



## Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

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## Summary

This report has been commissioned by Wealden District Council on behalf of six local authorities (Wealden, Mid Sussex, Lewes, Tunbridge Wells, Tandridge and Sevenoaks) and presents the results of a visitor survey at Ashdown Forest conducted in the summer 2021, broadly replicating a previous survey in 2016.

Surveys involved face-face interviews with a random sample of people visiting the Forest, at 20 different locations around the site and, at the same 20 locations, tally counts of the number of people seen entering/leaving the site. In addition a total of 15 counts of parked vehicles across the whole of Ashdown Forest were also undertaken.

## Key results and figures from the survey

### Interviews

- A total of 549 interviews were conducted;
- The majority of interviewees (94%) were on a day trip or short visit and had travelled directly from home that day. 22 interviewees (4%) stated they were on holiday in the area and staying away from home;
- Dog walking was the most frequently cited main activity (57% of interviewees) and 64% of interviewees had a dog with them during the visit.
- Dog walking accounted for a particularly high proportion of given activities at Long, Hindleap, Millbrook East, Fairwarp and Nutley;
- The other commonly cited activity was walking (33% of interviewees) and other activities included outing with the family/picnic (2%), jogging or power walking (2%), meeting up with friends (1%), wildlife or bird watching (1%), horse riding (1%) and photography (1%);
- Walking was the most commonly cited main activity at Hollies, Lintons, Reserve, Millbrook East and Roman Road;
- Most interviewees (55%) had been visiting Ashdown Forest for at least 10 years, while 11% of interviewees had only recently started visiting (either on their first visit – 7%, or starting within the past 6 months - 4%);
- Most visits were relatively short, with 89% of interviewees visiting for less than 2 hours. Over half (52%) were visiting for less than 1 hour;
- Visits tended to be slightly longer at the weekend, with a higher proportion of interviewees visiting for 1-2 hours compared to weekdays and a higher proportion on weekdays spending less than 1 hour;
- A higher proportion of interviewees were undertaking longer visits at Four Counties and Gills Leap and a high proportion of interviewees were taking shorter visits at Churlwood, Hindleap and Crowborough.
- We estimate that interviewees had typically visited the interview location around 127 times on average over the past year;

- The majority of interviewees (68%) stated they tended to visit equally all year and this was particularly the case for dog walkers (79% visiting equally all year);
- For those interviewees that did tend to visit at a particular time of year, the summer was the most common response (98 interviewees, 18%).
- Around a third (30%) of interviewees indicated the coronavirus pandemic had changed how often they visit the location where interviewed, with 22% indicating that they now visit more than before;
- Those who have started visiting more as a result of the pandemic are those that previously tended to visit relatively infrequently, for example, for those interviewees who visited less than once a month prior to the pandemic, 41% stated they now visit the location where interviewed more frequently;
- We estimate that, on average, the number of additional visits made by each interviewee following the pandemic (as opposed to before the pandemic) is 9 per year;
- The majority of interviewees (80%) had travelled to the interview location by car or van, while 20% had travelled on foot, <1% by bicycle and 1 interviewee had travelled on their pony;
- The most common factor determining interviewees' choice of route was previous knowledge of the area / previous experience, including habit (cited by 158 interviewees, 29%);
- A wide range of reasons for choosing to visit the location where interviewed were given, close to home was the most common reason (31% of interviewees).
- When asked to name one location outside Ashdown Forest that they would have visited that day if they had not visited Ashdown Forest, 24% of interviewees stated that they would not have gone anywhere else and a further 4% were not sure or didn't know;
- Of the alternative locations named, the South Downs were the most commonly cited (10% of interviewees) followed by Walshes Park (5%);
- 68% of interviewees were aware of guidance on dog walking relating to Ashdown Forest;
- 81% of interviewees knew there was a visitor information centre at Wych Cross and 56% of all interviewees had visited the centre;

### *Tally counts*

- In total, 1,725 groups were noted entering, leaving or passing through at the survey point;
- These groups contained a total of 3,254 people (of which 426 were minors) and 1,505 dogs.
- From these totals the mean group size was 1.89 people (of which 0.24 were minors) and 0.87 dogs;
- There was 1 dog for every 2.16 people;
- King's Standing was the busiest location from the tally data, with 15% of the groups, 16% of the people, 15% of the dogs and 18% of the minors logged entering all sites recorded entering at this location.

### *Vehicle counts*

- The total number of vehicles on the 15 transects ranged from 88 to 374, with a mean of 190.9 and a median of 191;

- Counts tended to be highest in the middle of the day compared to early morning and later afternoon/early evening;
- Weekends were higher during term time and the counts were slightly higher on those days when it was not raining.

### *Key differences 2016 – 2021*

Surveys during 2016 were broadly similar and comparisons are made after filtering the data to ensure as far as possible a like for like comparison. Note that the surveys in 2016 were slightly earlier in the year.

- Visitor numbers have increased (with the tallies showing a 7% increase, the number of interviews a 9% increase and the vehicle counts a 20% increase). The vehicle counts provide a more robust comparison (and future baseline) as they cover the whole of Ashdown Forest and there were 15 replicates however the timings were different between the two surveys and the 20% may be an overestimate;
- The proportion of people that are visiting to walk their dog (stated main activity) has decreased (69% of interviewees in 2016, 60% of interviewees in 2021);
- The proportion of walkers has increased (from 18% to 29% of interviewees);
- The proportion of interviewees that stated they went off paths has decreased (from 41% to 22%);
- The proportion that were visiting primarily because it was close to home has decreased (from 37% of interviewees to 27%);
- The data show a reduction in the proportion of interviewees that specifically named the 4Cs guidance relating to dog walking (41% to 22%);
- There was no significant difference in the distance between the survey location and interviewees' home postcode between the two surveys, suggesting people were not coming from nearer (or further) afield in 2021.

The two surveys provide a snapshot of visitor profiles, access patterns and levels of use in 2016 and 2021. Clearly much has happened over that period, and the 2021 survey took place as restrictions associated with the Covid pandemic were being fully lifted but at a time when the pandemic will still have been influencing visitor behaviour.

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# 1. Introduction

## Overview

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by Wealden District Council on behalf of six local authorities (Wealden, Mid Sussex, Lewes, Tunbridge Wells, Tandridge and Sevenoaks) and presents the results of a visitor survey at Ashdown Forest conducted in the summer 2021, broadly replicating a previous survey in 2016.

## Ashdown Forest

- 1.2 Ashdown Forest is an extensive block of common land between East Grinstead and Crowborough in East Sussex and forms one of the largest areas of continuous heathland in south-east England. The Forest is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and being located on a high sandy-ridge it provides expansive views across the High Weald to the North and South Downs.
- 1.3 It is internationally important for nature conservation, reflected in its designation as a Special Protection Area (SPA) due to the presence of breeding Nightjars and Dartford Warblers and as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), primarily due to the heathland habitats present. The European site extends to cover around 3,000ha (the SPA is slightly larger than the SAC).
- 1.4 Ashdown Forest is the largest public access space in southeast England, and the open, uncultivated countryside provides a draw for visitors. The heathland and commons are freely open to the public and there are over 40 car parks, two long-distance footpaths (the Vanguard Way and Wealdway) and there is a visitor centre. It is also famous as the setting for the Winnie-the-Pooh stories, written by A. A. Milne.
- 1.5 The responsibility for managing Ashdown Forest lies with an independent body, the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest.

## Impacts and importance of access

- 1.6 A challenging issue for UK nature conservation is how to respond to increasing demand for access without compromising the integrity of protected wildlife sites. Areas that are important for nature conservation are



often important for a range of other services, including the provision of space for recreation for an increasing population. Such recreation space can be used for a wide variety of activities, ranging from daily dog walks to competitive adventure and endurance sports.

- 1.7 Visits to the natural environment have shown a significant increase in England as a result of the increase in population and a trend to visit the countryside more (O'Neill, 2019). The issues are particularly acute in southern England, where population density is highest. The Covid-19 pandemic has further had a marked effect on how people use local greenspaces and many locations across the UK have seen a marked increase in recreation use during the pandemic (Burnett et al., 2021).
- 1.8 There is a strong body of evidence showing how increasing levels of access can have negative impacts on wildlife. Issues are varied and include disturbance, increased fire risk, contamination and damage (for general reviews see: Liley et al., 2010; Lowen et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2014; Underhill-Day, 2005). The issues are not, however, straightforward. It is now increasingly recognised that access to the countryside is crucial to the long term success of nature conservation projects, for example through enforcing pro-environmental behaviours and a greater respect for the world around us (Richardson et al., 2016). Access also brings wider benefits to society that include benefits to mental/physical health (Keniger et al., 2013; Lee and Maheswaran, 2011; Pretty et al., 2005) and economic benefits (ICF GHK, 2013; ICRT, 2011; Keniger et al., 2013; The Land Trust, 2018). Nature conservation bodies are trying to encourage people to spend more time outside and government policy is also promoting countryside access in general (e.g. through enhancing coastal access).

## Legislative context

- 1.9 The designation, protection and restoration of European wildlife sites is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'. Importantly, the most recent amendments (the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019<sup>1</sup>) take account of the UK's departure from the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> The amending regulations generally seek to retain the requirements of the 2017 Regulations but with adjustments for the UK's exit from the European Union. See Regulation 4, which also

- 1.10 The Regulations provide strict protection for European sites and this extends to local plans. Regulation 105 *et seq* addresses the assessment of local plans and there is also Government Guidance on the interpretation and application of the Regulations which includes local plans<sup>2</sup>. Local planning authorities, as public bodies, are given specific duties as ‘competent authorities’. A competent authority should only approve a project or give effect to a plan where it can be ascertained that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity of the European site(s) (or exceptionally, if there is overriding public interest and no alternatives).

## Mitigation for housing growth

- 1.11 Ashdown Forest lies relatively close to a number of settlements such as Crawley, East Grinstead, Royal Tunbridge Wells and Haywards Heath, as well as a number of smaller towns such as Crowborough and Uckfield. The attractive, extensive open nature of Ashdown Forest and the right of access across much of the site means it will inevitably draw residents for recreation. Housing growth in the surrounding area, as set out in local development plans, is therefore likely to result in increased pressure on the site bringing risks of disturbance to the SPA bird interest and damage to the heathland habitat. In order to ensure no adverse effects on the integrity of Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA, the surrounding local authorities, working with the Ashdown Forest Conservators, have established a range of mitigation measures. These measures include a range of access management and monitoring at Ashdown Forest and the provision of alternative natural greenspaces (‘SANGs’ – Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) to deflect access.

## Previous visitor survey work

- 1.12 Previous visitor surveys have included interviews and counts of visitors undertaken in 2009 (UE Associates, 2009). A subsequent survey (Liley et al., 2016) was then commissioned to inform an emerging strategic approach to mitigation, being undertaken jointly by the relevant Local Planning

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confirms that the interpretation of these Regulations as they had effect, or any guidance as it applied, before exit day, shall continue to do so.

<sup>2</sup> Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site. Defra and Natural England. 24 February 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-european-site> (accessed 4 March 2021)

Authorities, namely Wealden, Mid Sussex, Lewes, Tunbridge Wells, Tandridge and Sevenoaks.

- 1.13 The survey work in 2016 included counts of visitors and interviews with a random sample of interviewees at twenty access points, selected to represent a range of access points in terms of parking capacity and geographical spread across the Forest. In addition, automated counters were used at a small number of additional locations to count visitors and fifteen driving transects – counting all parked cars across all car-parks – were undertaken.
- 1.14 The survey results indicated that Ashdown Forest received in the region of 4,500 visitors per day. 452 interviews were conducted and the interview data highlighted that most visitors were visiting to walk their dog, with relatively few holiday makers and most (75%) non-holiday makers travelling from within a 9.6km radius. Interviewees tended to visit frequently – with 63% of interviewees visiting at least weekly, and visits were typically short (59% visiting for less than an hour). Visitors typically arrived by car. A wide range of other alternative sites were named, providing an indication of the range of other sites that draw access besides Ashdown Forest, but nearly half (46%) of interviewees indicated they would not have gone anywhere else if they could not have visited Ashdown Forest.

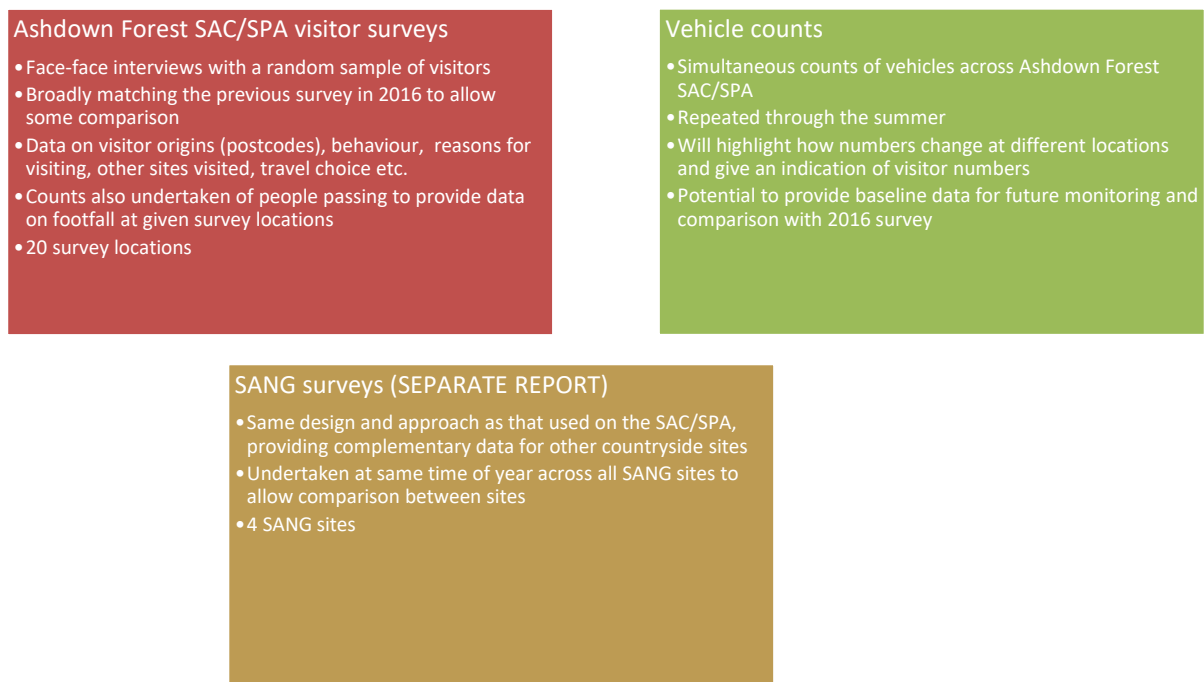
## Reasons for this survey

- 1.15 This survey was commissioned to provide a repeat of the 2016 survey and provide the evidence to inform future planning policy and the evidence base for Habitats Regulations Assessments of the respective local plans. The aim of the survey is to determine how access has changed and to check the use of SANGs around Ashdown Forest. Given the major effect of Covid on travel patterns and use of outdoor spaces, the survey will identify emerging trends and patterns of use and provide an indication of the potential pressures on Ashdown Forest as a result of housing growth. A second survey report accompanies this one and documents the survey results from four SANGs, with the survey approach and questionnaire design mirroring that used at Ashdown Forest.

## 2. Methods

### Overview

2.1 Our approach involves two separate survey elements, Ashdown Forest visitor surveys (involving counts of people and interviews) and vehicle counts across Ashdown Forest; these 2 elements are summarised in Figure 1. In addition, SANGs surveys have been undertaken alongside the visitor survey work at Ashdown Forest and the results of these surveys are in a separate report



**Figure 1: Summary of survey approaches**

### Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA visitor surveys

#### *Survey locations*

2.2 Surveys took place at 20 survey points. These broadly matched those used in the 2016 survey (see Liley et al., 2016 for details), which were originally selected to include a range of car-parks of different sizes, the main car parks (King's Standing and Wych Cross), pedestrian access points and also to ensure a good geographical spread.

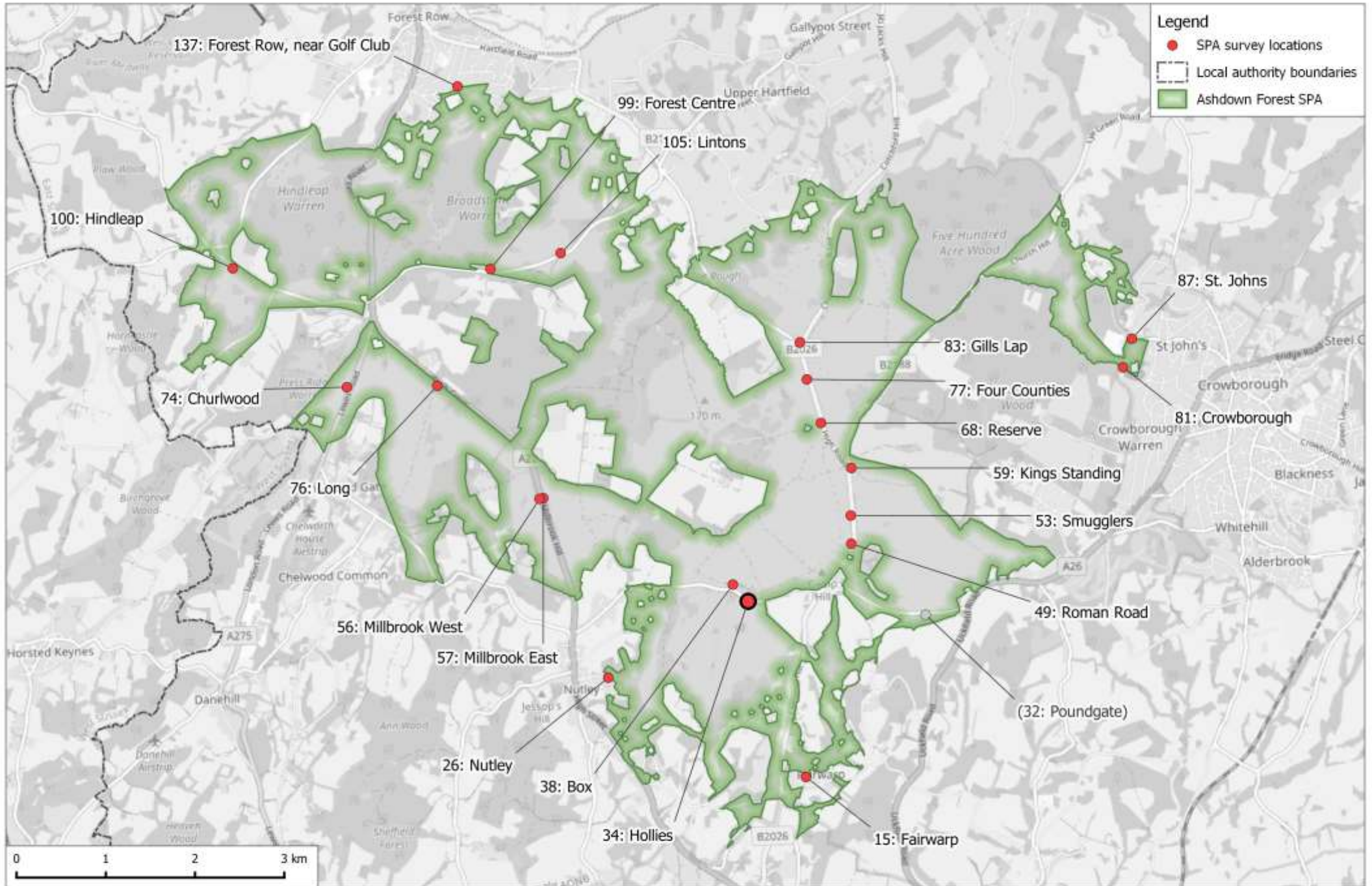
2.3 2 changes were made to the locations used in 2016, as these locations were very quiet in 2016 and at one (Vachery), no one was interviewed at all. The two changes were:

- Vachery was replaced with Millbrook East
- Twyford was replaced with Hindleap

2.1 In addition, after starting surveys at Poundgate, the decision was made to switch that location to Hollies (the nearest carpark) due to anti-social behaviour taking place. Survey points are shown in Map 1 (including both Poundgate and Hollies) and summarised in Table 1.



**Map 1: Survey locations around the SPA**



# Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

**Table 1: Survey Points. The 2009 column highlights those survey locations also surveyed in 2009 (see UE Associates, 2009).**

Type	Name	Car park size	Surveyed in 2009	Surveyed in 2016 (No. interviews)	Grid Reference
Pedestrian	Crowborough	0		✓ (43)	TQ50373126
Pedestrian	Forest Row, near Golf Club	0		✓ (33)	TQ42913443
Pedestrian	Nutley	0		✓ (20)	TQ44602778
Pedestrian	Fairwarp	0		✓ (8)	TQ46812667
Formal car park	Roman Road	8		✓ (10)	TQ47322929
Formal car park	Poundgate*	10	✓	✓ (11)	TQ48152849
Formal car park	Hollies*	45		x	TQ46222865
Formal car park	Reserve	12		✓ (27)	TQ46983064
Formal car park	Smugglers	15		✓ (22)	TQ47322960
Formal car park	Forest Centre	19		✓ (28)	TQ43283236
Formal car park	Churlwood	19	✓	✓ (9)	TQ41673104
Formal car park	Lintons	23	✓	✓ (18)	TQ44063254
Formal car park	St.Johns	30	✓	✓ (33)	TQ50463158
Formal car park	Millbrook West	30	✓	✓ (8)	TQ43832979
Formal car park	Long	37	✓	✓ (37)	TQ42683105
Formal car park	Box	40		✓ (38)	TQ46002883
Formal car park	Four Counties	50		✓ (4)	TQ46823112
Formal car park	King's Standing	50	✓	✓ (46)	TQ47323013
Formal car park	Gills Lap	105	✓	✓ (52)	TQ46753154
Formal car park	Millbrook East	50		x	TQ43872980
Formal car park	Hindleap	23	✓	x	TQ40393236

\*Note Poundgate was swapped for Hollies during survey work due to anti-social behaviour

### *Survey logistics*

- 2.2 Surveyors undertook counts and visitor interviews within standard two-hour periods, standardised across survey points. This is our standard approach for visitor surveys (with some Covid-19 adaptations) and matches that used in the previous survey.
- 2.3 Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random selection of visitors, with the surveyor selecting the next person they saw after completing the previous interview, with only one person interviewed per group or party.
- 2.4 Alongside the interview data, surveyors maintained a tally of all people passing, recording the number of groups (of any size), individuals, minors, dogs and cyclists. These counts allow a comparison across survey points in terms of visitor volume/footfall, and indicate the proportion of visitors that were interviewed at each location.

### *Covid-19 considerations*

- 2.5 Surveys took place outside and during a period when covid restrictions were relaxed. When carrying out interviews, surveyors followed the social distancing guidelines current at the time (2m apart, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable). Surveyors wore masks and visors to minimise the risk of transmission between them and interviewees, whilst still allowing easy communication.
- 2.6 In order to map routes, the surveyors had large (A3) laminated versions of their paper maps and were able to show these to the interviewee who could then broadly indicate their route with their finger (refraining from touching the laminated map).

### *Questionnaire design*

- 2.7 The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed using Snap Surveys software and was conducted using tablet computers running the Snap Mobile Anywhere app. The route that the interviewee had taken on site (or was planning to take) was drawn by the surveyor onto a paper map, using a unique reference number to match it to the corresponding questionnaire data and these routes were subsequently digitised into GIS.
- 2.8 The questionnaire matched that used in the 2016 survey, allowing comparison. Changes/adaptions that were made include:



- A new question was added to record additional activities, i.e. allowing a single main activity and multiple other activities to be logged for each interviewee, this allows for situations (potentially exacerbated during Covid) where groups are perhaps out for longer and undertaking a range of activities.
- Two new questions were added regarding the pandemic and whether visit patterns had changed.
- An additional question was added relating to information sources that influenced the visit.
- The questions about alternative sites were simplified, asking for names of alternative sites but dropping questions on frequency, mode of travel and reasons for going to another site.

