

Gala Policies User Survey Results



Scottish Borders COUNCIL

Gala Policies Management Plan Survey

Have your say!

Gala Policies is an outdoor green space in Galashiels with many heritage trees, grassland, paths and trails. A place for people to enjoy and nature to thrive.

Scottish Borders Council is interested to hear your thoughts on how you currently use the Gala Policies and your vision for the future which will help to inform a new Management Plan for the site.

The survey will take just a few minutes to complete.
Scan the QR code or go to <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/assets-and-infrastructure/gala-policies-user-survey>
Survey closes 25th November 2024.
Thank you!



Scottish Borders Council commissioned a Management Plan for the Gala Policies in August 2024. Alongside user interviews, a survey was developed to capture wider local views on current and future use of the site. The survey questions included common themes recorded during user interviews which took place during September and October 2024

The survey was available online between 1st and 25th November 2024. In addition, 130 paper copies were distributed to residents in the Balmoral area of Galashiels with replies being directed to a drop off point at Niki's Lounge Bar.

The survey was advertised through a wide range of social media channels and local pages, email lists, social media advertising and 100 posters distributed to shops and public spaces throughout Galashiels during November.

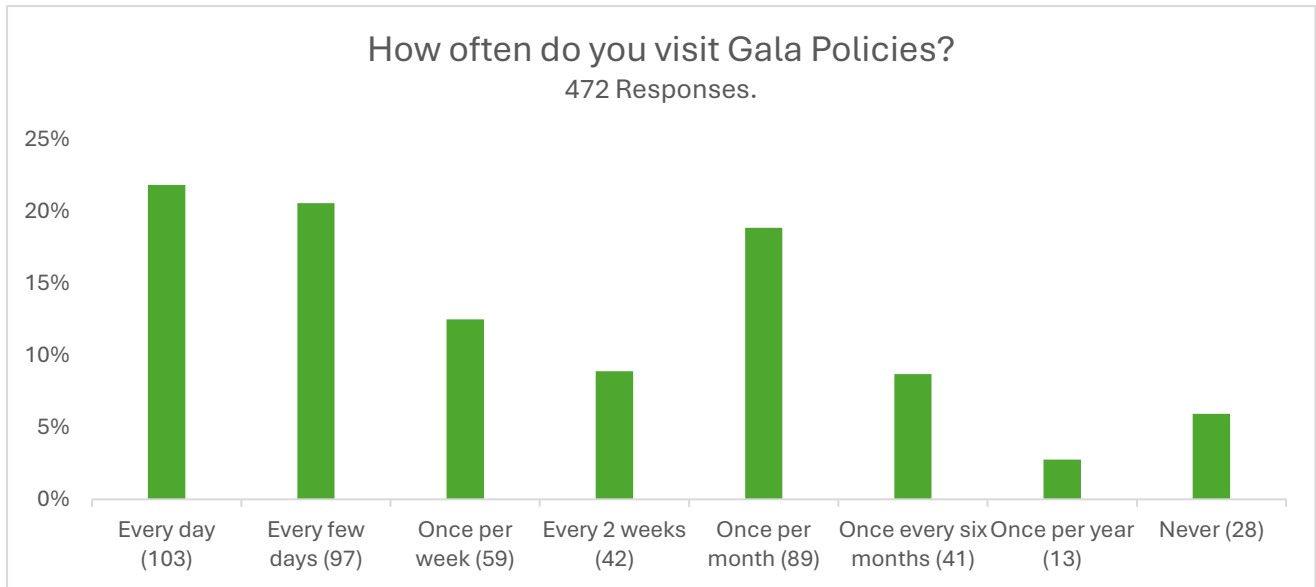
The survey of 20 questions was broken down into the following sections:

- How people currently use the Gala Policies
- What improvements could be made
- People's thoughts on volunteering
- General information about users and how they access the policies

There were 472 responses to the survey when it closed at the end of November.

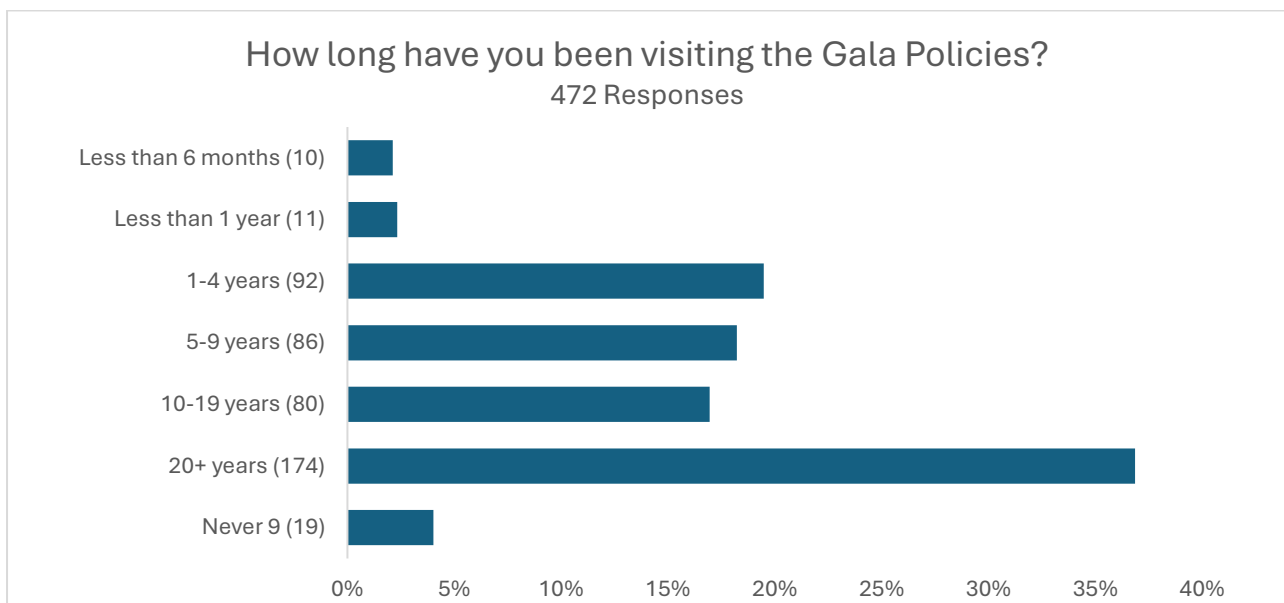
Question 1: How often do you visit Gala Policies?

A significant portion of respondents visited every day (103/21.8%), reflecting high engagement among regular users. Moderate users visited every few days (97/20.5%) and once per month (89/18.7%). Infrequent visitors selected once every six months (41/8.7%) and once per year (13/2.7%) accounted for a smaller segment of the population.



Question 2: How long have you been visiting the Gala Policies?

