safe being here alone, we have been broken into, people trying to burgle the houses next to the allotments, I've been flashed at and we've had odd characters lurking in the undergrowth next to the allotment watching us."*
> ~ Lyme Valley Allotments

It was noticeable that almost all the people who spoke with confidence about walking longer distances across the urban area and exploring unfamiliar urban routes on their own were older, physically able white men and this is consistent with the results of the Adult People and Nature [20] During an event hosted by Urban Wilderness (May 2025), one visually impaired person commented that she did not take her white stick when hill walking anymore, as she had experienced members of the public telling her that she

should not be hill walking. Several black women spoke of needing to consider the time of day to walk, to reduce the risk of dealing with racist and other hostile comments.

While dogs were clearly a source of joy to some people, others raised concern about the impact of dogs on wildlife and on people.

> "Walking dogs through cattle fields - dog owner knowledge to improve awareness of dogs needing to be on a lead or carried near cattle... Also, awareness for dog owners about effect on wildlife if chased by dog e.g. ducks in spring."
> ~ Biddulph Library Coffee Morning

> "I don't like dogs, I stop, and people do realise and make space for me to go past."
> ~ Hanley Indoor Market

> "Dogs should be on leads, I was with an elderly friend, she was nearly knocked over by a dog jumping up at her. We spoke to the owner who said well-behaved dogs don't need to be on leads. She was verbally abusive to us."
> ~Reaching North Staffs, Biddulph

People spoke about their frustrations seeing litter around. There was a sense that people who drop litter might be involved in other anti-social behaviour and so to avoid them, you might avoid the areas with a lot of litter.

> "The kind of people who drop litter aren't the kind of people I feel I could go up to and talk to."
> ~ Stoke Addiction Recovery Service

Shopping trolleys dumped in the Lyme Brook

Although we did not ask people how they managed their safety, people spoke of choosing to

- be outdoors with a friend or group
- walk at particular times of day
- walk in familiar safe areas
- go outdoors for essential purposes and not for pleasure
- avoid places of potential or past risk

"I don't feel safe alone and I won't use the canals on my own."
~ Meir Matters

"Don't feel safe outdoors, I only walk at certain times of day, better chance of seeing people I recognise."
~ Ford Green Hall

"I walk to get my tea but I don't stay outdoors, (I was) frightened by gang smashing a bottle in front of me."
~ Project Indi

"The canals need to be safe and accessible. I wouldn't go alone, and I wouldn't take my grandson. I feel guilty that he's missing out when he's with me but I daren't go, I feel vulnerable."
~ Birches Head Get Growing

Communication and Language

The response cards asked how people found out about local events (people completing these were more likely to be confident readers).

- 45% websites and e-newsletters
- 35% Facebook
- 24% TV/radio
- 21% Instagram

During our work it became clear that the language we used sometimes needed to change. The word "wildlife" is often used as a broad word including all types of creatures and we used it to try and open up conversations. However, some people did not find it relevant, possibly because it was not specific enough about birds, or because it related to wild birds rather than garden birds.

"No, duck, wildlife doesn't interest me… I love seeing the birds feeding from my window."
~ Better Together CIC (Man who gave a detailed account of the sparrows behaviour in his garden).

"I'm not interested in wildlife. I've seen a sparrowhawk taking a starling from the garden. I feed the birds in the garden every day. I can't do much else now due to my mobility."
~ Port Vale Family Fun Day

Plain English, with words of one or two syllables is easier for more people to understand when spoken or written. Short sentences, with one idea in each sentence is also easier to understand. The use of plain English should be easier for people to translate and

interpret for others, so the meaning can reach more people of all literacy levels and languages.

> *"We need less language, so meanings are clear in any language."*
> ~ Appetite Consultation

We engaged with dDeaflinks in May 2025 and had a discussion with the team providing British Sign Language support before the session started. Some of them commented that they weren't familiar with the words being using about the natural world, for example "larvae", so had difficulty choosing suitable signs ("egg" was used). As the majority of interpreting work relates to health and social care issues, language about nature and the environment may be less familiar to interpreters and translators in any language. Efforts to consider language and other forms of communication should help to spread the understanding of what is taking place, share interest and the benefits of natural environments both for people and nature.

Ways of Including People

The Natural England Included Outside reports[22,23,24,25] made a number of recommendations which we have merged as they can be relevant to people from different and overlapping communities and because individuals can belong to several different communities at any one time, or at different times of their life. We have modified these recommendations bearing in mind the comments given by local people but remained within the spirit of the original recommendations.

