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Ashridge Estate Visitor Survey 2025

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Summary

This report has been commissioned by the National Trust and presents the results of a visitor survey carried out at the Ashridge Estate in late spring / early summer 2025. The purpose of the survey is to provide an update on current visitor use, and to identify any changes since the previous survey in 2021. The current survey is part of a long-term monitoring strategy which measures the effectiveness of the recreation pressure mitigation strategy for the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Surveyors conducted face-to-face interviews with a random sample of visitors whilst also keeping a tally count of everyone passing the surveyor. Twelve survey points were used, with two days (16 hours) spent at each one.

Key results and figures from the survey

Tally counts

- In total, 1,240 groups were noted entering, leaving or passing through at the survey points over the 24 days of fieldwork.
- These groups contained a total of 2,314 people (of which 361 were minors) and there were 964 dogs.
- From these totals the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.3 were minors) and 0.8 dogs.
- There was roughly 1 dog for every 2 people.
- The busiest survey points were Monument Drive and Berkhamsted Common, although the highest number of dogs were recorded at Northchurch Common and Ling Ride.

Interviews

- A total of 510 interviews were conducted, with a median interview duration of just over 6 minutes.
- Most interviewees (97%) were on a day trip or short visit from home.
- The most common main activities of interviewees were dog walking (59%), walking (30%), jogging/running (2%) and cycling/mountain biking (2%). Many interviewees were also undertaking additional activities such as visiting a café or bird/wildlife watching.
- The majority of interviewees (90%) had arrived by car or van, and this was the most common mode of transport at all survey points except for Little Gaddesden, where more interviewees had arrived on foot.
- The average visit duration was around 1.5 hours. Overall, almost half of the interviewees (48%) stayed for less than an hour, and among dog walkers this figure was 63%. Visits were generally shorter at Frithsden Beeches and Northchurch Common, and longer at Aldbury and Monument Drive.
- Overall, 52% of interviewees said that they visit the location where they were interviewed at least once a week, including 13% who visit at least daily. First-time visitors accounted for 13% of the interviewees. Interviewees at Ivinghoe Beacon, Monument Drive and Barracks Square tended to be more infrequent visitors and interviewees at Little Gaddesden and Frithsden Beeches tended to be much more regular visitors.

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- The majority of interviewees indicated that they visit the survey location all year round (63%). The second most common response (excluding those on their first visit) was a preference for visiting in the summer (10%).
- The most common reasons for choosing to visit the survey location were because it is close to home (32%), because of the scenery and views (30%) and because it is a good place to bring their dog (16%).
- Almost all interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that they feel connected to nature during their visit to Ashridge (94%).
- The median route length taken by interviewees during their visit was 3.0 km. Heatmaps show where concentrations of footfall occur.
- The most commonly cited factors that had influenced the interviewee's choice of route were habit (23%), the weather (20%) and time (13%).
- Almost half of the interviewees (43%) said that at least half of their visits for their activity take place at Ashridge, including 12% who said that all of their visits take place there.
- Other locations that interviewees also visit included Monument Drive (10%), the Grand Union Canal (10%) and Wendover Woods (9%).
- Changes that interviewees would like to see at Ashridge included more dog waste bins (7%), reduced litter/flytipping (5%) and improvements to refreshment facilities (4%).
- Overall, 37% of interviewees had heard of the Protecting Our Roots project, although this varied between survey points, ranging from 23% at Frithsden Beeches to 56% at Ling Ride.
- A total of 492 interviewees (96%) gave full valid postcodes that could be plotted in GIS. The majority of interviewees were from Dacorum (58%), Buckinghamshire (15%) and Central Bedfordshire (11%).
- Half of all interviewees lived within a 6.4 km radius of the survey point where they were interviewed, and three quarters lived within 11.9 km.

Comparison with the 2021 survey (SAC survey points and summer term-time only)

- The tally counts in the 2021 survey were slightly higher, with 15.0 people counted per hour, compared to 12.6 people per hour in the recent survey.
- The main activities of interviewees were similar, although with a higher proportion of dog walkers in the recent survey (60% compared to 52% in 2021).
- The proportion of interviewees visiting on a daily basis was the same in both surveys (13%).
- The median straight-line distance from each interviewee's postcode to the survey point where they were interviewed was very similar (6.5 km in 2021, 6.1 km in 2025).

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Survey work was co-ordinated by Fenella Lewin and undertaken by Joe Costley, Andrew McLeish, Su Powner, Jenny Price and Mark Sumner. Data were entered by Manuela Naprta.

Cover photo © Zoe Caals

1. Introduction

Overview

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by the National Trust and presents the results of a visitor survey carried out at Ashridge Estate in late spring / early summer 2025.
- 1.2 There were two parts to the visitor survey. The first was to undertake tally counts in order to measure the level of footfall at each survey point. The second was to simultaneously carry out face-to-face interviews with a random sample of visitors in order to gather detailed information on visitor patterns and views.

Ashridge Estate

- 1.3 The Ashridge Estate is owned and managed by the National Trust and covers approximately 2,000 hectares of Beech and Oak woodlands, commons and chalk grassland. Most of it is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a large part of it also falls within the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As such it is afforded strict protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended (known as the Habitats Regulations).
- 1.4 Recent concerns about the impacts that increasing visitor numbers are having on the estate's important habitats have led to the implementation of a recreation pressure mitigation strategy (Buckinghamshire Council, 2024). This strategy seeks to ensure that there are no adverse effects on the integrity of the Ashridge part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC due to recreational pressure from new housing. The National Trust are also making some changes to visitor infrastructure through their 'Protecting Our Roots' project.

Aims of this work

- 1.5 A monitoring strategy has recently been developed (Liley and Saunders, 2025) which sets out a programme of data collection to measure the effectiveness of the above recreation mitigation strategy. This includes carrying out repeat visitor surveys at regular intervals.

- 1.6 The key aim of the survey is to provide an update on current recreational usage on the estate, and to identify any changes since the previous visitor survey in 2021 (Panter *et al.*, 2022). The survey design, questionnaire and approach have been closely aligned with the previous survey so that the results can be compared.
- 1.7 The interviews provide detailed information on who is visiting, why they have chosen to visit Ashridge Estate, what activities they undertake, where they go on site and which other local green spaces they also visit.

2. Methods

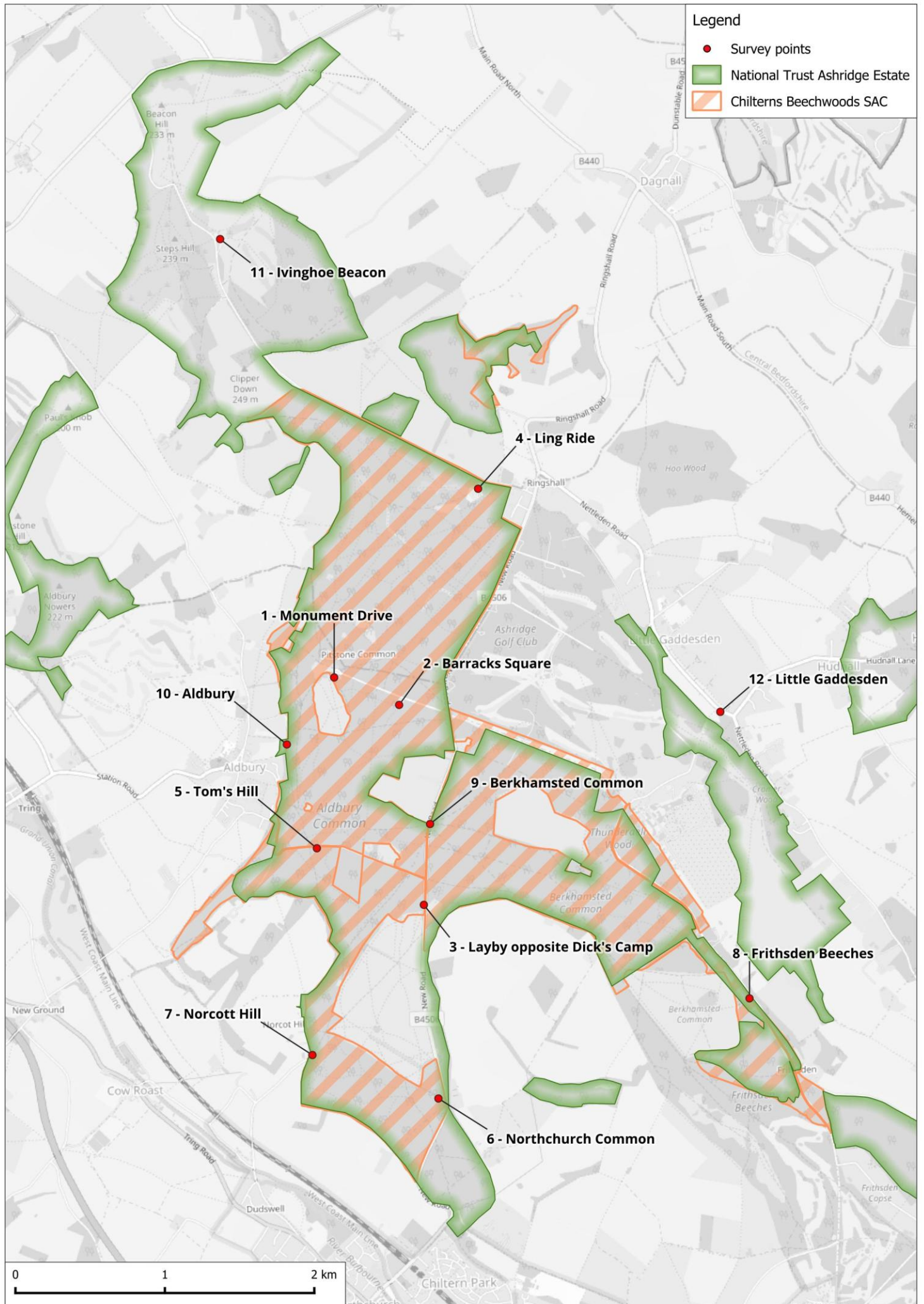
Survey locations

- 2.1 Surveys took place at 12 locations across the Ashridge Estate (see Table 1 and Map 1). Eleven of these locations were previously surveyed in 2021, while Ling Ride was a new location to replace Dockey Wood car park, which is now only open for a few weeks per year.
- 2.2 Ten of the survey points were located within the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and the remaining two were access points to other parts of Ashridge Estate. They were all locations with access to the estate and where visitors could easily be intercepted for interview.
- 2.3 The survey points were selected to sample a range of visitors and activity types, including both busy and quieter locations, and a range of car park sizes as well as one foot access point. They also have a good geographic spread across the site, covering a range of habitats and sensitive features.

Table 1: Details of the survey points used in the visitor survey.

ID	Name	Grid reference	Description	SAC
1	Monument Drive	SP97131303	Car park at the far end of Monument Drive, just before the visitor centre	✓
2	Barracks Square	SP97551284	Car park halfway up Monument Drive	✓
3	Layby opposite Dick's Camp	SP97721151	Large layby on B4506	✓
4	Ling Ride	SP98061429	Car park at Ringshall end of Beacon Road	✓
5	Tom's Hill	SP97011188	Car park on Tom's Hill Road	✓
6	Northchurch Common	SP97821021	Car park off B4506 opposite Hill Farm	✓
7	Norcott Hill	SP96971050	Small car park in SW of the estate	✓
8	Frithsden Beeches	SP99901088	Small car park on Hillingdon Road	✓
9	Berkhamsted Common	SP97761204	Small car park on B4506 at SW corner of Thunderdell Wood	✓
10	Aldbury	SP96801258	Footpath from Aldbury on western edge of the estate	✓
11	Ivinghoe Beacon	SP96351596	Large car park on Beacon Road	✗
12	Little Gaddesden	SP99701279	Car park on Nettleden Road with access to Golden Valley	✗

Map 1: Survey locations



Interviews

- 2.4 Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of visitors, by the surveyor approaching the next person they saw after completing the previous interview. Only one person was interviewed per group and no minors (under 18s) were interviewed.
- 2.5 The surveyor kept a record of the number of visitors who were approached for interview but declined to take part or were unable to take part for whatever reason. They also recorded the number of people who were approached but had already been interviewed, and were not re-interviewed.
- 2.6 The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed using Snap XMP survey software and was conducted using tablets running the Snap Offline Interviewer app. The app enables interviews to be conducted offline and then uploaded when the device is next connected to the internet.
- 2.7 Some of the questions had pre-determined categories to facilitate recording of the interviewee's responses, however these were not shown to the interviewee or read out loud, in order to avoid any bias.
- 2.8 As part of the interview, visitors were asked to describe the route that they had taken on site (or were planning to take). This was captured by the surveyor on a paper map, using a unique reference number to match it to the corresponding questionnaire data, and these routes were subsequently digitised into GIS for analysis.
- 2.9 After each interview, the surveyor recorded additional information about the number of people in each interviewed group and the number of dogs that they had with them (Q22).
- 2.10 There were some minor changes to the questionnaire mid-way through the survey, with 220 interviews before the changes and 290 after. The changes were:
- An additional question asking about nature connectedness (Q10);
 - A rewording of Q17 regarding awareness of the Protecting Our Roots project in order to improve clarity. The previous wording was: *"Are you aware of the plans being proposed by the National Trust to protect the future of Ashridge Estate, including the creation of three new visitor hubs to manage the large volume of visitors to Ashridge – the project is called 'Protecting Our Roots'?"*

Visitor counts

- 2.11 Alongside the interview data, surveyors maintained a tally of all people seen passing them, recording the number of groups (of any size), individuals (total headcount), minors (under 18s), dogs, cyclists and horse riders. 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.

Survey timings

- 2.12 Two days were spent at each survey location, comprising one weekday and one weekend day. Fieldwork took place between 16th May and 8th July 2025, excluding half term week (26th-30th May).
- 2.13 Each day of fieldwork consisted of eight hours of survey effort, split into 2-hour periods to provide breaks for the surveyors and to cover daylight hours. This ensured comparable survey windows across all locations. The session times were: 07:00-09:00, 10:30-12:30, 14:00-16:00, 17:00-19:00.
- 2.14 The weather during fieldwork was generally warm and dry, with maximum daily temperatures between 17°C and 32°C. It was the warmest June on record for England which included two heatwaves¹. Three days of fieldwork coincided with these heatwaves; however, the locations surveyed on those days were all within woodland so that our surveyors had some shade.
- 2.15 There were occasional thunderstorms, which were difficult to avoid due to uncertainty in the weather forecasts, but these only affected a small number of sessions.

¹ https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/summaries/mwr_2025_06_for_print.pdf

3. Results: tally counts

- 3.1 The tally data are summarised in Table 2. In total, 1,240 groups were noted entering, leaving or passing through at the survey points. These groups contained a total of 2,314 people (of which 361 were minors) and 964 dogs. From these totals the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.3 were minors) and 0.8 dogs. There was roughly 1 dog for every 2 people.
- 3.2 The survey points with the highest counts of people were Monument Drive (395 people) and Berkhamsted Common (294 people), although the highest numbers of dogs were recorded at Northchurch Common (128 dogs) and Ling Ride (125 dogs). At both Northchurch Common and Barracks Square the surveyors noted that it was difficult to keep track of the tallies at times due to how busy it was, so it is likely that some of these figures may be underestimates.
- 3.3 The quietest survey points were Little Gaddesden (63 people) and Norcott Hill (87 people).
- 3.4 Overall, 361 (16%) of the people counted were minors (under 18s), although this proportion ranged from just 3% at Norcott Hill to 29% at Ivinghoe Beacon. Duke of Edinburgh groups were observed at four locations (Layby opposite Dick's Camp, Berkhamsted Common, Aldbury and Ivinghoe Beacon).
- 3.5 There were 106 people on bicycles (5%), with the highest proportions recorded at Northchurch Common (12%) and Berkhamsted Common (10%).
- 3.6 Horse riders were observed at four of the survey points, with nine riders recorded in total.
- 3.7 The number of people counted on weekdays and weekend days at each location is shown in Figure 1, and the number of dogs in Figure 2. These figures show that some survey points were much busier at weekends than weekdays (e.g. Barracks Square, Ivinghoe Beacon) whereas others had less variation (e.g. Ling Ride, Layby opposite Dick's Camp).

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Table 2: Summary of tally data for each survey point. It includes all people passing the surveyor, regardless of direction. 'Groups' includes lone individuals. 'People' is a total headcount, including minors (under 18s). The highest three values in each column are highlighted in red. Two days (16 hours) were spent at each survey location.

Survey point	Groups	People	Dogs	Minors	Bicycles	Horses	% minors	% on bicycles
1 - Monument Drive	181	395	70	54	9	0	14%	2%
2 - Barracks Square	120	238	68	24	6	2	10%	3%
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	113	169	99	20	4	0	12%	2%
4 - Ling Ride	81	134	125	7	1	0	5%	1%
5 - Tom's Hill	99	181	107	20	0	0	11%	0%
6 - Northchurch Common	150	274	128	56	32	2	20%	12%
7 - Norcott Hill	59	87	48	3	6	0	3%	7%
8 - Frithsden Beeches	78	114	108	13	6	0	11%	5%
9 - Berkhamsted Common	143	294	100	78	28	2	27%	10%
10 - Aldbury	65	135	26	15	12	3	11%	9%
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	108	230	43	67	2	0	29%	1%
12 - Little Gaddesden	43	63	42	4	0	0	6%	0%
Total	1,240	2,314	964	361	106	9	16%	5%

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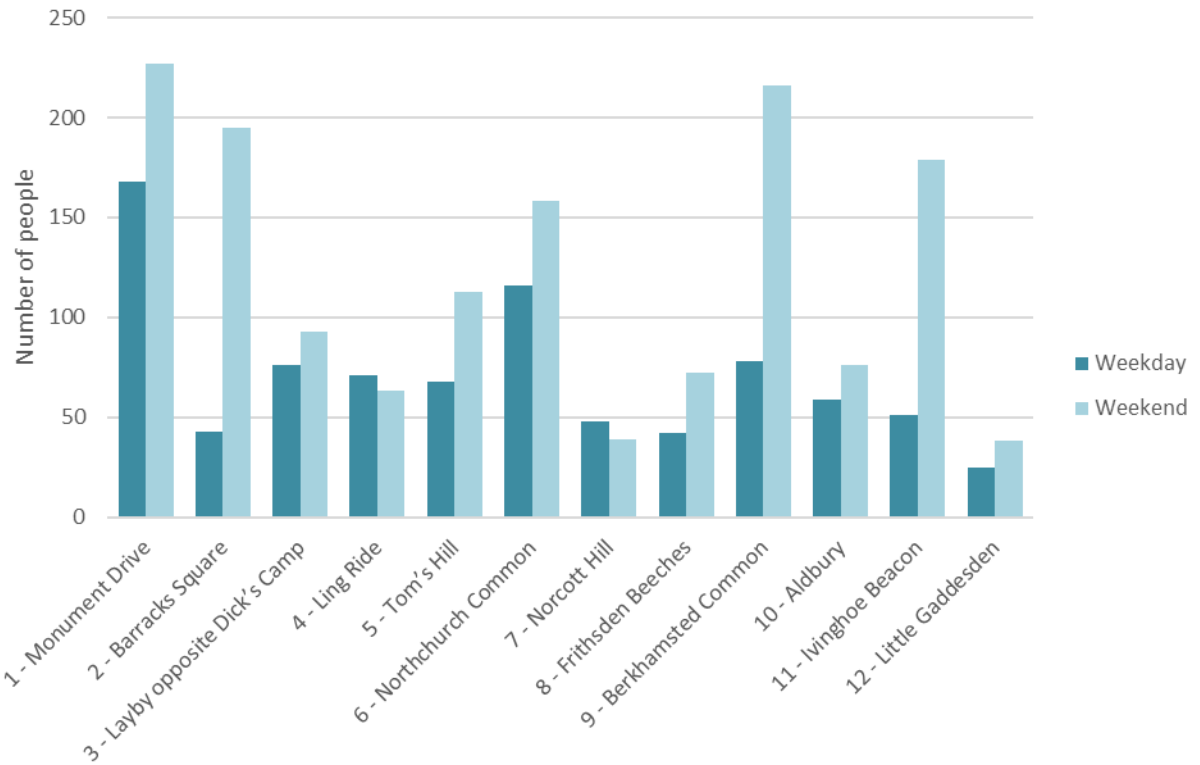


Figure 1: Number of people (adults and minors) counted at each survey point on weekdays and weekends.