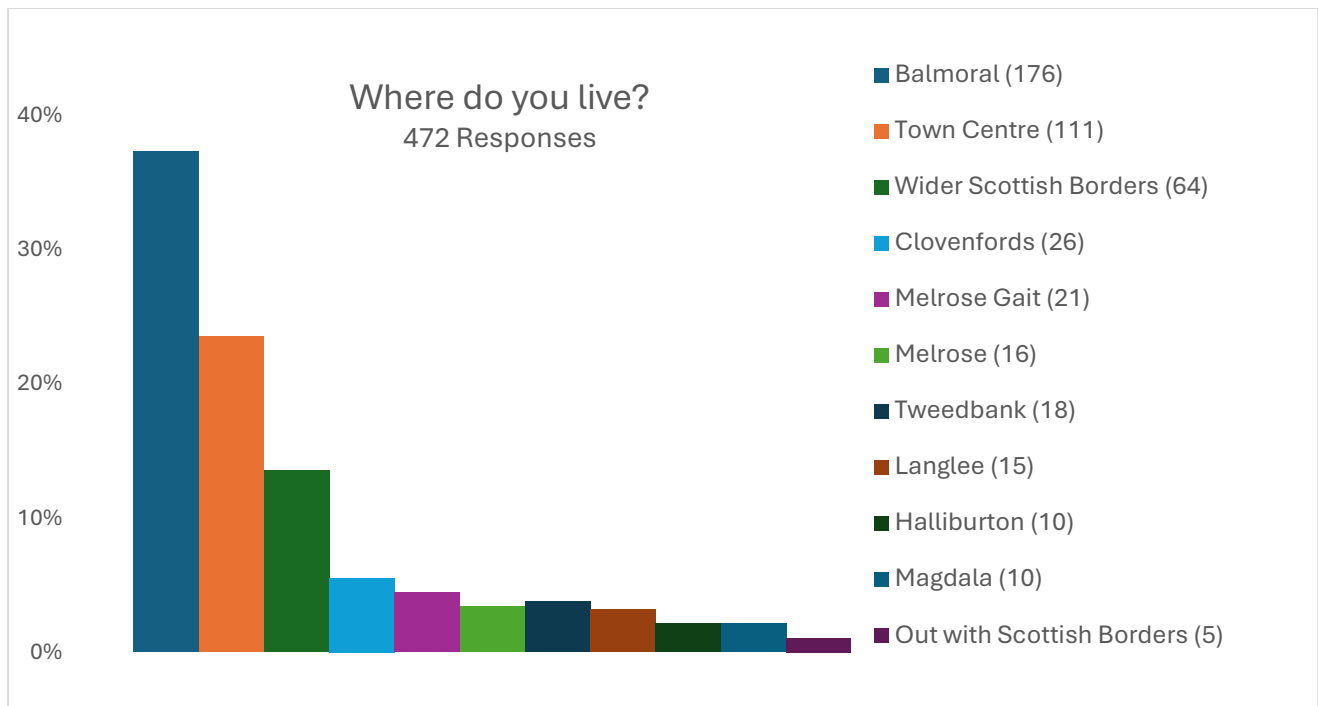
The majority of respondents (174/36.9%) have been visiting Gala Policies for over 20 years, highlighting enduring engagement with the site. Visitors of 1-4 years (92/19.5%) and 5-9 years (86/18.2%) form a significant part of the user base whereas newcomers (less than one year), represent just 11/4.5% of respondents.



Question 3: Where do you live?

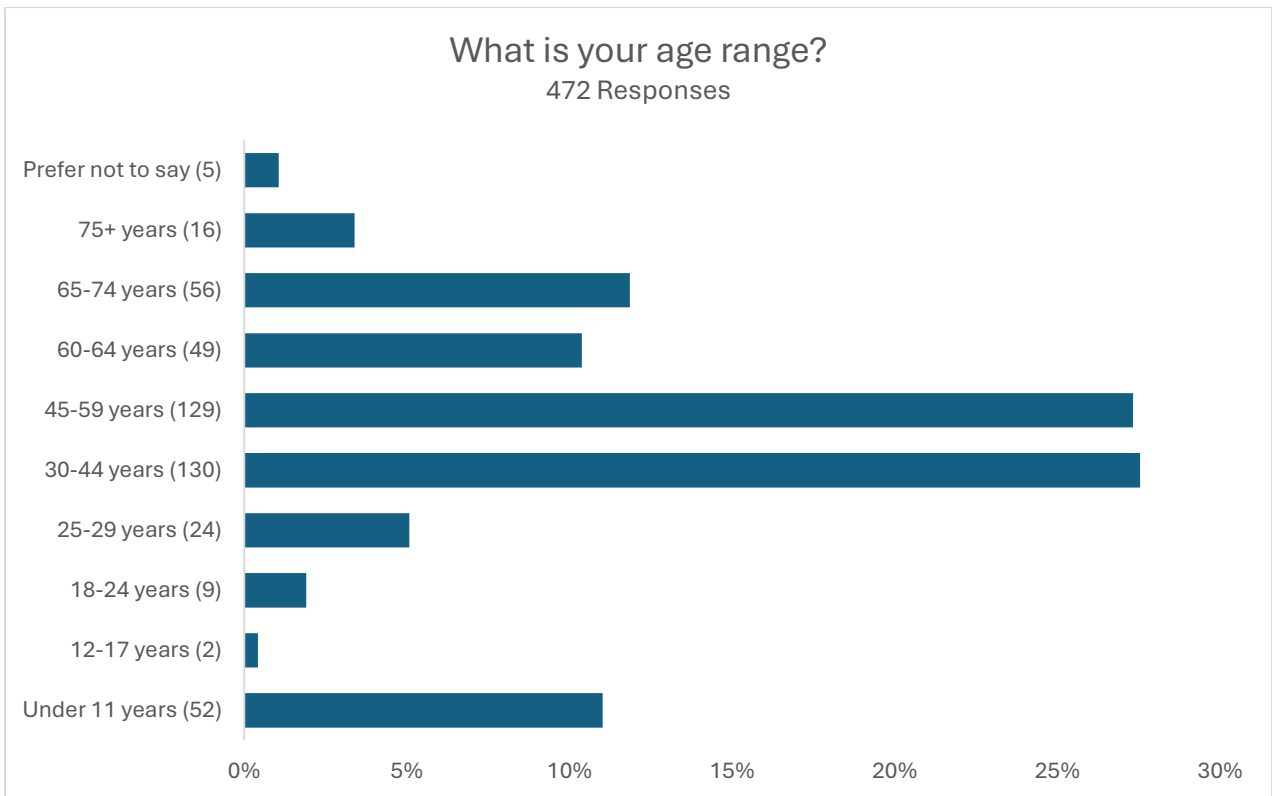
The majority of respondents live in Balmoral (176/37.3%) or the Town Centre (111/23.5%), emphasising the local nature of the survey (combined 287/60.8%). When all areas of Galashiels are included in the addition 343/72.7% of respondents were from the town of Galashiels.

Responses suggest that most users come from the immediate local area though the site does attract visitors from Clovenfords (26/5.5%), Tweedbank (18/3.8%), Melrose (16/3.4%), wider Scottish Borders (64/13.56%) and out with Scottish Borders (5/1.1%).