- Share accessible information about facilities, locations, events and activities so people can make informed choices.
- Monitor, audit and review facilities and locations, including people with relevant characteristics in those processes.
- Explore ways to improve facilities and infrastructure including local people and communities.
- Collaborate with people with relevant characteristics in design of routes, facilities, events and activities.
- Use co-production approaches with local communities and people, "doing with and not for".
- Provide and resource multi-use nature space to become part of essential everyday activities.
- Recognise and support the agency of people with particular characteristics
- Consider affordability including hidden costs of time, travel, refreshments, equipment and clothing etc.
- Widen the sensory ways of experiencing nature and natural settings, consider different senses, different seasons etc.
- Use local nature encounters and "stepping stone" approaches.
- Use cafés/refreshments stops in nature spaces.
- Use indoor/outdoor spaces that can be used flexibly given the weather and activity.

- Facilitate ways to be sociable in nature at different times of day/week/year, considering informal access and through events and activities.
- Multi-use spaces for families, communities and gatherings.
- Support and encourage genuine representation in challenging assumptions
- Train and raise awareness within all organisations about inclusion, recreation and nature engagement.
- Increase employment of people with protected characteristics.
- Be clear about and provide areas where dogs can be off lead or on lead (this may fit with biodiversity needs).
- Increase the diversity of times and ways people can spend time in nature
- Accept diverse perceptions and enjoyments of what is "nature"
- Encourage and develop confidence for accessing natural environments.

Summary

In the course of our work a number of things became clear and informed our principles. The Transforming The Trent Headwaters area is rich in people who are interested in some aspect of nature but encounter one or more barriers to engaging in nature. The area is rich in green spaces and watery places, but not all are appealing and accessible in the broadest sense. We have a rich network of community organisations keen to engage people and wanting to make use of local resources in affordable ways. The diversity of individual knowledge and experiences within local communities could help to inform ways of engaging more people in experiencing and protecting nature while sharing the benefits of nature more widely. As much as we need biodiversity to be prepared for environmental changes in the future, we need diversity of people to adapt, share skills and knowledge and be relevant to the future.

We remain firm in our belief that projects should engage people in local natural spaces as the most likely to be affordable, accessible in distance and daily life and to build on the sense of local pride and connection to community and location. Nature is for everyone, and everyone should be able to benefit from nature close to home. Nature based skills and knowledge should be shared with people but also with existing community organisations, so they have the opportunity to use these in future within their communities and locations. People and communities should have the opportunity to share their knowledge with us, shaping and changing what and how we offer the opportunity to engage.

The natural world is in crisis and under pressure from many different directions. Local authorities have limited budgets and increasing pressures. Our work should be sustainable socially, environmentally and economically[24] in order to meet the aims of our project and where possible, support and link in with wider local aims. Our project will be time limited but improved environments for people and nature to benefit from, with more people able and willing to care for their own natural world will be our greatest legacy.

Build in sustainability

Be collaborative, accessible, inclusive

Nature is for everyone

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Appendix A: Community groups and events

Groups were defined as regular events (weekly, fortnightly or monthly) appealing to the same core group of people who, over time, might get to know each other.

Community Group	Location we attended	Brief Description
Amity Hub (attended twice)	Newcastle under Lyme	Support project for teenage and young adult unaccompanied asylum seekers.
Appetite – Lunch Club and Supper Club – different membership for each of the community advisory panels	New Vic Theatre, Basford, Newcastle under Lyme	Local arts organisation facilitating, hosting and programming arts events for people of all ages locally to experience and be inspired by the arts, focus on diversity, high quality, accessibility and cohesion.
B-Arts (Climate Café) – attended two of the climate cafes.	Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent	Community arts organisation: running arts engagement opportunities for adults, young people and families, food justice café, climate café, community arts performances, urban nature recovery.
Bentilee Neighbourhood Centre	Bentilee, Stroke on Trent	NHS centre hosting a community lounge (social support/advice/well-being/welfare)
Better Together CIC	Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: social support/welfare/well-being, activities for all age ranges, community garden, foodbank/community fridge
Biddulph Library (Staffordshire County Council) Coffee Morning	Biddulph	Council run library and information point, hosting activities for all ages. Community garden.
Birches Head Get Growing CIC (Potter and Natter)	Bridge Centre, Birches Head, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: social support/well–being, activities for all ages, community food and item sharing, community allotment
Chesterton Elim Church (Chatty Café)	Chesterton, Newcastle under Lyme	Community faith organisation: social support/welfare/well-being, foodbank, activities for adults and families
Closer to Home South	Hanford, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Well-being, offering local short health walks in company for adults. Hosted by the Black Lion Pub (mornings).
Closer to Home North, East and West (2 different walks)	Meir, Stoke-on-Trent also Smithpool Park, Fenton	Community organisation: Well-being, offering local short health walks in company for adults.