### *Survey timings*

- 2.9 Each survey point was surveyed for 16 hours, with 8 hours on a weekend day and 8 hours on a weekday. Surveys were split into 2 hour periods to provide breaks for the surveyors and comparable survey windows across all locations. Survey times comprised: 07:00 - 09:00, 10:30 - 12:30, 14:00 - 16:00, and 17:00 - 19:00hrs. Every effort was made to avoid severe weather conditions.
- 2.10 Surveys took place in the following time windows:
- Weekday surveys: 12<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021;
  - Weekend surveys: 24<sup>th</sup> July – 22<sup>nd</sup> August.
- 2.11 These timings ensured the survey was broadly in line with the 2016 surveys (which were early summer) and that each survey point is comparable with the 2021 data, as coverage was standardised with weekday coverage during the school term time period and weekend coverage during the school holiday period. We deliberately avoided the bank holiday weekend as having some locations (but not others) surveyed in what may be a particularly atypical weekend would make comparison difficult. The surveys also avoided the European cup finals. Survey effort was otherwise spread within the survey windows, ensuring surveys were not weighted too much on a single date, and were spread survey effort over multiple dates, reducing the risk of bad weather on a few dates influencing the results.
- 2.12 Nonetheless, the weather during the survey was changeable and 54 of the 2-hour survey sessions (out of a total of 160 session) had some rain (see Appendix 2).

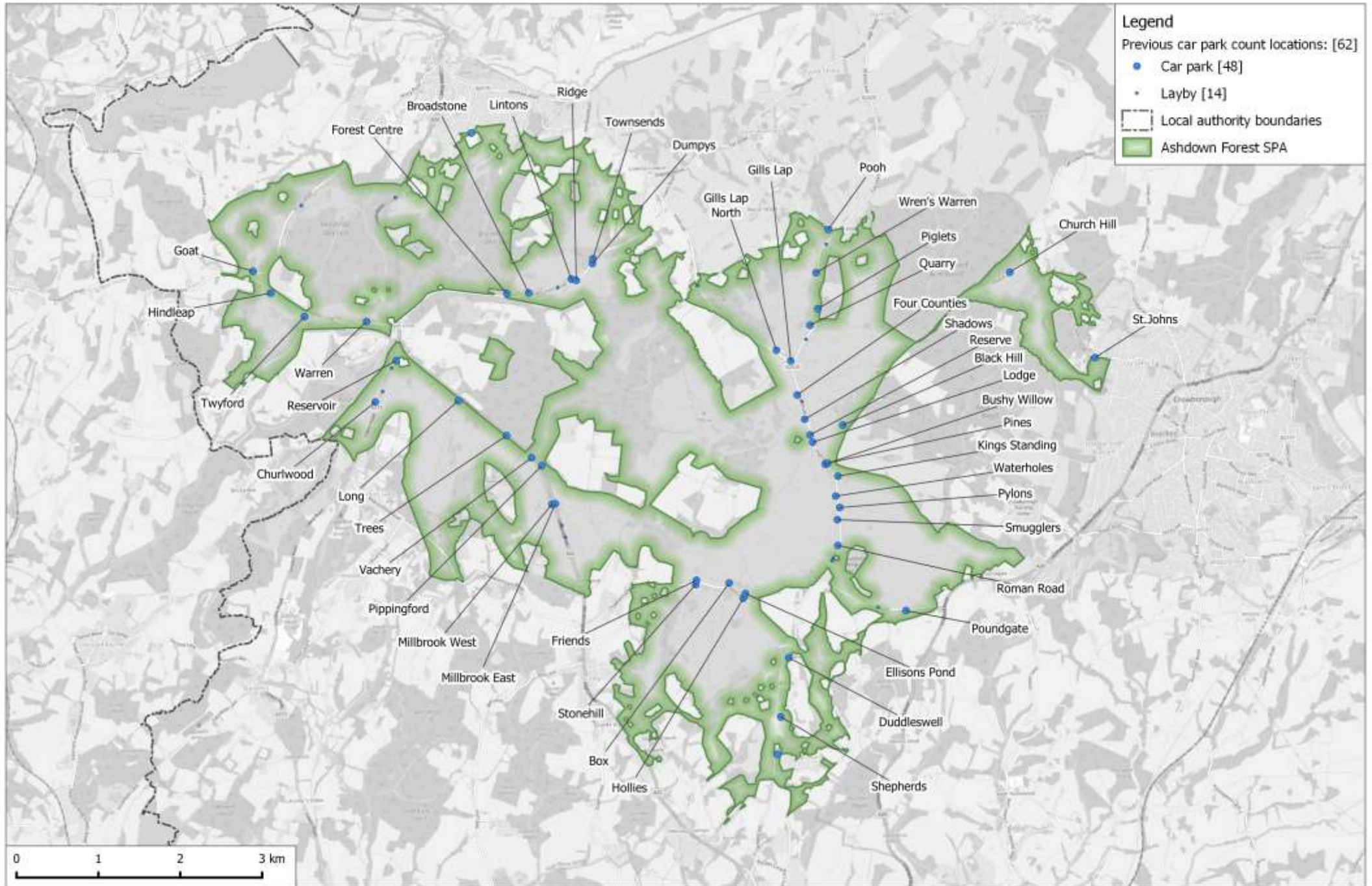
## Vehicle Counts

- 2.13 Vehicle counts were undertaken 15 times, with a single surveyor driving round the SPA/SAC and counting all parked vehicles at all car parks and any roadside/verge or other locations. This matches the approach used in the 2016 survey and will allow an estimate of overall visitor use (arriving by car) and how that use varies at different times.
- 2.14 Count locations are shown in Map 2. Each count took around 2 hours to complete (depending on traffic). Counts were spread to include school holiday, term time and the bank holiday weekend. The order/driving direction was varied between counts.

**Table 2: Temporal spread of vehicle counts, showing number of counts per date window and time of day.**

Time of day	Term time weekday 12-23 July, 5-25 Sept)	Term time weekend 12-23 July, 5-25 Sept)	Holiday weekday 24 July-22 Aug)	Holiday weekend 24 July-22 Aug)	Bank holiday weekend (28-30 Aug)
07-11	1	1	1	1	1
11-13	1	1	1	1	1
13-17	1	1	1	1	1
Total	3	3	3	3	3

Map 2: Car park counts



### 3. Visitor Interview Results

3.1 This section sets out the results from the visitor interviews.

#### Overview of number of interviews

3.2 A total of 549 interviews were conducted, with just over half (296 interviews, 54%) conducted on a weekend (Table 3). The number of interviews at the weekend was higher compared to the weekday at 11 of the survey points, and higher on the weekday at 6 survey points.

**Table 3: Number of interviews by survey location. Locations ranked by the number of interviews. Grey shading indicates the weekday or weekend column with the higher value and with balanced survey effort (\*note that survey effort was not balanced at Poundgate and Hollies).**

Survey location	Number interviews on a weekday	Number interviews on a weekend day	Total (%) of interviews	Already interviewed	Refusals
King's Standing	22	26	48 (9)	1	10
Crowborough	27	20	47 (9)	5	7
Gills Lap	21	25	46 (8)	4	13
Long	19	25	44 (8)	3	18
Box	14	27	41 (7)	1	9
Forest Centre	15	23	38 (7)	1	4
Nutley	20	13	33 (6)	15	10
Forest Row, near Golf Club	19	12	31 (6)	1	13
Hollies*	4	24	28 (5)	0	6
St.Johns	10	18	28 (5)	5	9
Hindleap	13	13	26 (5)	5	4
Lintons	14	10	24 (4)	1	7
Smugglers	7	16	23 (4)	1	6
Reserve	9	10	19 (3)	0	8
Millbrook West	9	10	19 (3)	3	10
Millbrook East	12	5	17 (3)	1	4
Fairwarp	9	6	15 (3)	2	5
Four Counties	3	6	9 (2)	0	3
Churlwood	4	4	8 (1)	0	2
Roman Road	1	3	4 (1)	1	2
Poundgate*	1	0	1 (0)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>549 (100)</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>

3.3 The interview lasted on average 8.7 minutes. A total of 50 people were approached that had already been interviewed (and were not re-



interviewed). The only location where the total of people already interviewed was above 5 was Nutley, where 15 people were approached that had already been interviewed (Table 3). A total of 150 people were approached and refused to be interviewed (Table 3). Refusals occurred at all locations with the exception of Poundgate (where survey effort was curtailed). The number of refusals correlated with the number of interviews conducted (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.630,  $p=0.003$ ), suggesting that refusals tended to be directly in proportion to the number of people approached at each location and were therefore not at particular locations. Only 3 refusals were directly attributed to Covid.

- 3.4 Group size<sup>3</sup> in the interviewed groups ranged from 1 to 23 (the latter an organised walking group that meets in Ashdown Forest on a weekly basis). The interviewed groups totalled 1,048 people, giving an average group size (for the interviewed groups) of 1.9 people. 351 interviewees had 1 or more dogs with them, with a total of 482 dogs, roughly 0.9 dogs per interviewee (across all interviewees) and 0.5 dogs per person in the interviewed groups. At least 204 (43%) of the dogs were noted by the surveyor as off the lead at the time of interview.
- 3.5 The majority (518 interviewees, 94%) were on a day trip or short visit and had travelled directly from home that day. 22 interviewees (4%) stated they were on holiday in the area and staying away from home while a further 6 interviewees (1%) were staying with friends or family in the area. The remaining 3 interviewees were not straight forward to classify and included a Duke of Edinburgh instructor (who was travelling backwards and forwards with the group rather than staying over due to Covid) and a carer who was working for clients that were on holiday.

## Activity (Q2 & Q3)

- 3.6 Dog walking was the most frequently given main activity (321 interviewees, 57% of interviewees) with walking the next most commonly cited activity (179 interviewees, 33%). Together these two activities accounted for 90% of interviewees' main activities (Figure 2). 3% of interviewees gave 'other' activities that did not fit with the pre-determined categories and these were varied, for example including two interviewees that were using the site for a

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<sup>3</sup> By group size we mean the number of people in the group, including the interviewee. While only one interview was conducted per group or party, the number of people in the group as a whole was logged.

meeting, two different interviewees that were visiting to scatter ashes/visit area where ashes were scattered, two interviewees that were breaking their journey or pausing on a journey and two instances where interviewees were undertaking survey work.

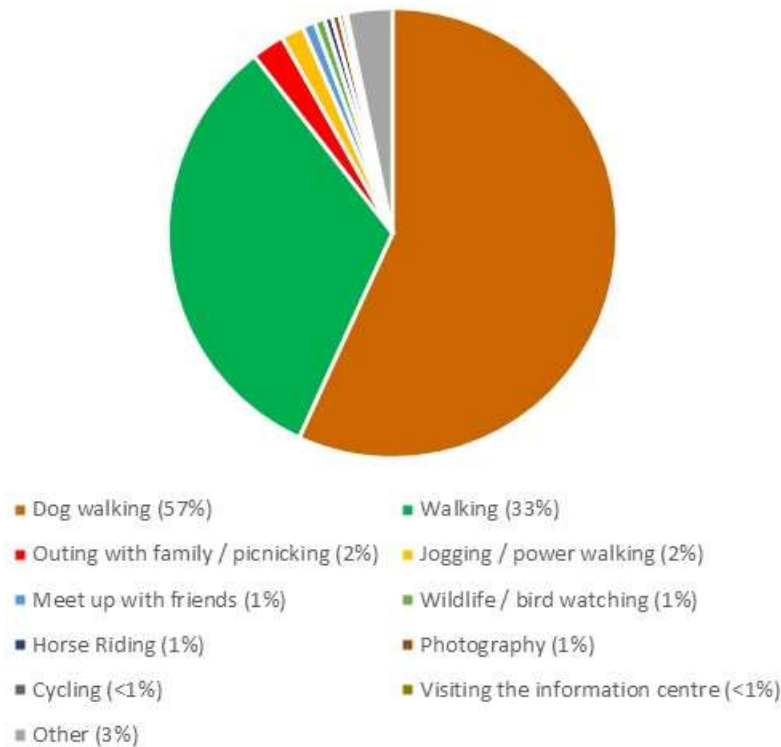


Figure 2: Proportion of interviewees by main activity, from responses to Q1.

3.7 Interviewees were also asked about any other activities they were undertaking during their visit, and these secondary activities are summarised in Table 4. A little under half (236, 43%) of interviewees gave a secondary activity, with walking the most common (80 interviewees, 15%). Also of note were: Outing with family/picnic (given as a secondary activity by 5% of interviewees), meeting up with friends (given as a secondary activity by 5% of interviewees) and wildlife/bird watching (given as a secondary activity by 5% of interviewees).

3.8 Including both main and secondary activities, 342 interviewees (62%) were dog walking. It should be noted that 351 interviewees (64%) actually had dogs with them. The difference relates to interviewees that had a dog with them but did not consider that they were out for a dog walk or that their visit did not involve a dog walk; these included, for example, interviewees who were horse riding, cycling, surveying and on a picnic.

**Table 4: Number (%) of interviewees undertaking different activities**

Activity	No (%) of interviews, main activity	No (%) of interviews, secondary activity	Total interviewees undertaking activity (%)
Dog walking	312 (57%)	30 (5%)	342 (62%)
Walking	179 (33%)	80 (15%)	259 (47%)
Outing with family / picnicking	13 (2%)	29 (5%)	42 (8%)
Jogging / power walking	9 (2%)	1 (0%)	10 (2%)
Meet up with friends	5 (1%)	26 (5%)	31 (6%)
Wildlife / bird watching	4 (1%)	30 (5%)	34 (6%)
Horse Riding	3 (1%)	1 (0%)	4 (1%)
Photography	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	6 (1%)
Cycling	2 (<1%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)
Visiting the information centre	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)
Other	18 (3%)	36 (7%)	54 (10%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>549 (100%)</b>	<b>236 (43%)</b>	

3.9 Looking across survey locations, dog walking was the most common activity at most locations (Figure 3 and Table 5). Dog walking accounted for a particularly high proportion of given activities at Long, Hindleap, Millbrook East, Fairwarp and Nutley. Walking was the most commonly cited main activity at Hollies, Lintons, Reserve, Millbrook East and Roman Road.

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**Figure 3: Percentage of interviewees undertaking different activities by survey location. Figure includes both main and secondary activities, with the percentages calculated based on the number of responses given at each location. Survey locations ranked by the number of interviews at each location (totals in brackets alongside location name).**



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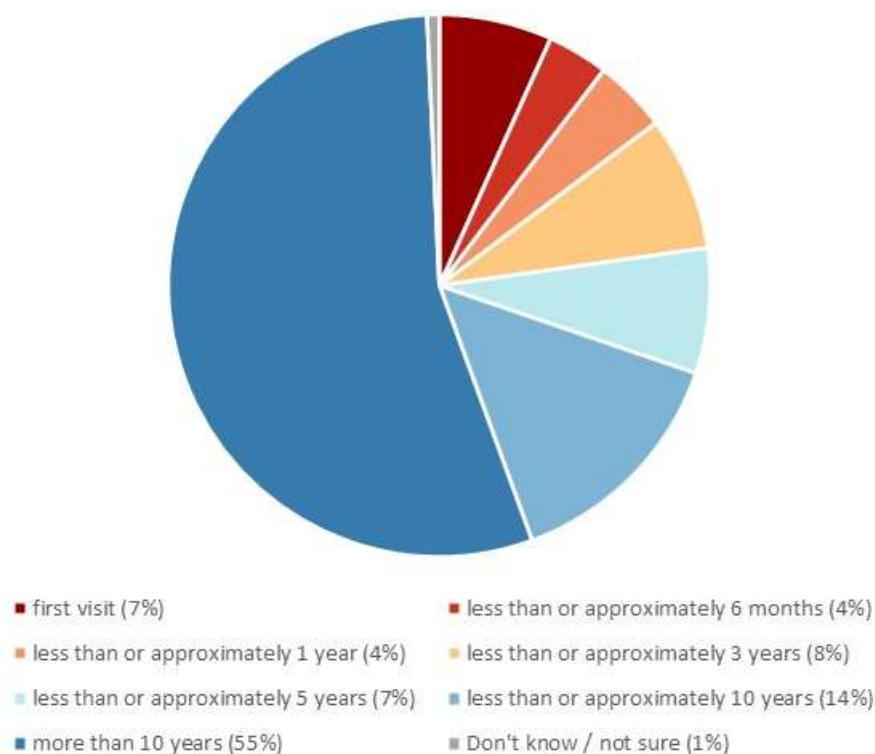
**Table 5: Number of interviewees undertaking given activities by survey location. Each cell gives: number of interviewees undertaking main activity | number of interviewees undertaking activity in total (i.e. main and secondary combined). Grey shading indicates the highest value in each row for main activity and all activities combined.**

Survey location	Dog walking	Walking	Outing with family / picnicking	Jogging / power walking	Meet up with friends	Wildlife / bird watching	Horse Riding	Photography	Cycling	Visiting the information centre	Other	Total
King's Standing	<b>32 35</b>	11 15	3 10	0 0	0 7	0 4	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 4	48 75
Crowborough	<b>30 33</b>	12 20	2 3	0 0	2 6	0 4	1 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 3	47 70
Gills Lap	<b>21 22</b>	19  <b>24</b>	1 5	1 1	0 2	0 1	0 0	1 2	1 1	0 0	2 11	46 69
Long	37  <b>38</b>	7 11	0 0	0 1	0 2	0 4	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	44 57
Box	<b>23 25</b>	14  <b>25</b>	0 0	1 1	0 1	2 3	0 0	0 0	1 1	0 0	0 0	41 56
Forest Centre	<b>16 19</b>	18  <b>21</b>	1 1	0 0	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 1	2 4	38 47
Nutley	<b>24 25</b>	8 14	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	1 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 3	33 44
Forest Row, near Golf Club	<b>15 17</b>	11 15	0 1	4 4	0 2	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 3	31 43
Hollies	6 10	<b>15 20</b>	3 9	1 1	1 1	0 2	1 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 3	28 47
St.Johns	<b>20 22</b>	6 12	1 4	0 0	1 4	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	28 45
Hindleap	<b>21 21</b>	3 5	0 0	1 1	0 1	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 4	26 34
Lintons	7 8	<b>14 17</b>	1 4	0 0	0 0	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 3	24 33
Smugglers	<b>14 15</b>	8 11	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 1	23 29
Reserve	5 7	<b>12 15</b>	0 2	0 0	0 1	2 4	0 0	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	19 31
Millbrook West	<b>16 17</b>	1 6	0 0	0 0	0 1	0 0	0 0	2 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	19 26
Millbrook East	7  <b>9</b>	<b>9 9</b>	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 3	17 22
Fairwarp	<b>11 11</b>	3 5	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 5	15 21
Four Counties	1 2	3 4	0 1	1 1	0 0	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	<b>4 5</b>	9 14
Churlwood	<b>5 5</b>	2  <b>6</b>	1 2	0 0	0 1	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	8 15
Roman Road	1 1	<b>2 3</b>	0 0	0 0	1 1	0 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	4 6
Poundgate	0 0	<b>1 1</b>	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>312 342</b>	<b>179 259</b>	<b>13 42</b>	<b>9 10</b>	<b>5 31</b>	<b>4 34</b>	<b>3 4</b>	<b>3 6</b>	<b>2 2</b>	<b>1 1</b>	<b>18 54</b>	<b>549 785</b>

## Temporal visit patterns (Q4 – Q7)

### *Length of time visiting (Q4)*

3.10 Most interviewees (301 interviewees, 55%) had been visiting Ashdown Forest for at least 10 years (Figure 4). Around 11% of interviewees had only recently started visiting, either on their first visit (37 interviewees, 7%) or starting within the past 6 months (20 interviewees, 4%).



**Figure 4: Length of time visiting Ashdown Forest (from Q4).**

### *Visit duration (Q5)*

3.11 Most interviewees (284, 52%) were visiting for between 30 minutes and 1 hour, with a further 167 interviewees (30%) visiting for 1-2 hours (Figure 5). In total, 487 interviewees (89%) were visiting for less than 2 hours. A higher proportion of those on family outings/picnics tended to be visit for shorter periods while a relatively high proportion of those jogging were visiting for

longer than 2 hours. Based on the categorical responses relating to visit duration the typical visit duration is around 72 minutes<sup>4</sup>.

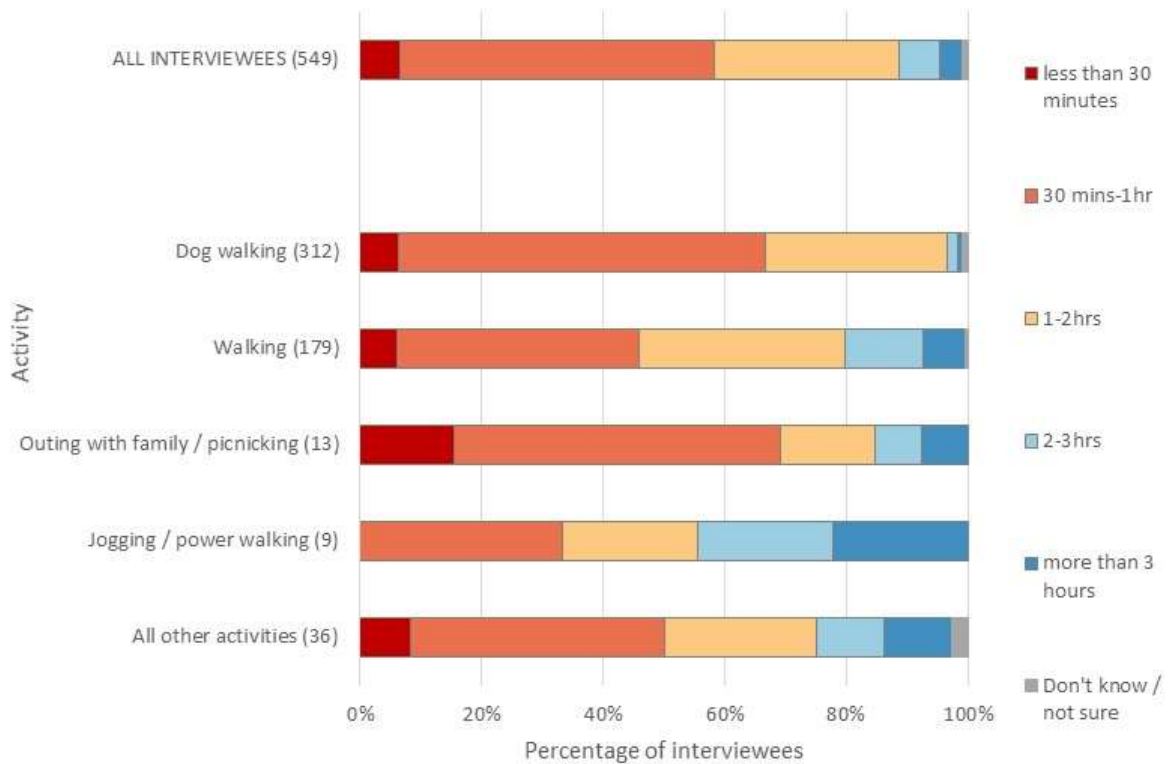


Figure 5: Visit duration for all interviewees (top) and by activity (lower). Numbers in brackets refer to sample size. Data from Q5.

3.12 Visits tended to be slightly longer at the weekend, with a higher proportion of interviewees visiting for 1-2 hours compared to weekdays and a higher proportion on weekdays spending less than 1 hour (Figure 6).

<sup>4</sup> Calculated by assigning an estimate of time to each category: less than 30 minutes = 20mins; 30 minutes - 1hr=45 mins; 1-2 hrs=90 mins; 2-3 hrs=150mins and more than 3 hours=240mins. Typical visit duration is then the average based on the total number of interviewees that gave one of the above categories.

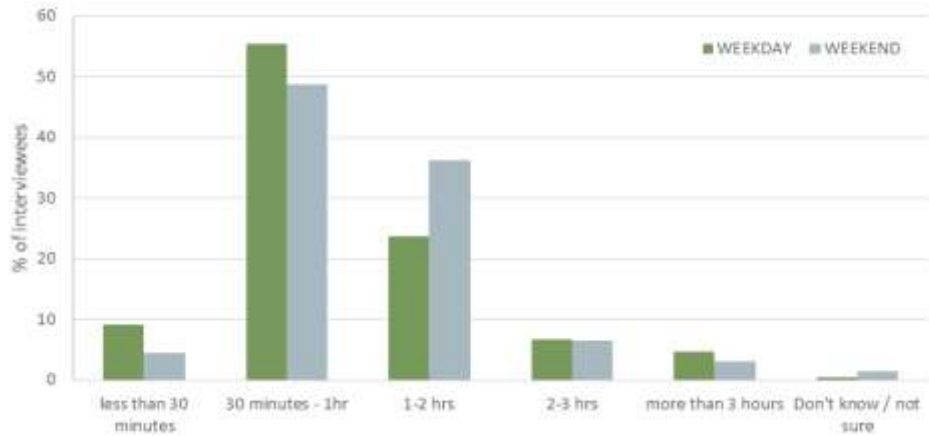


Figure 6: Percentage of interviewees and visit duration, for weekends and weekdays (from Q5).