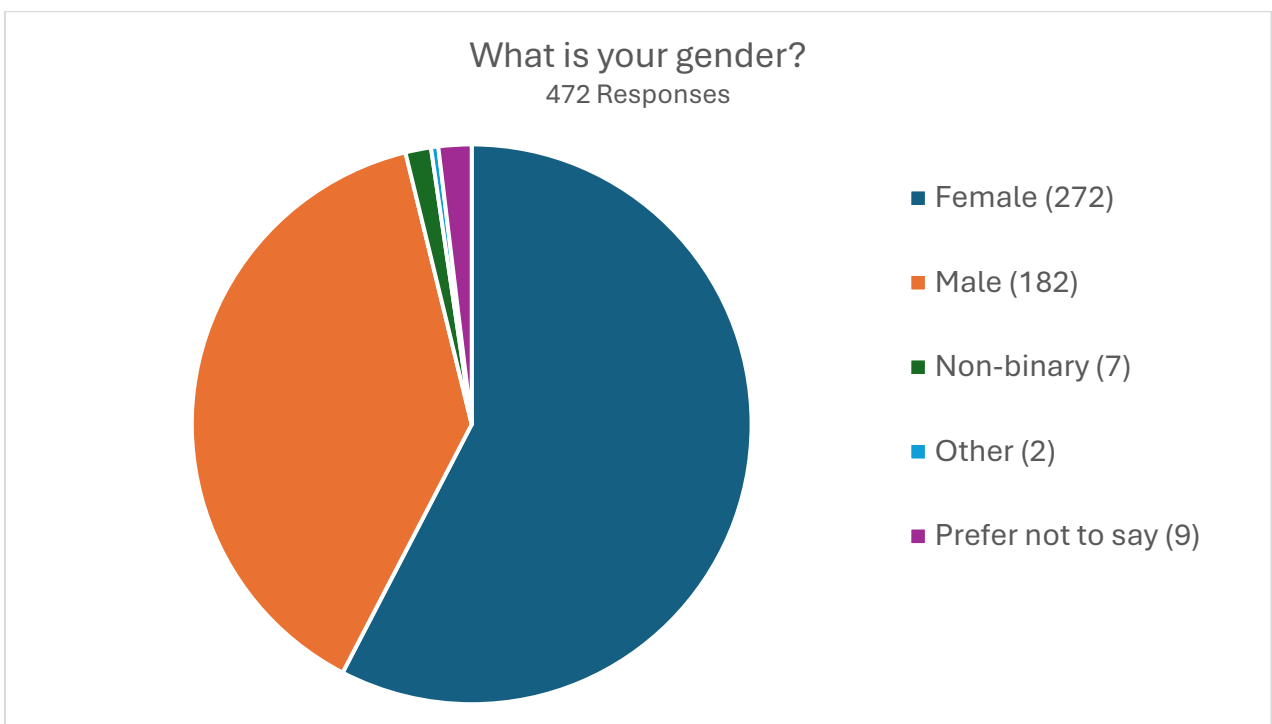
Question 4: What is your age range?

The most significant proportions of respondents were aged 30-44 (130/27.5%) and 45-59 (129/27.3%). There were fewer older respondents 56/11.9% aged 65-74 and 49/10.4% aged 60-64, and a small number 75+ (16/3.4%). Under 11's were reasonably well represented (52/11%) but there was limited participation from the 12-17 age group (2/0.4%).



Question 5: What is your gender?

The majority of respondents were female (272/57.6%) followed by males (182/38.6%). Only a small percentage of participants identified as non-binary (7/1.5%) or other (2/0.4%), with 9/1.91% preferring not to disclose their gender.

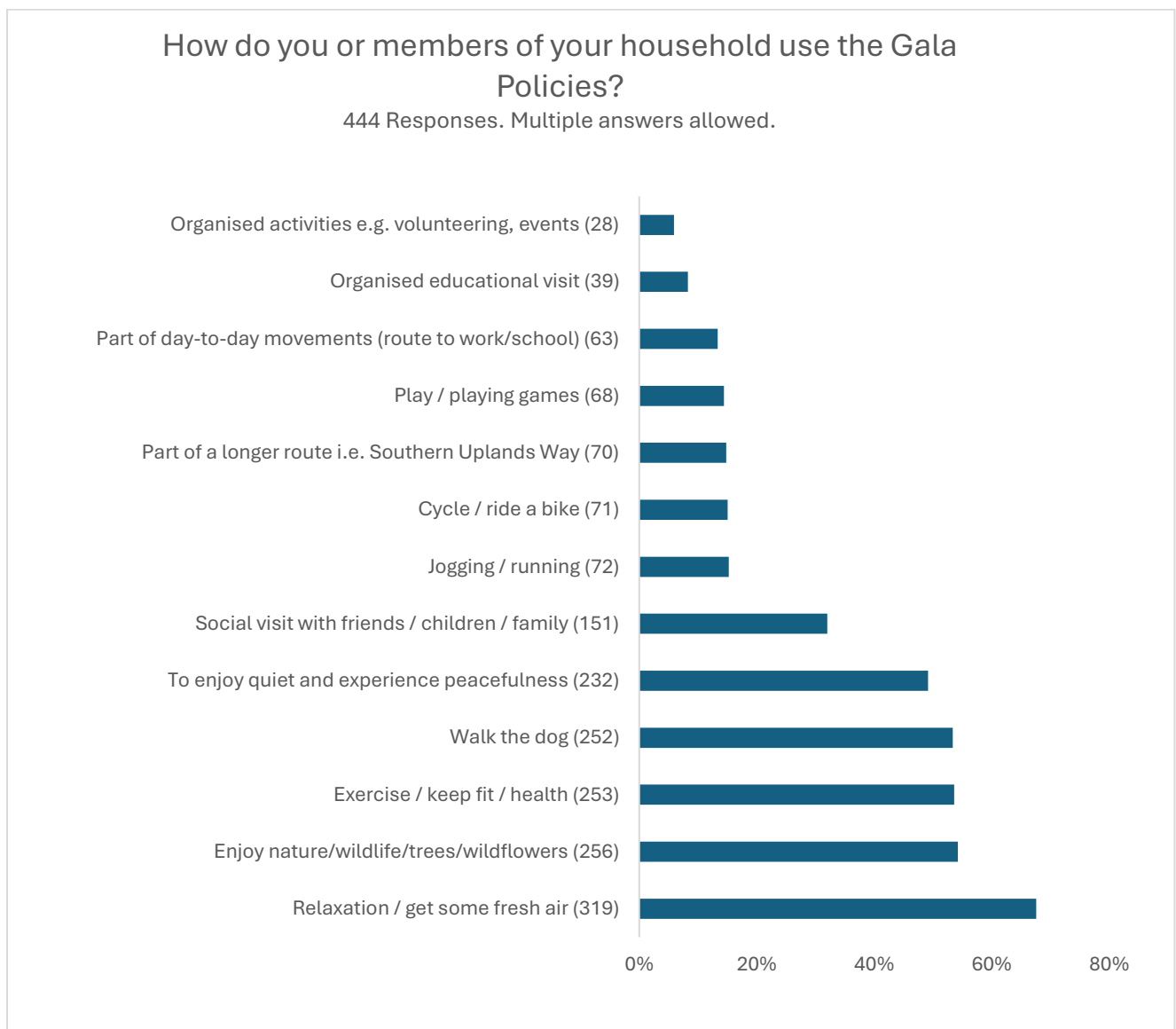


Question 6: How do you or members of your household use the Gala Policies? (Tick all that apply)

The most common uses were relaxation and fresh air (319/67.6%), followed by enjoying quiet and peacefulness (232/49.2%), and exercise/health (253/53.6%). Many respondents enjoyed nature, wildlife, and plant life (256/54.2%) and there were a significant number of dog walkers (252/53.4%).