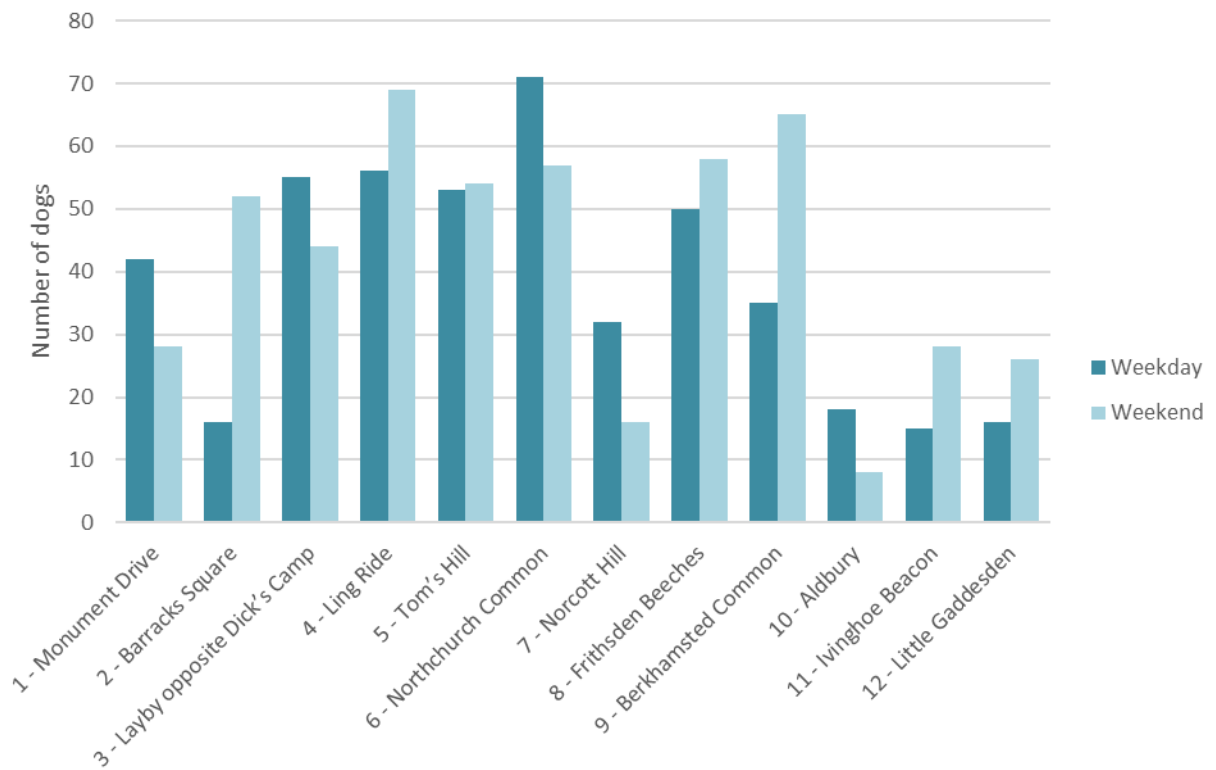


Figure 2: Number of dogs counted at each survey point on weekdays and weekends.

4. Results: visitor interviews

Overview

4.1 A total of 510 interviews were conducted, with 238 (47%) on weekdays and 272 (53%) at weekends (Table 3). The median interview duration was just over 6 minutes.

Table 3: Number (%) of people interviewed at each survey point, by day type.

Survey point	Weekday	Weekend	Total
1 - Monument Drive	42 (51%)	41 (49%)	83 (100%)
2 - Barracks Square	14 (38%)	23 (62%)	37 (100%)
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	24 (46%)	28 (54%)	52 (100%)
4 - Ling Ride	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)
5 - Tom's Hill	21 (48%)	23 (52%)	44 (100%)
6 - Northchurch Common	25 (46%)	29 (54%)	54 (100%)
7 - Norcott Hill	16 (52%)	15 (48%)	31 (100%)
8 - Frithsden Beeches	14 (45%)	17 (55%)	31 (100%)
9 - Berkhamsted Common	23 (45%)	28 (55%)	51 (100%)
10 - Aldbury	17 (55%)	14 (45%)	31 (100%)
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	22 (43%)	29 (57%)	51 (100%)
12 - Little Gaddesden	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	20 (100%)
Total	238 (47%)	272 (53%)	510 (100%)

4.2 In addition to the 510 people who were interviewed, 137 people were approached for interview but did not take part for various reasons. The most common reasons for not taking part in the survey were not having enough time, needing to walk their dog before it gets too hot, wearing earbuds/headphones or not wanting to stop in the middle of a run or cycle ride. There were also a number of Duke of Edinburgh groups who were not approached for interview on account of their age.

4.3 There were an additional 49 people who were approached for interview but who had already taken part in the survey, and were not reinterviewed.

Group composition

- 4.4 Most interviewees were either on their own (208 interviewees, 41%) or with one other person (231 interviewees, 45%). The remaining 71 interviewees (14%) were in groups of between 3 and 11 people. This included some organised walking, running and dog walking groups. A total of 48 interviewees (9%) had one or more minors (under 18s) with them.
- 4.5 The mean group size (including those on their own) amongst the interviewed groups was 1.9 people, including 0.2 minors.
- 4.6 Almost two thirds of interviewees (324 interviewees, 64%) had at least one dog with them. The highest number of dogs was seven. Almost a third (31%) of the dogs with interviewees were off lead at the time of the interview.

Visit type (Q1)

- 4.7 The majority of interviewees (493, 97%) were on a day trip or short visit from home. There were 10 interviewees (2%) who were on holiday, 5 interviewees (1%) who were staying with family or friends, and 1 interviewee (<1%) who didn't fall into any of the above categories.

Activity (Q2-3)

- 4.8 Across all survey points, the top four most frequently cited main activities were dog walking (299 interviewees, 59%), walking (154 interviewees, 30%), jogging/running (12 interviewees, 2%) and cycling/mountain biking (11 interviewees, 2%). There were a number of other activity types, but each given by five or fewer interviewees (Figure 3).

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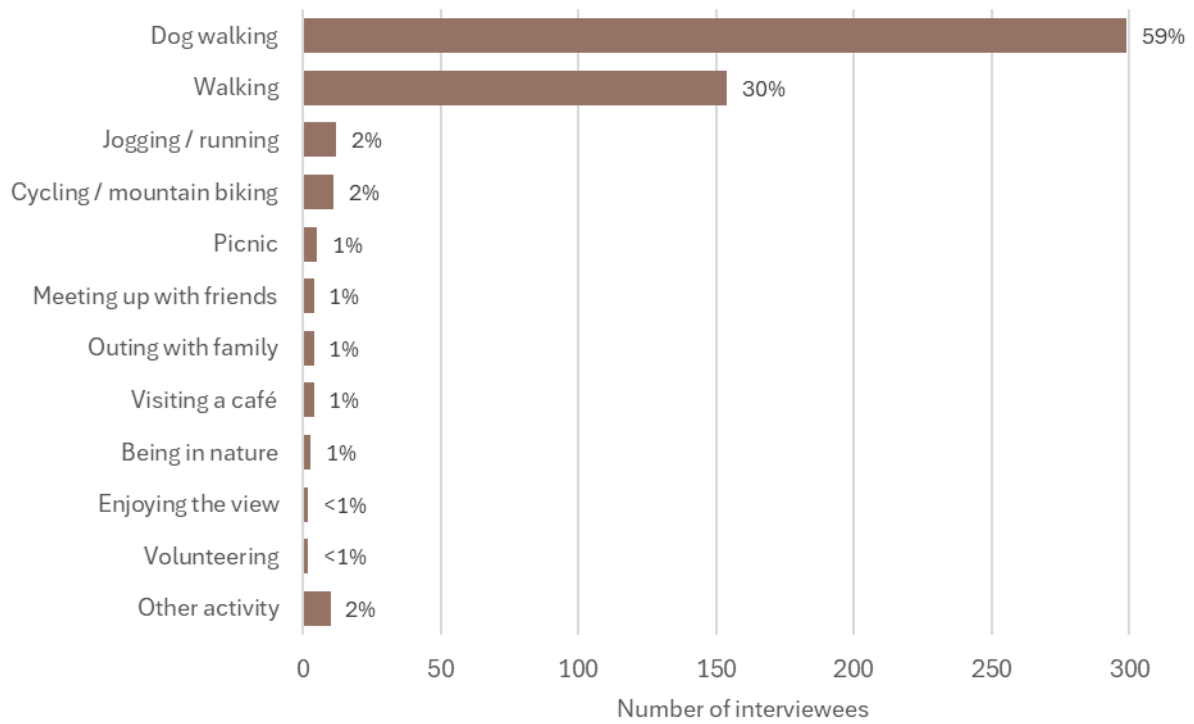


Figure 3: Main activity of interviewees (Q2) across all survey points. All answers given by two or more interviewees are shown.

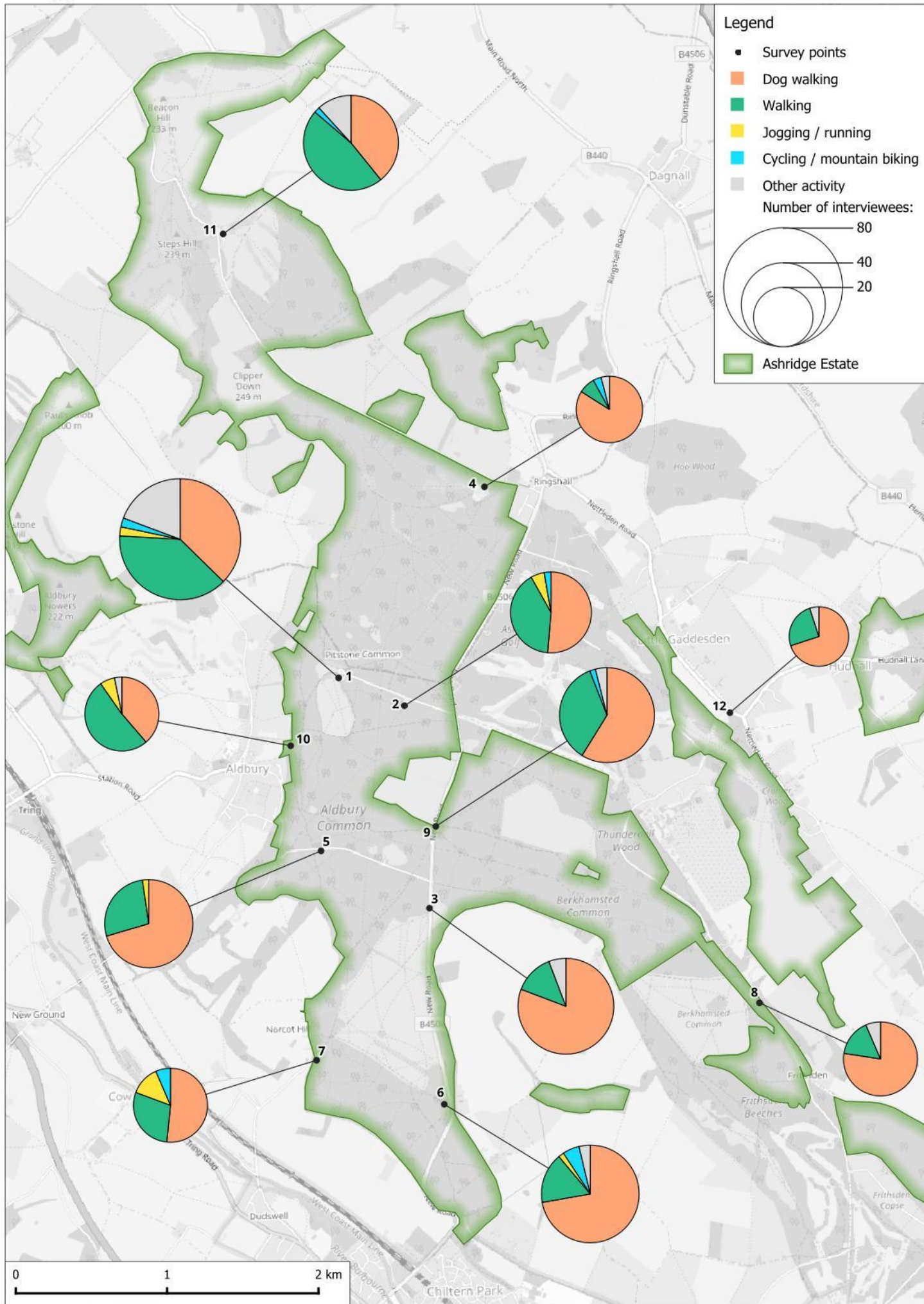
4.9 Dog walking was the most common main activity at all survey points except Monument Drive, Aldbury and Ivinghoe Beacon, where it was walking (Table 4 and Map 2).

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Table 4: Main activity of interviewees (Q2) by survey point. The highest value in each row is highlighted in red.

Survey point	Dog walking	Walking	Jogging/ running	Cycling/ mountain biking	Picnic	Meeting up with friends	Outing with family	Visiting a café	Being in nature	Enjoying the view	Volunteering	Other activity	Total
1 - Monument Drive	31 (37%)	32 (39%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4%)	83 (100%)
2 - Barracks Square	19 (51%)	15 (41%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	37 (100%)
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	42 (81%)	7 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	52 (100%)
4 - Ling Ride	21 (84%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	25 (100%)
5 - Tom's Hill	31 (70%)	12 (27%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	44 (100%)
6 - Northchurch Common	39 (72%)	9 (17%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	54 (100%)
7 - Norcott Hill	16 (52%)	9 (29%)	4 (13%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	31 (100%)
8 - Frithsden Beeches	24 (77%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	31 (100%)
9 - Berkhamsted Common	30 (59%)	18 (35%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	51 (100%)
10 - Aldbury	12 (39%)	16 (52%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	31 (100%)
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	20 (39%)	24 (47%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	51 (100%)
12 - Little Gaddesden	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
Total	299 (59%)	154 (30%)	12 (2%)	11 (2%)	5 (1%)	4 (1%)	4 (1%)	4 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (<1%)	2 (<1%)	10 (2%)	510 (100%)

Map 2: Main activity of interviewees. Pie charts are sized according to the number of interviewees at each survey point.



4.10 Interviewees were also asked to name any other activities that they (or people with them) were undertaking during their visit, and these additional activities are summarised in Figure 4. Some activities were named more frequently as an additional activity than as a main activity, for example visiting a café and bird/wildlife watching. However, dog walking and walking remained the most common activities, even when taking into account the additional activities.

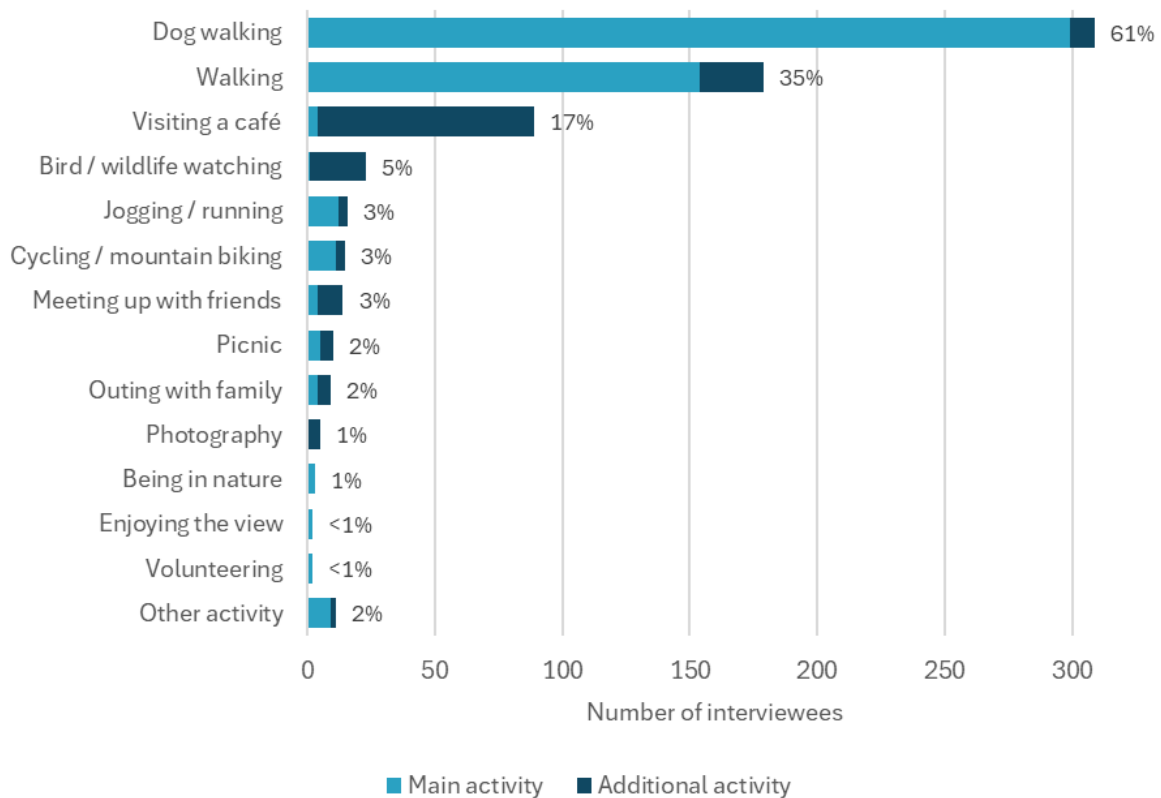


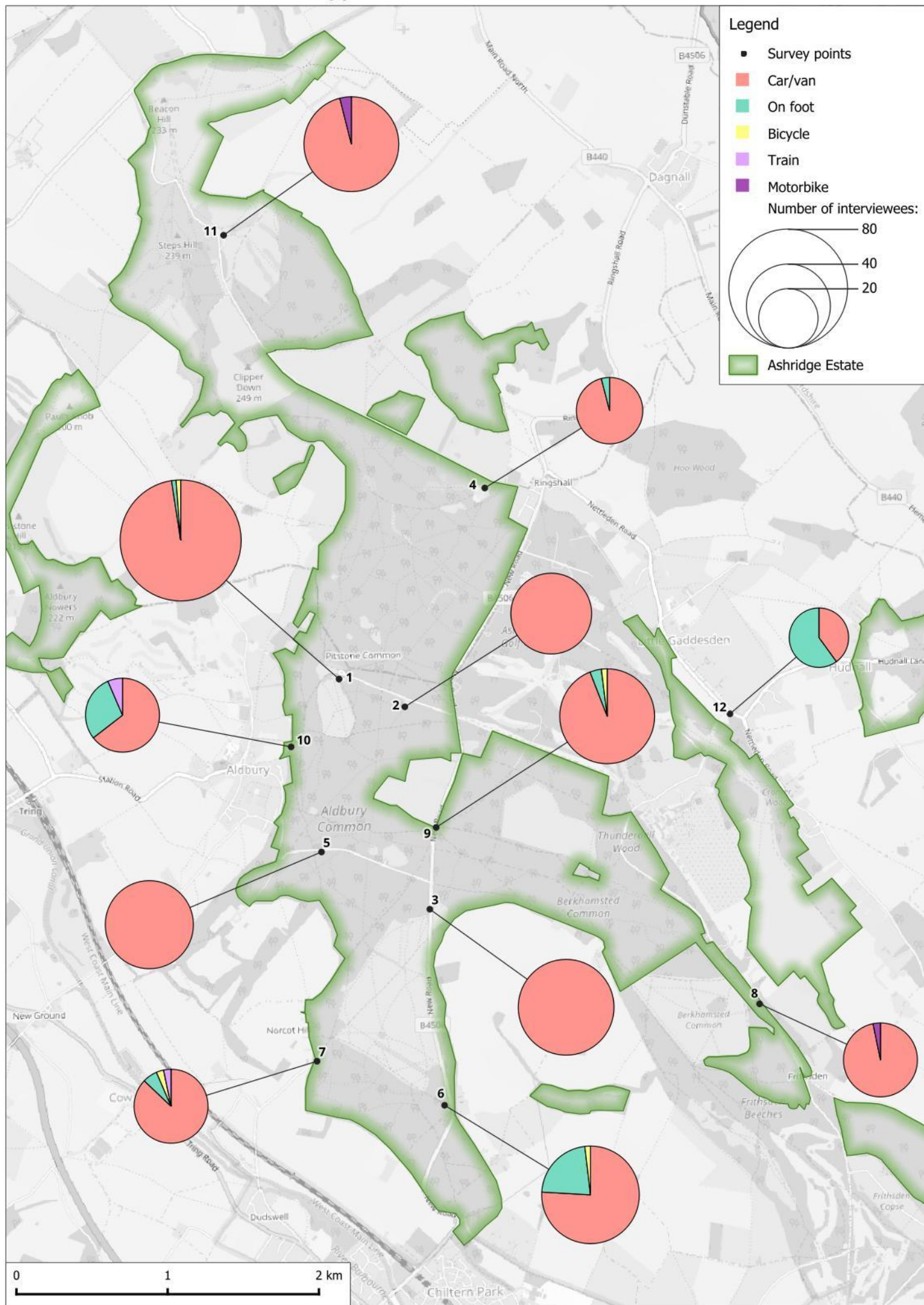
Figure 4: Activities undertaken by interviewees and others in their group. Includes both their single main activity (Q2) and any additional activities (Q3). Labels indicated the percentage of interviewees who named each activity type (whether as a main activity or an additional activity). Percentages will not add up to 100 since Q3 was a multiple-choice question.

Mode of transport (Q4)

4.11 Overall, 461 interviewees (90%) had reached the survey point by car/van, 39 interviewees (8%) had arrived on foot, 4 interviewees (1%) by bicycle, 3 interviewees (1%) by train and 3 interviewees (1%) by motorbike. All of those travelling by train had come from Tring Station.