3.13 Visit duration by survey point is summarised in Figure 7, which suggests a higher proportion of interviewees undertaking longer visits at Four Counties and Gills Leap and a high proportion of interviewees taking shorter visits at Churlwood, Hindleap and Crowborough.

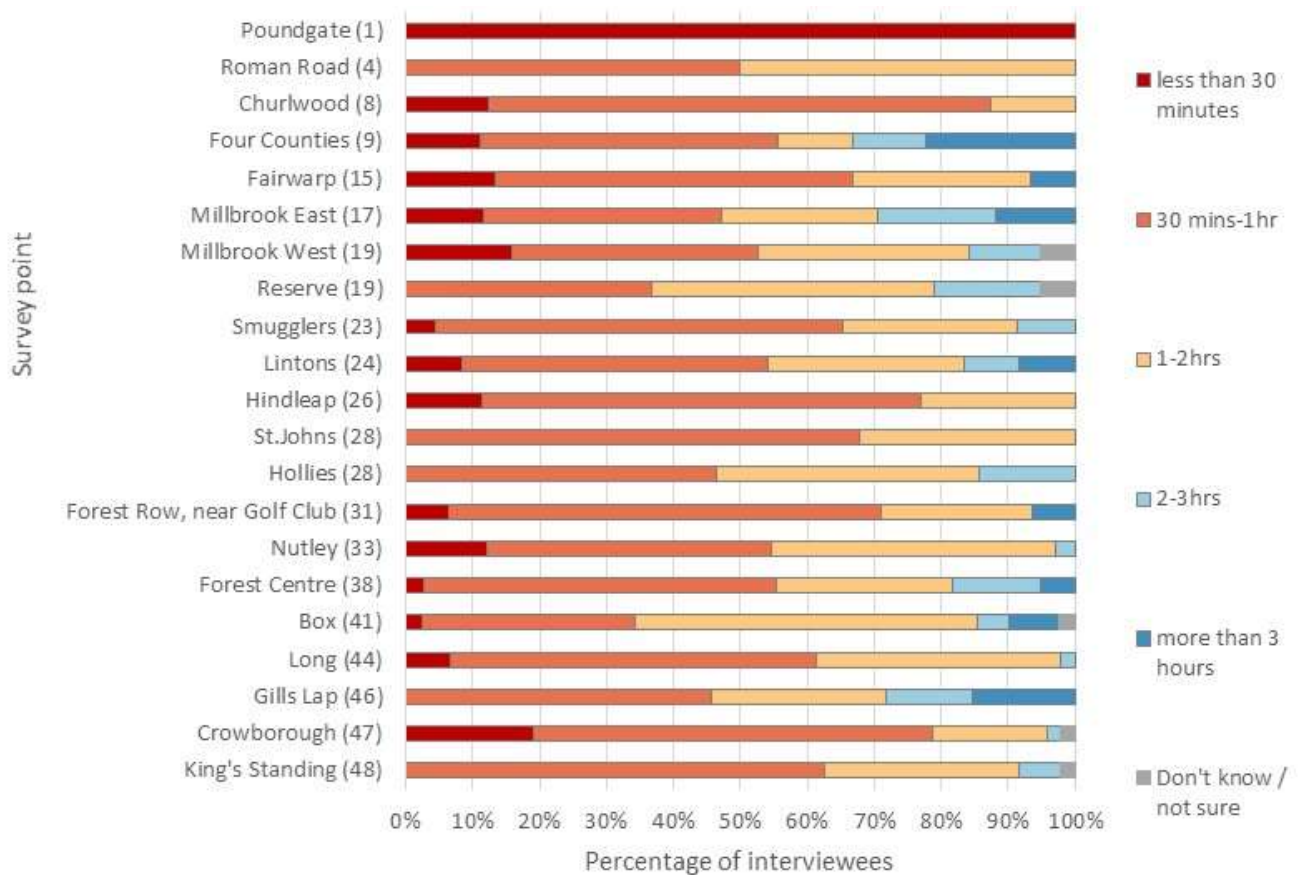


Figure 7: Percentage of interviewees and visit duration by survey point. Numbers in brackets refer to sample size. Data from Q5.

Visit frequency (Q6)

3.14 Visit frequencies are summarised in Figure 8. The most commonly cited visit frequency was 1-3 times per week (the frequency for 132 interviewees, 24%). 110 interviewees (20%) stated they had tended to visit daily over the past year and a further 58 interviewees (11%) had visited ‘most days’. In total 300 interviewees (54%) visited at least weekly. Dog walkers and those jogging had tended to visit the most frequently.

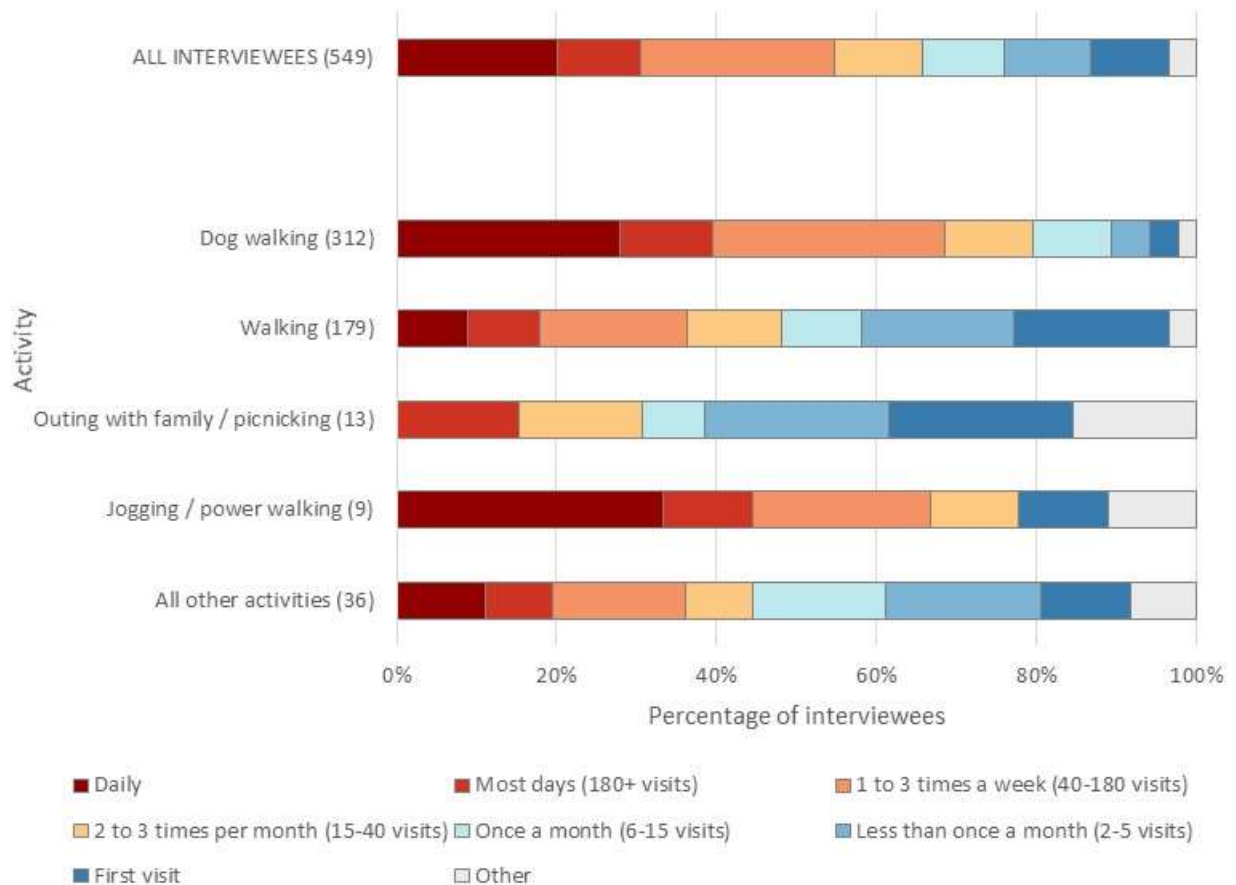


Figure 8: Visit frequency for all interviewees (top) and by activity (lower). Numbers in brackets refer to sample size. Data from Q6.

3.15 Based on the categorical responses relating to visit frequency, interviewees had visited the interview location around 127 times on average over the past year<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Calculated by assigning an estimate of time to each category: “Daily” = 350 visits, “Most days (180+ visits)” =200 visits, “1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)” = 110 visits, “2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)” =27.5 visits, “Once a month (6-15 visits)” =10.5 visits, “Less than once a month (2-5 visits)” = 3 visits and “First visit” =1. Typical visit frequency is then the average based on the total number of interviewees that gave one of the above categories.

### Time of year (Q7)

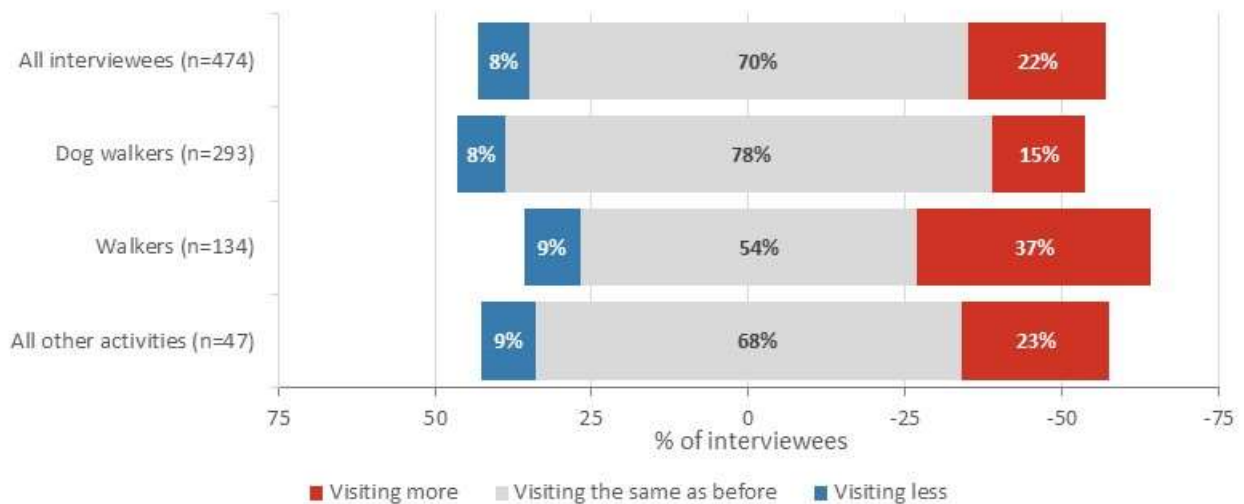
3.16 The majority of interviewees (375 interviewees, 68%) stated they tended to visit equally all year (Table 6), and this was particularly the case for dog walkers (245, 79% visiting equally all year). For those interviewees that did tend to visit at a particular time of year, the summer was the most common response (98 interviewees, 18%).

**Table 6: Number (%) of interviewees and time of year they tend to visit (from Q7). Dark grey shading indicates the most common response in each row and the paler shading the second most common. Note that multiple responses were possible (i.e. interviewees could visit more in both the spring and the summer); percentages are calculated based on the total number of interviewees rather than number of responses.**

Activity	Spring (Mar-May)	Summer (Jun-Aug)	Autumn (Sept-Nov)	Winter (Dec-Feb)	Equally all year	Don't know/first visit	Total interviewees
Dog walking	20 (6)	43 (14)	13 (4)	8 (3)	245 (79)	19 (6)	312 (100)
Walking	22 (12)	44 (25)	18 (10)	3 (2)	93 (52)	34 (19)	179 (100)
Outing with family / picnicking	1 (8)	3 (23)	2 (15)	0 (0)	8 (62)	2 (15)	13 (100)
Jogging / power walking	1 (11)	2 (22)	1 (11)	0 (0)	6 (67)	1 (11)	9 (100)
Meet up with friends	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (80)	2 (40)	5 (100)
Wildlife / bird watching	1 (25)	2 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (50)	0 (0)	4 (100)
Horse Riding	0 (0)	1 (33)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (67)	0 (0)	3 (100)
Photography	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (33)	2 (67)	3 (100)
Cycling	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (100)	0 (0)	2 (100)
Visiting the information centre	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100)	0 (0)	1 (100)
Other	4 (22)	3 (17)	2 (11)	0 (0)	12 (67)	2 (11)	18 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>49 (9)</b>	<b>98 (18)</b>	<b>36 (7)</b>	<b>11 (2)</b>	<b>376 (68)</b>	<b>62 (11)</b>	<b>549 (100)</b>

### Effects of pandemic on visit patterns

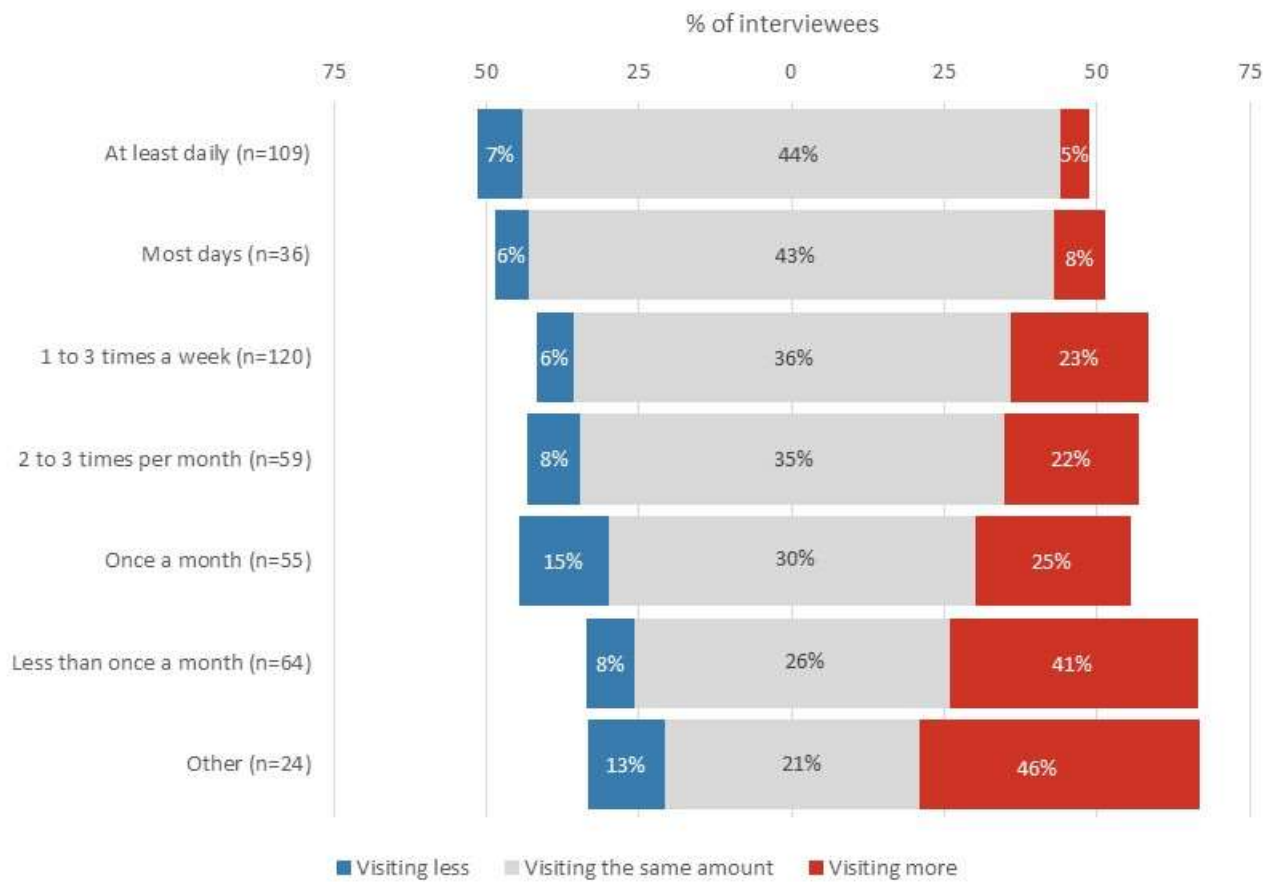
3.17 Across all interviewees, 142 interviewees (30%) indicated the coronavirus pandemic had changed how often they visit the location where interviewed, with 104 interviewees (22%) indicating that they now visit more than before (Figure 9). It would appear that a higher proportion of walkers (37%) in particular now visit more compared to dog walking and other activities.



**Figure 9: Effect of the coronavirus pandemic and percentage of interviewees visiting more, less or the same (from Q9). Top bar is all interviewees and lower 3 bars are for separate activity groups. Row labels give sample sizes (which exclude those who didn't know or were on their first visit).**

3.18 The data show that those who have started visiting more as a result of the pandemic are those that previously tended to visit relatively in-frequently (Figure 10). For example, for those interviewees (n=64) who visited less than once a month prior to the pandemic, 41% now visit the location where interviewed more frequently, by comparison for those who visited at least daily prior to the pandemic (n=109), only 5% stated they now visit more frequently.

3.19 By assigning a set number of visits to each frequency category (see para 3.15) it is possible to derive a rough estimate of the difference in the number of annual visits each interviewee made pre-pandemic compared to when the survey was conducted. This gives a rough estimate of 9 additional visits per year per interviewee.



**Figure 10: Frequency with which interviewees visited prior to the pandemic (from Q8) and whether the coronavirus pandemic has changed visit patterns. Values in brackets are sample sizes.**

### Mode of transport (Q10)

3.20 The majority of interviewees (438 interviewees, 80%) had travelled to the interview location by car or van. Other modes of transport were on foot (108 interviewees, 20%), by bicycle (2 interviewees, <1%) and 1 interviewee had travelled on their pony. There was some variation between survey locations (Figure 11), with the interview locations at Crowborough, Nutley and Fairwarp all with a high proportion of people arriving on foot. All the interviewees at King’s Standing, Long, St. Johns, Hindleap, Smugglers, Reserve, Millbrook West, Churlwood, Roman Road and Poundgate had arrived by car.

3.21 The mean group size for those who had arrived by car was 2.02 people.



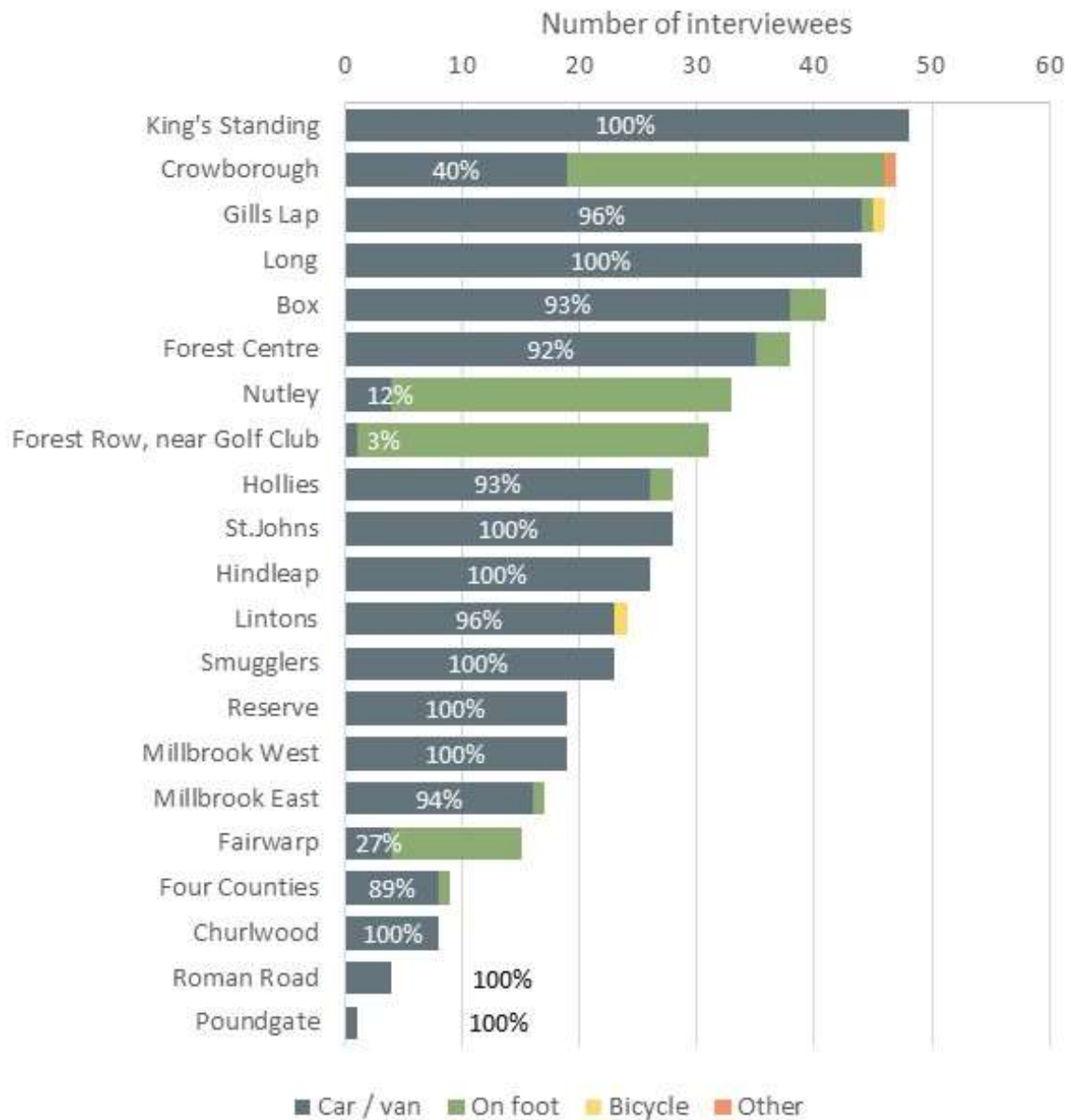


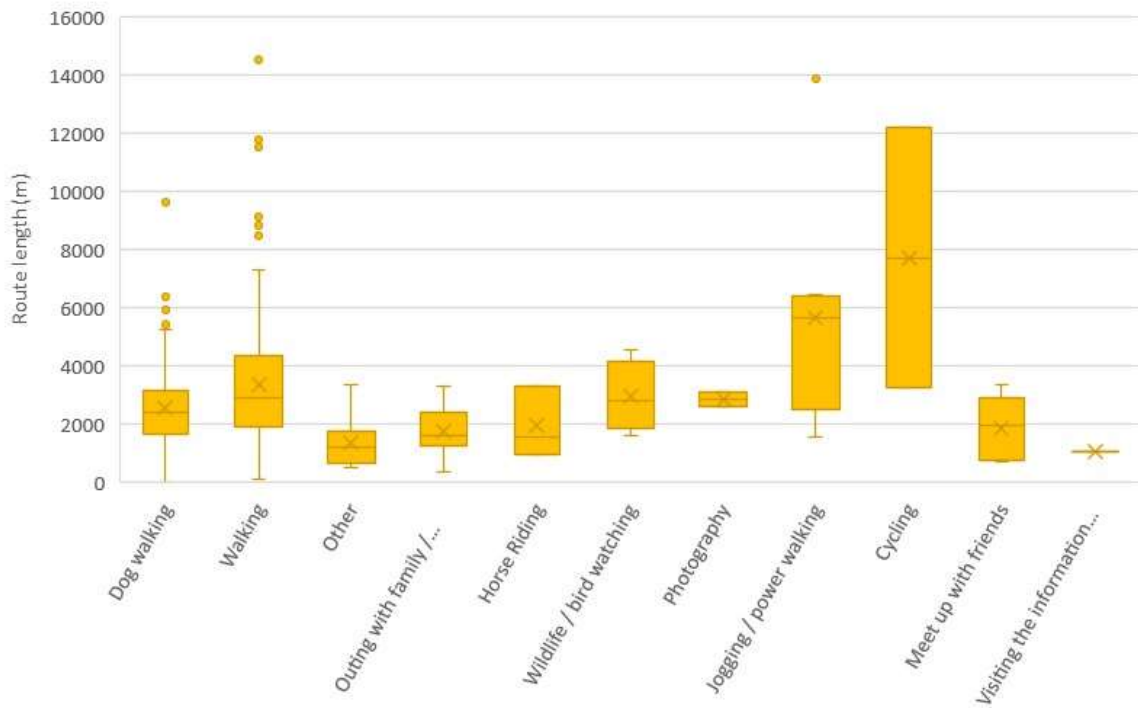
Figure 11: Number of interviewees by mode of transport and survey location. Labels give the % arriving by car at each survey location (from Q10).