Cobridge CIC – The Angel at Austin's	Cobridge, Stoke-on-Trent	Community Organisation hosting a community lounge (social support/advice/welfare/well-being).
dDeaflinks	Bridge Centre, Birches Head, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Social support/welfare/well-being for people hard of hearing and from the deaf community deaf community, interpreter training and services
Fenton Church of the Nazarene	Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: Social support/well-being/welfare. Activities for adults and families.
Festival Stoke (Fungi Walk)	Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent	Community arts organisation running nature connection arts-engagement projects, arts input into walking routes, community allotment and women's peer support, activities for adults and families. Fungi walk was one of a series of nature connection activities.
Festival Stoke (Greening Ford Green & Bradeley)	Bradeley Community Centre	As above. This group was meeting regularly to create a community garden at Bradeley Community Centre.
Grace Church (Craft and Chat)	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: social support/welfare/well-being, foodbank, activities for all ages, adoption support group, student support group
Hanley Park Health Walk	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Weekly walk around Hanley Park led by a volunteer.
Longton Town Forum	Longton, Stoke-on-Trent	Organised and hosted by Urban Wilderness CIC: exploring opportunities for improvement to Longton town centre. Meeting space for members of the public, representatives from community organisations and statutory agencies.
Lyme Valley Community Allotment	Lyme Valley Community Allotments, Newcastle under Lyme	Members of allotment committee at the time, now council run.
Meir Matters CIC	Meir, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Social support, foodbank, item share events, hosting a community lounge (social support/well-being, advice/welfare).
North Midlands OLGBT+	Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Peer support group for older people from the LGBT+ community across the North Midlands, social support/well-being, activities for older people. Hosted by Fenton Town Hall.

Norton Green Residents Association	Norton Green, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Local residents group raising awareness of local issues, seasonal activities for families.
Our Space	Dunkirk, Newcastle under Lyme	Community organisation: Social support/activities for children and adults with disabilities, indoor/outdoor play area, raised beds, woodland garden.
Project Indi	Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: Social support/well-being for adults and children with disabilities, promoting social inclusion, skills etc.
Portland Inn Project	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Community arts organisation: involving the community in the social, cultural and economic development of a community space. Activities for all ages, single-mothers group, education and training.
Reaching North Staffs (Biddulph Group)	Biddulph	Community Organisation: social support/well-being/welfare, advice service, specialist support to people with hoarding disorder, befriending. Activities for adults. Hosted by Green Tree Café.
Reaching North Staffs (Hanley Group)	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Community Organisation: social support/well-being/welfare, advice service, specialist support to people with hoarding disorder, befriending. Activities for adults. Hosted by Longrest Café.
Reaching North Staffs (Newcastle Group)	Brampton Museum, Newcastle under Lyme	Community Organisation: social support/well-being/welfare, advice service, specialist support to people with hoarding disorder, befriending. Activities for adults. Hosted by Brampton Museum, Newcastle Borough Council.
Roving Rangers - Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (2 walks as part of a wider series)	Hem Heath, Stoke-on-Trent	Guided walk, encouraging people to notice nature in the local area and use these skills in other settings.
Royal Voluntary Service	Hanley Community Centre	Local branch of a national organisation offering social support/well-being/welfare. Community lounge offers support/advice/welfare and well-being.
Swan Bank Church (Tuesday Club)	Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: social group for older people.
Stoke Recovery Service run by We Are With You	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Local branch of a national drug, alcohol and mental health recovery charity with NHS staff support. Support for adults.
Temple Street Methodist Church (Warm Welcome)	Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: social support, warm space and free hot meal one evening a week. Adults.