4.12 As shown in Map 3, car/van was the most common form of transport at all survey locations except for Little Gaddesden, where more people had arrived on foot (60%).

Map 3: Mode of transport used by interviewees to reach the site. Pie charts are sized according to the number of interviewees at each survey point.



Visit duration (Q5)

- 4.13 The two most common visit duration categories were “30 minutes to 1 hour” (212 interviewees, 42%) and “1 to 2 hours” (186 interviewees, 36%).
- 4.14 Weekend visits were slightly longer than weekday visits, with 58% of weekend interviewees spending more than an hour on site compared to 45% of weekday interviewees.
- 4.15 The visit duration varied by survey location (Figure 5) with visits typically shorter at Frithsden Beeches and Northchurch Common, where over three quarters of interviewees were visiting for less than an hour. Visits were typically longest at Aldbury and Monument Drive, where 42% and 27% of interviewees respectively were staying for more than two hours.
- 4.16 The visit duration also varied by the interviewee’s main activity (Figure 5), with dog walkers generally making shorter visits (63% staying for less than one hour).
- 4.17 By assigning a single value to each duration category², the typical visit duration was around 83 minutes.

² ‘Less than 30 minutes’ = 20 minutes; ‘30 minutes to 1 hour’ = 45 minutes; ‘1 to 2 hours’ = 90 minutes; ‘2 to 3 hours’ = 150 minutes, ‘3 to 4 hours’ = 210 minutes and ‘More than 4 hours’ = 300 minutes. Typical visit duration is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

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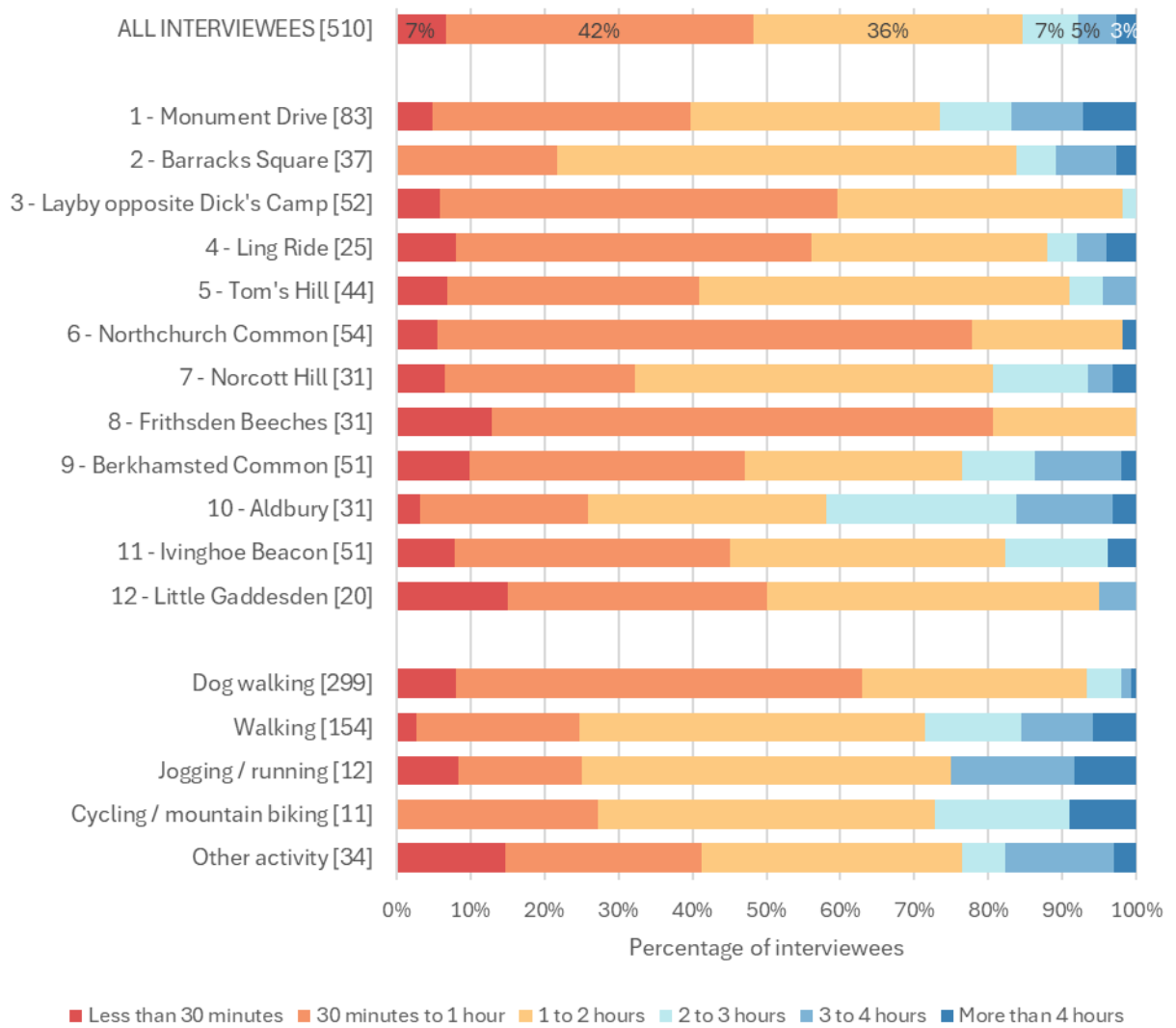


Figure 5: Visit duration of interviewees (Q5) by survey point and main activity (Q2). Numbers in square brackets are the sample size.

Visit frequency (Q6)

- 4.18 Overall, 267 interviewees (52%) indicated that they visit the location where they were interviewed at least once a week, including 66 interviewees (13%) who visit at least daily (Figure 6). There were 66 interviewees (13%) who were either visiting for the first time or had not visited within the previous year.
- 4.19 The visit frequency varied considerably by survey point, with the proportion of interviewees visiting at least daily ranging from none at Barracks Square to 50% at Little Gaddesden. Ivinghoe Beacon had the highest proportion of first-time visitors (29%).
- 4.20 Interviewees whose main activity was dog walking tended to be much more regular visitors than those with other activity types (Figure 6), with 70% visiting at least once a week, including 20% who visit at least daily. None of the other activity types had more than 3% visiting on a daily basis.
- 4.21 By assigning an estimated annual number of visits to each category³, the average interviewee had made 112 visits in the past year to the location where they were interviewed, equivalent to around two visits per week.

³ 'More than once a day' = 700 visits; 'Daily' = 350 visits; 'Most days' = 200 visits; '1 to 3 times a week' = 110 visits; '2 to 3 times per month' = 27.5 visits; 'Once a month' = 10.5 visits; 'Less than once a month' = 3 visits; 'First visit' = 1 visit. Typical visit frequency is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

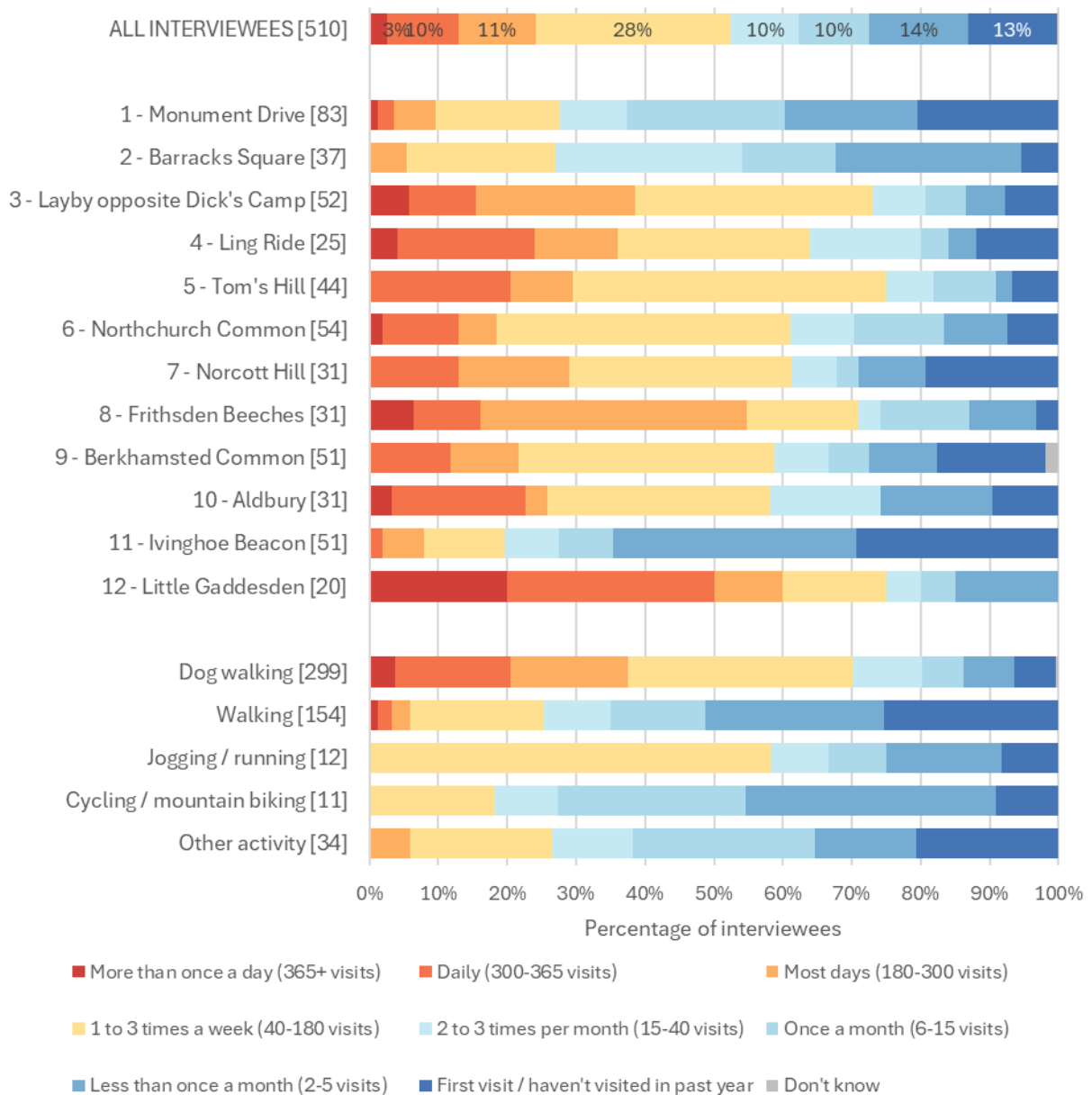


Figure 6: Visit frequency of interviewees (Q6) by survey point and main activity (Q2). Numbers in square brackets are the sample size.

Time of year (Q7)

4.22 The majority of interviewees (322 interviewees, 63%) stated that they visit equally all year round (Table 5). The second most common response (excluding those on their first visit) was a preference for visiting in summer (50 interviewees, 10%).

4.23 Visiting equally all year round was the most common response at all survey points, although the proportion of interviewees who gave this response ranged from 33% at Ivinghoe Beacon to 91% at Tom’s Hill.

Table 5: Number of interviewees (%) and the time of year that they tend to visit (Q7), by survey point. N is the number of interviewees. The highest two values in each row are highlighted in red.

Survey point	N	Spring (Mar-May)	Summer (Jun-Aug)	Autumn (Sep-Nov)	Winter (Dec-Feb)	Equally all year	Don't know / first visit
1 - Monument Drive	83	11 (13%)	14 (17%)	6 (7%)	2 (2%)	35 (42%)	17 (20%)
2 - Barracks Square	37	5 (14%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	20 (54%)	2 (5%)
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	52	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	40 (77%)	4 (8%)
4 - Ling Ride	25	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	19 (76%)	3 (12%)
5 - Tom's Hill	44	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	40 (91%)	3 (7%)
6 - Northchurch Common	54	3 (6%)	4 (7%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	41 (76%)	4 (7%)
7 - Norcott Hill	31	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	21 (68%)	6 (19%)
8 - Frithsden Beeches	31	3 (10%)	5 (16%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	21 (68%)	2 (6%)
9 - Berkhamsted Common	51	3 (6%)	9 (18%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	30 (59%)	8 (16%)
10 - Aldbury	31	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (71%)	3 (10%)
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	51	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	17 (33%)	15 (29%)
12 - Little Gaddesden	20	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (80%)	0 (0%)
Total	510	35 (7%)	50 (10%)	18 (4%)	7 (1%)	322 (63%)	67 (13%)

Reasons for visiting (Q8-9)

4.24 Reasons that interviewees gave for choosing to visit the location where they were interviewed are summarised in Figure 7. The most commonly cited reasons were that it is close to home (164 interviewees, 32%), because of the scenery and views (151 interviewees, 30%) and because it is a good place to bring their dog (81, 16%).

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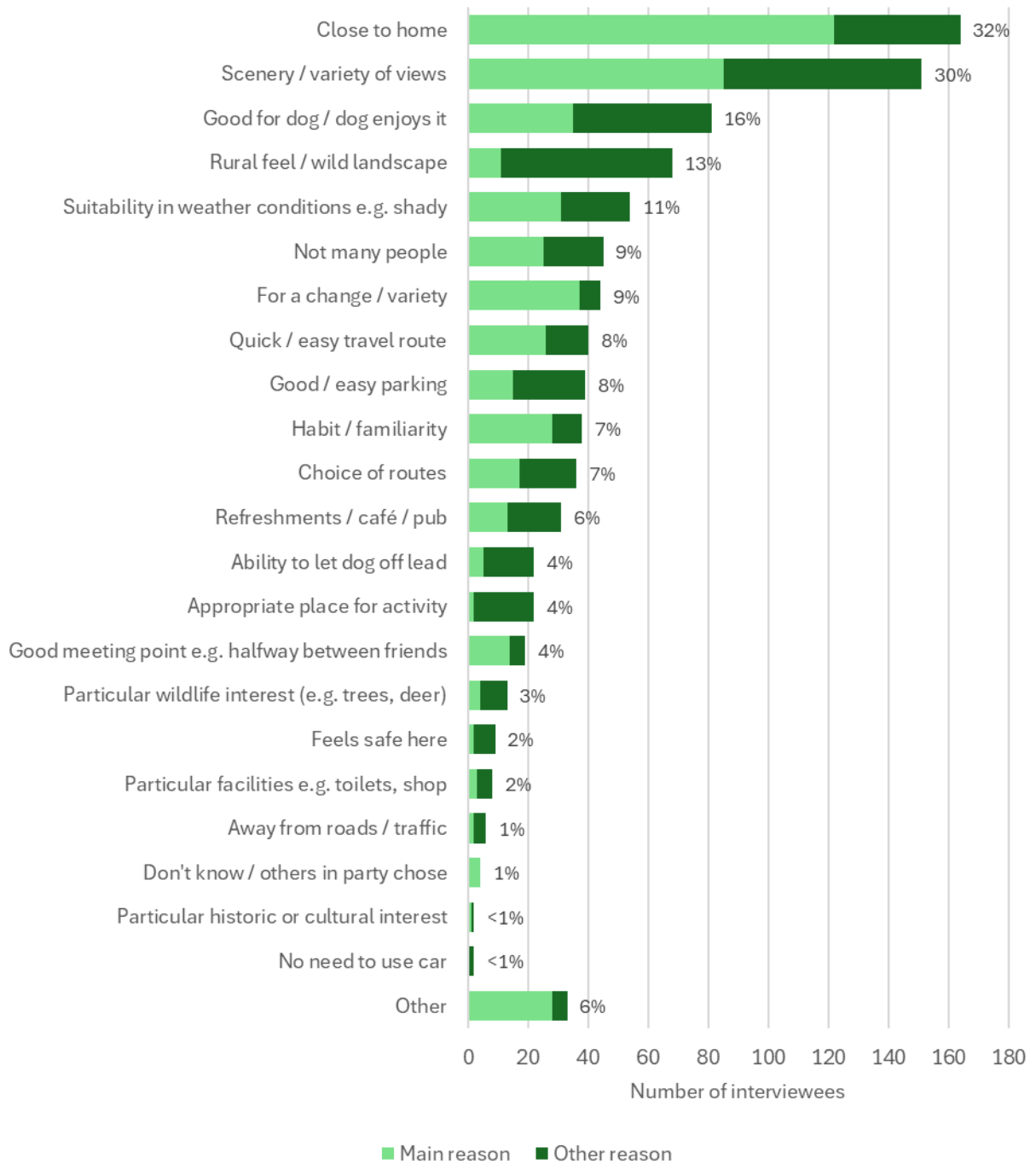


Figure 7: Reasons given by interviewees for choosing to visit the survey location, rather than somewhere else (Q8-9). Interviewees could give multiple reasons and were then asked which one of those was their main reason. They were not prompted or shown any options. Labels indicate the percentage of interviewees who cited each reason.

4.25 The most commonly cited reason for visiting given by interviewees at each survey point is shown in Table 7. At most survey points it was either being close to home or because of the scenery/views, however at Ling Ride the most common reason was that there were not many people and at Berkhamsted Common it was because it offered shade during hot weather.

Table 6: The most commonly cited reason for visiting (Q8) at each survey point.

Survey point	Top reason for visiting
1 - Monument Drive	Close to home
2 - Barracks Square	Scenery / variety of views
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	Close to home
4 - Ling Ride	Not many people
5 - Tom's Hill	Close to home
6 - Northchurch Common	Close to home
7 - Norcott Hill	Close to home
8 - Frithsden Beeches	Scenery / variety of views
9 - Berkhamsted Common	Suitability of area in given weather conditions
10 - Aldbury	Close to home
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	Scenery / variety of views
12 - Little Gaddesden	Close to home; Scenery / variety of views

Nature connectedness (Q10)

4.26 Over half of the interviewees (165 interviewees, 57%) strongly agreed with the statement: "During my visit to Ashridge, I feel connected to nature". The combined proportion of interviewees who either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' was 94%. Among the most common activity types, those who were jogging or running had the highest proportion answering 'strongly agree' to this question (88%, see Figure 8).

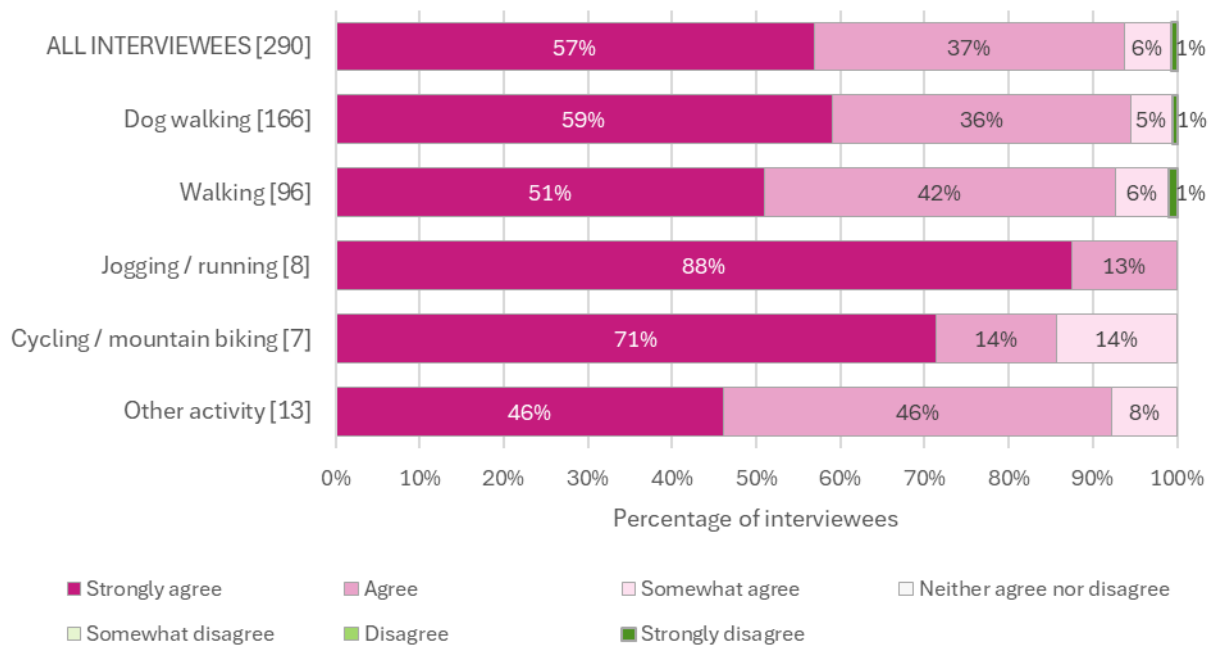


Figure 8: Responses to Q10, which asked to what extent interviewees agreed or disagreed with the statement: “During my visit to Ashridge, I feel connected to nature”. The numbers in square brackets are the sample sizes. Note that this question was added after May half term, so was not asked of earlier interviewees.