3.22 There were few differences in the modes of transport used by those undertaking different activities. For the two most common main activities, dog walking and walking without a dog, the percentage arriving by car was 81% and 79% respectively. For those visiting on a family outing (13 interviewees), a slightly higher percentage (92%) had arrived by car.

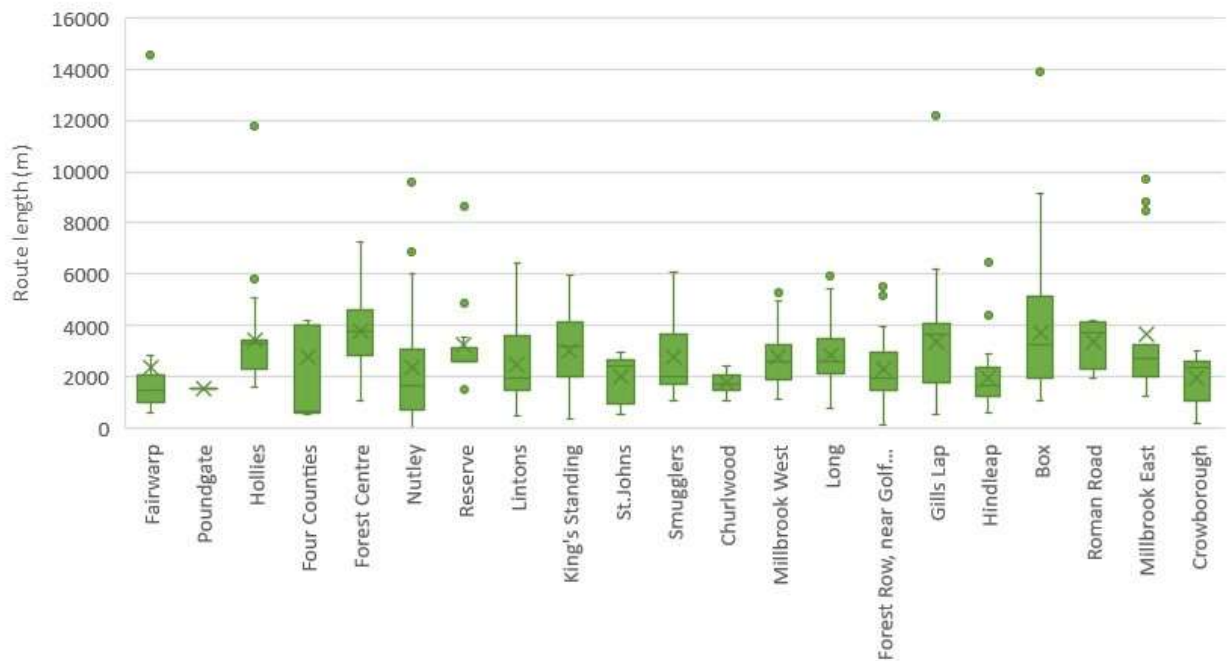
## Routes taken on site (Q11-14)

- 3.23 Most interviewees (344, 63%), stated that the route they had followed or intended to follow that day was similar to their usual route. 128 interviewees (23%) stated that the route was much shorter than normal while the route was much longer than normal for 15 (3%). The remaining interviewees were unsure, had no typical visit or were visiting for the first time.
- 3.24 The majority of interviewees (402, 73%) stated that they stayed on paths during their visit and 122 interviewees (22%) stated that they went off paths.
- 3.25 In total 529 routes were mapped as part of the interview. These are shown in Maps 3. Map 4 summarises the route density based on a 200m grid. Across all interviewees the median route length was 2.77km and ranged from 0.37km to 34.00km (the latter undertaken by a walker). Many of the routes extended well outside the European site, and when clipped to the SPA boundary (i.e. indicating the length actually walked/ridden within the SPA) the median was 2.53km.
- 3.26 Route length data are summarised by main activity type in Figure 12 and by survey location in Figure 13. While the longest route was taken by a walker, cyclists as a group tended to have the longest routes (median 19.13km not clipped to the SPA and 7.72km clipped). For dog walkers the route length was 2.41km (clipped) and 2.69km (not clipped). There was little difference between survey locations. Churlwood (median clipped 1.73km) was notable in that the 8 mapped routes were all very similar in length while many other locations such as Box (median clipped 3.72km) there were a very marked variation with a range of long and short routes.

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**Figure 12: Route lengths (clipped to SPA boundary) by activity.** Horizontal lines show the median, crosses indicate the mean, the boxes show the interquartile range and the whiskers the maximum and minimum values.



**Figure 13: Route lengths (clipped to SPA boundary) by survey location.** Horizontal lines show the median, crosses indicate the mean, the boxes show the interquartile range and the whiskers the maximum and minimum values.

3.27 Factors influencing choice of route are summarised in Figure 14. The most common factor (by some margin) was previous knowledge of the area / previous experience, including habit (cited by 158 interviewees, 29%). The 'other' factors included a diverse range of factors, including the presence of the ice cream van, avoiding snakes and personal safety. Three interviewees mentioned they were following a route based on an app – one using Komoot and the other two using Alltrails.

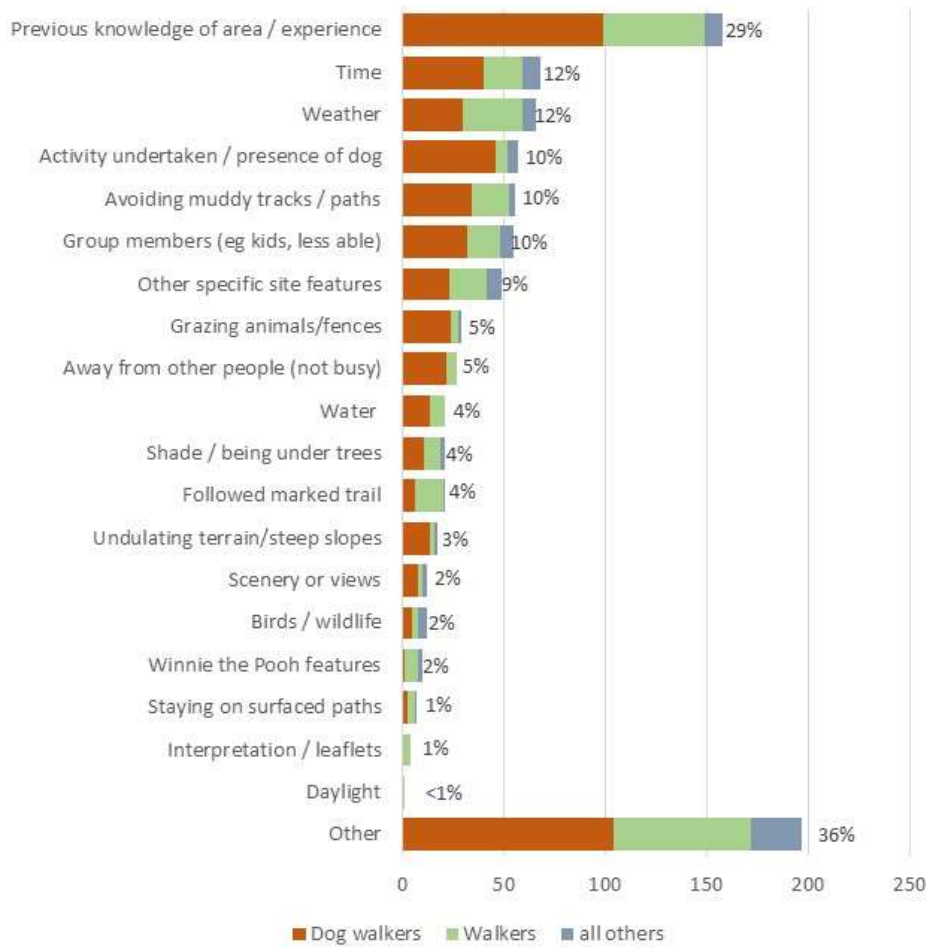
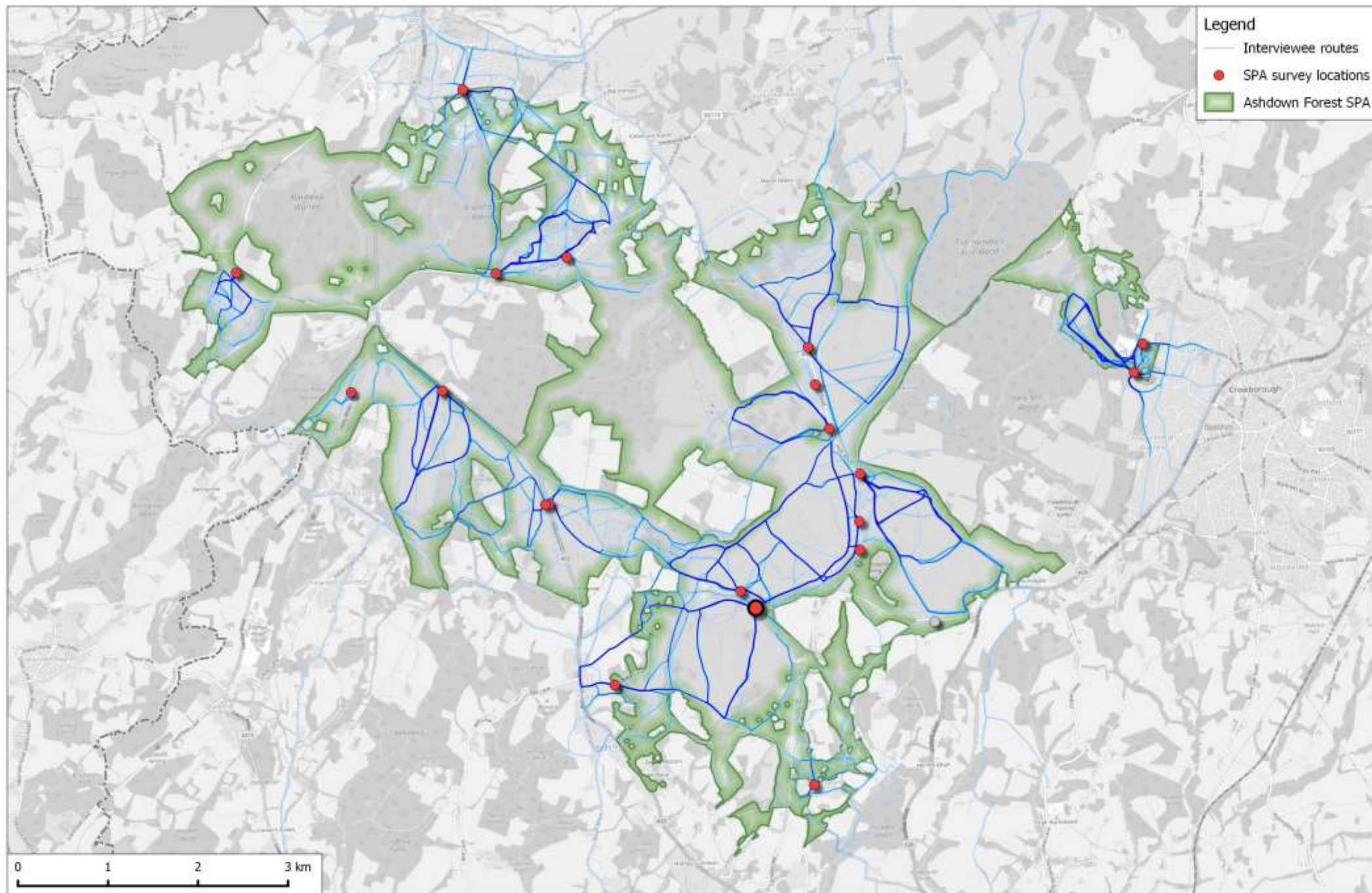


Figure 14: Factors influencing route choice (from Q13). Categories based on pre-determined list with additional categories added to include commonly cited 'other' responses recorded as free text and picked up after reviewing the data. Value labels give the overall percentage of interviewees who cited given factor. Interviewees could cite more than one factor and therefore percentages exceed 100.

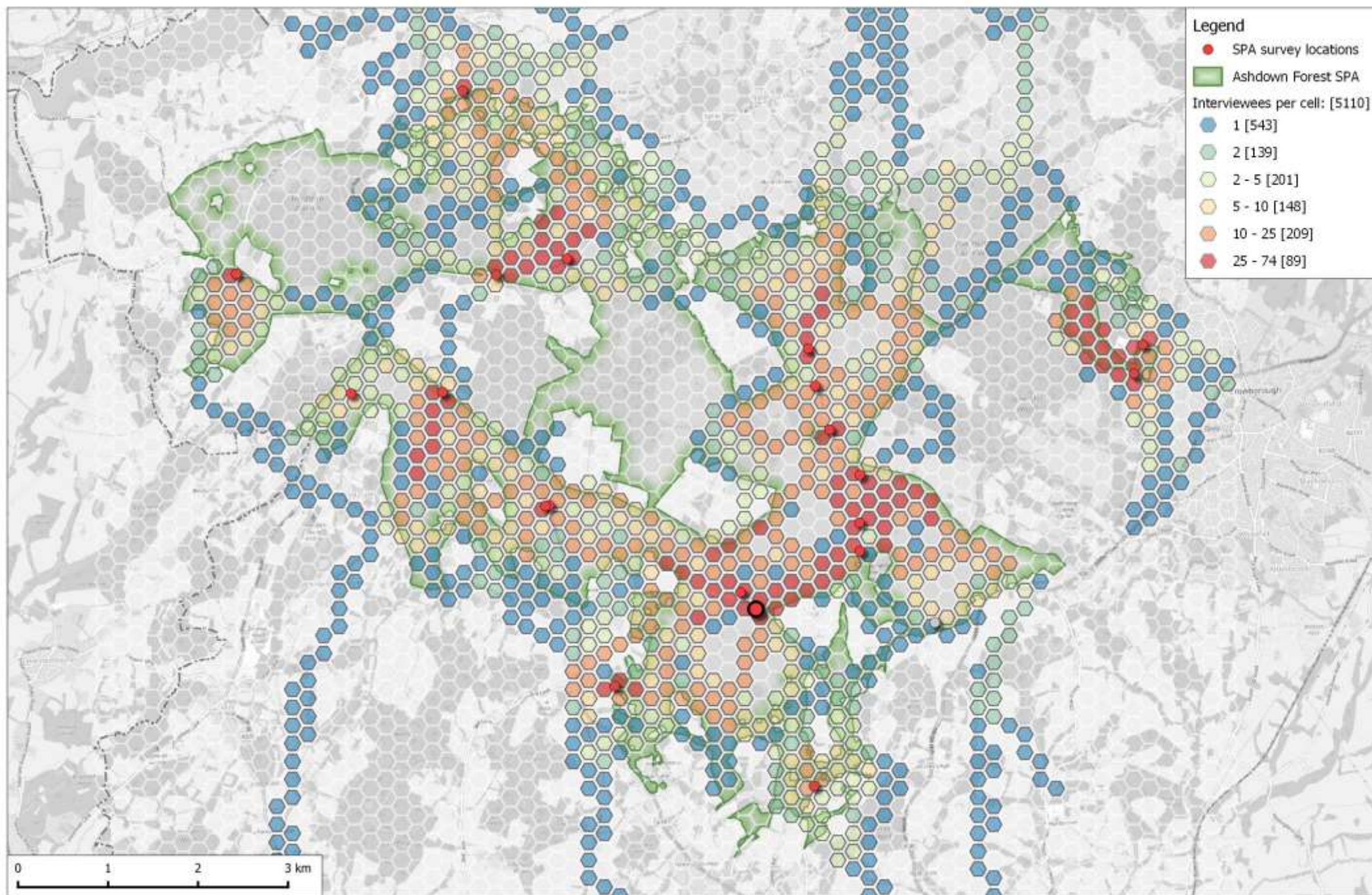


Map 3: Interviewee route lines, with darker colours to indicate heavily overlapping routes.





Map 4: Interviewee route lines summarised using a 200 m hexagonal grid use to show route density and quantify the number of routes per cell.



## Reasons for choice of location (Q14)

- 3.28 Interviewees gave a wide range of reasons for choosing to visit the location (Ashdown Forest) where interviewed, rather than another location (Figure 15); close to home was however the most common reason by some margin and cited by nearly a third of interviewees (171 interviewees, 31%). Other common responses related to the scenery and views (97 interviewees, 18%) and habit / familiarity (79 interviewees, 14%). In Figure 16 dog walkers are compared with all other activities types and it can be seen that for dog walkers proximity to home is of particular importance while scenery and views are less relevant to many.
- 3.29 From a review of the free text responses it was clear many had a strong attachment to particular locations, visiting for sentimental or nostalgic reasons, including 2 different interviewees who were visiting because their husbands' ashes were scattered nearby and a third who had planted heathers in memory of a deceased friend. A few interviewees (13 interviewees, 2%) were visiting for a specific wildlife interest and these included gentians (1 interviewee) and dragonflies (1 interviewee). 3 interviewees had chosen the location based on an app (1 who used Strava, 1 who used komoot and 1 unspecified). Grazing animals were mentioned by 19 interviewees (3%), with all but 2 choosing the location so as to avoid animals (the others wanted to see the animals).



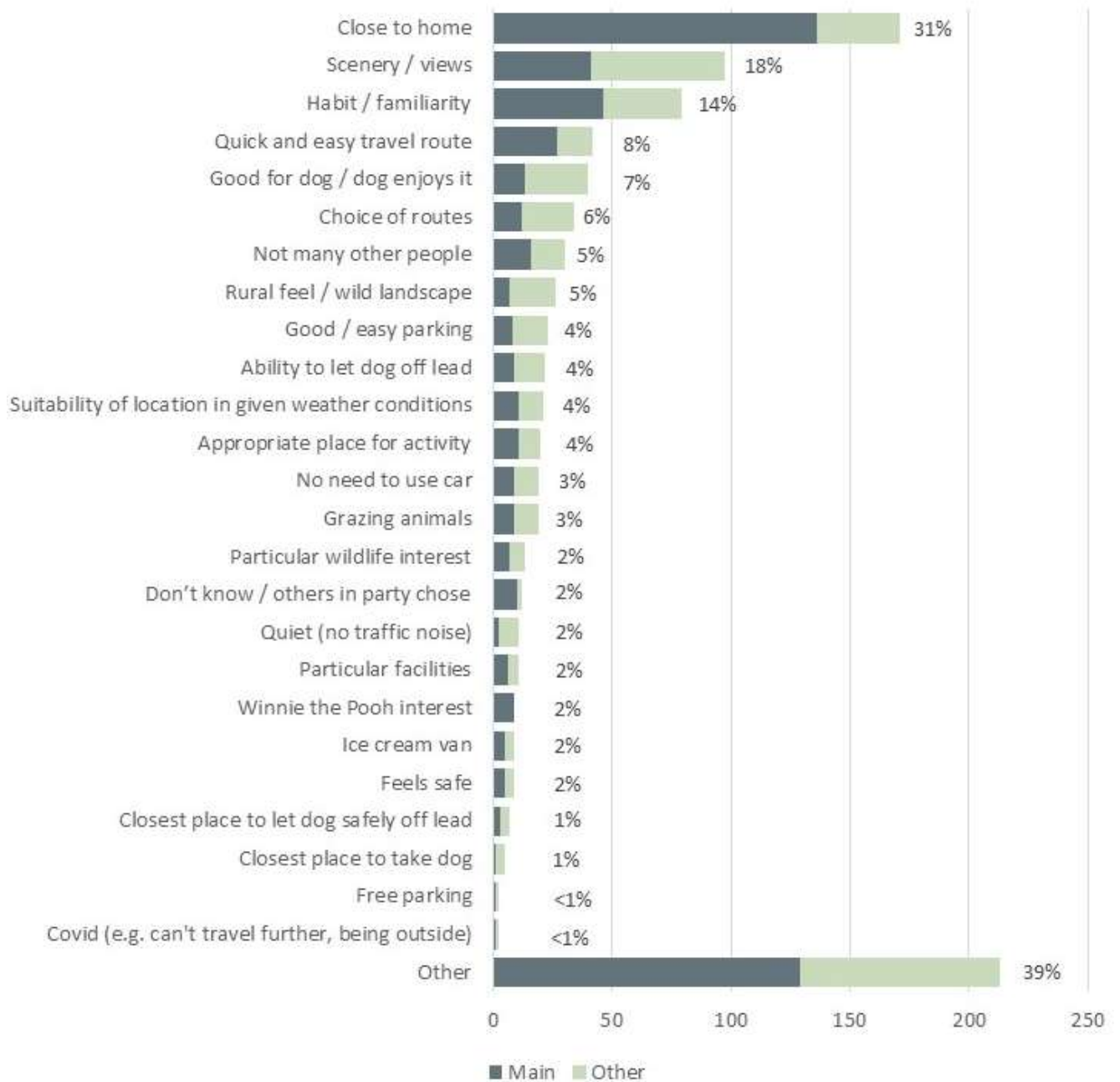


Figure 15: Reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else (Q14). Interviewees were asked for one main reason and could give multiple other reasons. Responses categorised by surveyor and additional categories added following a review of free text responses. Value labels give the percentage of all interviewees who cited the reason (main or other).



# Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

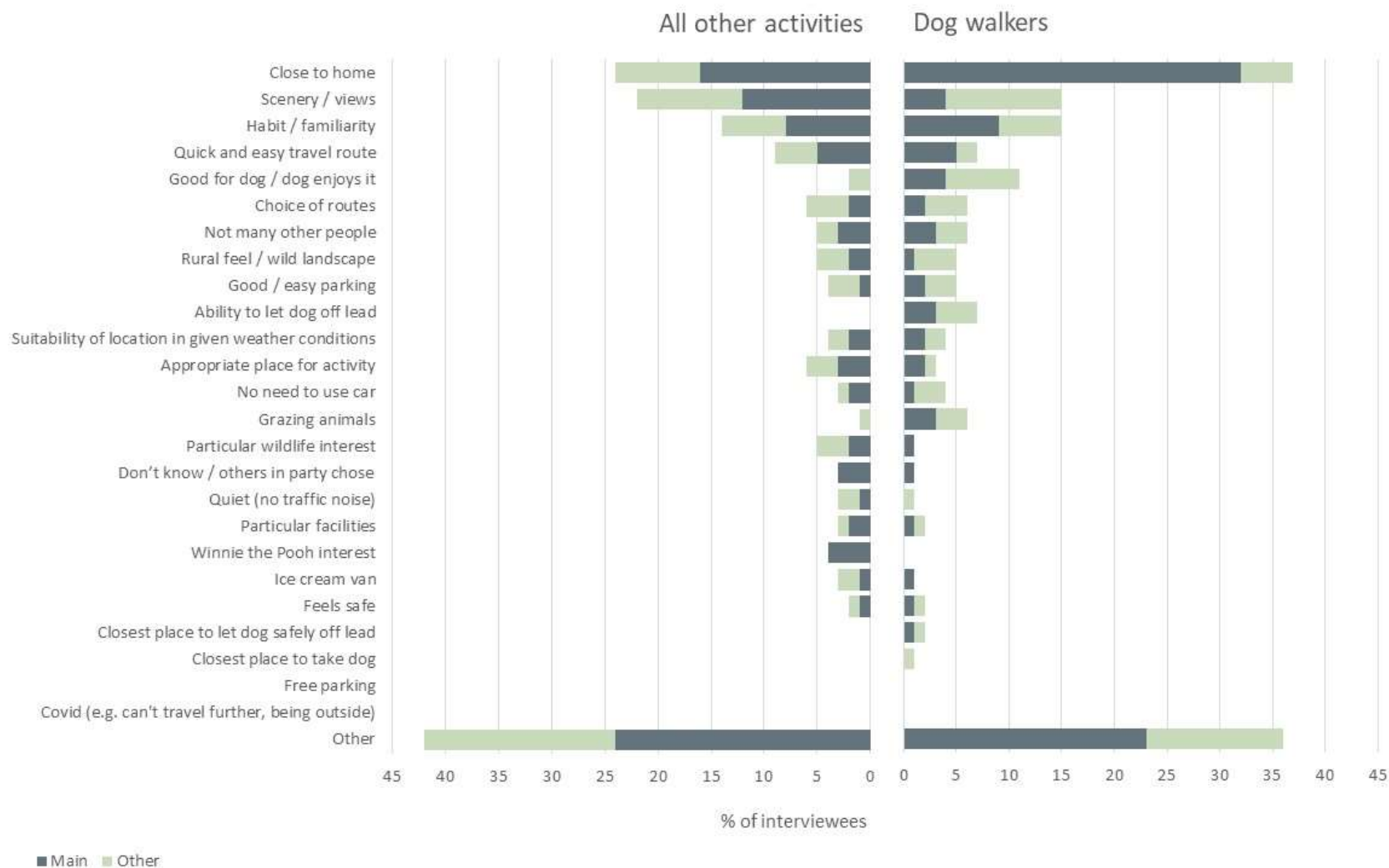


Figure 16: % of interviewees and reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else (Q14). Graph split to show dog walkers and all other activities.