Temple Street Methodist Church (Welcome Café)	Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: hosting a community lounge (social support/advice/welfare/well-being), free café, foodbank, clothes share, raised beds/greenhouse. Activities for adults and families.
The Hive	Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: social support/well-being, activities for all ages, foodbank. Hosting a regular community lounge (social support/advice/well-being/welfare).
Tri Services Veterans Support Centre	Old Post Office, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Community Organisation: Social support/well-being/welfare for veterans of the armed services and their families. Advice and assistance services, health and well-being clinic, kitchen skills course, community allotment.
Under One Roof	St. Mark's Church Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community project developing a sense of community cohesion, sharing local diverse heritage and raising funds to restore the church. Creative activities, talks, events, social support, exploring historical and current migration into the city of Stoke-on-Trent. Coffee morning, shared lunches, culture shares and singing.
Urban Wilderness CIC	Longton Exchange, Stoke-on-Trent	Community arts organisation: Running arts engagement opportunities for adults and young people, two community arts festivals, feminist film club. Hosting Longton Town Forum, Changes mental health peer support group and Open Door community lounge (social support/advice/well-being/welfare).
Walk Talk Action	Meir Heath, Stoke-on-Trent	Community Organisation: Social support/well-being with physical and mental health recovery. Activities for adults, hosted by St. Francis Church
West End Community Centre	Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: offering social support/well-being/social inclusion, foodbank, job club, activities for all ages and hosting community lounge (social support/advice/well-being/welfare).
YMCA North Staffordshire	YMCA Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Local branch of a national organisation: Social support/well-being/welfare for young people. Providing accommodation, family work, training, education and employment skills, volunteering, activities.
Young at Heart (Abbey Hulton) run by Father Hudson Caritas	Abbey Hulton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: Social support/well-being for older people, hosted by Breathe Church.

Community Event	Location	Description
Young at Heart (Kidsgrove) run by Father Hudson Caritas	Kidsgrove Town Hall, Stoke-on-Trent	Community faith organisation: Social support/well-being for older people

Events were defined as activities that might recur each season or year or not at all. The events below were ones we attended to gain comments.

Community Event	Location	Description
Biddulph Green Library Consultation	Biddulph	Organised by Biddulph Library (Staffordshire County Council) in association with Sustrans – consultation on active travel routes.
Biddulph Library	Biddulph	Discussion with local people (unplanned).
Biddulph Town Hall - Future You Wellness Event	Biddulph	Organised by Biddulph Town Council – event to share healthy lifestyle information.
Birches Head Get Growing – Share Fest	Bridge Centre Birches Head, Stoke-on-Trent	Celebration of autumn, stalls, cookery demonstrations, food share, activities for families.
Brampton Museum	Brampton, Newcastle under Lyme	Eco-therapy nature engagement session hosted by the Brampton Museum, Newcastle Borough Council
Co-op Academy Clarice Cliff	Longton, Stoke-on-Trent	End of term Christmas fair at primary school.
Etruria Canal Festival	Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent	Annual canal festival organised by B-Arts (above). Activities for people of all ages and families.
Fegg Hayes Futures Christmas Craft Fair	Fegg Hayes, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation: social support/well-being/welfare. Regular activities for all ages, events, arts projects, foodbank, including community lounge (social support/advice/welfare).
Ford Green Hall Spring Craft Fair, Autumn Craft Fair	Ford Green Hall, Stoke-on-Trent	Craft fair run by Ford Green Hall charitable trust, one of several though the year. Also running weekly craft group. Staffed by volunteers. Small medieval inspired garden.
Friends of Yeaman Street/National Literacy Trust	Yeaman Street Park, Stoke-on-Trent	
Green Conversation	Dudson Centre, Hanley, Brampton Museum,	Green conversation events organised by VAST and Support Staffordshire, networking on environmental issues.

	Newcastle and Wolseley Centre, Rugeley	
Greenway Bank Visitor Centre – Staffordshire County Council	Greenway Bank, Knypersley	Opening of visitor centre at half term, Halloween trail outdoors, indoor activities for children.
Hanley Indoor Market – Stoke City Council	Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Daily indoor market organised by Stoke City Council.
Into (Staffordshire County Council)	Apedale, Newcastle Borough	Walk led by active travel project encouraging more people to get into walking and cycling for health and well-being.
Middleport Pottery – Summer, Autumn and Christmas Fair	Middleport, Stoke-on-Trent	Local heritage ceramic business and museum run by Burgess and Leigh.
National Literacy Trust	Fenton Park, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	Summer event for families with young children aimed at encouraging an interest in reading, stories and hands-on play. Organised by the local team from National Literacy Trust.
National Literacy Trust/Thrive at Five (National Charities)	Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent	Organised by local teams from the National Literacy Trust and Thrive at Five, Half term autumn event for families with young children, aimed at encouraging an interest in reading, stories and hands-on play. Hosted by St. Stephen's Church, Bentilee.
Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group	Newcastle College, Newcastle under Lyme	Newcastle Freshers Fair for students attending the college.
Newcastle Market – Newcastle Borough Council	Newcastle under Lyme	Regular outdoor market organised by Newcastle Borough Council
Port Vale Foundation	Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation set up by Port Vale Football Club: Family Fun Day (activities for families with young children).
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust – Know Your Neighbourhood	Bucknall Park, Stoke-on-Trent	Guided walk around the park, encouraging people to notice nature in the urban park.
Stoke-on-Trent Boat Club	Endon, Stoke-on-Trent	Caldon Canal 50th Anniversary event.
Stoke-on-Trent College – Stoke and Burslem campuses	Shelton and Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent	Careers event and Freshers Fair for students attending the college.