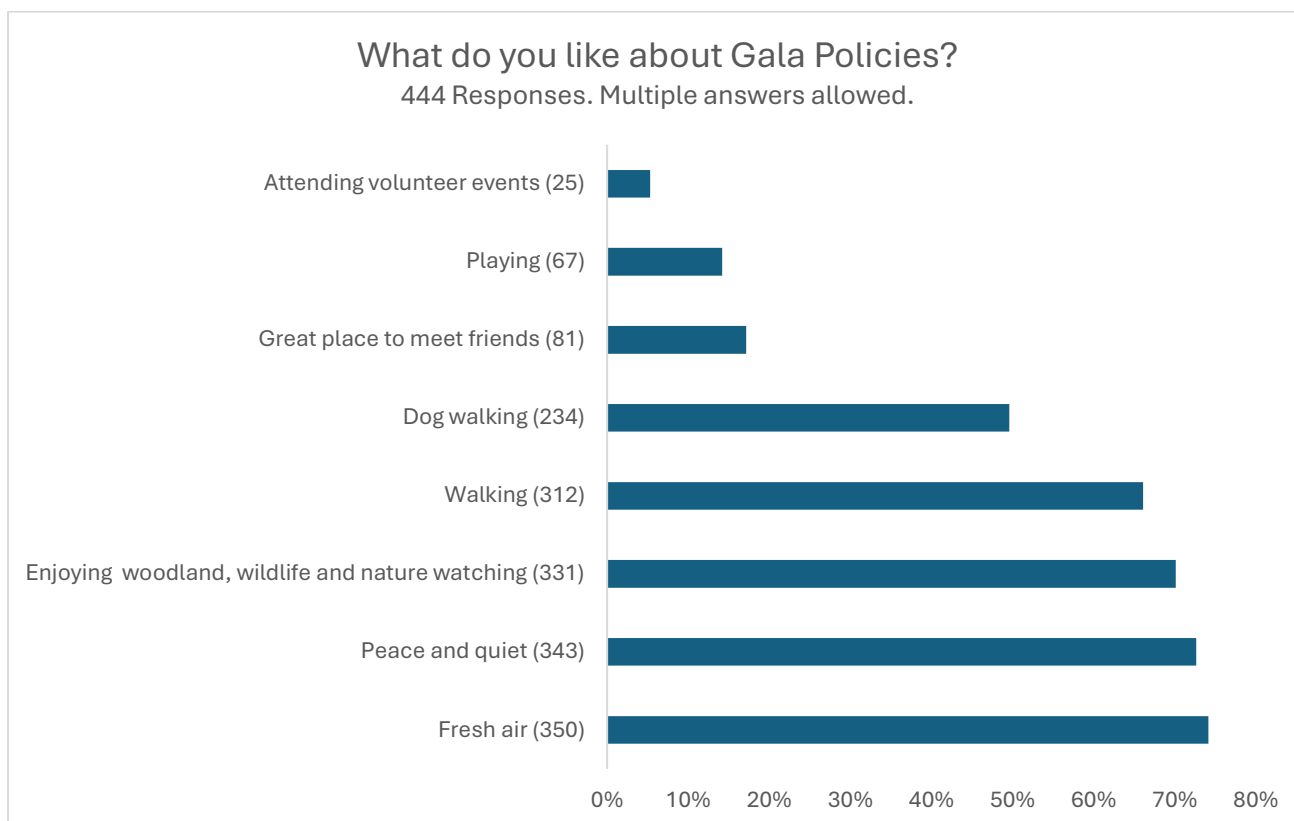
There were a number of active uses of the policies with cycling (71/15%), jogging (72/15.3%), as part of a longer walking route (70/14.8%) and playing games (68/14.4%) being the main ones. Social visits with family or friends were mentioned by 151/32% of respondents and 63/13.4% stated that visiting the Gala Policies was part of their daily movements.

Fewer people used the policies for organised educational visits (39/8.3%) or volunteering activities (28/5.9%).



Question 7: What do you like about Gala Policies? (Tick all that apply)

The top reasons for liking the Gala Policies were fresh air (350/74.2%), peace and quiet (343/72.7%) and enjoying woodland, wildlife, and nature watching (331/70.1%) highlighting the natural benefits of the area. Walking (312/66.1%) was highly valued by respondents as was dog walking (234/49.6%). Fewer people mentioned meeting friends (81/17.2%), playing games (67/14.2%) or attending volunteer events (25/5.3%) as their main reason for their enjoyment of the site.

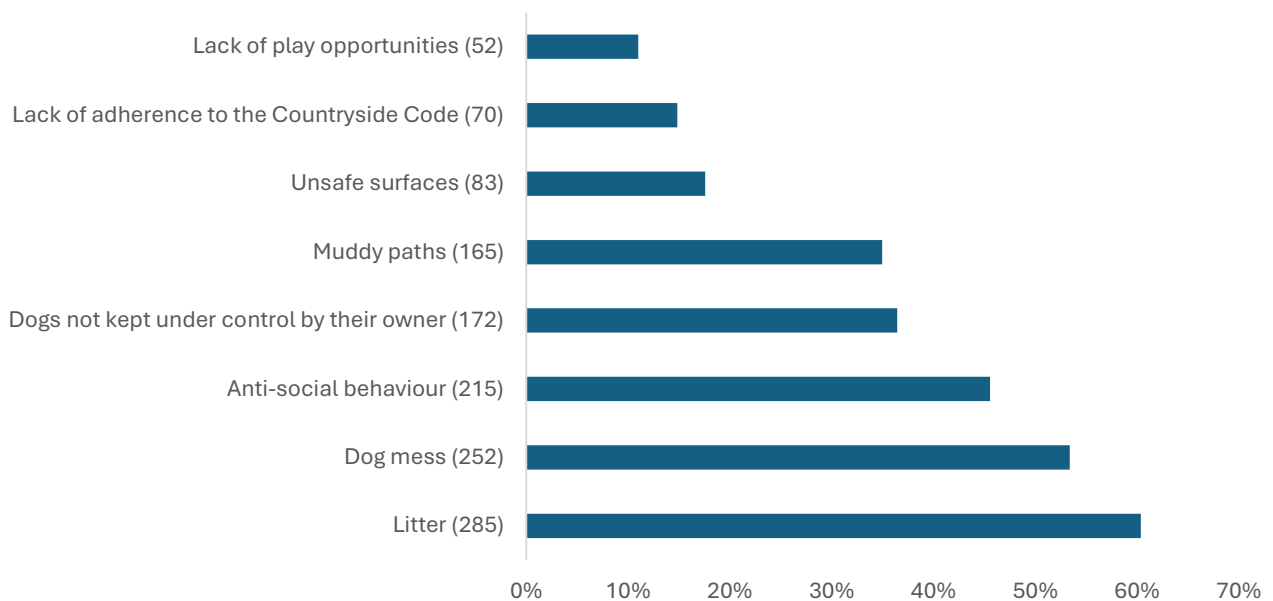


Question 8: What do you not like about Gala Policies? (Tick all that apply)