## Alternative locations visited (Q15-17)

3.30 When asked to name one location outside Ashdown Forest that they would have visited that day if they had not visited Ashdown Forest, 134 interviewees (24%) stated that they would not have gone anywhere else and a further 24 interviewees (4%) were not sure or didn't know. In total, 391 interviewees (71%) named an alternative location. The list of alternatives – as given by the interviewees – was reviewed and standardised to give a specific site where possible. For example, some responses were clearly the same location but given different names – for example “Seven Sisters” and “Cuckmere Haven” or “Ashplats”, “East Court” or “Woods around East Court”. For some locations, such as “South Coast” or “Seafront” or “the Down” no specific site was assigned. The standardised locations – given by at least 4 interviewees – are summarised in Figure 17. The South Downs were the most commonly cited alternative (57 interviewees, 10%) followed by Walshes Park (27 interviewees, 5%).

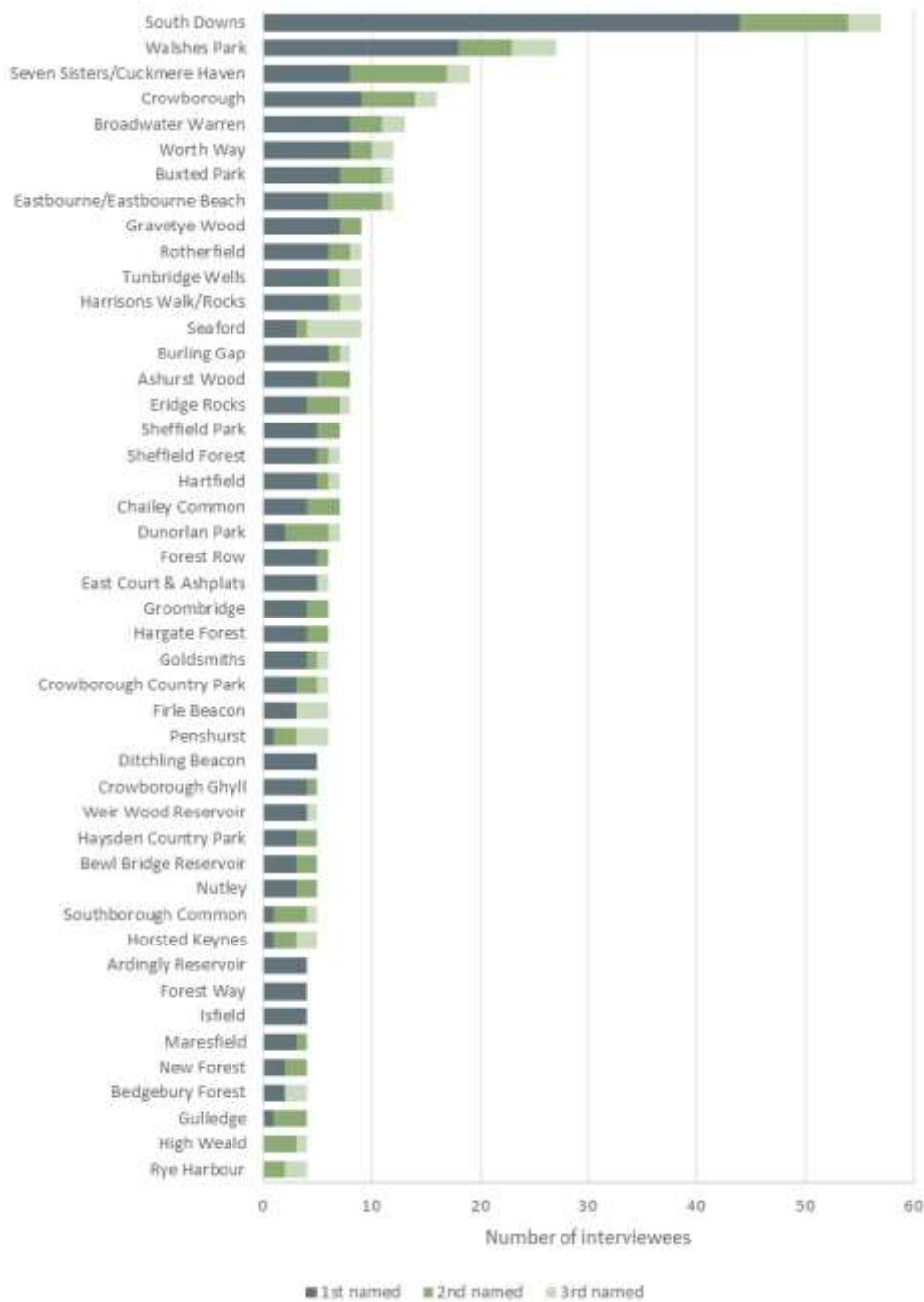


Figure 17: Number of interviewees and named alternative sites (Q15-17). All locations named by at least four interviewees are shown.

### Dog walking guidance (Q21 -23)

3.31 Just over two-thirds of interviewees (372 interviewees, 68%) were aware of guidance on dog walking relating to Ashdown Forest. Compared to other activities, more dog walkers were aware of guidance (270 dog walkers, 87%), (Table 7).

**Table 7: Number (%) of interviewees aware of guidance on dog walking relating to Ashdown Forest (from Q21).**

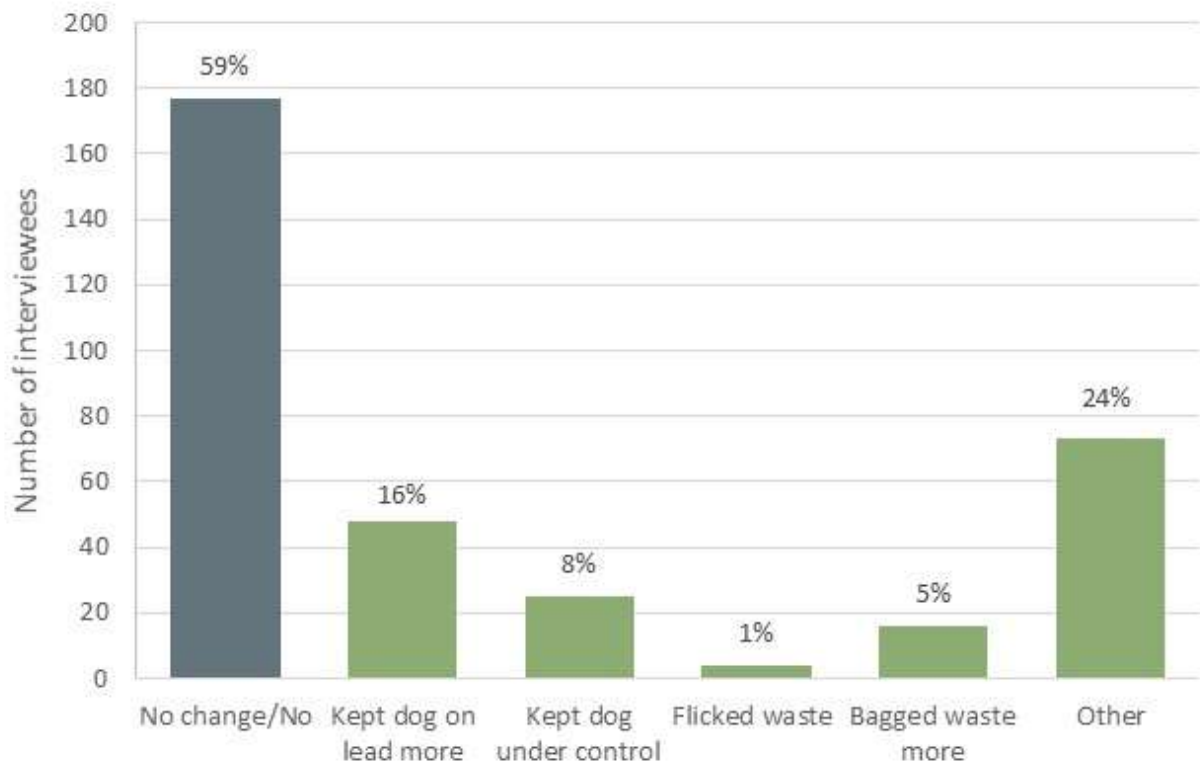
Activity type	No	Not sure / no answer	Yes	Total
Dog walking	35 (11%)	7 (2%)	270 (87%)	312 (100%)
Walking	88 (49%)	23 (13%)	68 (38%)	179 (100%)
Outing with family / picnicking	5 (38%)	0 (0%)	8 (62%)	13 (100%)
Jogging / power walking	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	6 (67%)	9 (100%)
Meet up with friends	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	5 (100%)
Wildlife / bird watching	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	4 (100%)
Horse Riding	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)
Photography	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	2 (67%)	3 (100%)
Cycling	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2 (100%)
Visiting the information centre	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Other	7 (39%)	1 (6%)	10 (56%)	18 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>140 (26%)</b>	<b>37 (7%)</b>	<b>372 (68%)</b>	<b>549 (100%)</b>

3.32 For those who were aware of guidance on dog walking, the most frequently cited guidance they had seen related to dogs and livestock (212 interviewees, 39% of all interviewees). This was particularly the case with dog walkers 155 (50%) of whom mentioned issues with dogs and livestock (Table 8). Specific mention of the dog walking code of conduct (the '4Cs') that is promoted around Ashdown Forest was made by 15% of dog walkers and 10% of all interviewees.

**Table 8: Number (%) of interviewees aware of guidance on dog walking relating to Ashdown Forest (from Q22).**

Activity type	Specific mention of dog walking code of conduct ('4Cs')	Mention of signs around Ashdown Forest	Mention of need to keep dogs under close control	Mention of need to pick up/flick	Mention of issues with dogs and livestock	No clear details/Not sure	Total
Dog walking	47 (15%)	78 (25%)	136 (44%)	98 (31%)	155 (50%)	21 (7%)	312 (100%)
Walking	6 (3%)	17 (9%)	34 (19%)	19 (11%)	39 (22%)	5 (3%)	179 (100%)
Outing with family / picnicking	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	6 (46%)	1 (8%)	13 (100%)
Jogging / power walking	0 (0%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	9 (100%)
Meet up with friends	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Wildlife / bird watching	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)
Horse Riding	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)
Photography	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)
Cycling	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Visiting the information centre	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Other	4 (22%)	3 (17%)	2 (11%)	3 (17%)	4 (22%)	1 (6%)	18 (100%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>57 (10%)</b>	<b>100 (18%)</b>	<b>183 (33%)</b>	<b>127 (23%)</b>	<b>212 (39%)</b>	<b>31 (6%)</b>	<b>549 (100%)</b>

**3.34** A total of 302 interviewees had dogs with them when interviewed and stated that they were aware of guidance. Most of these (177 interviewees, 59%) stated the guidance had not influenced what they did at all (Figure 18). The most common specific change (48 interviewees, 16%) stated they had kept their dogs on a lead more, 25 interviewees (8%) kept their dog under control and 16 interviewees (5%) bagged their waste more. A range of other responses were given, these related to interviewees choosing to avoid areas with livestock, modifying their routes or more general comments relating to being more aware, more respectful or more conscious of the rules.



**Figure 18: Number of interviewees (only those with dogs and that were aware of guidance) where the guidance has influenced what they do. Data filtered for those 302 interviewees with at least one dog and that were aware of guidance. Value labels give percentages for that sample (302 interviewees). From Q23.**

### Information or recommendations used to help plan visit (Q24) and use of Wych Cross Visitor Centre (Q25-26)

3.35 Relatively few interviewees (33) gave details of information or recommendations they had used to plan their visit on the day interviewed. Of those that gave a response, the most common were the internet/a website (8 interviewees, 24% of those that had used information to plan their visit) and 5 interviewees (15% of those that had used information to plan their visit) had used an app and 5 had also relied on word of mouth. Free text responses included reference to information boards in the car park (1 interviewee), downloading maps off the forest website (1 interviewee), the Vanguard Way website (1 interviewee) and use of bus/train timetables (1 interviewee).

3.36 A total of 445 interviewees (81%) knew there was a visitor information centre at Wych Cross. 306 of these interviewees (56% of all interviewees) had visited the centre.

3.37 There was some variation between activities (Figure 19), with dog walkers being the group with the highest proportion of interviewees aware of the visitor centre. There were also clear differences between those who visit frequently compared to infrequent visitors (Figure 20) – in particular just under half (44%) of those on their first visit were not aware there was a centre at Wych Cross.

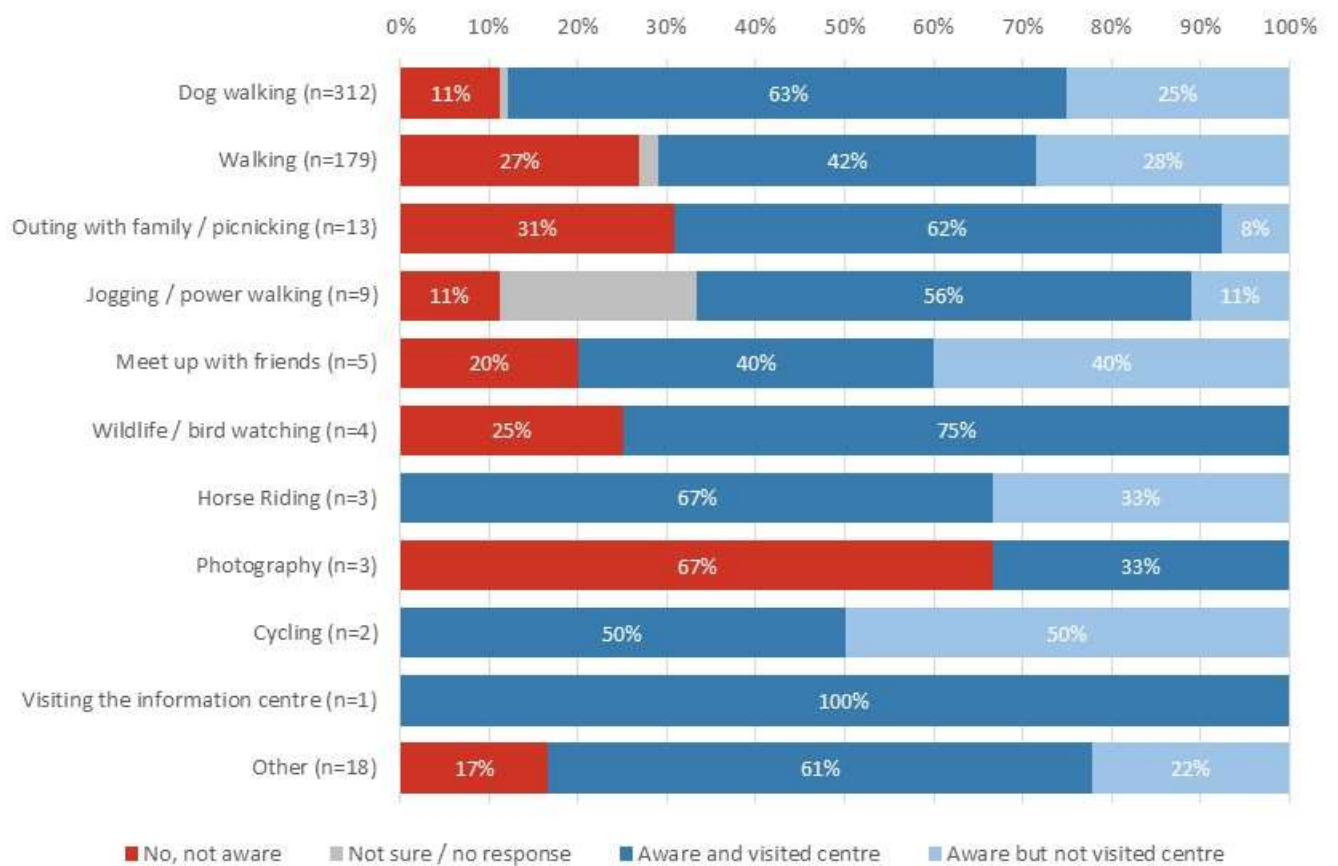


Figure 19: Percentage of interviewees aware there was a visitor centre at Wych Cross (Q25) and those who have visited the centre (from Q26), by activity type.



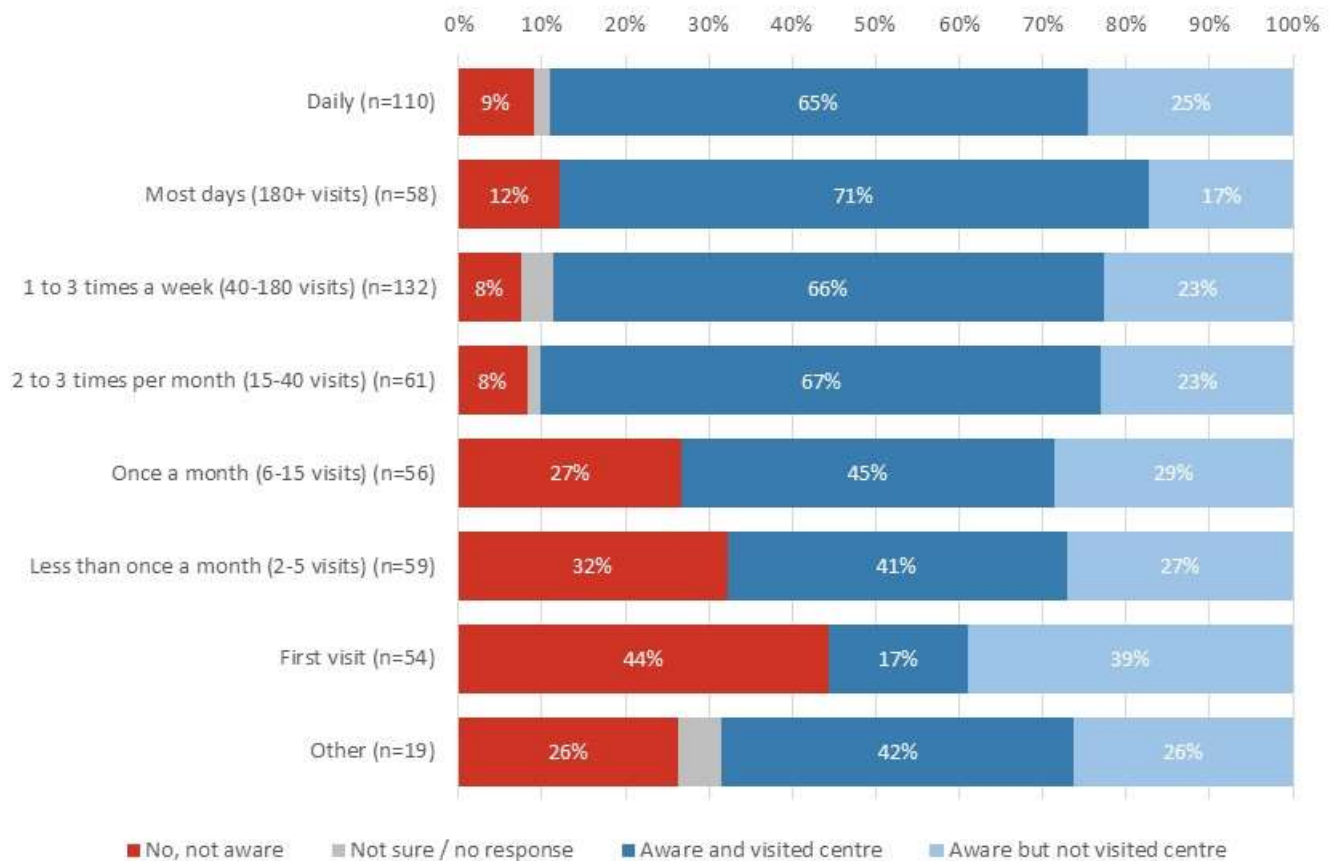


Figure 20: Percentage of interviewees aware there was a visitor centre at Wych Cross (Q25) and those who have visited the centre (from Q26), by frequency of visit.

### Comments on management of access at Ashdown Forest (Q27)

3.38 Interviewees were asked for any suggestions for measures they would like to see in relation to how Ashdown Forest was managed for access. Responses were recorded as free text and 412 responses were logged (excluding those that were simply “no change”, “no”, “none” or “all good”. Responses are summarised in Figure 4.

3.39 Key themes included: car parks and the surface of car parks (132 responses, 24% about parking) and comments around dog poo / a desire to see dog bins provided (89 interviewees, 16%). 24 interviewees (4%) mentioned litter and fly-tipping was raised by 4 interviewees (1%). Addressing overnight stays by campervans were an issue for 4 interviewees (1%). Mountain biking was mentioned by 11 interviewees (2%), with provision of a dedicated route or routes a key theme.

- 3.40 Vegetation management was a key issue for some with varied comments relating to paths, tree clearance and grazing. In total, 21 responses (4%) included the words “grazing”, “cattle”, “ponies”, “livestock” or “cows”.
- 3.41 It was clear many recognised the financial challenges in managing the forest with comments picking up about lack of resources or funding – 20 responses (4%) included the words “pay”, “money” or “resources”. Coffee or cafes were mentioned by 17 interviewees (3%). Among these responses, the coffee vans/pop up stalls have clearly divided opinion, with at least 6 interviewees clearly negative (about the extra people they attract and the litter) while 6 interviewees were positive about them.



## Visitor origins (home postcodes) (Q18-20)

3.42 A total of 505 interviewees (92%) gave full valid postcodes that could be plotted in GIS. The majority of interviewees (323, 64%) gave home postcodes in Wealden District (Table 9). In total, interviewee postcodes spanned 36 local authorities, however five authorities (Wealden, Mid Sussex, Tunbridge Wells, Tandridge and Lewes) together accounted for 89% of the people interviewed.

**Table 9: Number of interviewee postcodes by local authority (only local authorities with more than 1 interviewee shown)**

NAME	Authority type	Number (%) of interviewee postcodes	Median distance (km)	Range (km)
Wealden	District	323 (64)	3.25	0.03 - 33.14
Mid Sussex	District	72 (14)	8.705	1.22 - 20.85
Tunbridge Wells	District	27 (5)	15.58	10.96 - 20.47
Tandridge	District	16 (3)	13.42	9.14 - 30.97
Lewes	District	11 (2)	19.54	9.67 - 30.59
Sevenoaks	District	9 (2)	21	10.89 - 30.66
The City of Brighton and Hove	Unitary Authority	8 (2)	27.75	24.85 - 30.9
Bromley	London Borough	4 (1)	41	35.74 - 41.81
Crawley	District	3 (1)	17.56	12.32 - 18.9
Tonbridge and Malling	District	3 (1)	19.2	19.17 - 20.6
Croydon	London Borough	2 (<1)	35.88	34.34 - 37.41
Lambeth	London Borough	2 (<1)	46.51	45.69 - 47.32
Lewisham	London Borough	2 (<1)	44.13	41.42 - 46.84

3.43 Maps 5-7 show the postcode data – by visit type (Map 5), by main activity (Map 6) and by frequency of visit (Map 7). It can be seen that the postcodes span a wide swathe of England, however the majority are in the vicinity of Ashdown Forest and the spread is greater on a north-south axis (i.e. from the coast towards London) more than east-west. Postcodes are particularly clustered around Crowborough, East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells.

3.44 In Table 10 the postcode data are summarised by settlement, with the table giving the number and percentage of interviewee postcodes for each settlement and also the data for those who visited at least weekly and those visiting to walk their dog. It can be seen that the four settlements account for a high proportion of interviewee postcodes, namely Crowborough, East Grinstead, Forest Row and Nutley.