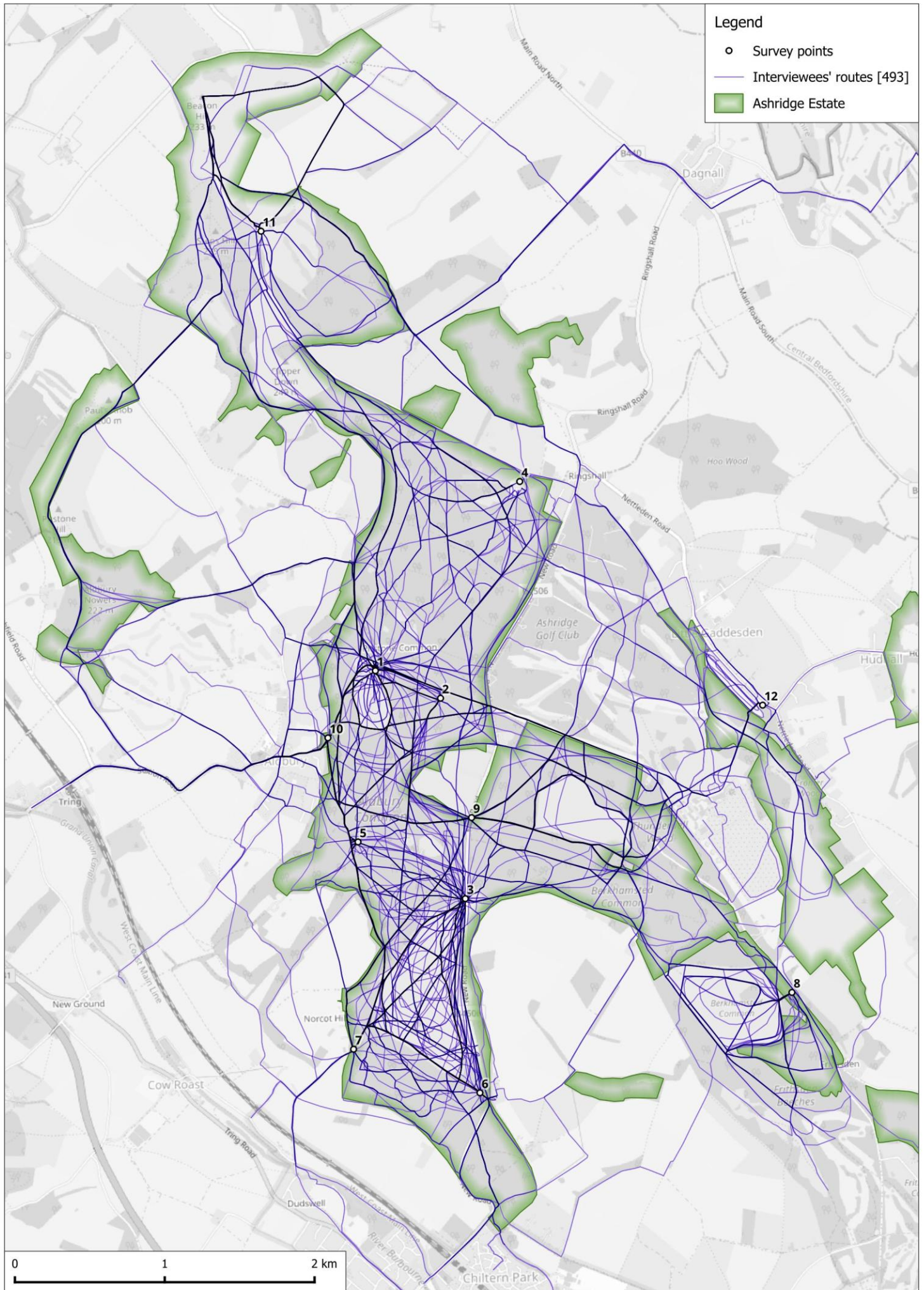
Routes taken on site (Q11-13)

- 4.27 Most interviewees (493, 97%) were able to describe to the surveyor the route that they had taken (or planned to take) during their visit. These routes have been digitised from the paper maps and are shown as lines in Map 4 and as a heatmap in Map 5. Map 6 shows the areas used by interviewees with different activity types.
- 4.28 These maps highlight the areas which had the highest footfall, such as around the visitor centre, Meadley’s Meadow, the bridleway towards Aldbury, Northchurch Common, Lady’s Walk and the footpath up to Ivinghoe Beacon.
- 4.29 Overall, the median route length was 3.0 km and at individual survey points the median route length was between 2 and 4 km for all except Aldbury, where the median route length was 6.4 km (Figure 9).
- 4.30 Cyclists and joggers/runners tended to have the longest routes, with median lengths of 8.7 km and 8.2 km respectively. Dog walkers tended to have the

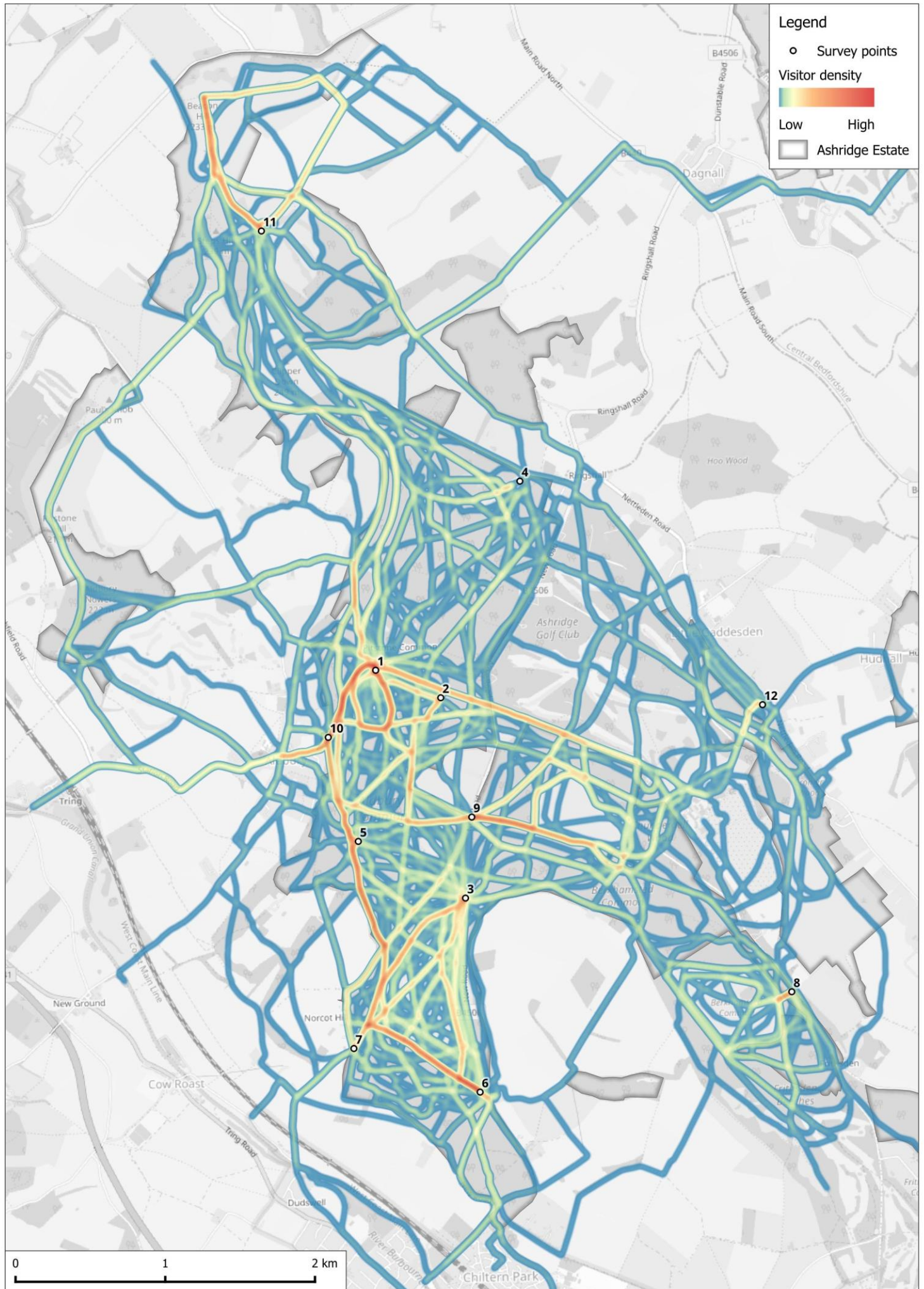
shortest routes, with a median length of 2.8 km, although the longest dog walk was 16.2 km (Figure 10).

- 4.31 Routes were only slightly longer at weekends (median length of 3.1 km) compared to weekdays (median length of 2.8 km).

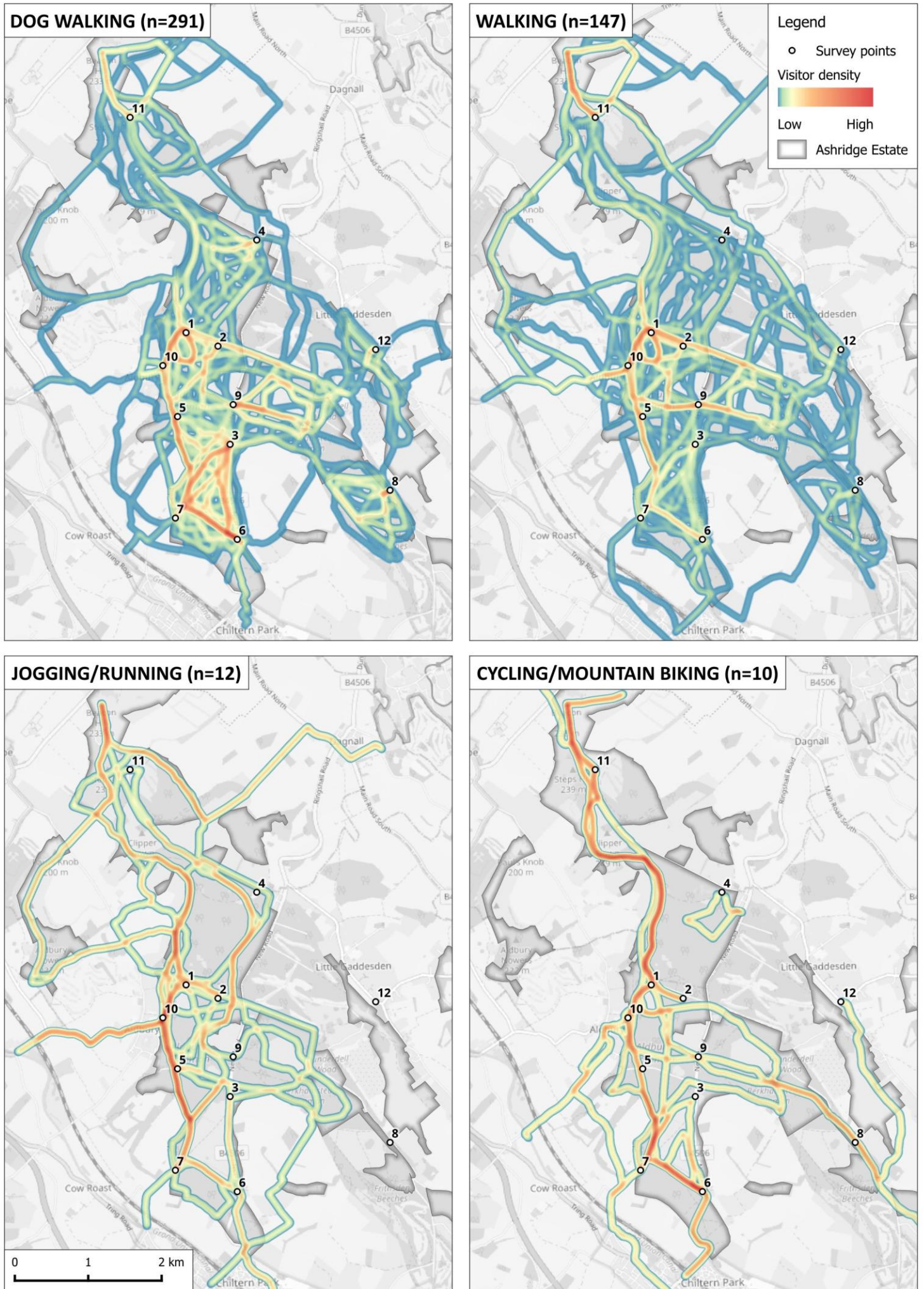
Map 4: Routes taken by interviewees during their visit. Darker lines indicate overlapping routes.



Map 5: Heatmap of routes taken by interviewees during their visit.



Map 6: Heatmap of routes taken by interviewees during their visit, by their main activity.



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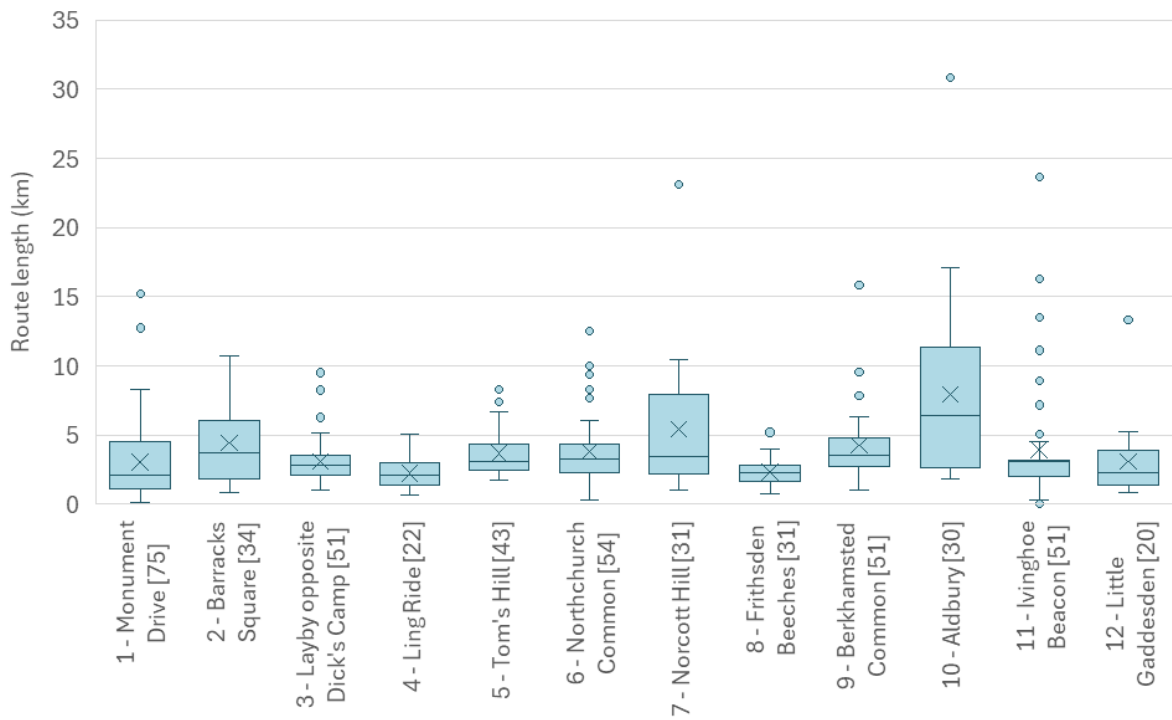


Figure 9: Lengths (km) of routes taken by interviewees by survey point. Horizontal lines show the median, crosses indicate the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, whiskers are the maximum and minimum values, and the dots are outliers. Numbers in square brackets indicate the number of interviewees.

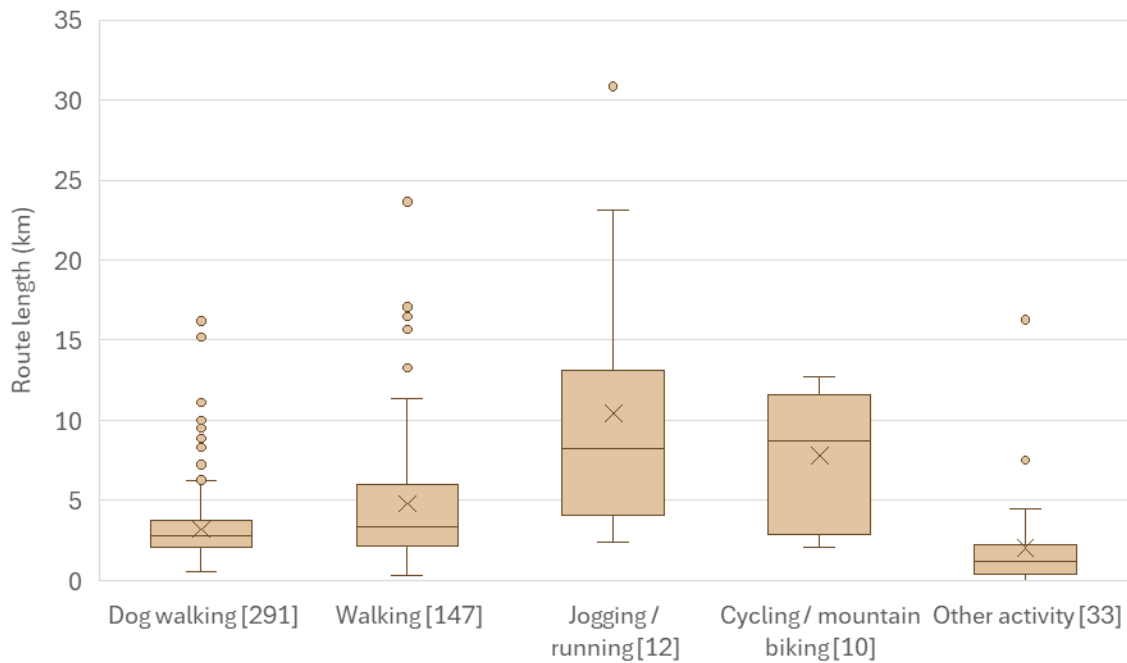


Figure 10: Lengths (km) of routes taken by interviewees by their main activity (Q2). Horizontal lines show the median, crosses indicate the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, whiskers are the maximum and minimum values, and the dots are outliers. Numbers in square brackets indicate the number of interviewees.

4.32 Factors that had influenced the interviewee’s choice of route are summarised in Figure 11. The most common factors were habit (116 interviewees, 23%), the weather (101 interviewees, 20%) and time (67 interviewees, 13%).

4.33 Waymarked or named routes that interviewees were following included the Foresters’ Trail, the Family Cycle Trail, the Rangers’ Ramble, the Old Chalk Way and the Ivinghoe Beacon Ridgeway Circular Walk.

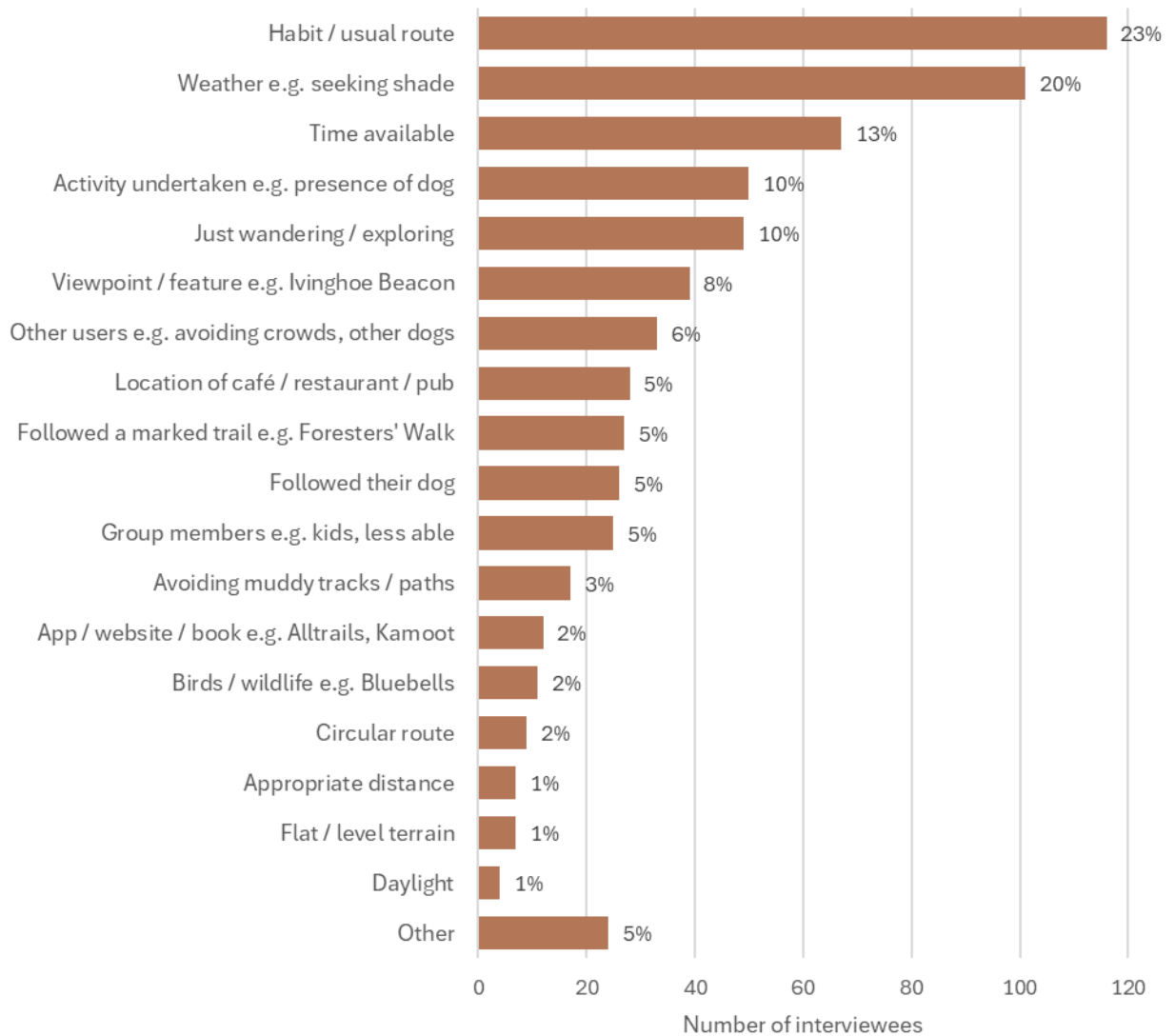


Figure 11: Factors influencing route choice (from Q13). Interviewees were not prompted or shown any options. Labels indicate the percentage of interviewees who cited each factor. Interviewees could cite more than one factor and therefore percentages will not total 100.