The most common issues reported by respondents were litter (285/60.4%), dog mess (252/53.4%), and anti-social behaviour (215/45.6%). A significant portion of respondents (172/36.4%) expressed concern about dogs not being kept under control by their owners whilst others highlighted muddy paths (165/35%) and unsafe surfaces (83/17.6%) as their most notable concerns. Fewer respondents mentioned issues with the Countryside Code (70/14.8%) or lack of play opportunities (52/11%).

What do you not like about Gala Policies?

422 Responses. Multiple answers allowed.

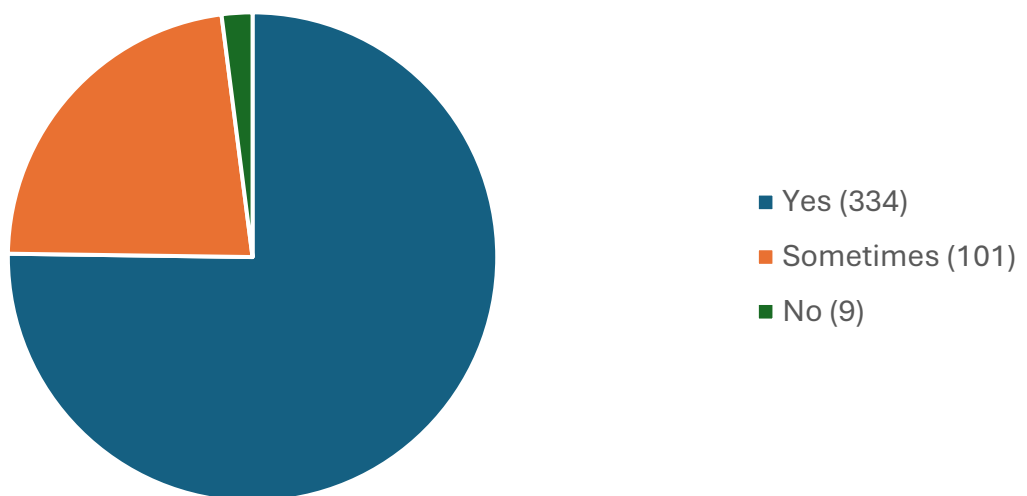


Question 9: Do you feel safe in Gala Policies?

The majority of respondents (334/70.8%) felt safe in Gala Policies. 101/21.4% felt safe sometimes suggesting that there may be certain times or situations that contribute to safety concerns. A smaller number (9/1.9%) did not feel safe in Gala Policies.

Do you feel Safe in Gala Policies?

444 Responses.



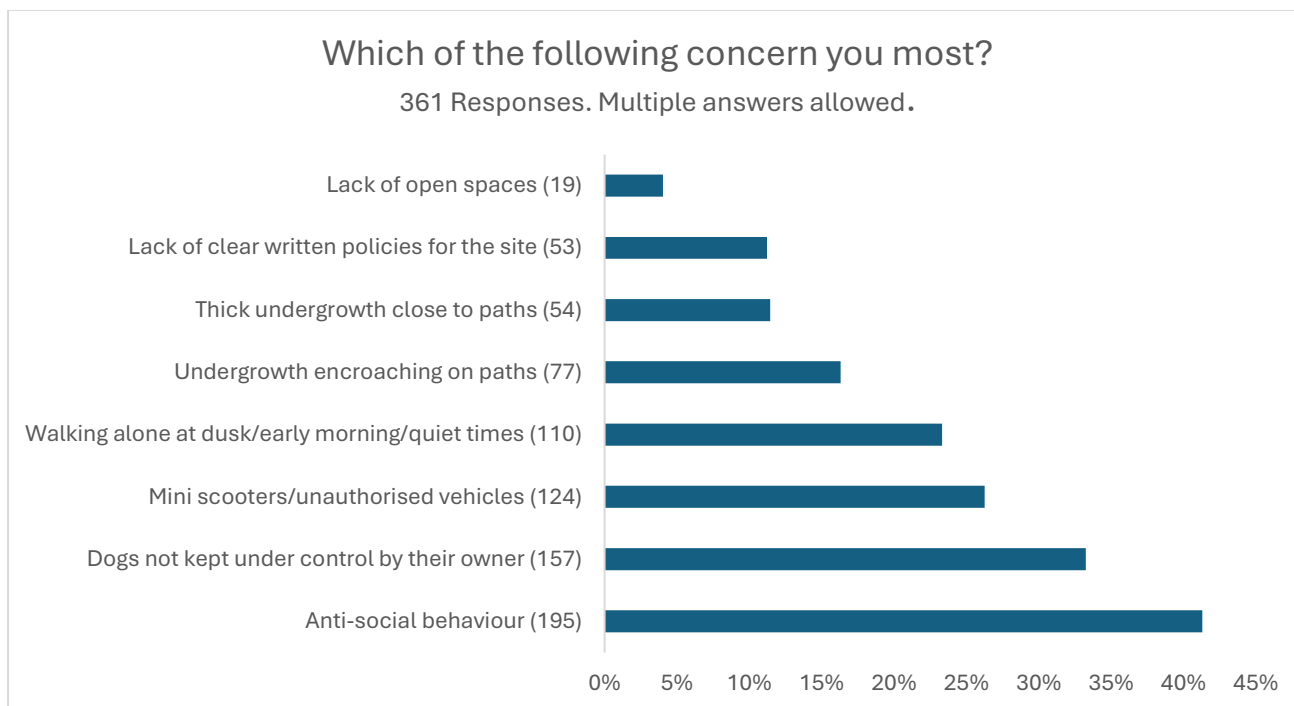
If Sometimes or No what makes you feel unsafe?