**Table 10: Number (%) of interviewees by settlement. Settlement boundaries defined using the built-up areas data from the ONS. Settlements ranked according to the total number of interviewee postcodes and all settlements with 3 or more interviewee postcodes are included**

Settlement	Total no. (%) of interviewee postcodes	No. (%) of weekly visitor postcodes	No. (%) of dog walkers
<b>Number of interviewee postcodes</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>288</b>
Crowborough	129 (26)	88 (31)	83 (29)
East Grinstead	45 (9)	24 (8)	27 (9)
Forest Row	43 (9)	35 (12)	22 (8)
Nutley	36 (7)	34 (12)	30 (10)
Royal Tunbridge Wells	25 (5)	9 (3)	13 (5)
Uckfield	15 (3)	11 (4)	10 (3)
West Hoathly/Sharpthorne	10 (2)	5 (2)	9 (3)
Haywards Heath	7 (1)	2 (1)	4 (1)
Brighton	4 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Bromley	4 (1)	1 (0)	2 (1)
Mayfield	4 (1)	0 (0)	2 (1)
Lewes	3 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Sevenoaks	3 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Crawley	3 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Crawley Down	3 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Tonbridge	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Eastbourne	3 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Rottingdean/Saltdean	3 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Heathfield	3 (1)	1 (0)	2 (1)
Town Row	3 (1)	3 (1)	1 (0)

3.45 For each interviewee postcode the linear distance was calculated from the home postcode to the survey point at which the interview took place. Data are summarised for different types of visitor in Table 11. The distances range from 30m to 346km, with half of all interviewees giving home postcodes within 5.45km of the survey location and 75% originated within 13.5km. Taking just those on a short visit directly from home, half came from within 5.05km and 75% within 11.36km.

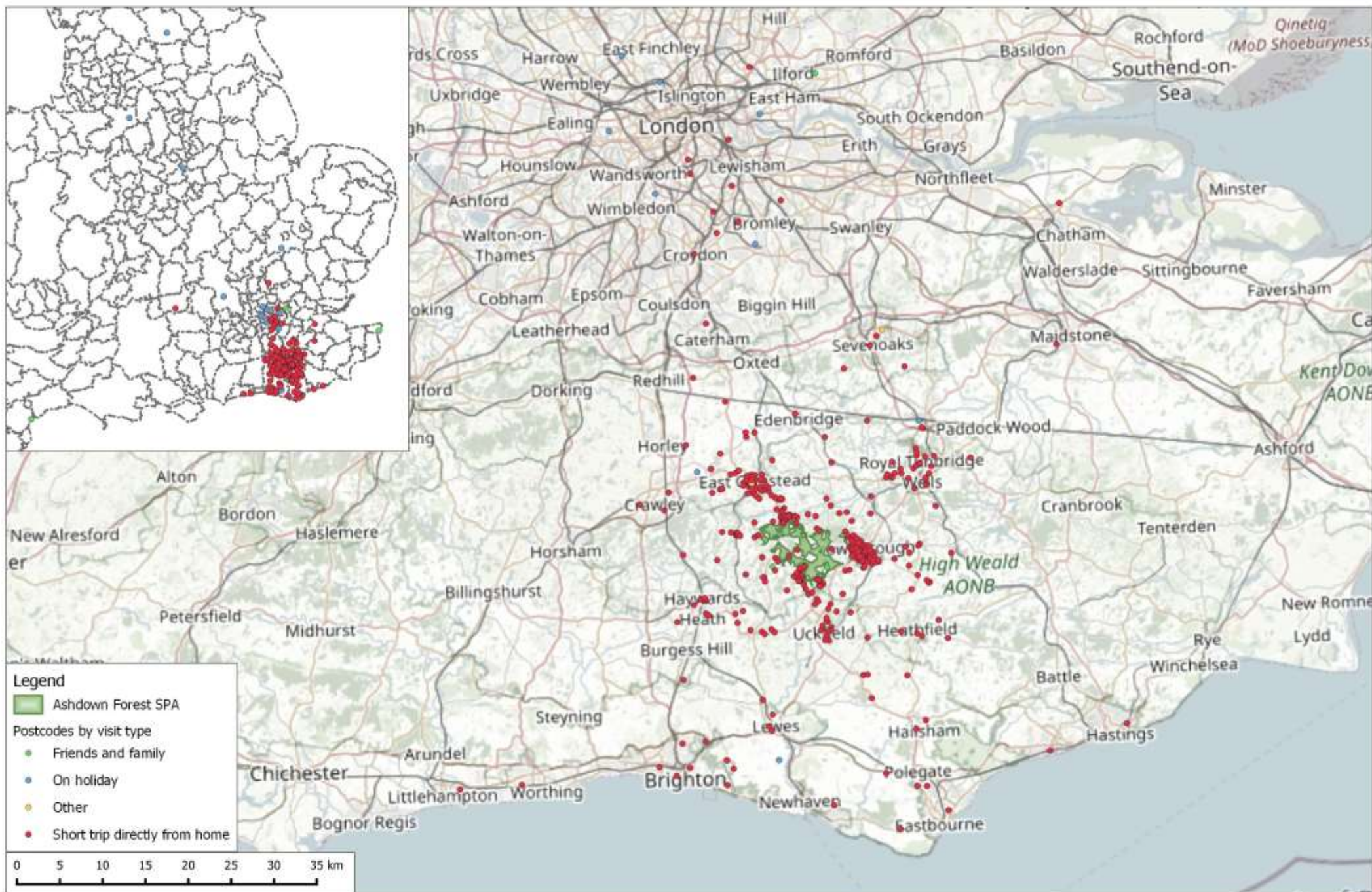


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**Table 11: Summary statistics for different groups of interviewees and the distance from the survey point to home postcode (km).**

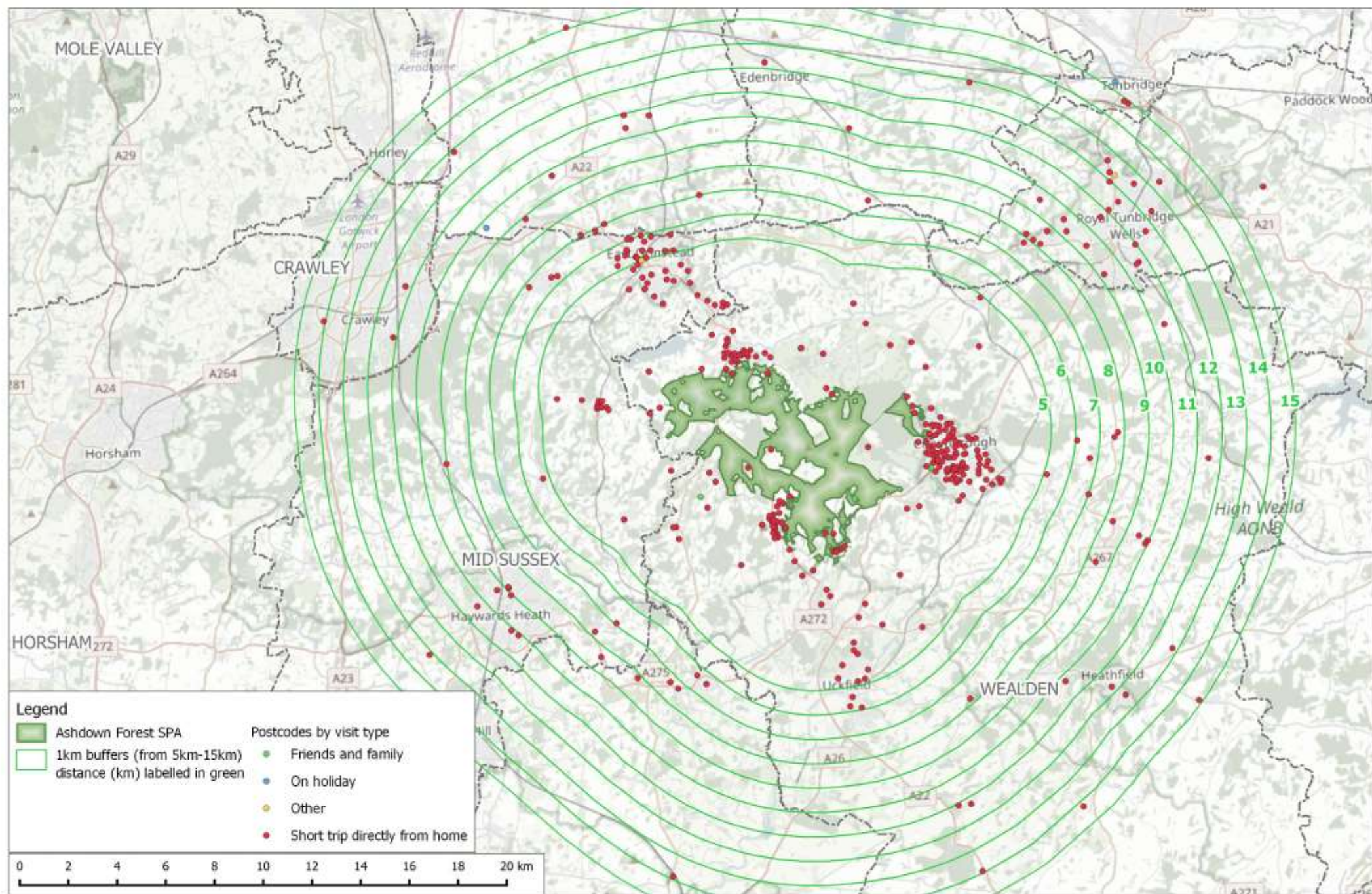
	Category	N	Mean ( $\pm 1$ SE)	Range	Median	Q3
Visit type	All interviewees	505	12.03 ( $\pm 1.24$ )	0.03 - 345.55	5.45	12.48
	Day trip/short visit from home	482	8.707 ( $\pm 0.513$ )	0.03 - 122.57	5.05	11.36
	On holiday	14	100.5 ( $\pm 28.1$ )	13.7 - 345.6	53.5	139.4
Main activity	Dog walking	288	7.00 ( $\pm 0.57$ )	0.03 - 99.04	4.555	8.765
	Jogging / power walking	8	12.20 ( $\pm 9.97$ )	0.18 - 81.76	2.31	5.76
	Meet up with friends	5	31.80 ( $\pm 23.5$ )	0.6 - 122.6	2.1	77.4
	Outing with family	11	11.49 ( $\pm 3.59$ )	0.69 - 34.74	4.98	20.71
	Walking (without a dog)	164	20.12 ( $\pm 3.46$ )	0.11 - 345.55	9.6	17.48
Visit frequency	Daily	105	2.829 ( $\pm 0.53$ )	0.03 - 47.16	1.07	4.145
	Most days	57	3.24 ( $\pm 0.43$ )	0.13 - 14.97	2.39	4.99
	1 to 3 times a week	122	7.91 ( $\pm 0.94$ )	0.06 - 99.04	5.8	10.663
	2 to 3 times per month	56	8.70 ( $\pm 1.16$ )	1.08 - 45.07	5.74	11.95
	Once a month	50	10.27 ( $\pm 0.91$ )	0.83 - 30.97	9.655	14.973
	Less than once a month	52	19.87 ( $\pm 4.79$ )	2.38 - 254.01	13.19	19.46
	First visit	46	49.30 ( $\pm 10$ )	2 - 345.6	30.2	50.9
Survey location	Box	39	10.02 ( $\pm 1.03$ )	1.07 - 30.97	7.76	13.81
	Churlwood	8	7.26 ( $\pm 2.31$ )	1.61 - 20.71	3.76	11.00
	Crowborough	46	1.29 ( $\pm 0.23$ )	0.24 - 10.88	1.11	1.395
	Fairwarp	14	4.49 ( $\pm 2.48$ )	0.06 - 30.66	0.15	3.36
	Forest Centre	29	17.08 ( $\pm 2.7$ )	1.96 - 55.15	13.18	23.22
	Forest Row, near	30	8.03 ( $\pm 4.35$ )	0.13 - 99.04	0.31	0.76
	Four Counties	8	15.07 ( $\pm 3.13$ )	5.2 - 26.33	15.65	24.36
	Gills Lap	43	38.5 ( $\pm 10.90$ )	3.3 - 345.6	12.7	41.5
	Hindleap	25	5.99 ( $\pm 1.14$ )	0.8 - 29.79	5.01	7.33
	Hollies	27	24.25 ( $\pm 9.89$ )	1.31 - 254.01	10.9	16.34
	King's Standing	48	10.42 ( $\pm 1.10$ )	1.11 - 34.74	7.27	14.43
	Lintons	20	19.84 ( $\pm 5.94$ )	2.39 - 113.22	9.09	19.55
	Long	39	9.37 ( $\pm 1.32$ )	3.01 - 47.16	7.63	10.02
	Millbrook East	17	11.61 ( $\pm 1.93$ )	2.38 - 37.41	10.51	12.73
	Millbrook West	17	12.86 ( $\pm 3.06$ )	1.47 - 41.81	8.53	17.79
	Nutley	31	1.736 ( $\pm 0.65$ )	0.03 - 15.58	0.4	0.53
	Reserve	16	6.85 ( $\pm 1.2$ )	1.98 - 18.9	4.61	10.23
	Roman Road	3	18.16 ( $\pm 7.12$ )	9.56 - 32.3	12.62	32.3
	Smugglers	20	9.27 ( $\pm 1.40$ )	3.79 - 22.11	4.8	15.28
	St.Johns	25	4.32 ( $\pm 2.17$ )	0.69 - 54.98	1.78	2.55

Map 5: Interviewee postcodes, by visit type



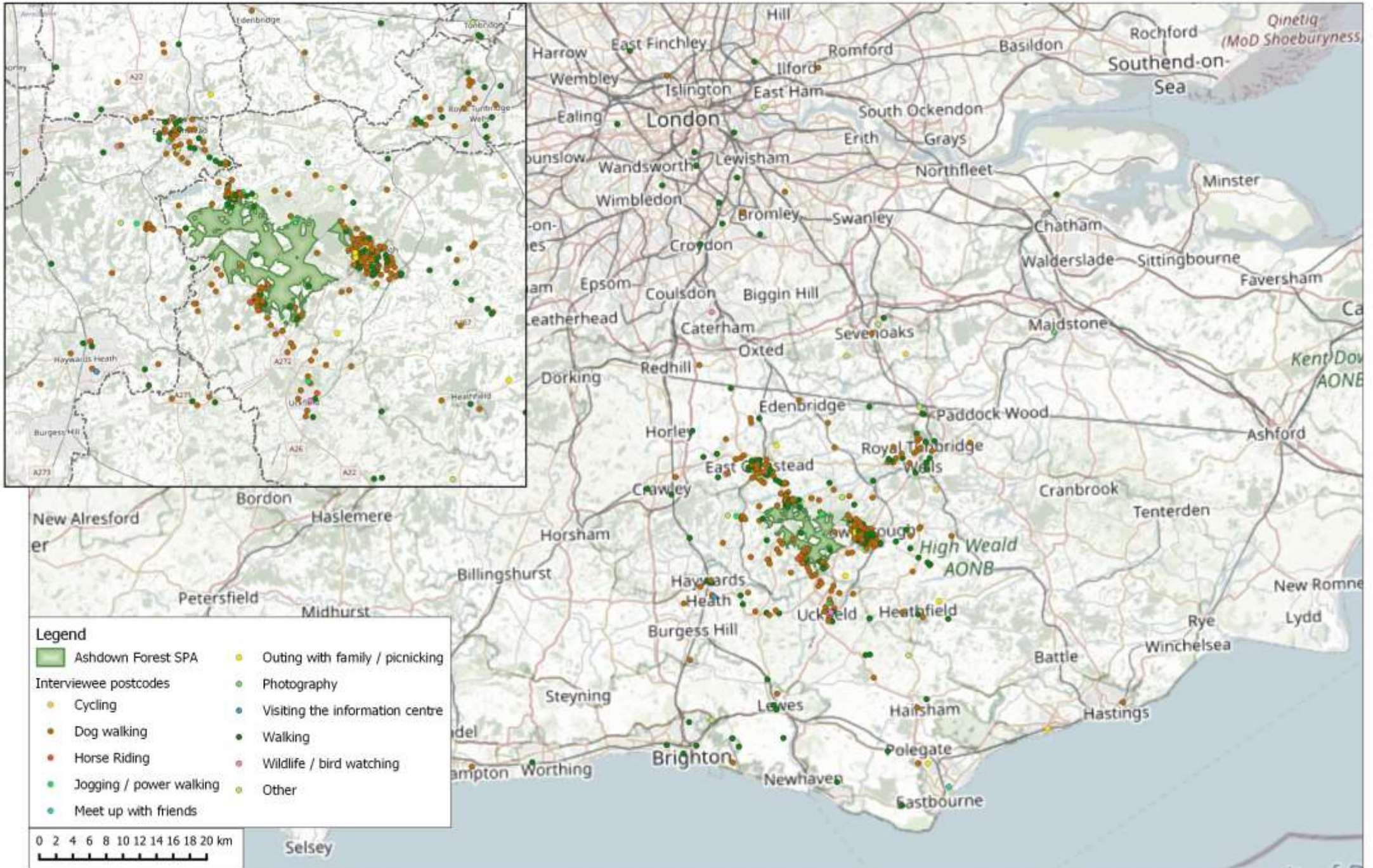


**Map 6: Interviewee postcodes, by visit type**



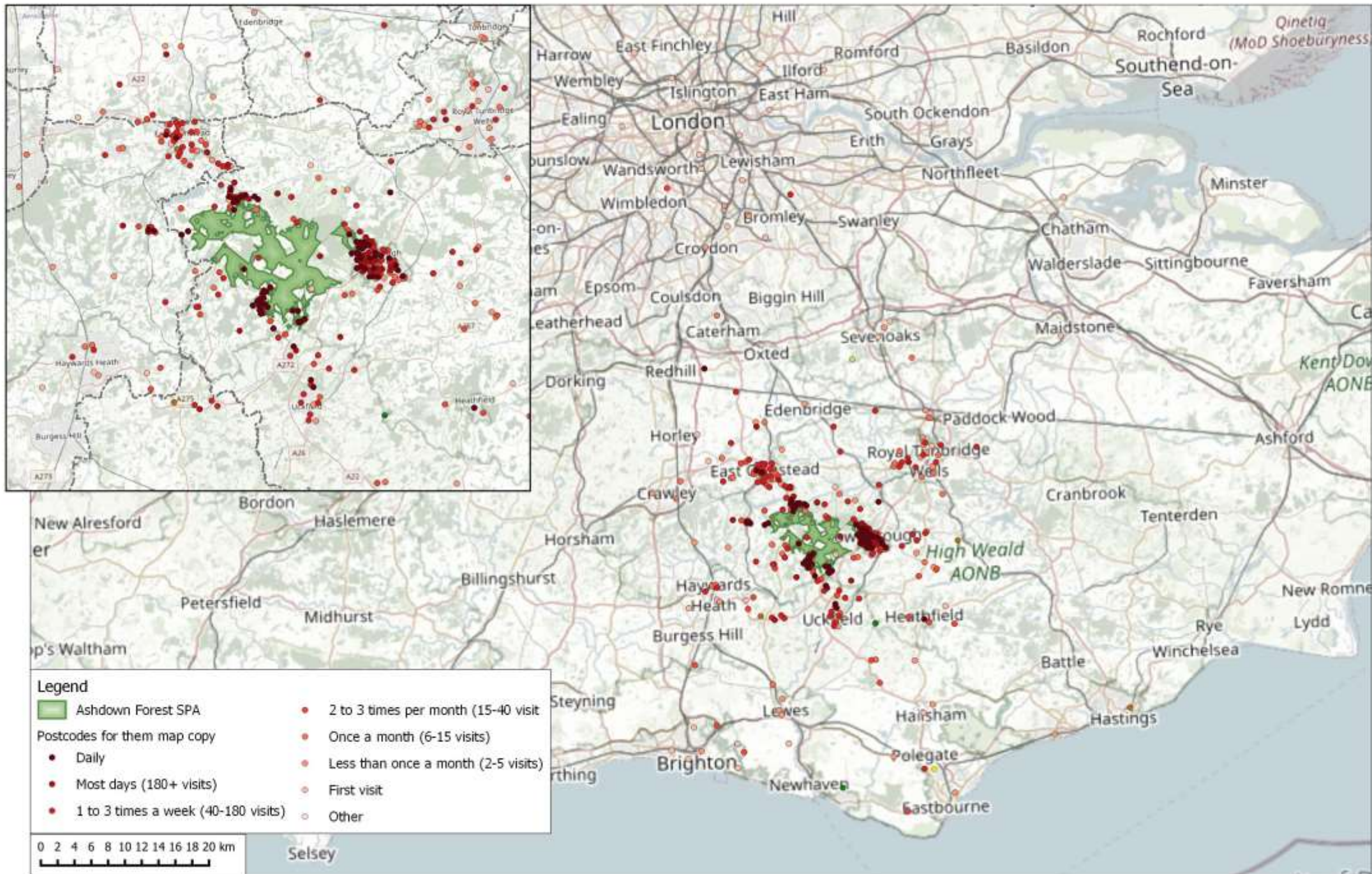


Map 7: Interviewee postcodes, by main activity





Map 8: Interviewee postcodes, by frequency of visit



**3.46** Cumulative frequency plots are shown in Figure 22. These show the percentage of interviewees that lived within a given radius of the location were interviewed with separate plots for all interviewees, those arriving by car, those who walked to the site and those who visited at least weekly. The plots allow a visual comparison between the different groups. It can be seen that virtually all (94%) those who walked lived within a 5km radius of the interview location, whereas for those arriving by car 34% lived within 5km. For those visiting at least weekly, 66% lived within a 5km radius.

# Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

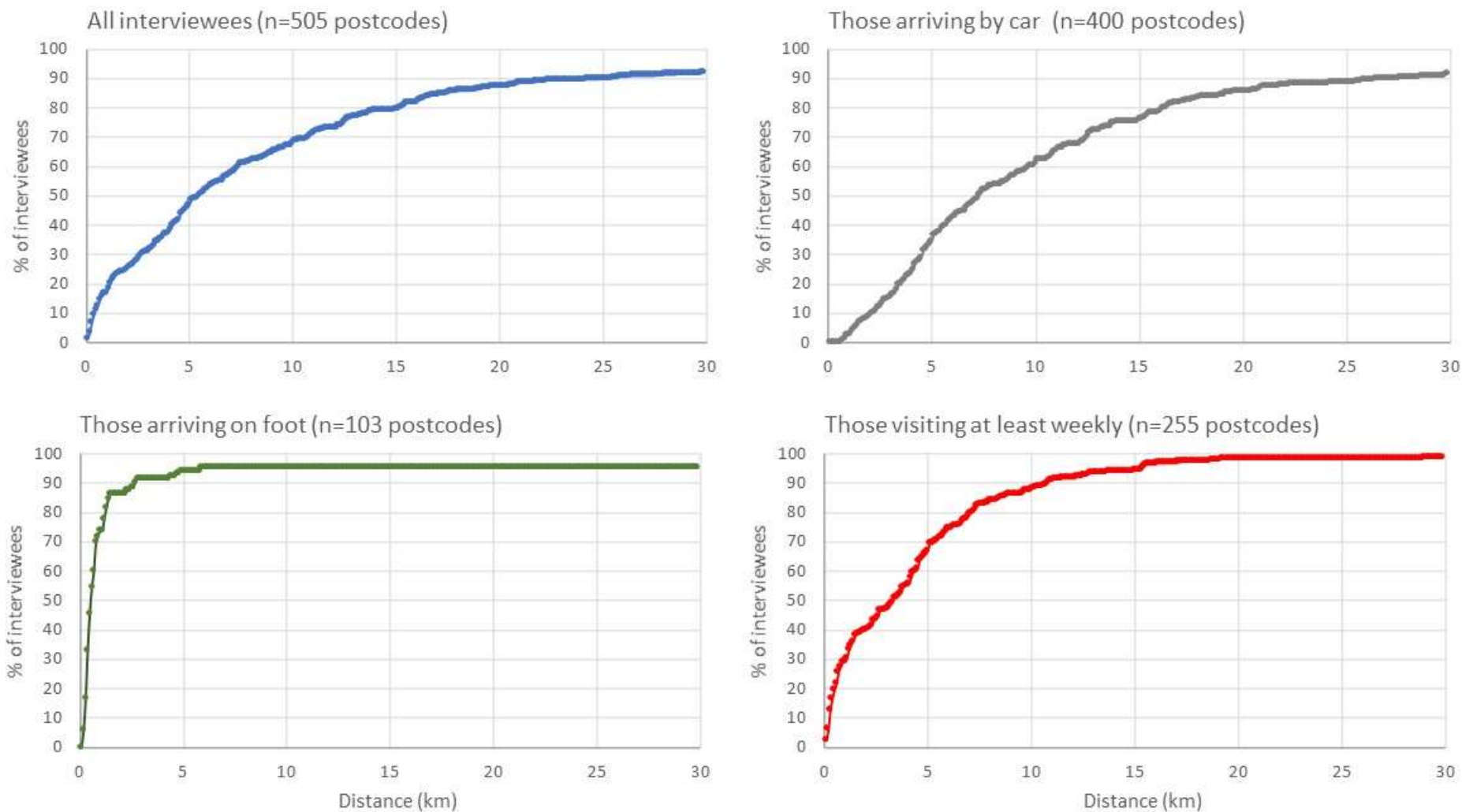


Figure 22: Cumulative frequency plots showing percentage of interviewees and distance (from home postcode to survey point). Separate plots for all interviewees, those arriving by car, those arriving on foot and those visiting at least weekly.