Other sites visited (Q14-15)

4.34 For some interviewees, Ashridge was the main location for their activity, with 63 interviewees (12%) saying that all of their visits for their activity take place there, and an additional 86 interviewees (17%) saying that at least three quarters of their visits take place there. However, almost a third (164 interviewees, 32%) said that less than a quarter of their visits for their activity take place at Ashridge (Figure 12).

4.35 The activities with the highest proportion of interviewees who only visit Ashridge for their activity were jogging/running (17%) and dog walking (12%).

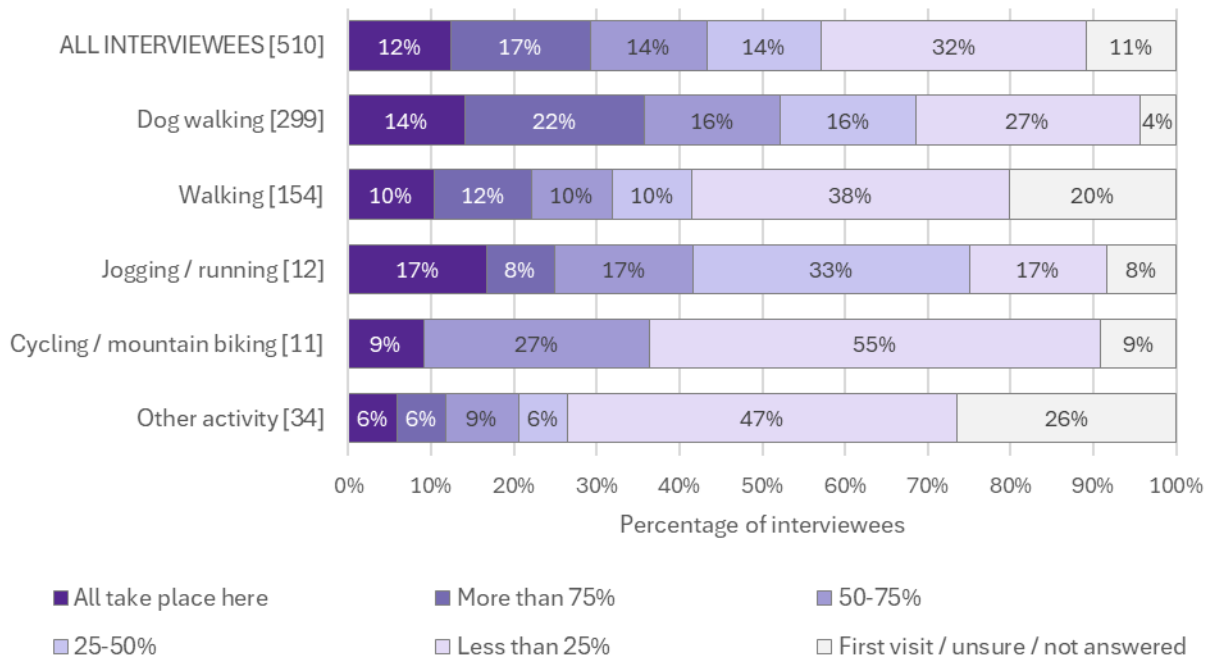


Figure 12: The proportion of interviewees' visits that take place at Ashridge (Q14) by main activity (Q2).

4.36 Interviewees were then asked to name up to three other locations that they visit for their activity, and this resulted in 248 different locations. These included other parts of the Ashridge Estate, as well as a range of other parks and countryside sites. The responses varied in levels of precision and included, for example, 'Ashridge' as well as specific locations such as Monument Drive.

4.37 Locations that were named by at least five interviewees are shown in Map 7. Overall, the most frequently cited locations were Monument Drive (53 interviewees, 10%), the Grand Union Canal (50 interviewees, 10%) and Wendover Woods (48 interviewees, 9%). The most commonly cited location at each survey point is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The alternative location named most frequently at each survey point (Q15).

Survey point	Top alternative location
1 - Monument Drive	Wendover Woods
2 - Barracks Square	Wendover Woods
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	Monument Drive
4 - Ling Ride	Northchurch Common
5 - Tom's Hill	Wendover Woods
6 - Northchurch Common	Grand Union Canal
7 - Norcott Hill	Grand Union Canal; Tring
8 - Frithsden Beeches	Northchurch Common
9 - Berkhamsted Common	Northchurch Common
10 - Aldbury	Ivinghoe Beacon; Wendover Woods
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	Monument Drive
12 - Little Gaddesden	Monument Drive

Site improvements (Q16)

- 4.38 Just over half of the interviewees (265 interviewees, 52%) were happy with access and did not suggest any changes. However, many interviewees did make suggestions about ways to improve access, and these have been categorised into key themes in Figure 13.
- 4.39 The two most frequently made suggestions were providing more dog waste bins (mentioned by 7% of interviewees) and reducing the amount of litter, including flytipping (5%). This was followed by comments about the visitor centre café and other refreshment facilities (4%). This included requests for earlier opening times, under-cover seating and an improved menu, as well as having a coffee van at Ivinghoe Beacon car park.
- 4.40 Issues that were highlighted by a high proportion of interviewees at specific survey locations were: cutting back vegetation from paths at Little Gaddesden (mentioned by 25% of interviewees there), more dog waste bins at Frithsden Beeches (19%) and improving the surface of Monument Drive (19% of interviewees at Barracks Square).

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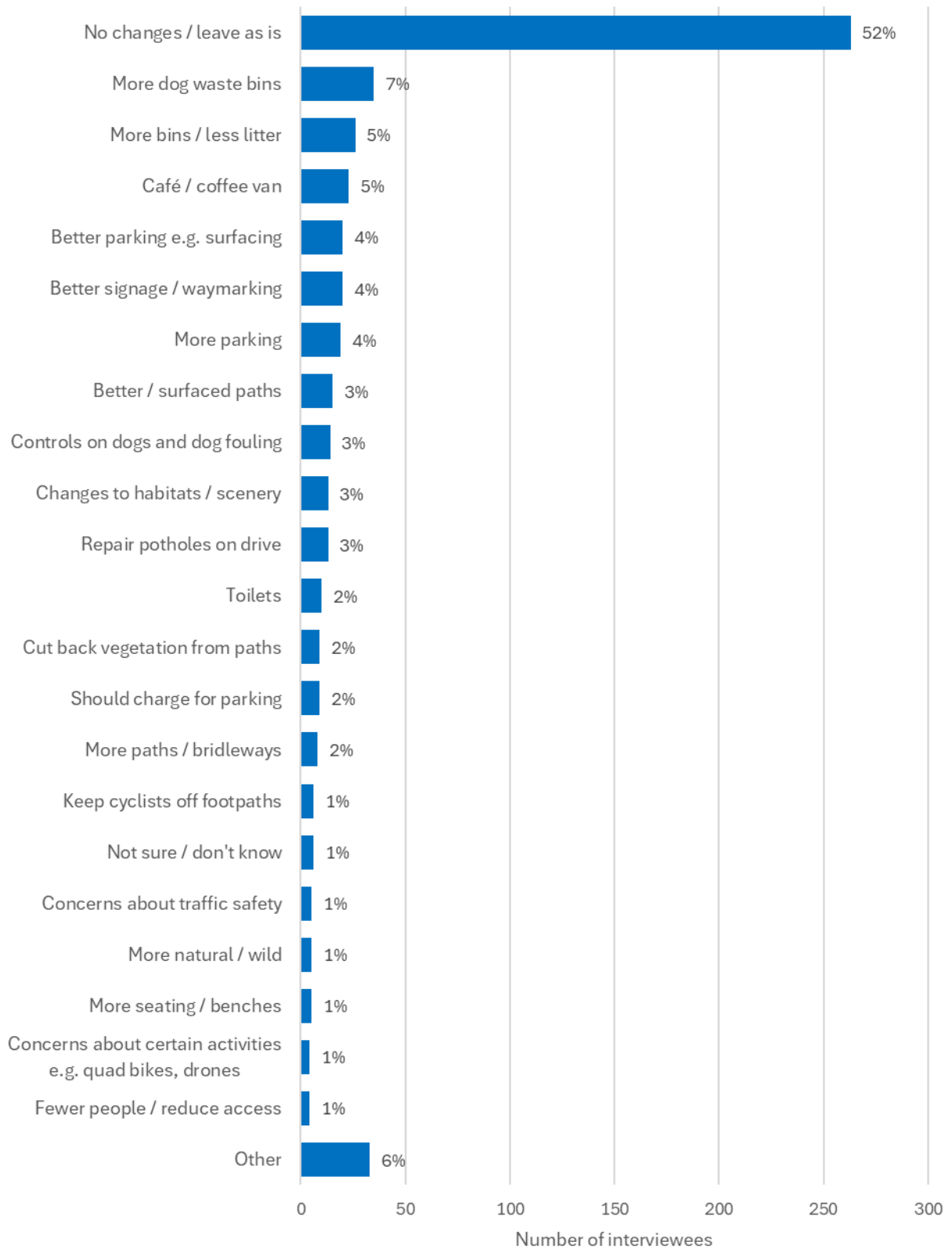


Figure 13: Changes that interviewees would like to see (Q16). Interviewees were not prompted or shown any options. They could give multiple responses, so percentages will not add up to 100.

Awareness of the Protecting Our Roots project (Q17)

4.41 Overall, 191 interviewees (37%) had heard of the National Trust's Protecting Our Roots project, increasing to 42% if first-time visitors are excluded. At individual survey locations, the proportion of interviewees who were familiar with the project ranged from 23% at Frithsden Beeches to 56% at Ling Ride (Table 8).

Table 8: The number (%) of interviewees at each survey location and whether they had heard of the Protecting Our Roots project (Q17).

Survey point	Yes	No	Not sure / unanswerd	Total
1 - Monument Drive	27 (33%)	56 (67%)	0 (0%)	83 (100%)
2 - Barracks Square	11 (30%)	26 (70%)	0 (0%)	37 (100%)
3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	25 (48%)	24 (46%)	3 (6%)	52 (100%)
4 - Ling Ride	14 (56%)	11 (44%)	0 (0%)	25 (100%)
5 - Tom's Hill	19 (43%)	22 (50%)	3 (7%)	44 (100%)
6 - Northchurch Common	24 (44%)	29 (54%)	1 (2%)	54 (100%)
7 - Norcott Hill	11 (35%)	19 (61%)	1 (3%)	31 (100%)
8 - Frithsden Beeches	7 (23%)	24 (77%)	0 (0%)	31 (100%)
9 - Berkhamsted Common	19 (37%)	29 (57%)	3 (6%)	51 (100%)
10 - Aldbury	9 (29%)	22 (71%)	0 (0%)	31 (100%)
11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	14 (27%)	36 (71%)	1 (2%)	51 (100%)
12 - Little Gaddesden	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
Total	191 (37%)	307 (60%)	12 (2%)	510 (100%)

Other comments or feedback (Q18)

4.42 There were several additional comments from interviewees covering topics such as the Protecting Our Roots project, proposed changes to car parks, the visitor centre café, woodland management, Bluebells and deer management. Many interviewees also expressed how much they enjoy the site.

Visitor postcodes (Q19-21)

- 4.43 A total of 492 interviewees (96%) gave full valid UK postcodes that could be plotted in GIS. The distribution of postcodes is shown by visit type in Map 8, by main activity in Map 9 and by survey point in Maps 10-11.
- 4.44 The interviewees came from 43 different local authority areas (Table 9), although the majority were from Dacorum (284 interviewees, 58%), Buckinghamshire (75 interviewees, 15%) and Central Bedfordshire (55 interviewees, 11%).

Table 9: Number (%) of interviewees by local authority area. Only includes local authorities with at least two interviewees. Percentages are calculated using only those interviewees for whom we have full postcodes.

Local authority	Total
Dacorum	284 (58%)
Buckinghamshire	75 (15%)
Central Bedfordshire	55 (11%)
St. Albans	11 (2%)
Milton Keynes	8 (2%)
Luton	7 (1%)
Hertsmere	4 (1%)
Watford	4 (1%)
Barnet	4 (1%)
North Hertfordshire	3 (1%)
Hillingdon	2 (<1%)
Huntingdonshire	2 (<1%)
Three Rivers	2 (<1%)
Waltham Forest	2 (<1%)

- 4.45 The linear distance between each interviewee's home postcode and the survey point at which they were interviewed was calculated in GIS. Data are summarised for different groups of visitors in Table 10. Overall, half of the interviewees lived within a radius of 6.4 km, or 6.1 km if only those on a day trip or short visit from home are included (i.e. not those staying overnight away from home).

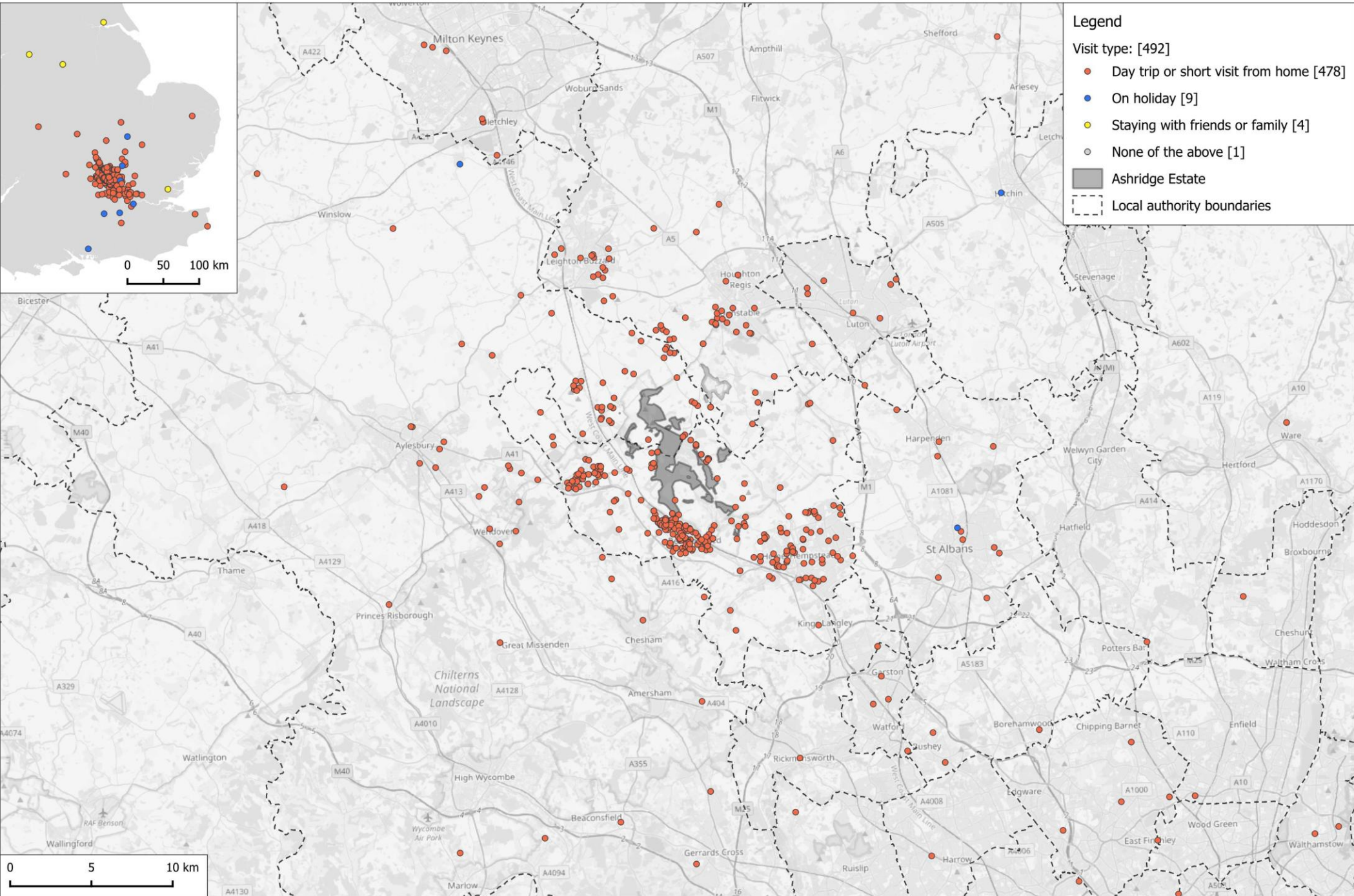
- 4.46 Interviewees whose main activity was dog walking tended to live closer to the survey point where they were interviewed than those with other activities, with a median straight-line distance of 5.0 km.
- 4.47 Interviewees at Monument Drive and Ivinghoe Beacon had typically come from furthest away, with a median straight-line distance of 10.1 km for both. Interviewees at Little Gaddesden were the most local, with half of them living within a 0.4 km radius of the survey point.

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Table 10: Summary statistics for different groups of interviewees and the straight-line distance (km) between the survey point and their home postcode. N is the number of interviewees within each group who gave full, valid postcodes. Q3 reflects the 75th percentile.