Networking contacts/events attended are included below although there was no available opportunity to arrange a follow-up visit to gather comments.

Networking Contact	Location	Description
Action on Poverty Conference	University of Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent	Organised by Raising Voices: Taking Action and Staffordshire University. Conference exploring community led approaches to addressing poverty and working with statutory agencies.
All The Small Things	Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation working for positive social change through community organising. Hosting the Loneliness Partnership, More In Common, Raising Voices: Taking Action
Biddulph Youth and Community Zone	Biddulph	Community organisation running activities and facilities for all ages (sport/craft), a range of support groups, community café, hosting repair café. Community garden. Affordable fresh vegetable boxes.
Black History Month – Potteries Museum and Art Gallery	PMAG, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Black History Month celebration event, run by Kwanzaa Collective community arts organisation and hosted by Potteries Museum and Art Gallery (Stoke City Council).
Blooming Longton	Longton, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation run by volunteers trying to improve the environment in Longton using gardening and nature.
Burslem Port Trust	Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation seeking to restore Burslem Branch Canal.
Chinese New Year Celebrations	PMAG, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Hosted by Potteries Museum and Art Gallery (Stoke City Council).
Churnet Sound Radio	Radio interview	Radio interview given about Transforming The Trent Headwaters.
Earth Stories Film Festival	Mitchell Arts Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	International film festival held annually showcasing short environmental films made by young film makers (under 25 years old).
Expert Citizens CIC	Dudson Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation led by and for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage contributing to and influencing system change in local services and organisations.
Friends of Hanley Park	Hanley Park, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation supporting council owned park, hosting regular seasonal events. Christmas event.

Friends of Lyme Brook	Lyme Valley Park, Newcastle under Lyme	Community organisation set up to monitor and enhance the quality of the water in the Lyme Brook and its environment. Open evening event showcasing the work of Friends of Lyme Brook, Lyme Valley Community Orchard and Transforming the Trent Headwaters.
Growthpoint (Stoke City Council)	Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent	Mental health project run by Stoke City Council offering recreational, vocational, allotment and craft-based activities for adult.
Healthy Communities Alliance	Dudson Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Hosted and organised by VAST – meeting for community organisations and statutory agencies to share information about health initiatives.
Inland Waterways Association Staffordshire and South Cheshire Branch	Staffordshire and South Cheshire	Local branch of national organisation campaigning on inland navigation, heritage and planning.
Keele University Earth Day	Keele University	Open day showcasing university initiatives on environmental issues.
Knotworking Networking	Smithfield Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Local independent digital news organisation (The Knot) hosting a networking event for small local businesspeople and innovators.
Love Stoke Church – Love Coffee	Meir Park Community Centre	Community faith organisation run café.
Middleport Matters	Middleport, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation seeking improve the local area for people (social support, well-being) and the environment. Offering a range of activities for people of all ages including indoor and outdoor crafts, community garden (Root n Fruit), work placements, opportunities to learn.
Moorland Green Network – several meetings	Online	Online meetings facilitated by Support Staffordshire and open to representatives of community groups interested in environmental issues in Staffordshire Moorlands and the Peak District. Organised by Support Staffordshire.
Moorlands Locality Market Place	Salvation Army Church Leek	Regular events for representatives of voluntary sector and social enterprise organisations to network, share information etc. Organised by Support Staffordshire