## 4. Visitor Count Results (from the tallies)

- 4.1 Tally data are summarised in Table 12. In total, 1,725 groups were noted entering, leaving or passing through at the survey point. These groups contained a total of 3,254 people (of which 426 were minors) and 1,505 dogs. From these totals the mean group size was 1.89 people (of which 0.24 were minors) and 0.87 dogs. There was 1 dog for every 2.16 people.
- 4.2 King's Standing was the busiest location from the tally data, with 15% of the groups, 16% of the people, 15% of the dogs and 18% of the minors logged entering all sites recorded entering at this location. Spatial data are summarised in Map 8.
- 4.3 The number of people entering at each location is shown in Figure 23. It can be seen that Gills Leap, King's Standing, Long and the Forest Centre all had markedly higher numbers of groups and people on the weekends compared to the weekdays. The pedestrian access points (Crowborough, Forest Row, Nutley, Fairwarp) and the two Millbrook access points were more balanced, with similar totals on the weekends and weekdays.
- 4.4 The number of groups recorded entering by time period and type of day are shown in Figure 24, with the colours reflecting the different survey locations. It can be seen that on the weekdays (note that these surveys took place during school term time), the peak numbers entering were in the first session 0700-0900. By contrast at the weekends (during the school holidays) visitor numbers peaked during the middle of the day and the afternoon in particular and the evenings (1700-1900) were the quietest. The high numbers entering on the weekend afternoons particularly related to King's Standing and Gills Lap.

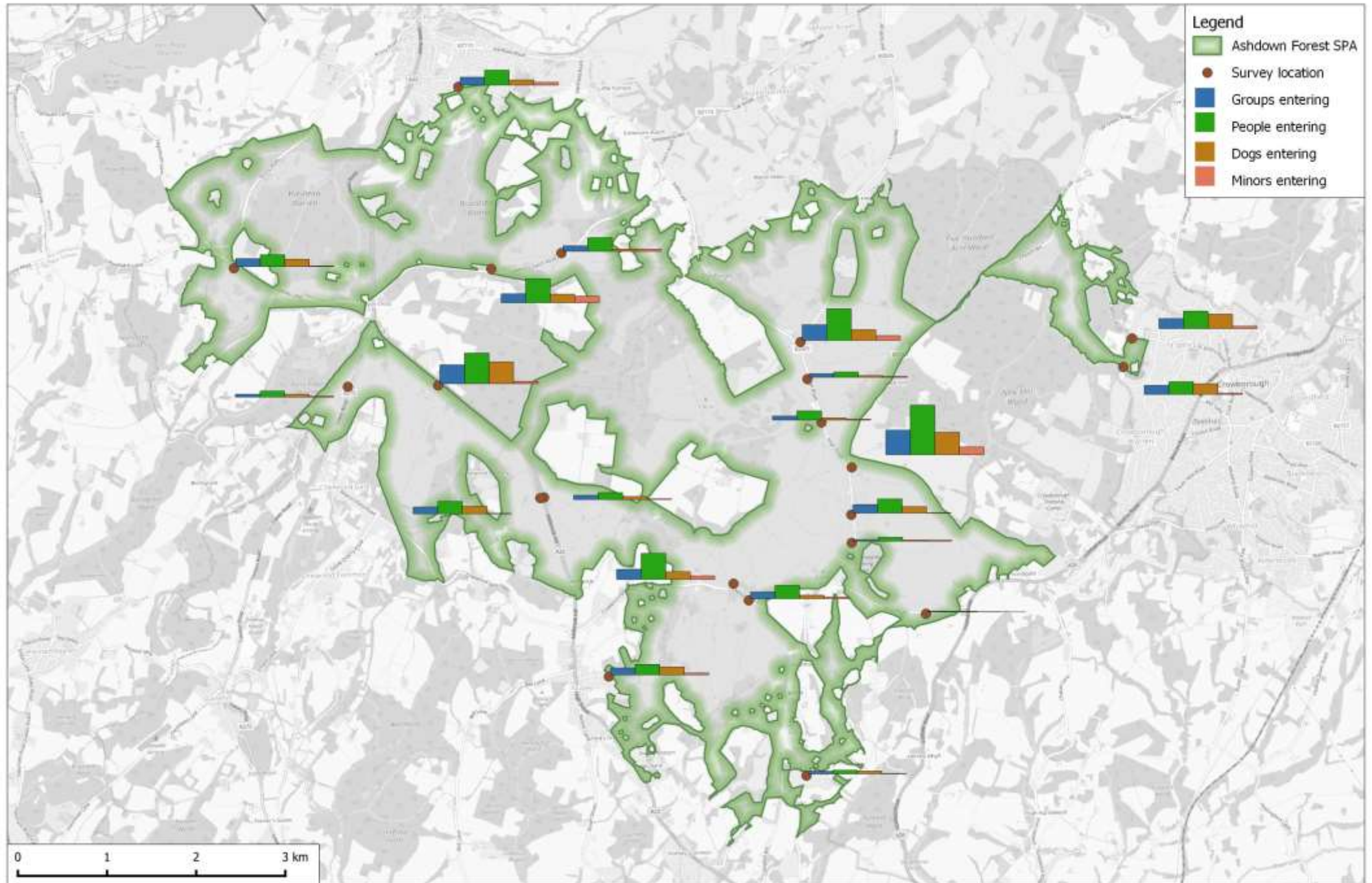
Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

**Table 12: Summary of tally data. Entering are those starting their visit at the survey point (e.g. parking at given car park); those leaving are those exiting the site at the given location (e.g. returning to cars) and passing through are those that pass the surveyor having not started at that location, e.g. a mountain bike or horse rider that passes through a car park. Grey shading indicates cells with values at least 10% of column total.**

Site	Entering						Leaving						Passing through					
	Groups	Total people	Total dogs	Minors	Bikes	Horses	Groups	Total people	Total dogs	Minors	Bikes	Horses	Groups	Total people	Total dogs	Minors	Bikes	Horses
Box	47	122	36	17	0	2	59	127	50	5	0	2	50	95	35	5	3	1
Churlwood	13	28	13	5	0	0	11	29	10	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Crowborough	42	59	50	6	0	4	59	85	77	4	0	1	6	6	3	1	0	0
Fairwarp	12	17	13	2	0	0	19	28	14	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forest Centre	42	113	40	31	0	0	38	103	38	21	0	0	6	13	2	0	0	0
Forest Row, near Golf Club	37	70	24	13	2	0	40	50	34	6	1	0	32	45	2	10	19	0
Four Counties	17	25	8	4	0	0	13	23	6	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Gills Lap	73	148	50	22	1	2	75	150	63	24	0	0	7	9	0	0	1	0
Hindleap	37	55	34	3	0	0	38	50	44	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Hollies	31	62	16	8	0	0	29	60	16	14	0	0	14	26	2	3	0	3
King's Standing	115	232	105	36	1	0	119	246	118	39	1	0	8	13	2	1	2	0
Lintons	26	64	11	10	1	0	25	62	11	8	0	0	9	38	19	2	2	0
Long	88	143	102	11	0	0	82	143	88	16	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0
Millbrook East	20	32	14	3	0	0	14	25	14	5	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0
Millbrook West	32	58	35	2	0	0	26	38	25	2	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0
Nutley	32	49	37	9	0	1	41	58	36	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poundgate	4	4	1	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reserve	19	43	10	5	0	0	23	58	11	7	0	0	7	19	0	3	0	0
Roman Road	7	18	6	5	0	0	5	15	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Smugglers	40	66	30	2	0	0	33	57	25	1	0	0	2	6	0	2	0	0
St.Johns	47	82	68	11	0	0	42	75	48	15	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>1490</b>	<b>703</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>1485</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>



Map 9: Tally count results (entering only)



# Ashtown Forest Visitor Survey 2021



Figure 23: Groups, people and dogs entering each site on weekdays compared to weekends. Only those locations with balanced survey coverage included.

# Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

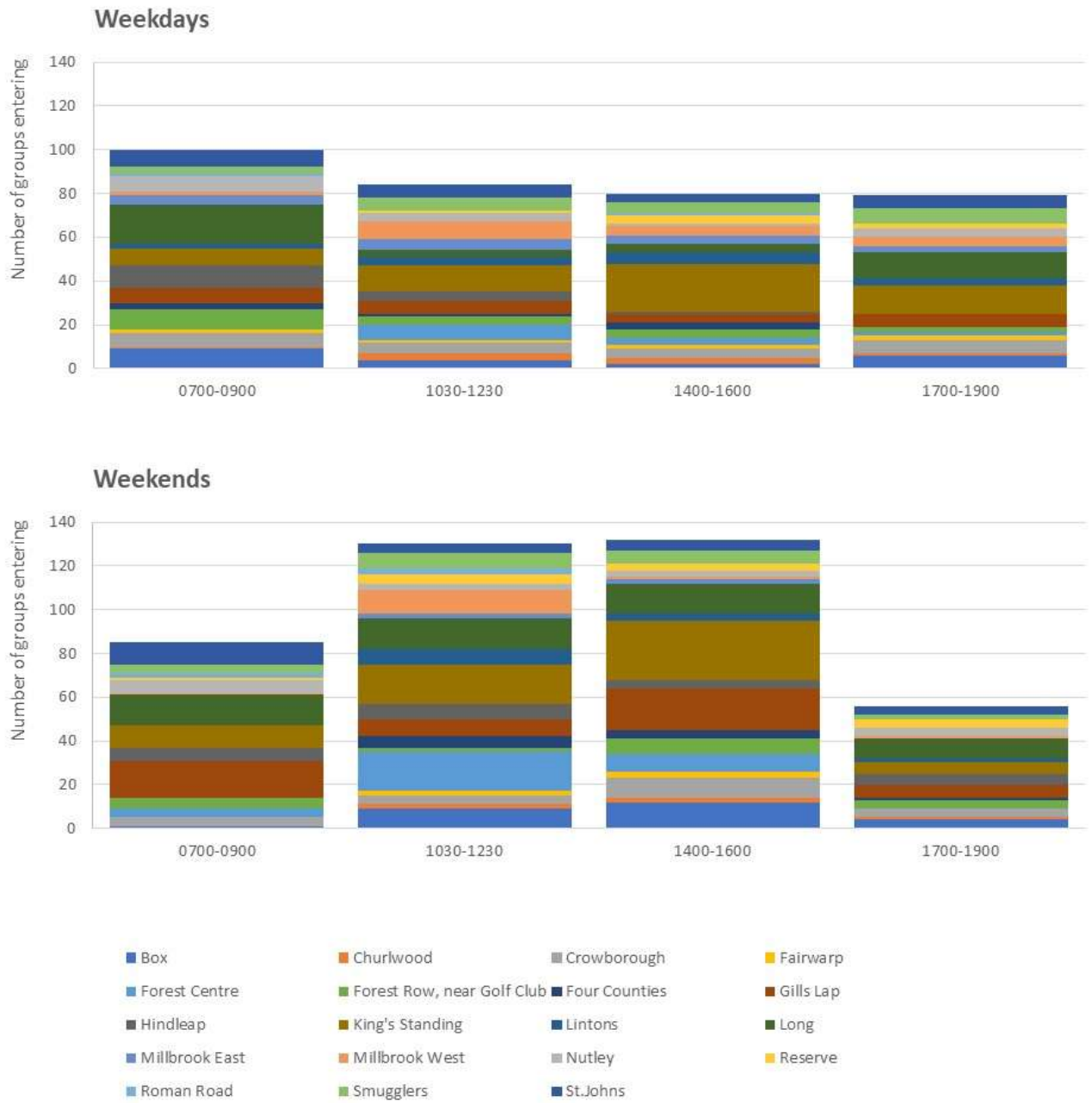


Figure 24: Number of groups entering by time period, type of day and survey point

## 5. Vehicle Count Results

5.1 A total of 15 transects were undertaken counting all vehicles. The total number of vehicles on these 15 transects ranged from 88 to 374, with a mean of 190.9 and a median of 191. The results are summarised in Figure 25.

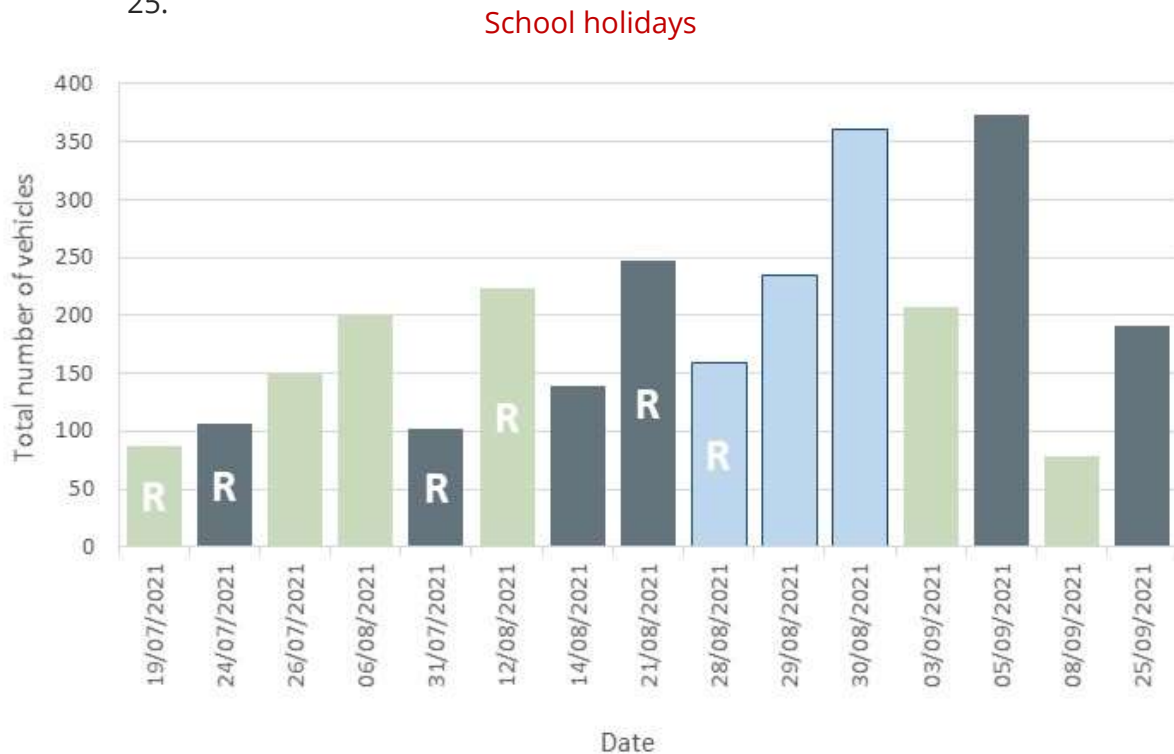


Figure 25: Vehicle count results by date. Green bars are weekdays and dark grey are weekend, while the blue bars reflect the bank holiday weekend. 'R' indicates some rain during the transect. School holiday arrow reflects main period of state school holiday.

5.2 There was variation between the time of day, with counts tending to be highest in the middle of the day compared to early morning and later afternoon/early evening. Weekends were higher during term time and the counts were slightly higher on those days when it was not raining (see Table 13 and Figure 26).

**Table 13: Summary statistics for different groupings of the car count data**

Grouping	n	Mean	Median	Standard error	Range
All data	15	190.87	191	23.18	78 - 374
Term-time weekday	3	124.67	88	41.77	78 - 208
Term-time weekend	3	224	191	78.82	107 - 374
Holiday weekday	3	191	200	22.11	149 - 224
Holiday weekend	3	163	139	43.82	102 - 248
Bank-holiday weekend	3	251.67	235	58.90	159 - 361
0700-1100	5	141.6	139	26.48	78 - 235
1100-1300	5	283	248	35.14	208 - 374
1300-1500	5	148	159	22.79	88 - 200
Rain	7	154.67	133	25.65	88 - 248
No rain	8	215	200	56.55	78 - 374

**5.3** Different vehicle types were noted. 2,863 vehicles were counted in total across the 15 counts. Among these 2,863 vehicles, 148 (6%) were vans; 58 (2%) were campervans or caravans; there were 31 vehicles (1%) with bike racks; 5 (<1%) horse boxes, 3 (<1%) branded dog walking vehicles and 1 (<1%) minibus/coach. The two highest count of vans (21 and 17 vans) were both on weekdays during the summer holiday period and were the lunch time and late afternoon counts, potentially reflecting work vehicles taking a break/pausing on a journey. The highest count of campervans/caravans (13 campervans/caravans) was on the 5<sup>th</sup> September; a weekend count during term time (but just at the start of the autumn term) with the count starting at 1300.

**5.4** The three busiest car parks (i.e. with the highest number of vehicles across all transects) were Gills Lap (203 vehicles, 8.7% of the total vehicles counted), Long (190 vehicles, 8.2%) and King's Standing (184 vehicles, 7.9%). Map 9 shows the totals for each car park.



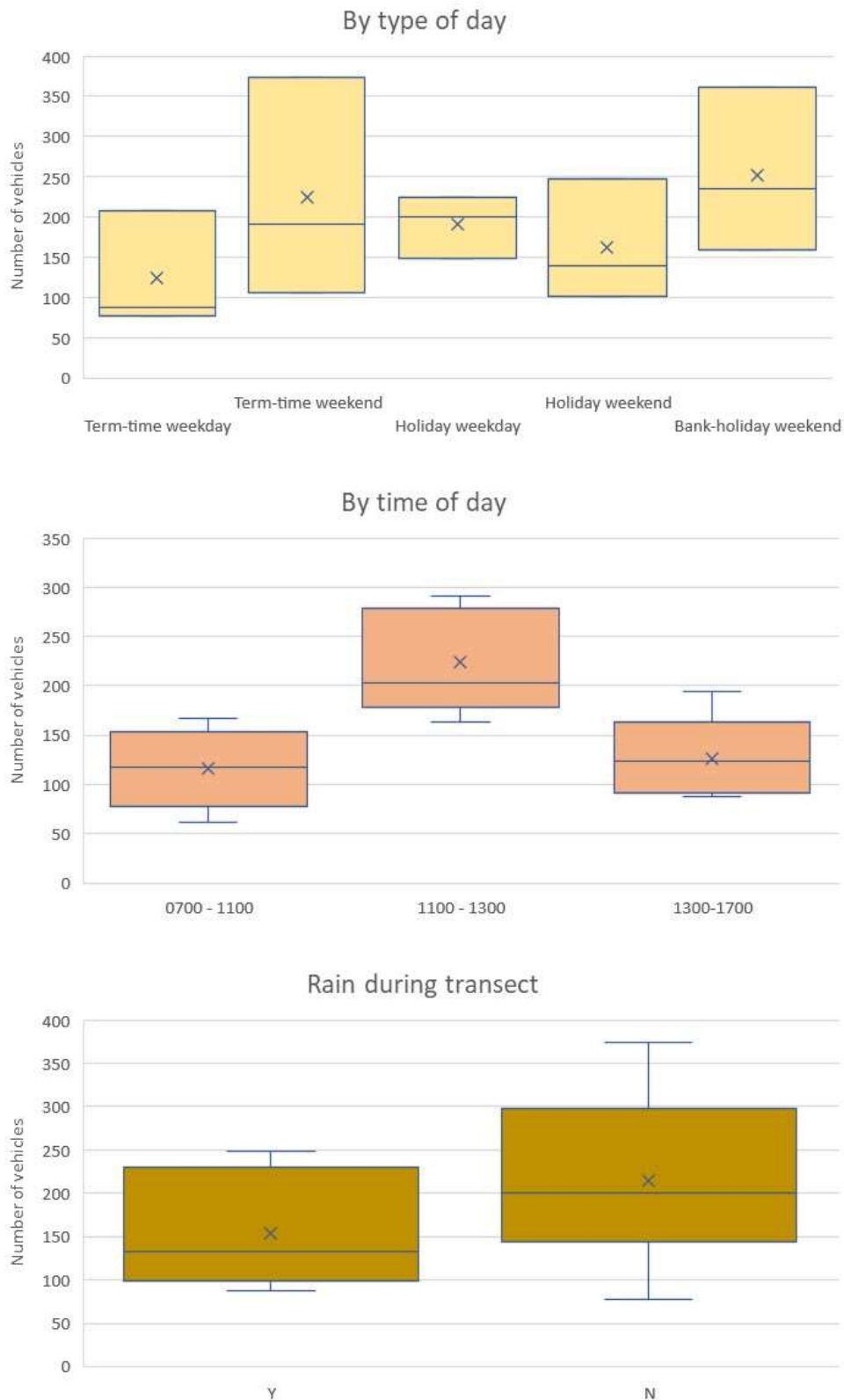
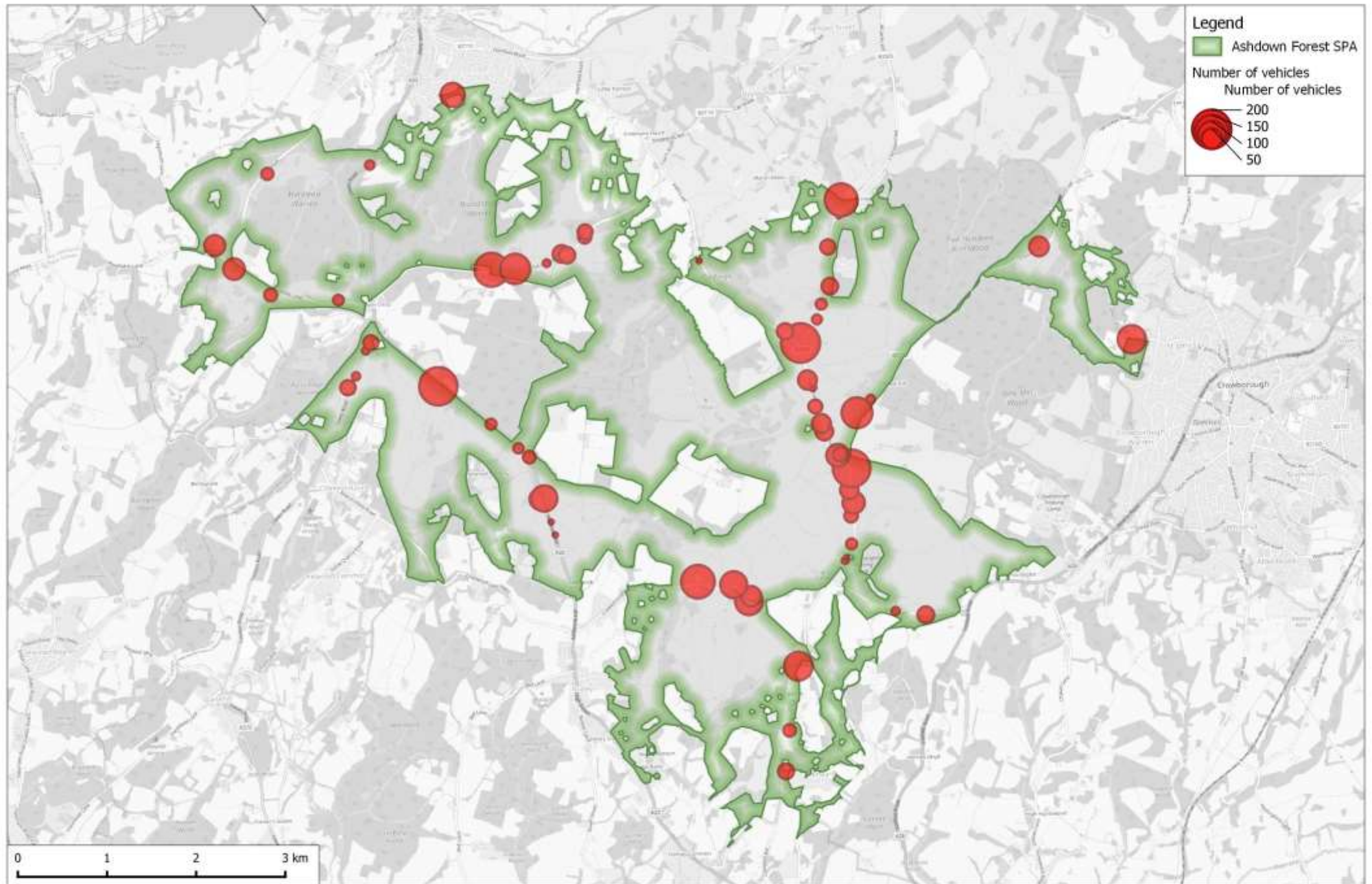


Figure 26: Summary of vehicle count data. Horizontal lines show the median, crosses indicate the mean, the boxes show the interquartile range and the whiskers the maximum and minimum values. 15 counts in total – top plot shows them split by the type of day (3 counts per type); middle plot by time of day (5 counts per time period) and lower plot rain (Yes, 6 counts; No, 9 counts).