There were 97 responses to this part of the question

- Many expressed a fear of the dark and a feeling of vulnerability when visiting after dark due to the secluded nature of the space. Respondents mentioned restricting their visits to daylight hours and avoiding the Gala Policies after dusk but there were mixed opinions on lighting the area as it might overly compromise the natural environment. Women, particularly when alone, express heightened unease in the area at night or in heavily shaded sections. Encounters with strangers, even harmless ones, felt unnerving.
- The comments highlighted significant concerns about antisocial behaviour in the area, particularly involving groups of young people and others. Many reported gatherings of teenagers, often near the pond, at the top of the hill, or in other secluded spots. There were fears about youths and other individuals drinking alcohol or using illegal substances, often leaving behind broken glass, bottles, or needles which raised many safety concerns. The presence of intoxicated youths felt intimidating for women and parents with children. Some reported being harassed or victim to disrespectful behaviour during and after school hours from school children.
- Many comments highlight the problem of dogs not being kept on a lead or described dogs as intimidating and sometimes dangerous, causing fear and potential danger, especially for children, joggers, and those who have had negative experiences (attacked in the past) of dogs. Parents express anxiety about uncontrolled dogs posing risks to toddlers and limiting the freedom of children to play safely. Some mentioned hostile behaviour from dog owners when confronted about their pets or dismissing their concerns with remarks such as "the dog won't hurt you." Concerns were raised about dog waste in public areas, which detracted from the environment's usability, cleanliness and safety.
- The comments highlighted a need for improved path maintenance and restricted vehicle access as paths were being further damaged by these. Respondents mentioned paths and bridges becoming very muddy and slippery after wet weather and wooden walkways with worn-out non-slip surfaces creating further risk of slips and falls. There were suggestions to restrict vehicle access to protect the environment as the area was being used by people with chainsaws for collecting firewood.

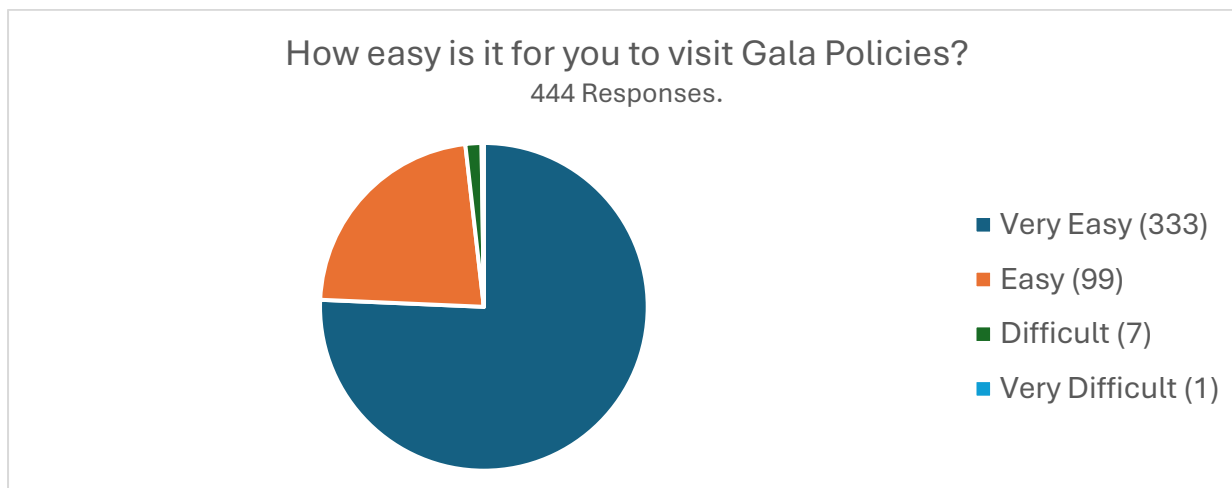
Question 10: Which, if any, of the following concern you most? (Tick all that apply)

The predominant concerns were around anti-social behaviour (195/41.3%), dogs not kept under control by their owner (157/33.3%), and walking alone at dusk/early morning/quiet times (110/23.3%). Many highlighted the use of mini scooters and unauthorised vehicles (124/26.3%) as safety concerns. Less pressing issues were undergrowth encroaching on paths (77/16.3%), the lack of clear written policies for the site (53/11.2%) and the lack of open spaces (19/4%).



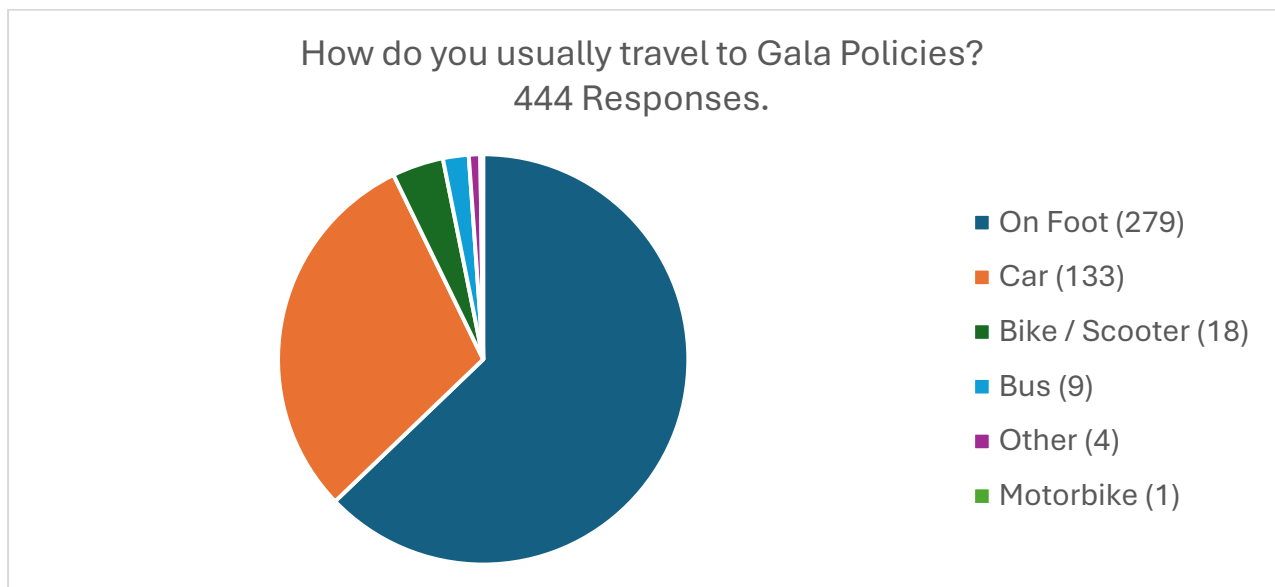
Question 11. How easy is it for you to visit Gala Policies?

The majority of respondents (432/91.6% combined) found it either very easy (333/70.6%) or easy (99/21%) to visit Gala Policies. Only 7/1.5% found it difficult or very difficult (1/ 0.2%).