Newcastle Locality Forum/Market Place	Salvation Aremy, Chesterton and Whitmore Village Hall in Newcastle Borough	Regular events for representatives of voluntary sector and social enterprise organisations to network, share information etc.
Outdoor Arts UK Conference	Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	National strategic organisation supporting outdoor artists and organisations.
Outside – Waymaking Project	Gradbach, Peak District	Community arts organisation (part of Support Staffordshire), creating arts programme by and for people in Staffordshire Moorlands. Waymaking project exploring walking, art making, and nature observation.
Social Connective CIC	Biddulph Youth and Community Zone	Community organisation: Running repair café in Biddulph and starting in Newcastle under Lyme.
Staffordshire Archaeology Day	PMAG, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Organised by Potteries Museum and Art Gallery with Stoke-on-Trent Museum Archaeological Society
Staffordshire County Council	SWT, Wolseley Centre, Rugeley	Local Nature Recovery Strategy event organised by Staffordshire County Council and hosted by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Staffordshire Invertebrate Science Fair	University of Staffordshire, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent	Organised by Conops Entomology Ltd hosted by University of Staffordshire.
Stockton Brook Time and Space CIC	Stockton Brook, Stoke-on-Trent	Community heritage organisation repurposing Victorian waterworks building, arts and nature engagement, wildflower meadow creation and open days.
Stoke Creates - Exchange Forum	Wild Rumpus, Scholar Green, Cheshire	Arts organisation facilitating community arts collaboration, networking, support, skills and development.
Stoke-on-Trent Pride	Hanley Park, Stoke-on-Trent	Annual festival celebrating LQBTQ+ people and allies.
Sylvester Community Trust	Fegg Hayes, Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation promoting social cohesion and support, activities for all ages,

		community garden and wilder space, food support.
The Friends of Chatterley Whitfield	Stoke-on-Trent	Community organisation aiming to preserve the heritage of Chatterley Whitfield Colliery and records.
University of Staffordshire	Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent	Welcome back student fair at the start of the spring semester.
Village Hall Network	Weston Village Hall, Staffordshire	Village Hall network, support and information event organised by Support Staffordshire.
YMCA North Staffordshire Youth Conference	Regent Theatre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent	Conference organised by YMCA North Staffordshire following the publication of the Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire City Wide Youth Consultation Report, research in partnership with Keele University and University of North Staffordshire.

Appendix B: Full list of conversational questions:

- What local green spaces matter to you?
- What local watery places matter to you?
- What local wildlife do you know of?
- What are you proud of locally and in your community?
- What local projects have inspired you?
- Is there anything else you want to tell us?
- Would you like us to come and talk to your group?
- Would you like to take part?
- Have you heard of citizen science?
- Are you interested in volunteering?

Appendix C: Comment card questionnaire

The comment cards were available at groups and events for people to fill in if they wanted to. Some people chose to fill in comment cards instead of chatting, some people chose to fill in comment cards and chat.

Appendix D: Keywords and definitions

Keyword	Definition	Frequency
Accessibility	Mention of accessing nature through active travel, physical and sensory access, and any restrictions	229
Companionship	Mention of having or wanting companionship, this included references to "we" rather than "I"	47
Cost	Mention of financial cost (parking, bus fares entrance fees, activity fees, food and drink etc.)	33
Day trip	Mention of a connection to nature usually as a day trip or one-off experience	19
Development	Mention of building/infrastructure development	59
Dog	Mention of owning or walking a dog, concern about the behaviour of dogs, dog mess.	25
Facilities	Mention of location information, café, toilets, available activities, opening hours, etc.	81
Fishing	Mention of fishing (fish were counted in wildlife).	8
Garden	Mention of private or community allotments or gardens, excluding businesses such as Trentham Gardens	59
Green space	Mention of a green space such as a nature reserve, country or urban park, cemetery, rough ground, woods, public garden, field etc.	214
Health	Mention of physical or mental health benefits, or difficulties accessing nature due to health conditions.	89
History/Memories	Mention of history, public or personal and memories.	75
Learning	Mention of wanting to know more, asking questions, how to find or share information with others, learning about nature or history, nature as a learning opportunity or subject.	149
Litter	Mention of litter or wanting to help clear litter. Fly tipping was included as there were a few comments but not enough to create a separate category.	49
Personal safety	Mention of ways of staying safe, not feeling safe or experience of anti-social behaviour.	113
Pollution	Mention of pollution in any form, past or present.	35
Route info	Mention of routes, how to get to a location, questions about routes, useful and accessible route information.	91
Transport	A reference to motorised transport (car, bus, taxi etc.).	110

Volunteering	Mention of needing volunteers, volunteer support, being or wanting to be a volunteer.	16
Watery Place	Mention of a watery place such as a river, brook, canal, stream, lake, pond, marsh (excluding floods on roads).	252
Wildlife and Nature	Any mention of wildlife, nature or plants (excluding zoos, zoo animals and pets).	195