Map 10: Total vehicles at each location from the 15 driving transects



## 6. Comparison 2016 – 2021

- 6.1 The survey in 2021 replicated that undertaken in 2016 and various metrics can be directly compared from the two surveys. In order to draw the comparison, we have only used interview and tally data from survey points used before – Vachery and Twyford were surveyed in 2016 and not in 2021 while 2021 included Millbrook East and Hindleap. In addition, Poundgate was only partially surveyed in 2021 and then the survey effort was switched to Hollies. Survey data from these locations is therefore excluded from this section (and therefore the data presented for 2021 does not match that in earlier sections of the report).
- 6.2 In Table 14 we provide a summary of selected metrics, drawing on the relevant data from the two surveys. It can be seen that a number of changes are evident between the two surveys. Overall visitor use has increased (with the tallies showing a 7% increase, the number of interviews a 9% increase and the vehicle counts a 20% increase). The proportion of people that are visiting to walk their dog (stated main activity) has decreased (69% of interviewees in 2016, 60% of interviewees in 2021) and the proportion of walkers has increased (from 18% to 29% of interviewees). The proportion of interviewees that stated they went off paths has decreased (from 41% to 22%) and the proportion that were visiting primarily because it was close to home (from 37% of interviewees to 27%). The data show a reduction in the proportion of interviewees that specifically named the 4Cs guidance relating to dog walking (41% to 22%). There was no significant difference in the distance between the survey location and interviewees' home postcode (median distance in 2016 = 4.96km, in 2021 = 4.75km, Mann-Whitney W=173346, p=0.69).

**Table 14: Selected metrics from 2016 and 2021 surveys. Data for the 17 survey points where survey effort comparable between the two surveys. Where the metrics are %, the change value gives the difference between the 2 years. Where the metrics are totals the value reflects the % change. 'Home only' indicates the metric is extracted only for those on a short visit/day trip directly from home.**

Metric	2016	2021	change
Number of survey points (comparable)	17	17	
Number of interviews	436	477	9
Number of interviews (home only)	429	448	4
Average group size (interview data, home only)	2.1	1.9	11
% of interviewees visiting on their own	49	45	-4
% dog walking stated main activity (home only)	69	60	-9
% walking stated main activity (home only)	18	29	11
% visiting daily (home only)	23	22	-1
% visiting at least weekly (home only)	65	59	-6
% on first visit (home only)	6	7	1
% arriving by car (home only)	81	77	-4
% that stated they went off paths (home only)	41	22	-19
Median route length (not clipped to SPA, m)	2616	2769	6
% stating close to home main reason for site choice (home only)	37	27	-10
% aware of guidance relating to dog walking (home only)	76	69	-7
% specifically mentioning 4Cs (home only)	29	11	-18
% that had visited Wych Cross visitor centre (home only)	68	57	-11
median distance survey point to home postcode (km) (home only)	4.96	4.75	-4
75th percentile survey point to home postcode (km) (home only)	9.45	11.04	17
% visiting who live within 1.5km	26	26	0
% visiting who live within 5km	50	45	-5

6.3 The tally count data and vehicle count data for individual locations are compared in Figure 27 and Figure 28. In each plot the diagonal line represents the 1:1 ratio, such that any points above the line have increased between the two surveys and points below the line represent locations where there has been a decrease. The further the points are from the diagonal line, the bigger the scale of change and selected locations are labelled on each plot.

6.4 For the tally counts there are 11 locations where the counts have increased and 6 where there has been a decrease. For the vehicle counts there was an overall increase at 39 different locations, a decrease at 18 and no change at 6. The 15 driving transects during 2016 recorded an average of 159 vehicles

with counts ranging from 50 to 278. In 2021 the average was 191 and ranged from 78 - 374.

6.5 Both the tally counts, and the vehicle counts, show a decrease in visitor numbers at the Forest Centre, and this may reflect the effect of Covid as the centre was not open to visitors during the 2021 surveys. The tally data reflect an increase at King's Standing and this is not reflected in the vehicle counts.

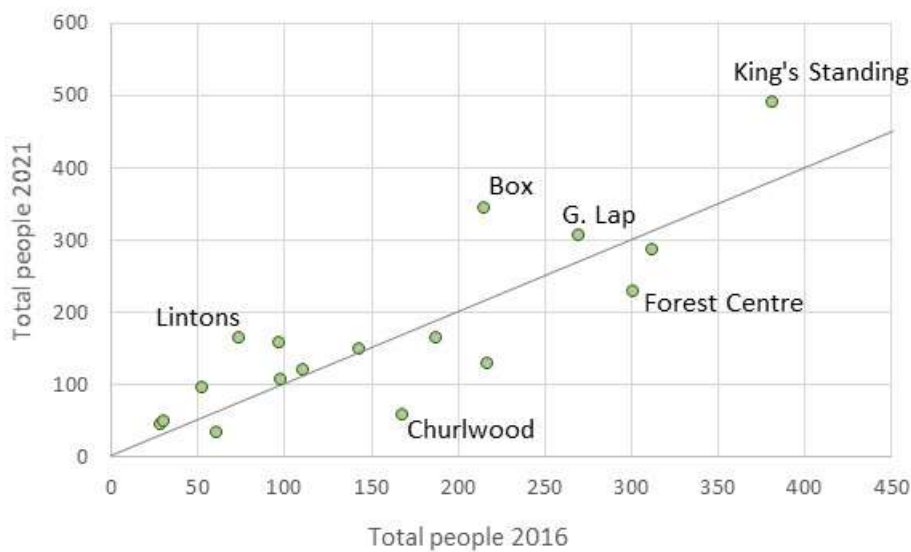


Figure 27: Tally count data from 2016 and 2021 by point. Diagonal line represents 1:1 ratio.

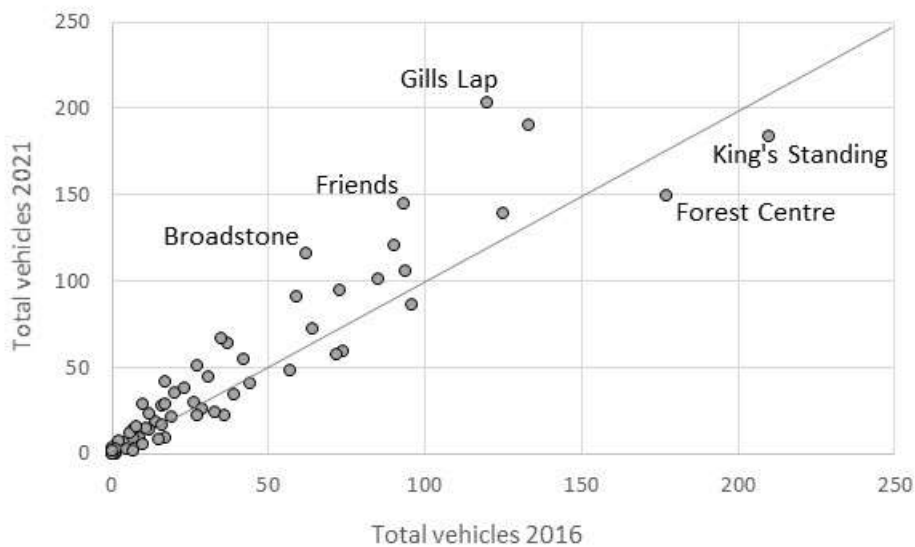


Figure 28: Vehicle count data from 2016 and 2021 by point. Diagonal line represents 1:1 ratio.



## 7. Discussion

### Key findings

- 7.1 Visitor survey results show Ashdown Forest is primarily visited by dog walkers, with relatively few holiday makers and most (75%) of non-holiday makers travelling from within a 11.4km radius. Visitors tend to visit frequently – with interviewees on average making 127 visits per year, and visits are typically short (52% visiting for less than an hour). Visitors typically arrive by car. When asked about alternative locations visited, 24% of interviewees stated they wouldn't have gone anywhere else besides Ashdown Forest and for those that did, a wide range of other alternative sites were named. Walshes Park (cited by 5% of interviewees) was notable as the most frequently mentioned alternative (that is a discrete, single site). Walshes Park is a SANG, designed to provide an alternative destination to Ashdown Forest in order to absorb additional recreation use associated with new housing.
- 7.2 Comparing 2021 with 2016, visitor numbers have increased – potentially by as much as 20% (though this may well be an overestimate). The proportion of people visiting to walk their dog (stated main activity) has decreased and the proportion of walkers has increased (from 18% to 29% of interviewees). The proportion of interviewees that stated they went off paths has decreased (from 41% to 22%) as has the proportion that were visiting primarily because it was close to home. The data show a reduction in the proportion of interviewees that specifically named the 4Cs guidance relating to dog walking. There was however no significant difference in the distance between the survey location and interviewee's home postcode, suggesting that visitors are not coming from any further afield.

### Context

- 7.3 The survey results from 2021 provide a snapshot of visitor use at Ashdown Forest during the summer 2021. The survey took place just as restrictions relating to Covid were being relaxed but at a time where the pandemic would still have been affecting people's decisions regarding travel and where to go.
- 7.4 It is widely recognised that the pandemic has had a marked effect on how people use local greenspaces (Burnett et al., 2021; Natural England and

Kantar Public, 2021; Randler et al., 2020). Outdoor space – during the pandemic – has become the safe place and default location for many for exercise and for socialising, and there is a continued and growing importance of urban green spaces in particular as spaces to connect with nature and each other (Natural England and Kantar Public, 2021). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the 2021 visitor survey results show some marked changes from the 2016 survey, in particular in the overall number of visitors, the reasons behind site choice and the behaviour. Looking to the future it is not clear how patterns of use will further change following the pandemic and whether the increased levels of countryside access are a new 'normal'. Climate change is also likely to be a driver of change in recreational use (Coombes and Jones, 2010; McEvoy et al., 2008). Long term monitoring will therefore be important to pick up emerging trends and the drivers behind those trends.

- 7.5 In drawing comparison between 2016 and 2021 it should be noted that the surveys were slightly different in their timing (with the 2016 survey work taking place entirely within the June-July period) and as such the 2021 surveys have more survey effort during the school holiday period. The 2021 driving transects included the bank holiday weekend and this may in part account for the 20% difference between the two surveys. The weather was also different as the summer 2021 was variable and while there was a period of exceptionally warm weather in mid-July, much of July and August was characterised by unsettled weather and frequent showers. The south-east of England was one of the wettest areas in the UK during August and the Met Office weather summaries note that many weather stations across the UK recorded their dullest August in over 60 years.

## Implications

- 7.6 The results from this survey and the SANGs surveys (see separate report) provide a clear indication that SANGs are working to deflect use away from Ashdown Forest. On the SANGs sites, the most commonly cited alternative location was Ashdown Forest while at Ashdown Forest, the South Downs were the most popular alternative, followed by Walshes Park (the SANG that is closest to Ashdown Forest). These findings suggest that SANGs are working as mitigation but inevitably it is not possible to deflect all access and management measures (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring 'SAMM') at Ashdown Forest will continue to be necessary alongside.

- 7.7 Comparing the list of alternative sites from the two surveys suggest those visiting Ashdown Forest do favour large countryside sites with expansive scenery, and this may have implications for future SANGs design and delivery.
- 7.8 The results provide some indications of measures that could be incorporated into any future reviews of SAMM measures. Interviewees highlighted a desire to see changes around parking and the surfacing of car parks, provision of dog bins, addressing campervans and provision of mountain bike routes and these kinds of interventions may provide means to influence visitor use. Vegetation management and the presence of livestock were other key themes in the comments.
- 7.9 Dog walkers are a key group to influence, due to the particular impacts associated with dog fouling, disturbance from dogs off leads and impacts on livestock. The results suggest a drop in the level of awareness in the dog walking guidance and code of conduct, and this would suggest scope for more awareness raising and targeted work with dog walkers.
- 7.10 The results indicate when use peaks and highlight the likely importance of engagement in the early morning during the week and later in the day at weekends in order to maximise the number of people reached.
- 7.11 There was no significant difference in the distances from home postcode to survey location when comparing the 2016 and 2021 data, and this would suggest that there is no need to change any zones of influence used to identify where development might trigger likely significant effects and where mitigation is required.
- 7.12 Given the increases in the levels of use and potential fluctuations associated with Covid, climate change and changes in management at Ashdown Forest (e.g. the introduction of parking charges), regular monitoring will be important and the vehicle counts provide a straight forward and easily repeatable approach for visitor numbers and distribution to be monitored.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire



### Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey

Good am/pm. I am undertaking a survey for local authorities to better understand which local countryside sites people visit and why. Can you spare me a few minutes please?

- Q1 Firstly I'd like to ask about your visit today.
- Are you on a day trip/short visit and travelled from home ... *if no*
  - Are you on a short trip & staying with friends or family ... *if no*
  - On holiday in the area, staying away from home... *if no*
  - If none of the above, **How would you describe your visit today?**

Details

**Q2 What is the main activity you are undertaking today?** *Tick closest answer. Do not prompt. Single response only. Ensure activity rather than reason for undertaking (e.g. not "health", "relaxing" etc.)*

- Dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / power walking
- Outing with family / picnicking
- Cycling
- Wildlife / bird watching
- Fishing
- Photography
- Meet up with friends
- Visiting the information centre
- Horse Riding
- Other, please detail:

Further details

**Q3 Are there any other activities you or the people with you will be undertaking today?** *Tick closest answers. Do not prompt. Multiple responses possible. Ensure activity rather than reason for undertaking (e.g. not "health", "relaxing" etc.)*

- Dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / power walking
- Outing with family / picnicking
- Cycling
- Wildlife / bird watching
- Fishing
- Photography
- Meet up with friends
- Visiting the information centre
- Horse Riding
- Other, please detail:

Further details

**Q4 How long have you been visiting this location?** *Single response only. Do not prompt.*

- first visit
- less than or approximately 6 months
- less than or approximately 1 year
- less than or approximately 3 years
- less than or approximately 5 years
- less than or approximately 10 years
- more than 10 years
- Don't know / not sure

**Q5 How long have you spent / will you spend here today?** *Single response only. Do not prompt.*

- less than 30 minutes
- between 30 minutes and 1 hour
- more than 1 hour to 2 hours
- more than 2 hours to 3 hours
- more than 3 hours
- Don't know / not sure

**Q6 Over the past year, roughly how often have you visited this location?** *Tick closest answer, single response only. Only prompt if interviewee struggles.*

- Daily
- Most days (180+ visits)
- 1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)
- 2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)
- Once a month (6-15 visits)
- Less than once a month (2-5 visits)
- Don't know
- First visit
- Other, please detail

further details:

**Q7 Do you tend to visit this area more at a particular time of year for [insert given activity]? Multiple answers ok.**

- Spring (Mar-May)
- Summer (Jun-Aug)
- Autumn (Sept-Nov)
- Winter (Dec-Feb)
- Equally all year
- Don't know
- First visit

**Q8 Before the pandemic, roughly how often did you visit this location? Tick closest answer, single response only. Use example frequency or estimate of visits per year. Do not prompt.**

- More than once a day (365+ visits a year)
- Daily (300-365 visits)
- Most days (180-300 visits)
- 1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)
- 2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)
- Once a month (6-15 visits)
- Less than once a month (2-5 visits)
- Don't know
- First visit
- Other, please detail

Further details:

**Q9 Has the coronavirus pandemic changed how often you visit this location? Await answer and If yes follow with Have your visits increased or decreased? Do not prompt. Single response only.**

- No, visiting the same as before
- Don't know
- Yes, visiting more
- Yes, visiting less

Further details:

**Q10 How did you get here today? What form of transport did you use? Single response only.**

- Car / van
- On foot
- Public transport
- Bicycle
- Other, please detail

further details (and if multiple modes of transport mentioned, record main one and note others below):

**Now I'd like to ask you about your route today. Looking at the area shown on this map, can you show me where you started your visit today, the finish point and your route please? Probe to ensure route is accurately documented. Use P to indicate where the visitor parked, E to indicate the start point and X to indicate the exit. Mark the route with a line; a solid line for the actual route and a dotted line for the expected or remaining route. If they have followed a particular route please note this in free text at end of interview.**

**Q11 Is / was your route today similar to your usual route when you visit here for [insert given activity]? Tick closest answer, do not prompt. Single response only.**

- Yes, normal
- Much longer than normal
- Much shorter than normal
- Not sure / no typical visit
- First visit

**Q12 Did you / do you plan to go off the paths during your visit today? Tick closest answer, do not prompt. Single response only.**

- Yes, went off the paths
- No, stayed on the paths
- Not sure / don't know



**Q13** What, if anything, influenced your choice of route here today? *Tick closest answers, do not prompt. Multiple responses ok.*

- Weather
- Grazing animals/fences/grazing enclosures
- Daylight
- Time
- Away from other people (not busy)
- Group members (eg kids, less able)
- Avoiding muddy tracks / paths
- Staying on surfaced paths
- Followed a marked trail
- Previous knowledge of area / experience
- Activity undertaken (eg presence of dog)
- Other specific site features (viewpoint, lake etc.)
- Birds / wildlife
- Interpretation / leaflets
- Other, please detail

Further details:

**Q14 Why did you choose to visit this location today, rather than somewhere else?** *Tick all responses given by visitor in the 'other' column. Do not prompt, tick closest answers. Then ask Which single reason would you say had the most influence over your choice to visit here today? Tick only one main reason. Use text box for answers that cannot be categorised and for further information.*

	Other	Main
Don't know / others in party chose	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close to home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No need to use car	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quick & easy travel route	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good / easy parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Particular facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choice of routes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feels safe here	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quiet, with no traffic noise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not many people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scenery / variety of views	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rural feel / wild landscape	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Habit / familiarity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Particular wildlife interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good for dog / dog enjoys it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to let dog off lead	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Closest place to take dog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Closest place to let dog safely off lead	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate place for activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Suitability of area in given weather conditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COVID (e.g. can't travel, being outside)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please detail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Further details:

**Q15 Could you name the one location outside Ashdown Forest you would have visited today for [insert given activity] if you did not visit here? Do not prompt, tick closest answer.**

Not sure / Don't know

Go to Q18

Nowhere / wouldn't have visited anywhere

Go to Q18

Site Named

Record site name:

**Please can you name up to 2 other locations outside Ashdown Forest you also visit for [given activity]?**

**Q16 Name of Site 2**

**Q17 Name of Site 3**

**Q18 What is your full home postcode? This is an important piece of information, please make every effort to record full postcode correctly. If necessary add *This will only be used to tell us roughly how far you have travelled today***

**Q19 If visitor is unable or refuses to give postcode: What is the name of the nearest town or village?**

**Q20 If visitor is on holiday ask: Which town / village are you staying in?**

**Q21 Are you aware of any guidance on dog walking relating to Ashdown Forest?**

- Yes Go to Q22
- No Go to Q25
- Not sure Go to Q25

**Q22 If yes Can you tell me what guidance you have seen? Multiple responses ok. Tick all that apply. Do not prompt.**

- Specific mention of dog walking code of conduct ('4Cs')
- Mention of signs around Ashdown Forest
- Mention of need to keep dogs under close control
- Mention of need to pick up/flick
- Mention of issues with dogs and livestock
- No clear details/Not sure

Other/more details

**Q23 Has the guidance influenced what you do at all? Multiple responses ok.**

- No change/No
- Kept dog on lead more
- Kept dog under control
- Flicked waste
- Bagged waste more
- Other/more details

Further details:

**Q24 Did any information or recommendations help you plan your visit here today? Do not prompt, multiple answers ok. Tick closest and log further details (particularly if specific sources referred to).**

- Word of mouth recommendation
- Visitor centre
- Internet/website
- Leaflet
- Guidebook
- Social media (twitter/facebook/instagram etc)
- OS map (online or paper)
- App (e.g. Strava, ViewRanger etc)
- Other or further details:

Further details:

**Q25 Did you know there is a visitor information centre at Wych Cross?** *(note if interview undertaken at visitor centre CP, change 'Wych Cross' to 'here').*

- Yes Go to Q26
- No Go to Q27
- Not sure Go to Q27

**Q26 Have you visited the visitor information centre at Wych Cross before?** *(note if interview undertaken at visitor centre CP, change 'Wych Cross' to 'here').*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**Q27 Finally, do you have any suggestions of measures you would like to see relating to the management of access at Ashdown Forest?** *Free text*



That is the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your time.

**To be completed by surveyor after interview**

**Q28 Survey details**

Surveyor initials

Survey location code

MapRef for Route

**Q29 Gender of interviewee**

Female

Male

Unsure

Total number in interviewed group

Total males

Total females

Total number of dogs

Number of dogs off lead

**Q30 Surveyor comments.** *Note anything that may be relevant to the survey, including any changes to the survey entry that are necessary, eg changes to answers.*

## Appendix 2: Summary rainfall during visitor interview/tally sessions

This appendix summarises the dates each location was surveyed (visitor interviews and counts), showing the dates each time period was covered (all points were surveyed on a weekend day and weekend day with all four time periods covered on both types of day). Values in the table reflect the amount of rain during each survey period: blank cells mean no coverage, 0=survey undertaken, no rain; 1=survey undertaken, rain for less than 30 minutes during two-hour period; 2 = survey undertaken, rain for less than 1 hour during two-hour period; 3 = survey undertaken, rain for less than 1 hour and 30 minutes during two-hour period; 4 = survey undertaken, rain for more than 1 hour and 30 minutes during two-hour period. Grey shading reflects survey periods with rain. A summary table at end gives total number of survey periods with rain of different duration.

Location name	Date	0700-0900	1030-1230	1400-1600	1700-1900
Box	21-Jul	0	0	0	0
	24-Jul	2	0	0	0
Churlwood	15-Jul	0	0	0	0
	14-Aug	0	0	0	0
Crowborough	23-Jul	0	0	0	0
	07-Aug	3	4	2	3
Fairwarp	12-Jul	1	0	1	4
	07-Aug	3	3	2	3
Forest Centre	12-Jul	4	0	1	2
	21-Aug	0	2	2	0
Forest Row, near Golf Club	19-Jul	0	0	2	0
	14-Aug	0	1	0	0
Four Counties	12-Jul	0	0	1	3
	14-Aug	0	0	0	0
Gills Lap	20-Jul	0	0	0	0
	15-Aug	0	2	0	0
Hindleap	20-Jul	0	0	0	0
	15-Aug	0	3	0	0
Hollies	12-Jul			1	4
	31-Jul	0	1	2	2
King's Standing	14-Jul	0	0	0	0
	01-Aug	0	0	1	3
Lintons	13-Jul	0	0	0	0
	22-Aug	0	0	1	0
Long	19-Jul	0	0	2	0
	15-Aug	0	2	0	0

Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey 2021

Location name	Date	0700-0900	1030-1230	1400-1600	1700-1900
Millbrook East	23-Jul	0	0	0	0
	07-Aug	3	3	3	2
Millbrook West	16-Jul	0	0	0	0
	01-Aug	0	1	2	3
Nutley	13-Jul	0	0	0	0
	08-Aug	0	2	2	1
Poundgate	12-Jul	0	0		
Reserve	13-Jul	0	0	0	0
	08-Aug	0	2	2	1
Roman Road	22-Jul	0	0	0	0
	25-Jul	4	3	3	2
Smugglers	15-Jul	0	0	0	0
	31-Jul	0	0	1	1
St.Johns	14-Jul	0	0	0	0
	08-Aug	0	3	2	1