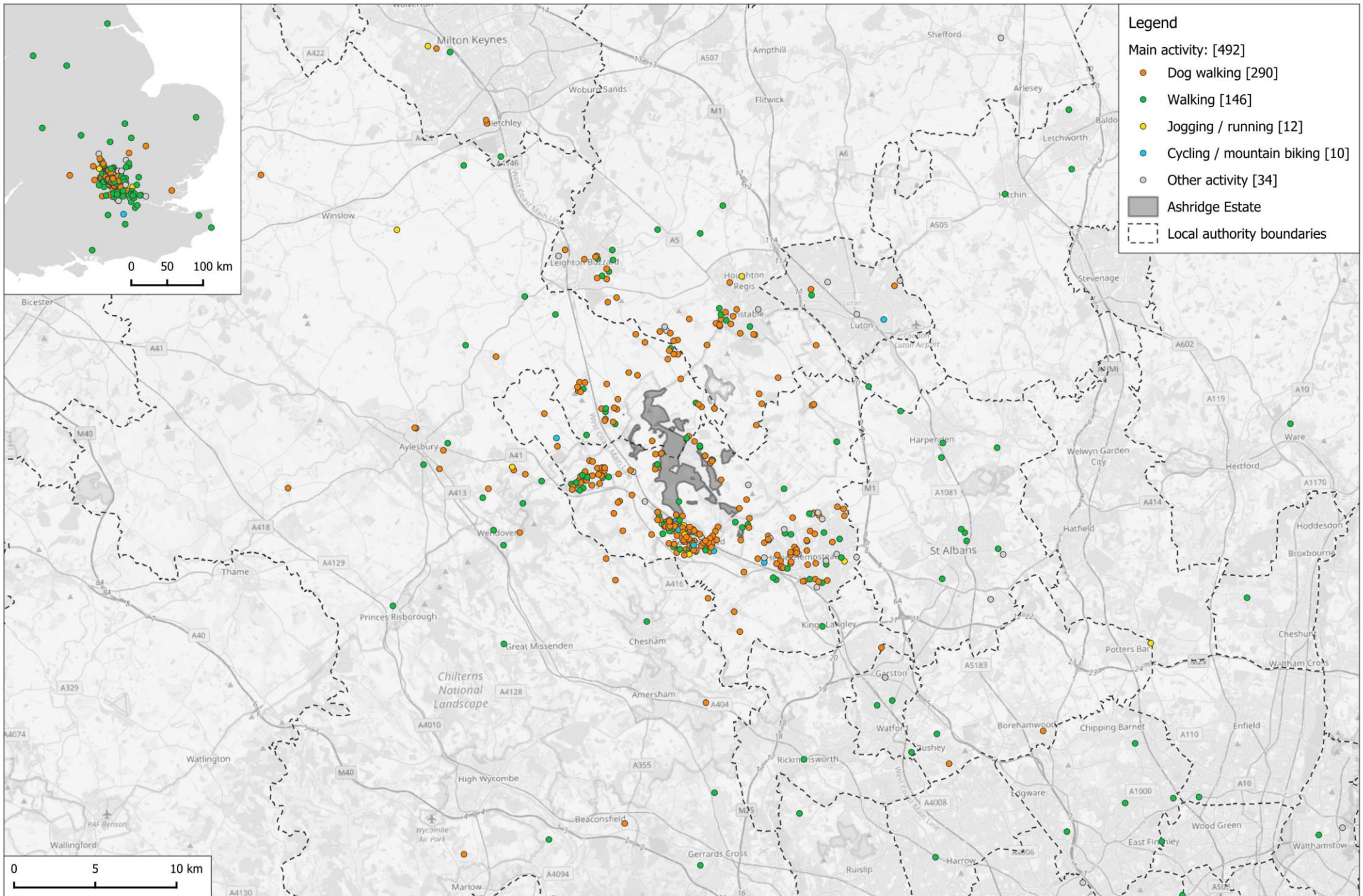
Category	N	Mean ± SE	Range	Median	Q3
All interviewees	492	15.0 ± 1.9	0.2 - 740.5	6.4	11.9
Visit type: Day trip or short visit from home	478	10.9 ± 0.7	0.2 - 155.0	6.1	11.4
Visit type: On holiday	9	83.7 ± 36.7	20.3 - 369.5	50.8	81.0
Visit type: Staying with friends or family	4	169.2 ± 29.1	87.5 - 216.9	186.2	213.6
Main activity: Dog walking	290	8.3 ± 1.3	0.2 - 369.5	5.0	8.8
Main activity: Walking	146	28.6 ± 5.8	0.2 - 740.5	11.7	24.2
Main activity: Jogging / running	12	11.9 ± 3.0	2.0 - 31.3	9.7	19.8
Main activity: Cycling / mountain biking	10	11.1 ± 4.6	1.6 - 50.1	6.8	11.0
Main activity: Other activity	34	15.5 ± 2.3	2.2 - 56.4	11.7	18.3
Survey point: 1 - Monument Drive	79	17.1 ± 2.6	0.4 - 146.1	10.1	19.2
Survey point: 2 - Barracks Square	37	20.0 ± 6.5	3.7 - 203.7	9.2	13.4
Survey point: 3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp	50	6.2 ± 0.6	2.2 - 21.2	5.1	8.8
Survey point: 4 - Ling Ride	23	15.0 ± 7.1	0.4 - 168.7	8.3	11.1
Survey point: 5 - Tom's Hill	44	7.8 ± 1.1	1.5 - 44.5	4.9	9.6
Survey point: 6 - Northchurch Common	51	5.0 ± 0.7	0.2 - 23.2	2.9	7.5
Survey point: 7 - Norcott Hill	29	13.8 ± 4.0	0.9 - 100.7	3.8	18.4
Survey point: 8 - Frithsden Beeches	30	5.2 ± 0.6	2.0 - 17.0	4.0	6.3
Survey point: 9 - Berkhamsted Common	48	22.8 ± 8.1	2.2 - 369.5	7.3	13.4
Survey point: 10 - Aldbury	31	18.8 ± 7.1	0.2 - 216.9	6.9	13.7
Survey point: 11 - Ivinghoe Beacon	50	19.3 ± 2.7	2.4 - 87.5	10.1	25.6
Survey point: 12 - Little Gaddesden	20	41.1 ± 36.8	0.2 - 740.5	0.4	8.6
SAC survey points only (1-10)	422	13.2 ± 1.4	0.2 - 369.5	6.1	11.4
SAC survey points only, day trip or short visit from home only	414	10.6 ± 0.8	0.2 - 155.0	6.0	11.0

Map 8: Interviewee postcodes, coloured by visit type. Two postcodes (in Cornwall and Scotland) are not shown.

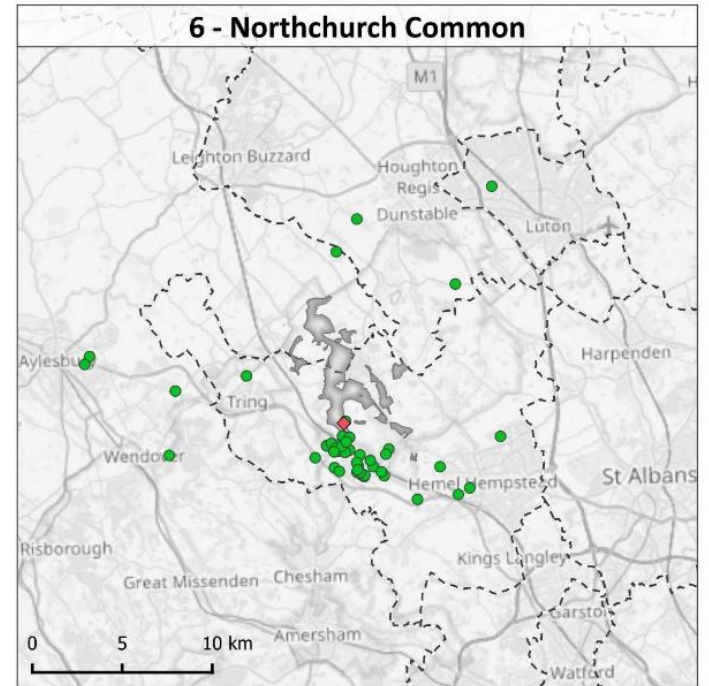
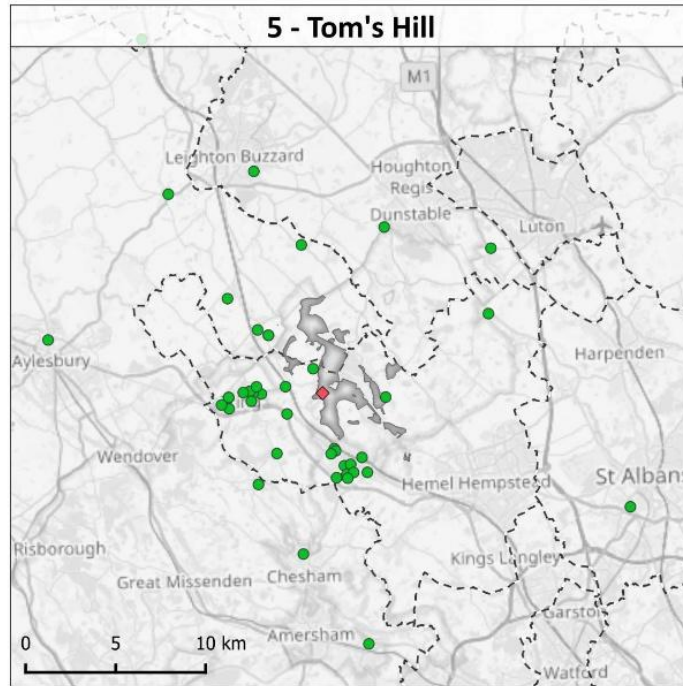
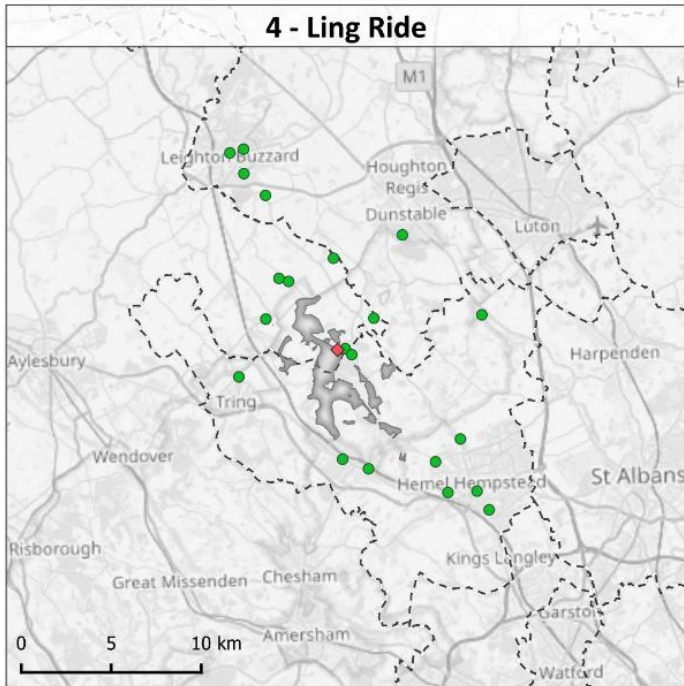
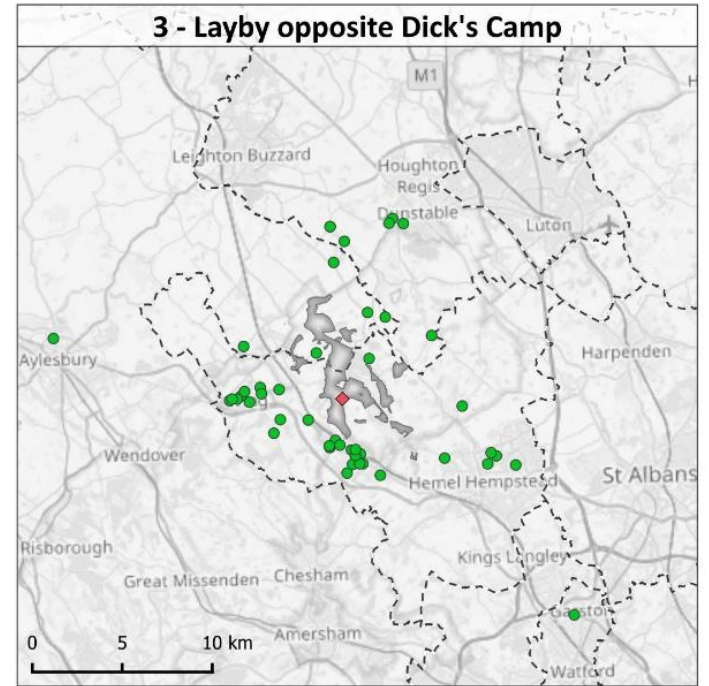
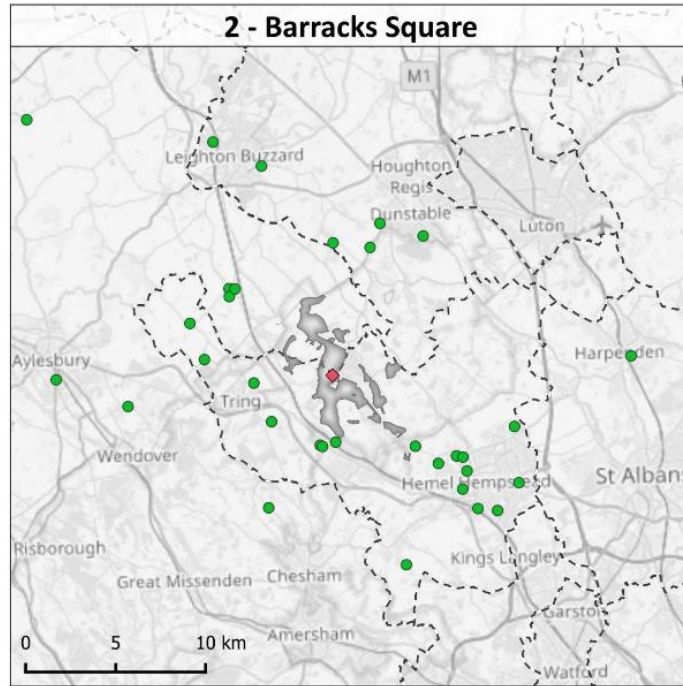
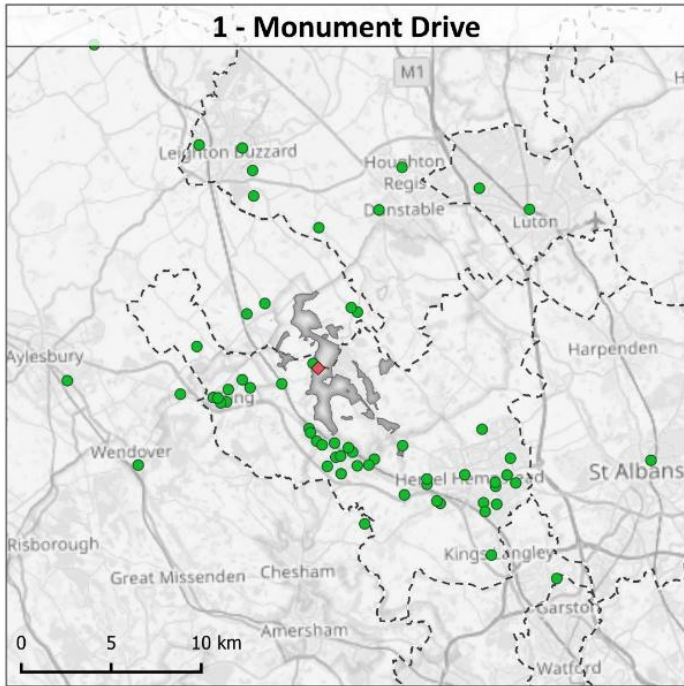


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Map 9: Interviewee postcodes, coloured by main activity. Two postcodes (in Cornwall and Scotland) are not shown.



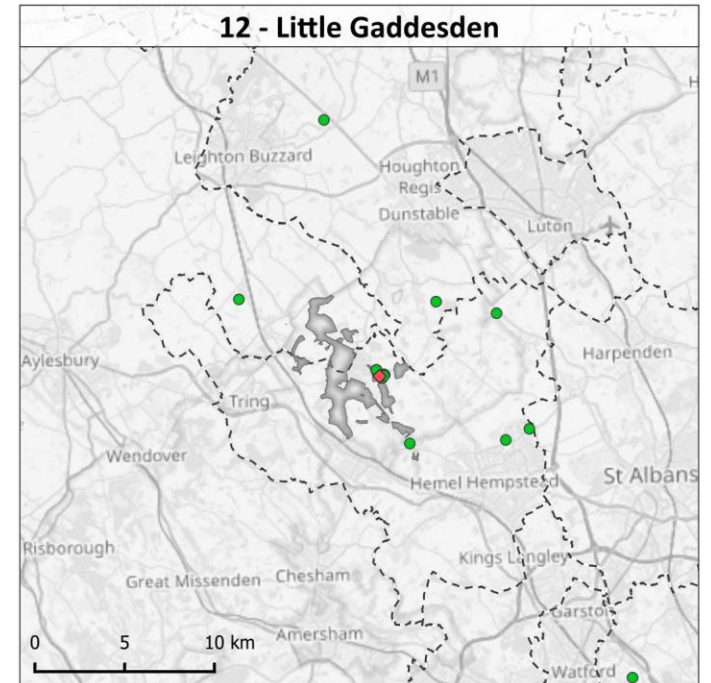
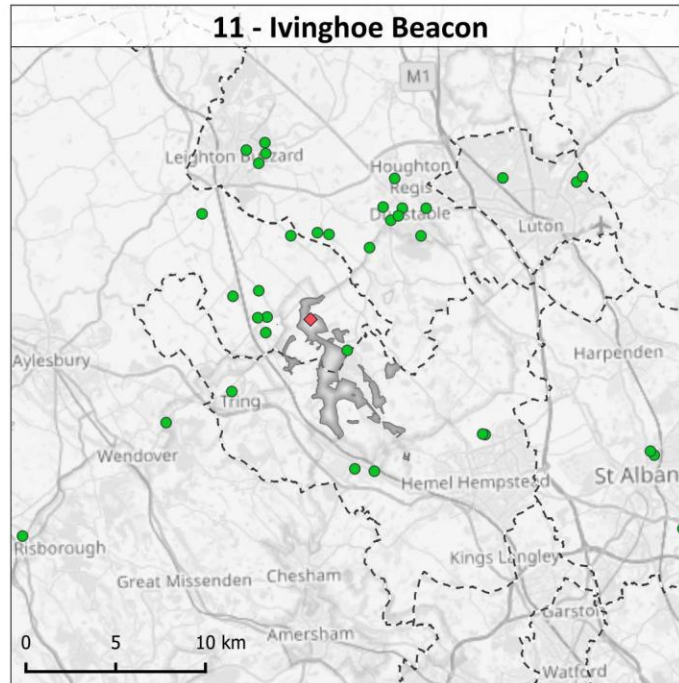
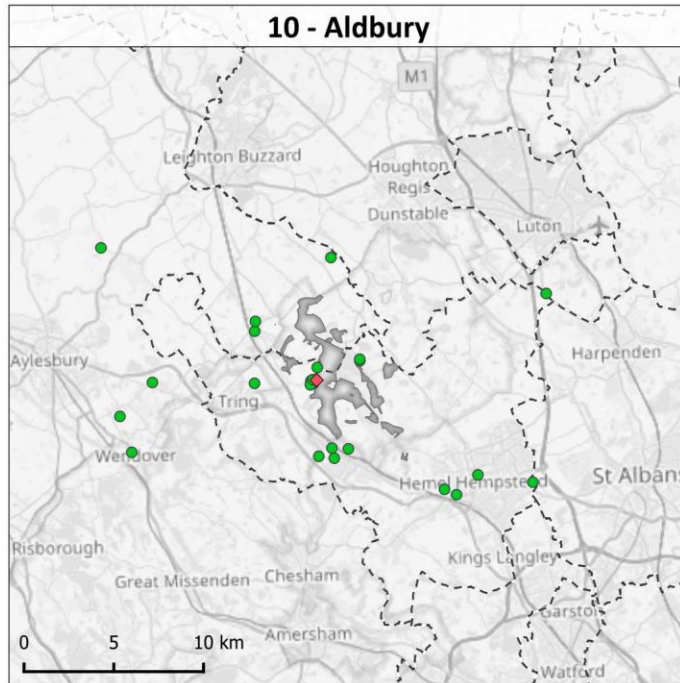
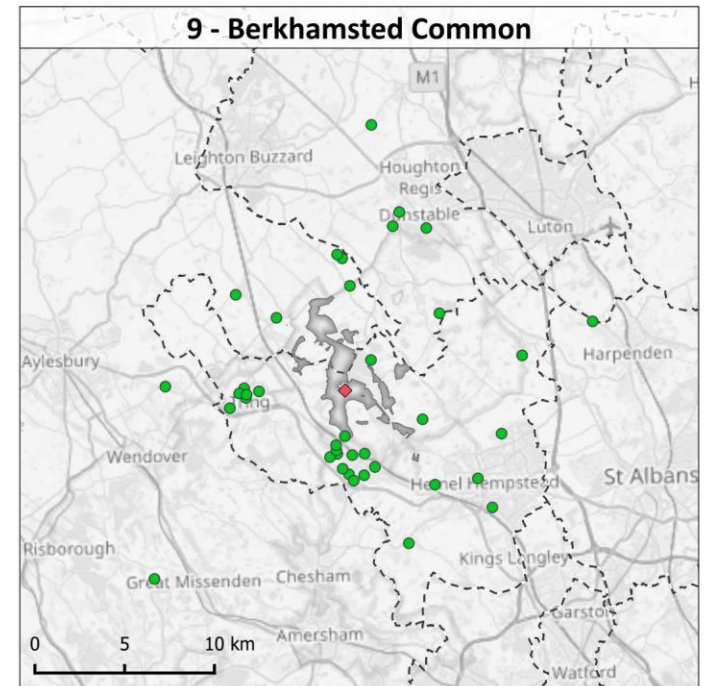
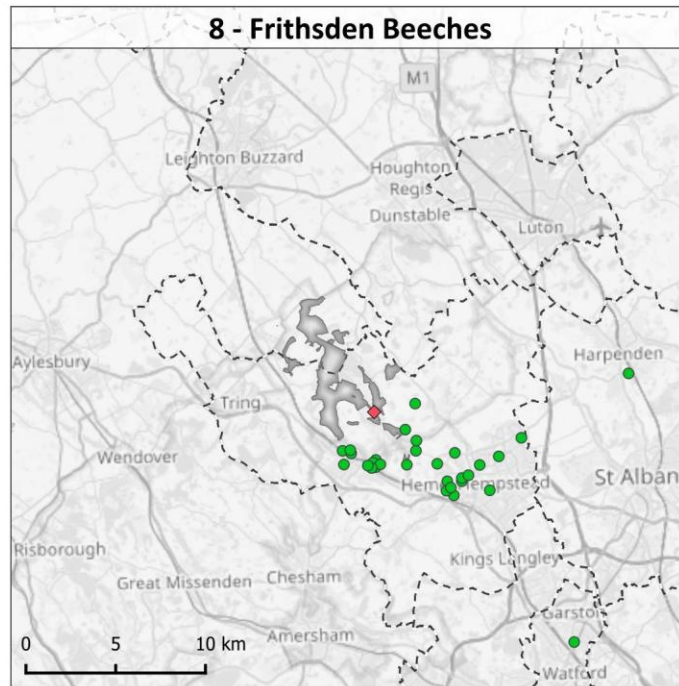
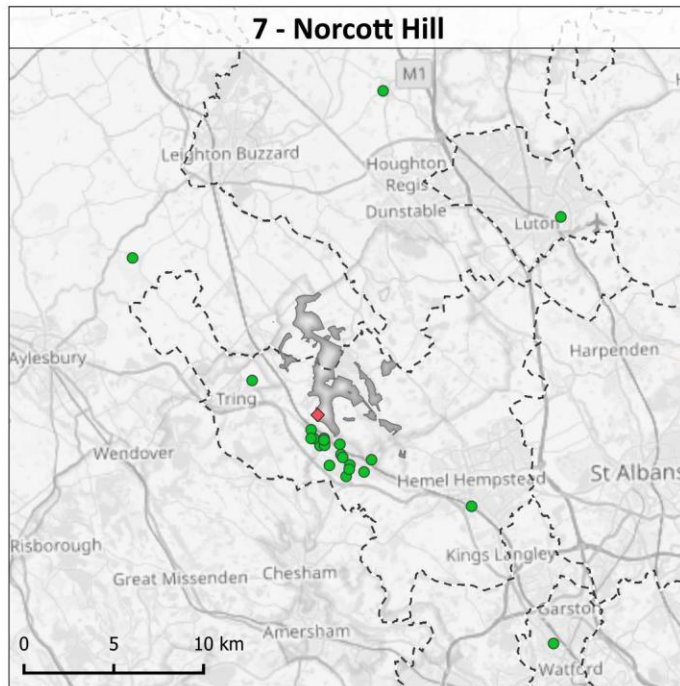
Map 10: Interviewee postcodes, by survey point.