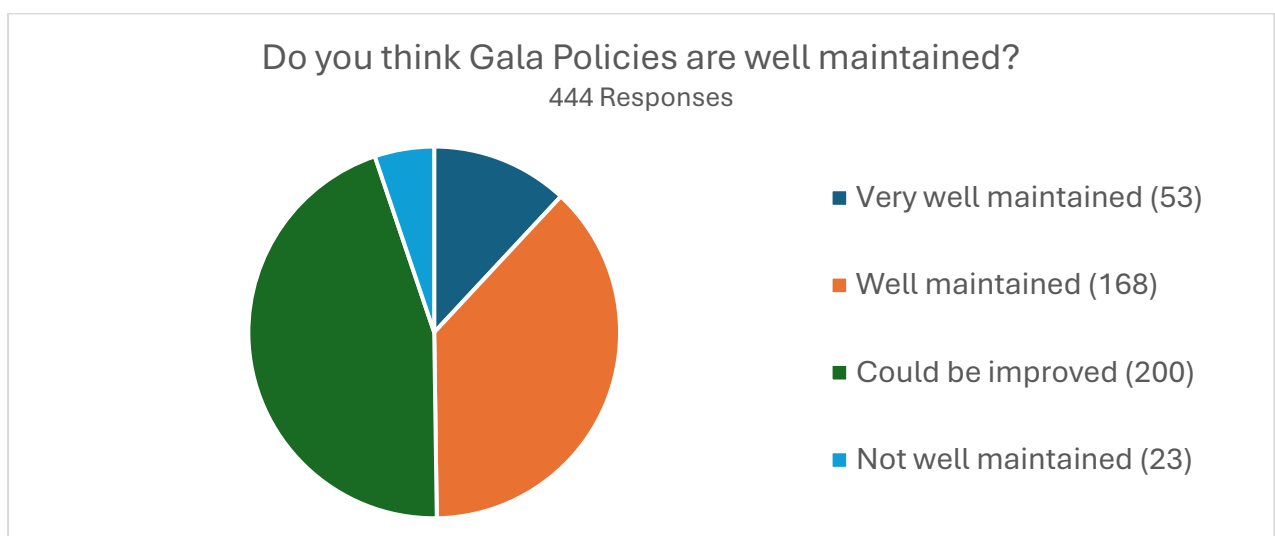
Question 12: How do you usually travel to the Gala Policies?

A large proportion of respondents (279/59.1%) travelled on foot, reflecting the site's accessibility for pedestrians. A lower number of respondents (133/28.2%) accessed the Gala Policies by car. Less popular modes of transport included bike/scooter (18/3.8%), motorbike (1/0.2%), bus (9/1.9%), and other (4/0.9%).



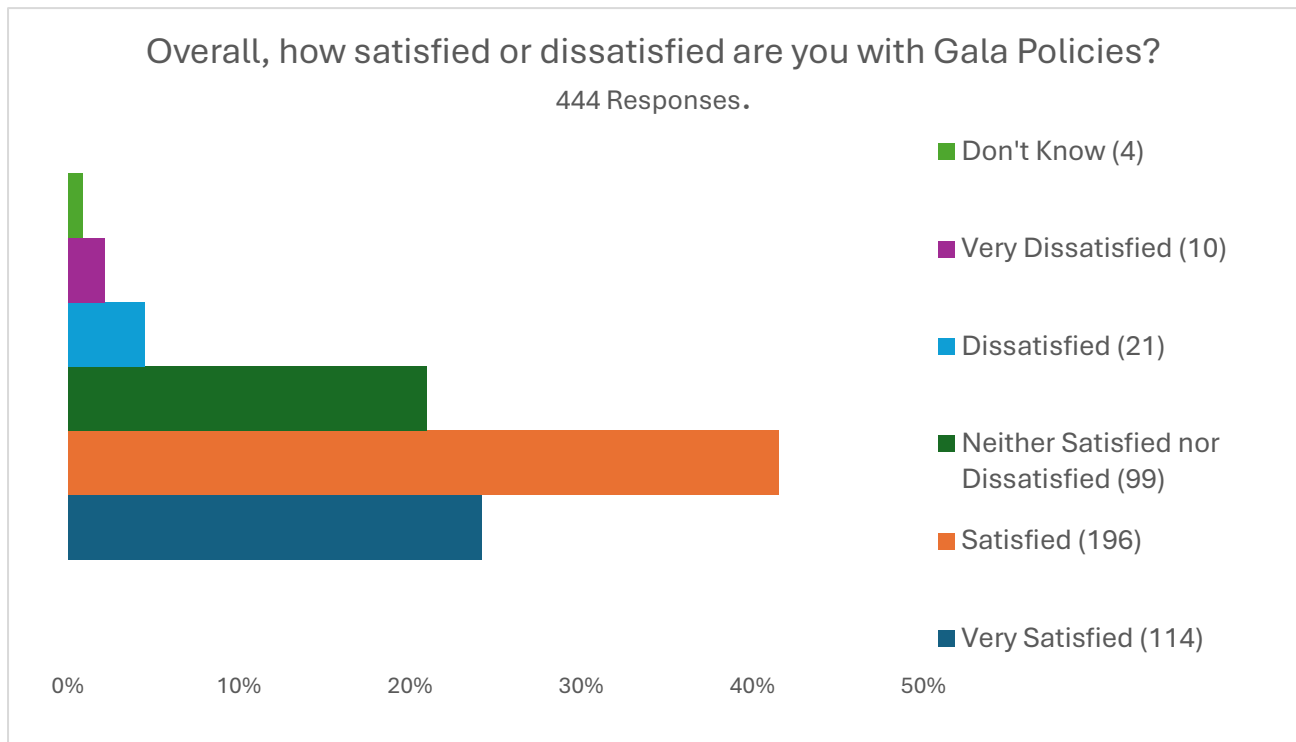
Question 13. Do you think Gala Policies are well maintained?

Consensus was fairly evenly split with 221/46.8% (combined) stating the site was either very well maintained (53/11.2%) or well maintained (168/35.6%), whereas others (223/47.3% combined) felt it could be improved (200/42.4%) or was not well maintained (23/4.9%).



Question 14: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Gala Policies?

Respondents expressed high satisfaction (310/65.7% combined) with 196/41.5% being satisfied and 114/24.2% very satisfied. There were 99/21% neutral responses. Only a small percentage (31/6.6% combined) reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, indicating that most visitors are content with their experience of Gala Policies.



