

Outdoor Partnerships Annual User Survey Trend Analysis

601 people responded to the Annual Survey in 2016/17. They were mostly over 55, white British and lived in Shropshire. Slightly more men than women replied. The survey was filled out by people from more user groups this year, with fewer users of Countryside Sites and many more mountain bikers, cyclists and horse riders. 10% were 4x4 or drivers or trail bikers. This is reflected in over 40% of respondents being members of a horse riding or cycling group and 8% belonging to a 4x4 or trail riding group. 67% of those filling out the survey last year volunteered with us, compared to only 30% this year. This will have had an impact on the results when compared with previous years.

Only 18% of respondents were under 45, compared with 76% of users of the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website, most of whom are using it to find walking routes, so the survey results are unlikely to represent the opinion of the majority of the 103,000 users of the site.

Key messages from the User Survey:

- The Service is appreciated and people are aware of how important the provision is for health and wellbeing
- Better promotion of the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website and the work of the Service is needed
- Concerns over impact of housing and other developments
- Concerns about lack of funding and reliance on volunteers
- More investment is needed in off-road cycling and horse riding routes
- Some people are not keen to see car parking charges on sites
- There is demand for 4x4 and motor bike trail riding routes

Results:

- Walking is still the main activity (77%)
- Most people are enjoying the outdoors to improve their health and experience nature
- Overgrown vegetation and physical obstructions are the most common issues experienced
- Circular walk and Country Parks and Sites are most commonly used
- Respondents were most likely to use the provision 1-3 times per week, for 2 hours or more with family and friends
- 70% were involved with an outdoor activity or volunteer group. They joined a group to make friends, learn new activities and get more active
- The most popular improvements sought were:
 - Better signage
 - More circular walks- although this was down on previous years
 - More walks with gates instead of stiles
 - More online guides and interpretation
 - More cycle tracks
- Respondents are most likely to get information from:
 - Shropshire's Great Outdoors website and other local websites (51%)
 - Printed leaflets and guidebooks (40%)
 - Organised groups (38%)
 - Local Newspapers (29%)
 - Social media (26%)
- 99% of respondents think that getting into the great outdoors has a positive or very positive impact on their quality of life

- 62 people were interested to know more about the work we do or to volunteer with us

Trends

When these results are compared, where possible, with results from previous years the following trends can be seen:

- Physical obstructions were much more of an issue
- There were fewer users of promoted walks routes and more users of bridleways, with people more likely to be out for 2 hours or more
- There was a lower satisfaction level with Rights of Way than previous years, with only 31% seeing improvements in the past 12 months
- Whilst 54% were satisfied with parks and sites, only 22% had seen improvements in the past 12 months
- Fewer people were using printed leaflets and guide books (40% compared to 59% last year)
- 70% of people did not want to volunteer

There were many comments, with a good number thanking the team for all their hard work. The primary concern was cuts to funding and the ability for these services to be maintained in the current financial climate.

Quotes from the User Survey that sum up the key messages:

- I think Shropshire are far ahead of other areas in the UK, the website is probably the best I've seen in the UK
- The work of SOP is hugely important to the physical and psychological health and wellbeing of the community. I truly hope that sufficient funding is available to continue its work.
- I think the Outdoor Dept do a very good job considering the horrendous cuts to their budget. If they were to sort out all of the problems of blocked paths etc. the County Council would need to make a considerable increase in investment in Rights of way. Surely people of Shropshire deserve this.
- Excellent organisation. As a walking for health leader I am impressed by the help, support and continuing good work of the Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships.
- Footpaths are not always well kept and housing developments often encroach onto them, disturb the footpath and make it uneven or make them very enclosed
- It would be great if there were more extensive routes for off road cycling. Currently a lot of the bridleway network leads to nowhere which means many routes require large portions of on road riding. Secondly there are many bridleways that aren't being kept accessible as gates are being locked or paths are left unattended.
- Responsible 4x4 drivers are usually forgotten in these plans.
- The walks in Shropshire are definitely an asset to the area.
- Thank you for everything you do, and the improvements you continue to make, despite funding cuts. Don't know how you do it, but glad you are able to!

62 people asked to be kept informed about the work of the service and volunteering.