Legend

- ◆ Survey point
- Interviewee postcodes
- ▭ Ashridge Estate
- - - Local authority boundaries

Map 11: Interviewee postcodes, by survey point.



Legend

- ◆ Survey point
- Interviewee postcodes
- Ashridge Estate
- Local authority boundaries

5. Discussion

Key findings

- 5.1 The visitor survey provides an insight into recreational use across the National Trust Ashridge Estate during term-time in late spring and early summer 2025. The results show that the site is popular for a variety of recreational activities, although the majority of interviewees were either dog walking or walking. Most interviewees were visiting from home, and the majority visit all year round. They are attracted to the site due to its scenery and views, and because it is close to home.
- 5.2 There were some differences between survey points. For example, at Ivinghoe Beacon and Monument Drive there was a much higher proportion of first-time visitors, with interviewees coming from a wider radius. In contrast, survey points such as Little Gaddesden, Northchurch Common and Frithsden Beeches tended to be used more by local residents who make short, frequent visits.

Limitations

- 5.3 Part of the fieldwork coincided with heatwaves, which may have influenced visitor patterns on those days. During this period, some interviewees indicated that they were actively choosing routes which offered shade, or that they were walking their dogs earlier before it got too hot. These changes in visitor behaviour may become more common and they correspond to impacts identified in the National Trust's climate change adaptation guidance (National Trust, 2024).
- 5.4 Although interviewees were selected at random, it is possible that some activities such as cycling and jogging were under-represented in the interviews, simply because those people are unlikely to stop their activity to take part in the interview.
- 5.5 There were some minor changes to the questionnaire part-way through the survey, as outlined in paragraph 2.10. This meant that one question (Q10) had a smaller sample size than the other questions, but still included over half of the interviewees. The other change was to the wording of Q17, and it was not possible to quantify what difference this change had, since different survey locations were surveyed before and after the change.

Comparison with previous survey

- 5.6 The previous survey took place in 2021, during a time when most Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted, but while there were still some limits to overseas travel. It is therefore important to compare the two surveys to see whether access patterns have changed in the intervening period.
- 5.7 Key metrics from the two visitor surveys are summarised in Table 11. The data for 2021 have been filtered so that they represent the same time of year i.e. summer term-time, and the final column shows the 2025 data filtered for the SAC survey points only, in order to compare the same survey points and same survey effort. On the whole, the results from the two surveys were very similar.

Table 11: Selected metrics from the 2021 and 2025 visitor surveys. Data for 2021 have been filtered for summer term-time interviews only, which were only at the SAC survey points. The final column shows the 2025 data filtered for the SAC survey points only. Note that the Dockey Wood survey point used in 2021 was changed to Ling Ride in 2025.

Metric	2021	2025 – all survey points	2025 - SAC only
Month(s)	June to July	May to July	May to July
Number of survey points	10	12	10
Number of interviews	334	510	439
Tally data: mean number of people per group	1.9	1.9	1.9
Tally data: mean number of dogs per group	0.7	0.8	0.8
Tally data: mean number of people per hour	15.0	12.1	12.6
Tally data: mean number of dogs per hour	5.4	5.0	5.5
% interviewees on a day trip or short visit from home	96%	97%	98%
% Interviewees with main activity of dog walking	52%	59%	60%
% Interviewees with main activity of walking	34%	30%	28%
% Interviewees visiting daily	13%	13%	13%
Median route length during visit (km)	3.0 km	3.0 km	2.9 km
Median distance from home postcode to survey point (km)	6.5 km	6.4 km	6.1 km
75 th percentile distance from home postcode to survey point (km)	14.5 km	11.9 km	11.4 km

- 5.8 The number of people counted per hour in the tally counts was slightly lower in the recent survey (12.6 people per hour at the SAC survey points,

compared to 15.0 people per hour in 2021). Figure 14 compares the tally counts of the two surveys for the SAC survey points. It can be seen that overall, five survey points were busier in 2025, and five survey points were busier in 2021. The biggest differences were at Aldbury and Norcott Hill, which were both busier in the 2021 survey.

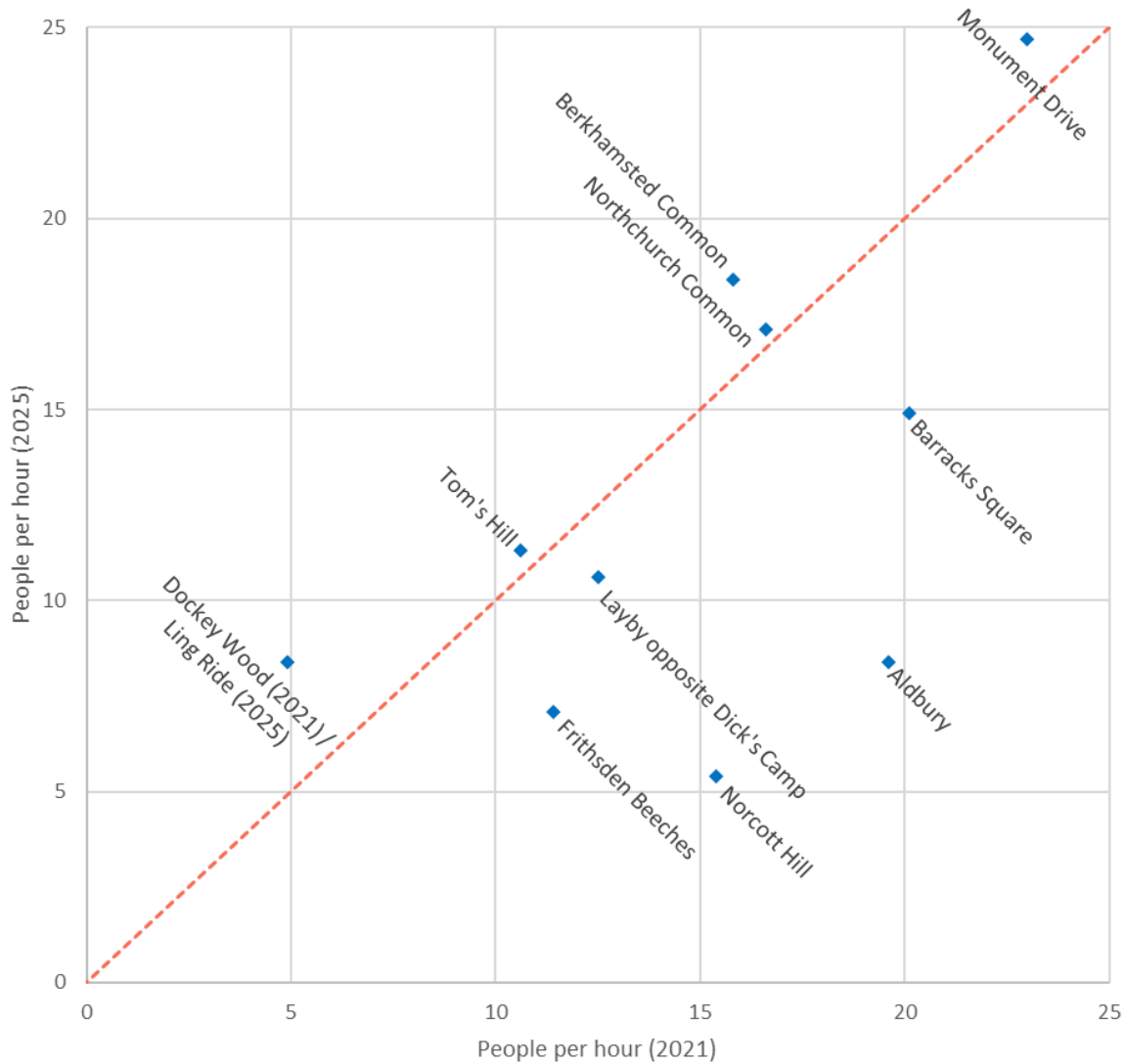


Figure 14: Comparison of the tally counts at individual survey points in 2021 and 2025, for those survey points that were the same in both surveys. Data from 2021 are filtered for summer term-time only. The dotted line indicates the line of equality where the 2021 and 2025 values are the same. As such, values below the line were higher in 2021 and values above the line were higher in 2025.

5.9 It has not been possible to provide an updated estimate of the number of visitors per year (previously estimated at 1.7 million), since this figure was based on vehicle counts, which were not included in the recent visitor survey.

5.10 At the SAC survey points, the top four most common activities of interviewees were the same in both surveys, although the proportion of dog walkers had increased from 52% in 2021 to 60% in 2025 (Figure 15).

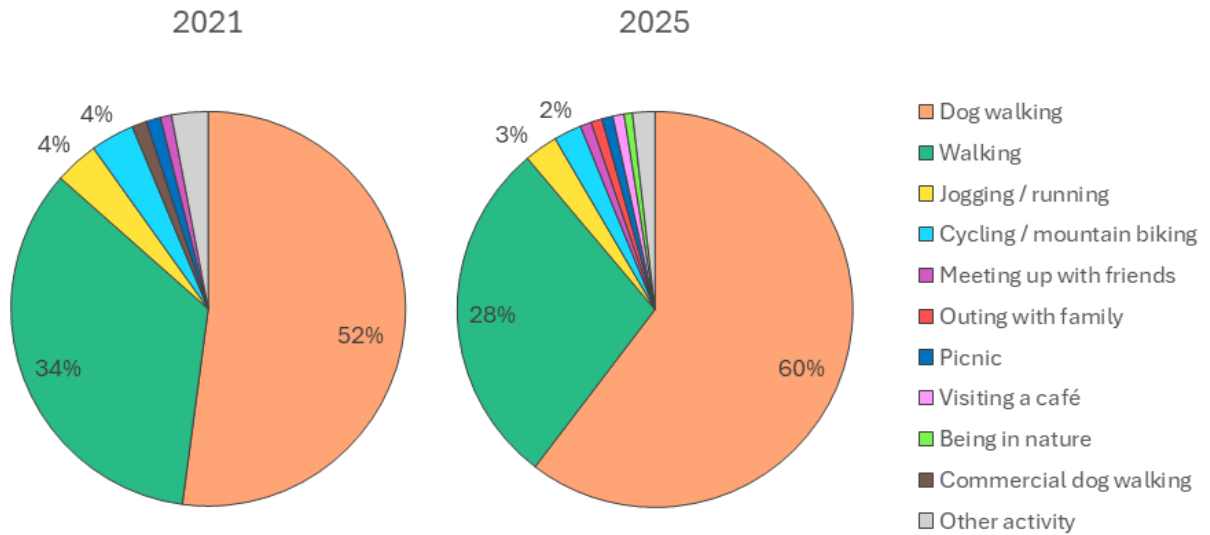
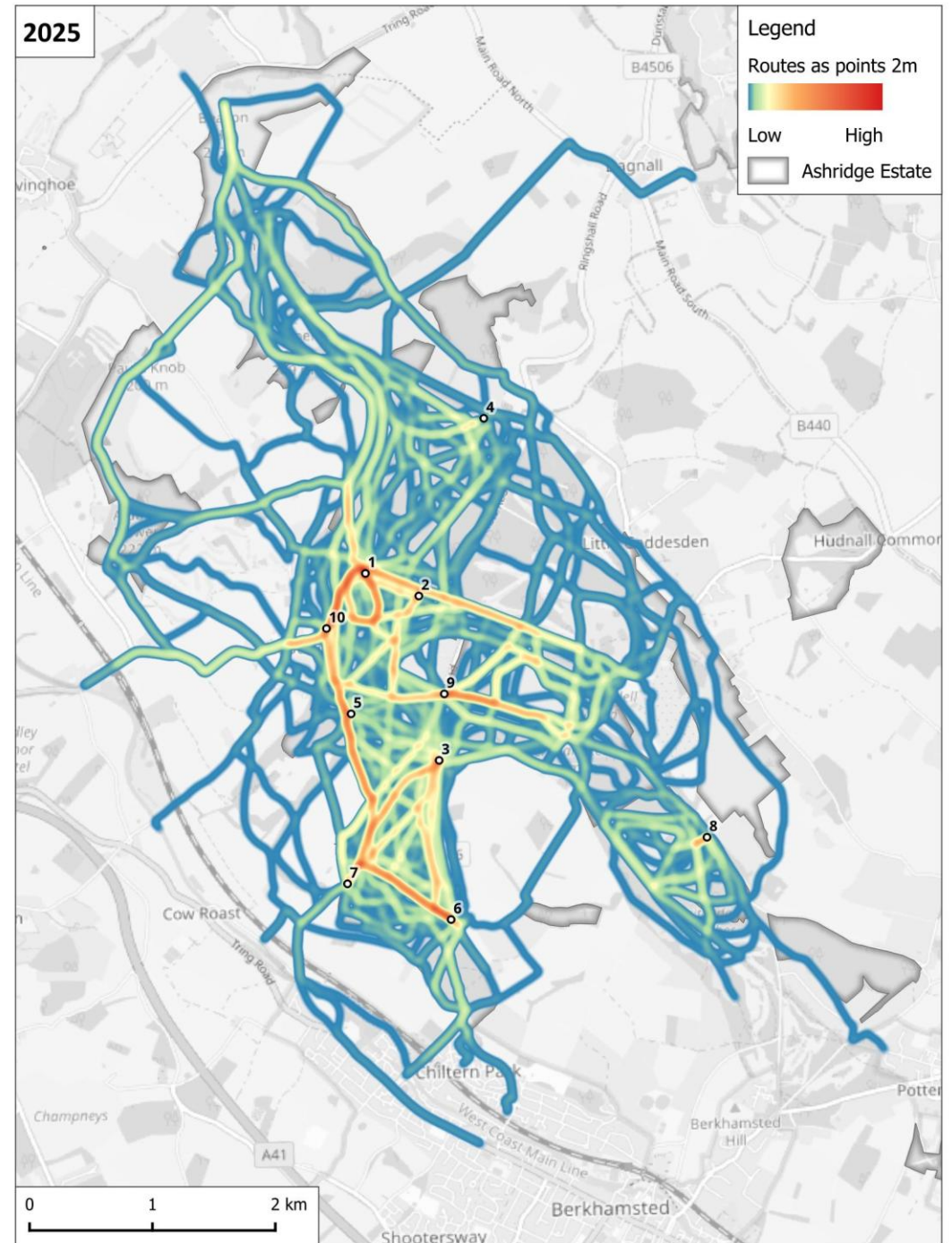
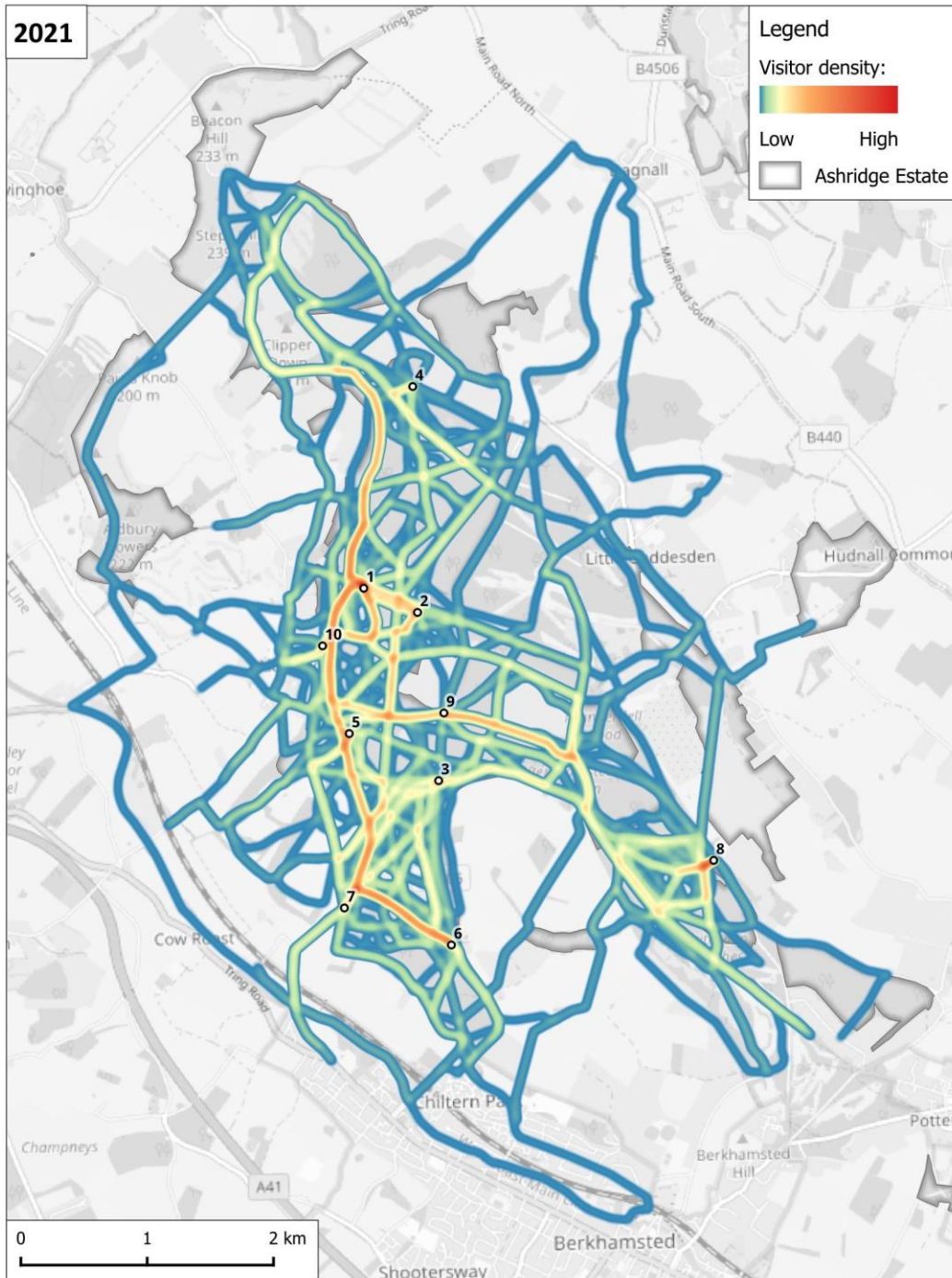


Figure 15: Pie charts comparing the main activities of interviewees at SAC survey points from the two surveys. Data from 2021 are filtered for summer term-time only.

5.11 Map 12 presents the route heatmaps from both surveys side-by-side, with the data filtered for SAC survey points and summer term-time only so that they are comparable. The maps are fairly similar, although with slight differences in the northern part of the estate due to survey point 4 moving from Dockey Wood to Ling Ride. There was also a higher concentration of visitors in the 2021 survey along Duncombe Terrace (north of survey point 1), and a higher concentration of visitors in the 2025 survey along Prince’s Riding (east of survey point 2).

Map 12: Comparison of routes taken by interviewees in the 2021 and 2025 visitor surveys, for SAC survey points only. The 2021 data are filtered for summer term-time only.



5.12 Map 13 compares the density of interviewees' postcodes from the 2021 and 2025 surveys, for those interviewed at SAC survey points. The 2021 survey data are filtered for summer term-time interviews only so that they are comparable. Both maps show a similar distribution, with clusters of postcodes in local settlements such as Berkhamsted, Tring and Hemel Hempstead.

5.13 Figure 16 compares the straight-line distance between the interviewee's home postcode and the survey point where they were interviewed, for interviewees at SAC survey points. This shows that for distances below 6 km the proportion of interviewees was very similar in both surveys, but that for distances greater than 6 km a higher percentage of interviewees lived closer in 2025 compared to 2021.

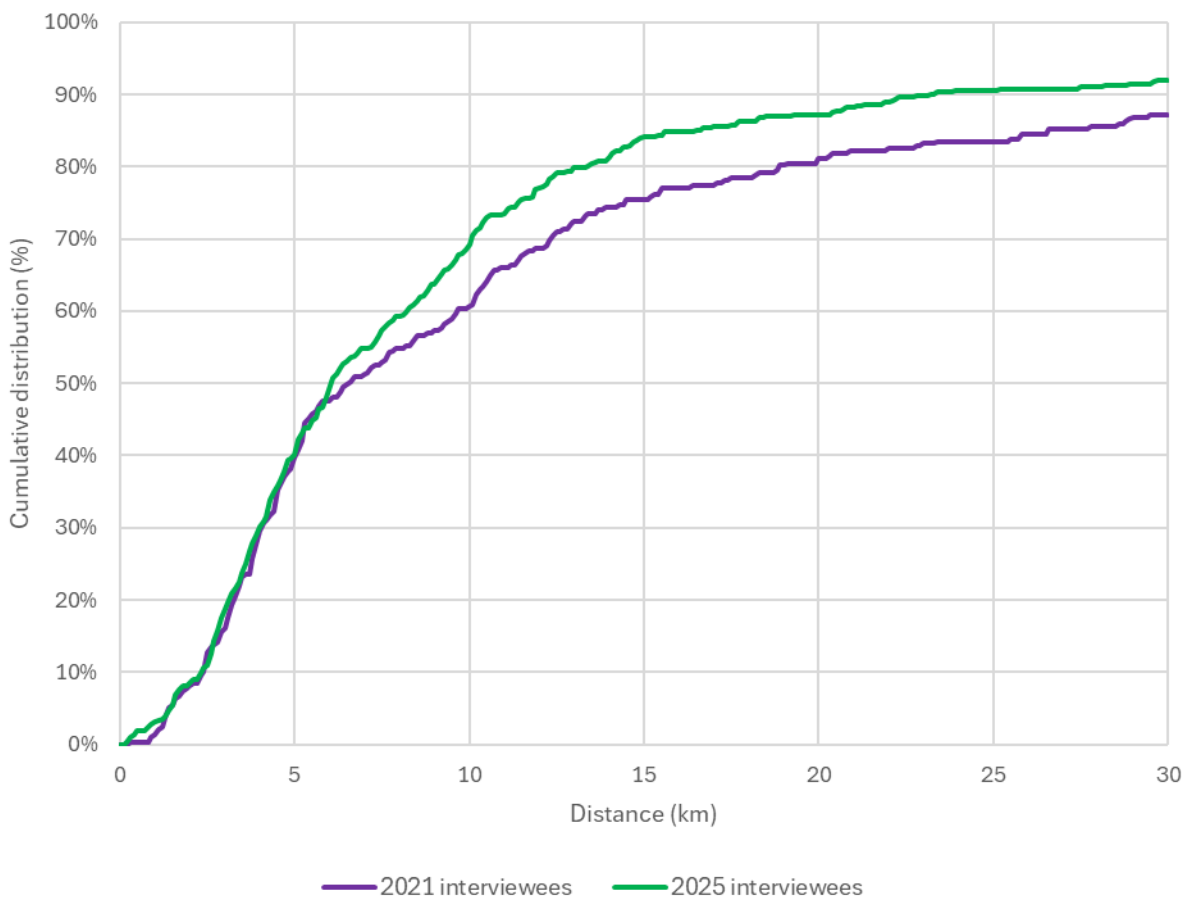
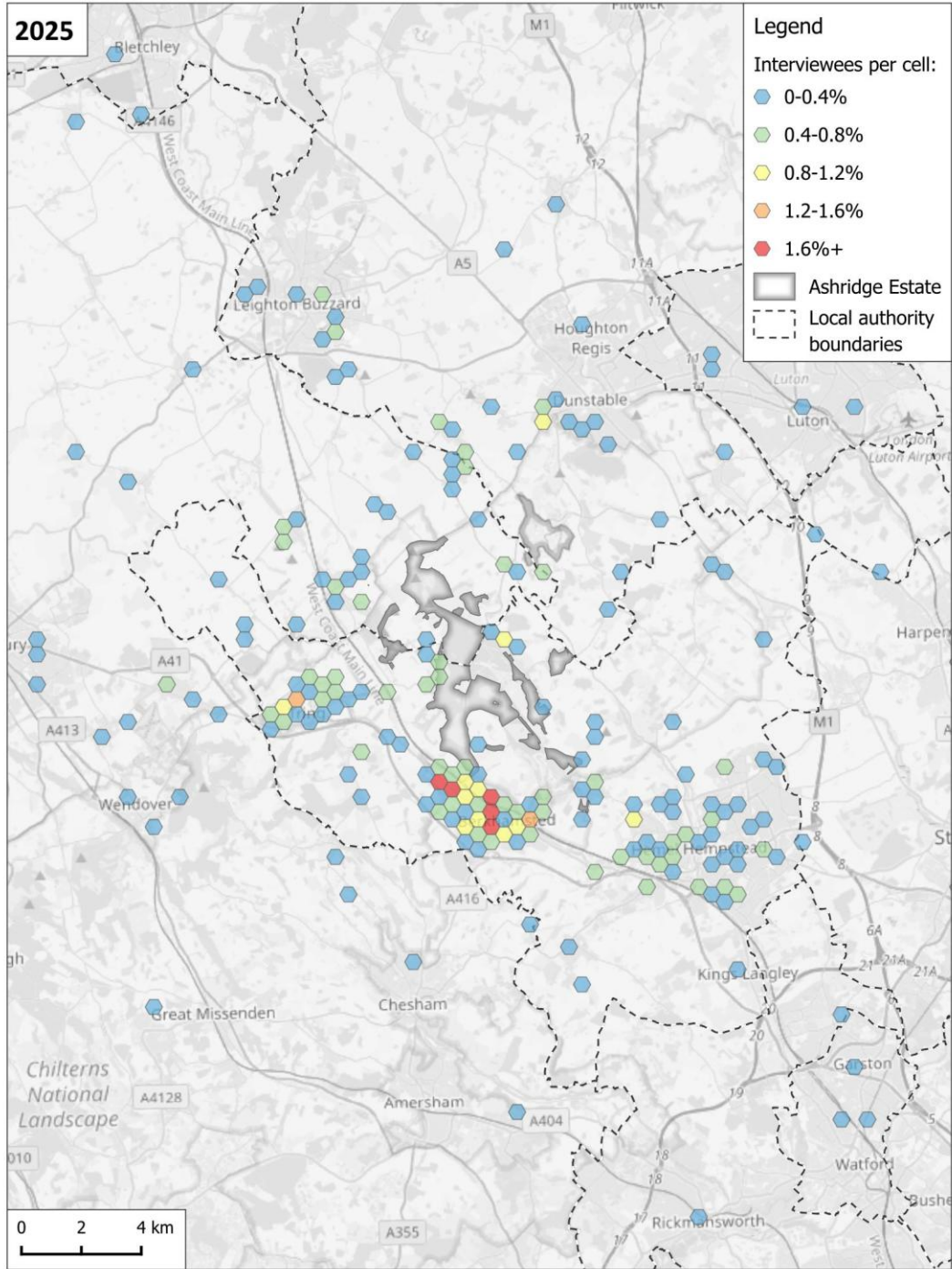
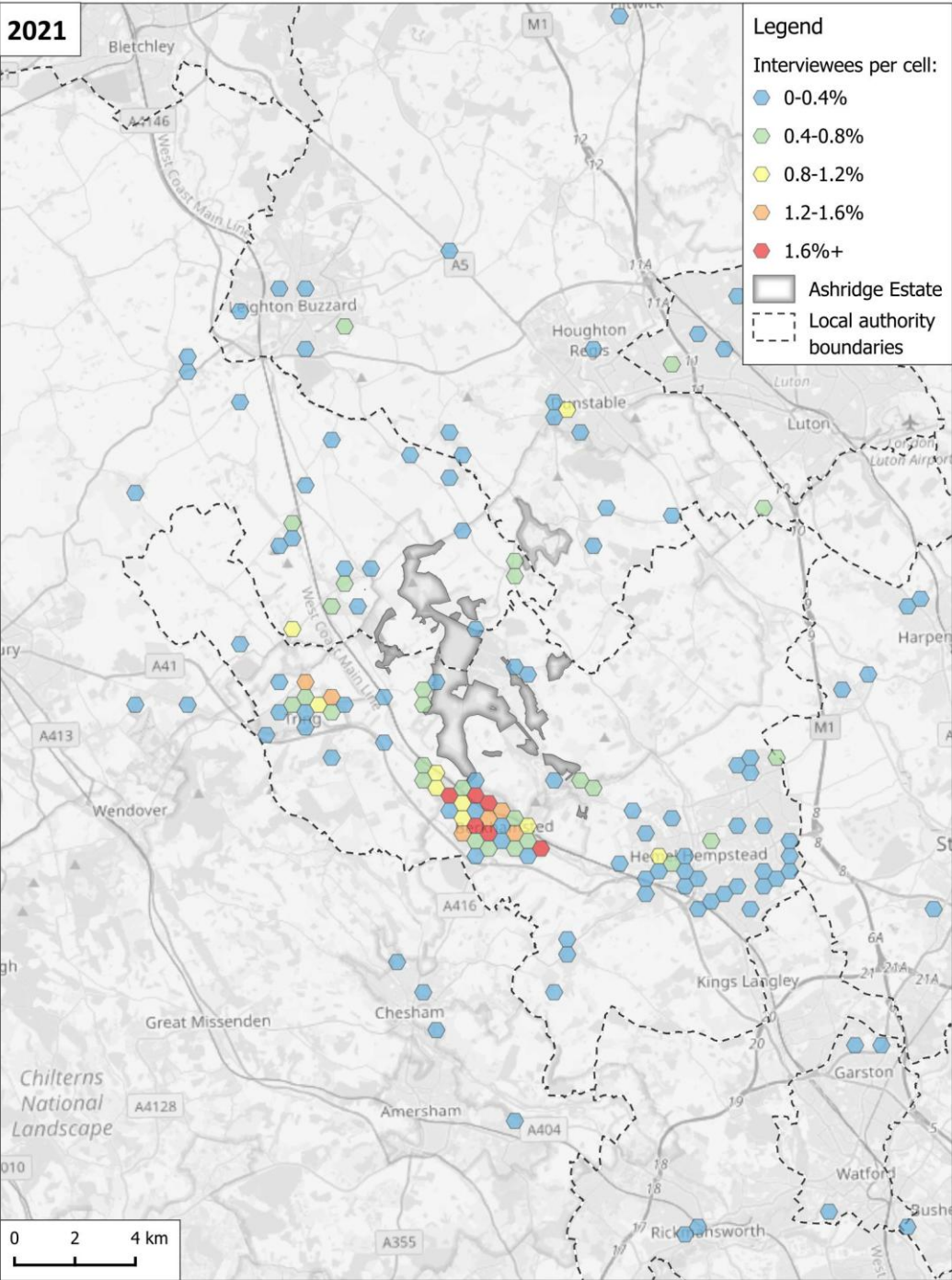


Figure 16: Cumulative straight-line distance (km) between the interviewee's home postcode and the survey point. Both datasets are for SAC survey points only, and the 2021 data are filtered for summer term-time only.

Map 13: Comparison of the distribution of interviewees' postcodes from the 2021 and 2025 visitor surveys, for SAC survey points only. The 2021 data are filtered for summer term-time only.



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Implications for the zone of influence

- 5.14 The distance currently used to define the zone of influence, 12.6 km, was calculated by taking the 75th percentile straight-line distance between the interviewee's home postcode and the location where they were interviewed from the 2021 survey. The data were filtered for those on a day trip or short visit from home who were interviewed at one of the ten survey points within the Ashridge part of the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. This included interviewees from all survey periods (i.e. the Easter holidays, summer term-time and summer holidays).
- 5.15 The equivalent distance from the 2025 survey would be 11.0 km (Table 10). This is a slight decrease, which could be for a number of reasons, for example an increase in local housing (and therefore population), increased participation in outdoor recreation among local residents, the differences in the survey periods or other sampling influences such as the weather. It is also possible that in 2021 restrictions on foreign travel were still having an effect on how people spent their leisure time and how far they would travel for days out.
- 5.16 We would not suggest making any changes to the current zone of influence at this time, based on the results from a single survey. The data are a sample of visitors and a snapshot in time, and it remains to be seen whether this is a real trend. Other mitigation strategies, such as the Dorset Heaths, have used a single rounded figure to reflect the zone of influence despite varying results from visitor surveys in different years, and it would seem sensible to take a precautionary approach, to be consistent and base any change on evidence of a long-term trend. This approach is supported by Natural England (see Appendix 2).

References

Buckinghamshire Council (2024) Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation Recreational Pressure Mitigation Strategy for Ashridge Commons and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest. Buckinghamshire Council.

Liley, D. and Saunders, P. (2025) Ashridge Estate Mitigation Monitoring Strategy. 834. Footprint Ecology / National Trust.

National Trust (2024) National Trust – Climate change adaptation guidance. National Trust. Available at: <https://www.into.org/new-national-trust-climate-change-adaptation-guidance/>.

Panter, C. et al. (2022) Visitor survey, recreation impact assessment and mitigation requirements for the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and the Dacorum Local Plan. 628. Report by Footprint Ecology for Dacorum Borough Council.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire



Good morning/afternoon. I am conducting a visitor survey on behalf of the National Trust to find out how people use this area for recreation. Can you spare me a few minutes please?

Q1 ...

- Are you on a day trip/short visit and have travelled directly from your home today... *if no*
- Are you staying away from home with friends or family ... *if no*
- Are you staying away from home, e.g. second home, mobile home or on holiday
- If none of the above, **How would you describe your visit today?**

Further details

Q2 **What is the main activity you are undertaking here today?** *Tick closest answer. Do not prompt. Single response only. Record any additional activities on the next page (Q3).*

- Dog walking
- Commercial dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / running
- Cycling / mountain biking
- Meeting up with friends
- Outing with family
- Horse riding
- Bird / wildlife watching
- Photography
- Visiting cafe / restaurant / pub
- Picnic
- Other, please detail:

Further details

Q3 **Are there any other activities that you (or members of your group) are doing whilst you are here today?** *Tick all that apply. Do not prompt. Leave blank if not applicable.*

- Dog walking
- Commercial dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / running
- Cycling / mountain biking
- Meeting up with friends
- Outing with family
- Horse riding
- Bird / wildlife watching
- Photography
- Visiting cafe / restaurant / pub
- Picnic
- Other, please detail:

Further details

Q4 **What mode of transport did you use to get here today?** *Multiple responses possible - e.g. train and bicycle.*

- Car / van
- On foot
- Bicycle
- Bus
- Train
- Motorbike
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q5 How long have you spent / will you spend here today? Single response only. Tick closest.

- Less than 30 minutes
- Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
- 1 to 2 hours
- 2 to 3 hours
- 3 to 4 hours
- More than 4 hours
- Don't know

Further details:

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

- More than once a day (365+ visits)
- 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)
- First visit / haven't visited in past year
- Don't know
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q7 Do you tend to visit this location 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 **Why did you choose to visit this specific location today, rather than somewhere else?** *Tick all responses given. Do not prompt, tick closest answers.*

- Don't know / others in party chose
- Close to home
- No need to use car
- Quick / easy travel route
- Good / easy parking
- Particular facilities
- Refreshments / cafe / pub
- Choice of routes
- Away from roads/traffic
- Feels safe here
- Not many people
- Scenery / variety of views
- Rural feel / wild landscape
- Particular wildlife interest (e.g. deer, bluebells, trees)
- Particular historic or cultural interest
- Habit / familiarity
- Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- Ability to let dog off lead
- Appropriate place for activity
- Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- For a change / variety
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q9 **Which of those reasons would you say had the most influence over your choice of location to visit today?** *Single choice, tick their main reason only. List is based on their answers to Q8.*

- Don't know / others in party chose
- Close to home
- No need to use car
- Quick / easy travel route
- Good / easy parking
- Particular facilities
- Refreshments / cafe / pub
- Choice of routes
- Away from roads/traffic
- Feels safe here
- Not many people
- Scenery / variety of views
- Rural feel / wild landscape
- Particular wildlife interest (e.g. deer, bluebells, trees)
- Particular historic or cultural interest
- Habit / familiarity
- Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- Ability to let dog off lead
- Appropriate place for activity
- Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- For a change / variety
- Other reason (Further details:)

Q10 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "During my visit to Ashridge, I feel connected to nature".** *Single choice. Read out the options below or show them to the interviewee. Note that the order in which the responses is shown will alternate.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree / unsure
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q11 **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.** Ask questions to ensure route is accurately documented. Use **P** to indicate where the visitor parked (if applicable), **E** to indicate where they started and **X** to indicate where they finished. Mark the route with a solid line for the route already taken and a dotted line for the expected or remaining route, with arrows to indicate the direction.

Enter the map reference below, or write 'no map' with a brief reason if no route map completed.

Q12 **Is / was your route today the normal length 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

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

- Weather
- Daylight
- Time
- Habit / usual route
- Other users (avoiding crowds, other dogs etc.)
- Group members (e.g. kids, less able)
- Avoiding muddy tracks / paths
- Followed a marked trail e.g. Ashridge Boundary Trail - PLEASE NAME
- Location of cafe/restaurant/pub
- Activity undertaken (e.g. presence of dog)
- Birds / wildlife
- Followed their dog
- App / website / book - PLEASE NAME
- Viewpoint / feature
- Just wandering/exploring
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Ashridge Estate Visitor Survey 2025

Q14 **What proportion of your weekly visits for [given activity] take place here, compared to other sites? Can you give a rough percentage?** *Do not prompt. Tick closest answer.*

- All take place here
- 75% or more
- 50-75%
- 25-50%
- Less than 25%
- Not sure / don't know / first visit

Q15 **Can you tell me the name of up to 3 other locations that you also visit for [given activity]?** *Do not prompt. Ask for spellings if necessary.*

1st site name:

2nd site name:

2nd site name:

Q16 **Are there any changes you would like to see here with regards to how this area is managed for access?** *Do not give options or prompt. Tick closest option(s).*

- No changes / leave as is
- More parking
- Better parking
- More paths
- Better / surfaced paths
- More bins / less litter
- More dog waste bins
- Controls on dogs and dog fouling
- Facilities for dogs (e.g. training areas, washing facilities)
- More accessible
- Seating / benches
- Toilets
- Cafe
- Changes to habitats / scenery
- More natural / wild
- Not sure / don't know
- Other, please detail below

Further details:

Q17 **Are you aware of the National Trust's 'Protecting Our Roots' project? The project includes changes to infrastructure and the creation of three new visitor hubs with the aim of protecting the future of the estate.** *Do not prompt.*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q18 **Do you have any further comments or general feedback about your visit and access to this area?**

Ashridge Estate Visitor Survey 2025

- Q19 **Finally, to identify how far people have travelled, what is your full home postcode?**
This is very important, please make every effort to record correctly. If necessary, reassure them that we don't want their full address, and it will only be used to work out where people are coming from.

- Q20 *If visitor is unable or refuses to give postcode:* **What is the name of the town or area where you live?**

- Q21 *If visitor is on holiday ask:* **Which town / area are you staying in?**

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

TO BE COMPLETED AFTER INTERVIEW FINISHED.

Q22 Survey location:

- 1 - Monument Drive
- 2 - Barracks Square
- 3 - Layby opposite Dick's Camp
- 4 - Ling Ride
- 5 - Tom's Hill
- 6 - Northchurch Common
- 7 - Norcott Hill
- 8 - Frithsden Beeches
- 9 - Berkhamsted Common
- 10 - Aldbury
- 11 - Ivinghoe Beacon
- 12 - Little Gaddesden

Number of people in group (including minors)	<input type="text"/>
Number of minors in group (under 18s)	<input type="text"/>
Number of dogs with group	<input type="text"/>
Number of dogs with group seen off lead	<input type="text"/>

Q23 **Did the interviewee appear to be part of an organised group e.g. a walking group?**

- Yes, interviewee part of an organised group

Q24 **Did the interviewee struggle with answering questions because English was not their first language?**

Tick if you feel this may have influenced their responses.

- Yes, interviewee struggled because English was not their first language

Q25 **Surveyor comments.** *Note anything that may be relevant to the survey, including any changes to the survey entry that are necessary, e.g. typos/mistakes/changes to answers/additional information.*

Appendix 2: Advice from Natural England

Date: 11 December 2025



Melissa Robinson
Dacorum Borough Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Melissa,

Thank you for your question regarding Zones of Influence and Chilterns Beechwoods Strategic Solution.

Natural England are now seeing several Strategic Solutions commissioning new visitor surveys which suggest that ZOIs have changed. Which is logical, they are always only snapshots in time. Our advice is that the ZOIs should remain the same until multiple surveys are completed, which show significant long-term trends. We don't want a ZOI to change every 5 years, moving in and out a little bit, as it provides no certainty for developers or LPAs producing Local Plans. That is unless one survey shows an acute result, completely different to before. This has only happened on a couple of occasions when a ZOI has drastically increased, such as where it doubled at Upper Nene Gravel Pits SPA.

I imagine you might be thinking that over a 1km change here is drastic, our advice would be that we review this matter after receipt of the next visitor survey. The Precautionary Principal within the Habitats Regulations requires us to be certain that something has changed. As I state above, we need longer term trends, before looking again at the ZOI.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries regarding this letter, for new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Marc Turner

*Principal Planning Officer
Major Planning Casework Team
National Planning Delivery Team
Natural England*