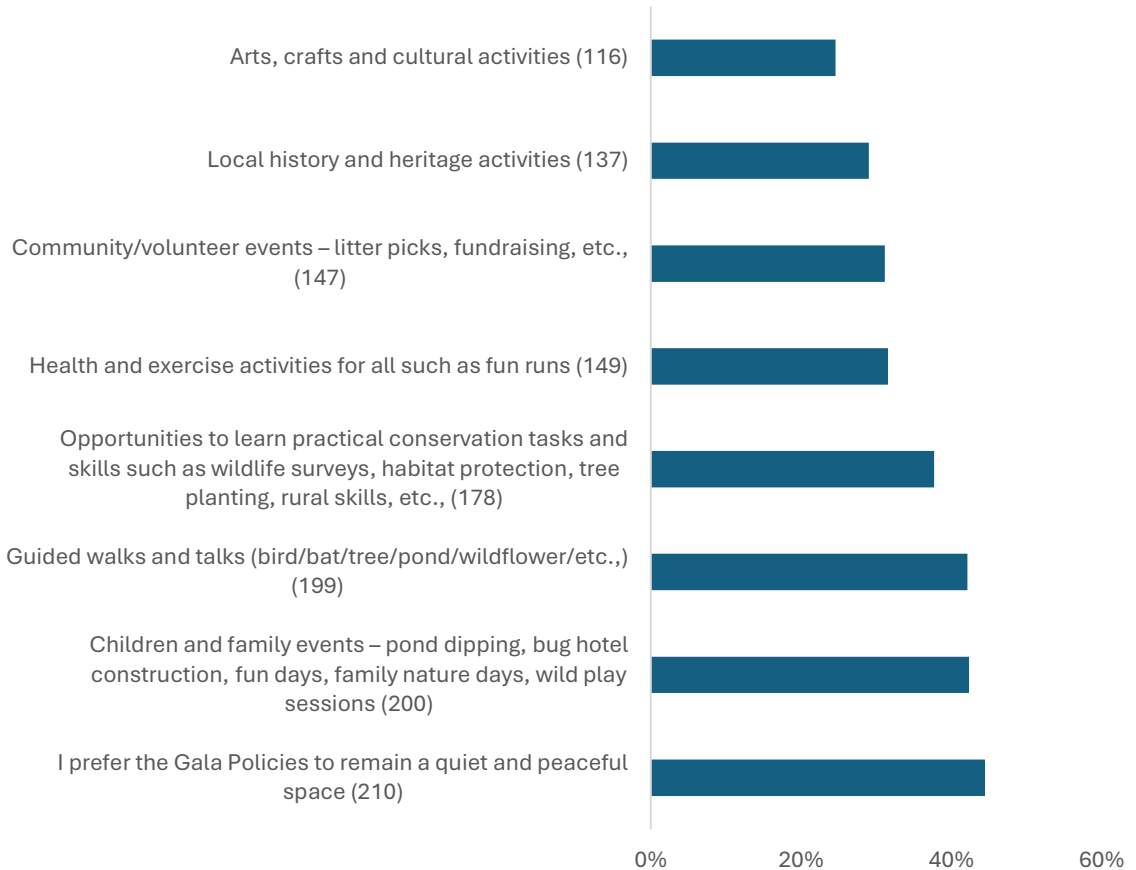
Question 15: Would you like any of the following events and activities to be made available in the Gala Policies? (Tick all that apply)

The most popular choice was for the Gala Policies to remain quiet and peaceful (210/44.5%), closely followed by family-oriented activities like pond dipping and nature days (200/42.4%) and guided walks and talks (199/42.2%).

178/37.7% were interested in conservation activities like wildlife surveys and habitat protection whilst 149/31.6% favoured health focussed activities such as fun runs. Many people (147/31.1%) supported community events like litter picks and fundraising, local history and heritage (137/29%) and arts, crafts and cultural activities (116/24.6%).

Would you like any of the following events and activities to be made available in the Gala Policies?

444 Responses. Multiple answers allowed.



Question 16: Would any of the following improve your experience of the Gala Policies? (Tick all that apply)

Better placed litter and dog poo bins were high on the agenda (301/63.8%) for respondents as were the installation of new features (bird and bat boxes, bug hotels, bee posts) to support biodiversity (264/55.9%). Many supported upgrading the board walk around the pond (196/41.5%) to make it more accessible and visually appealing.

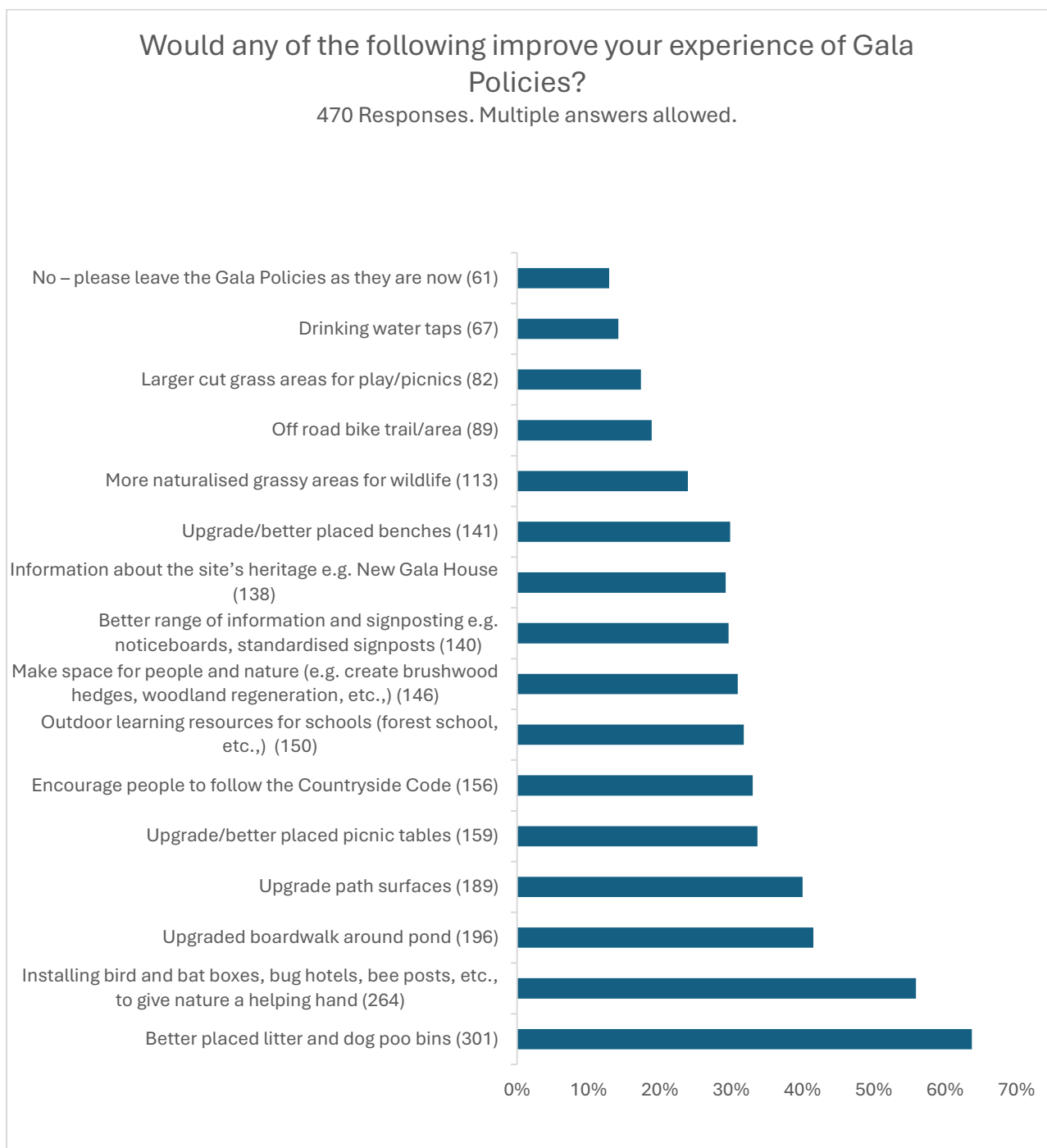
189/40% would like upgraded paths for better accessibility, better placed picnic tables (159/33.7%) and upgraded benches (141/29.9%).

To increase responsible use 156/33% would encourage adherence to the Countryside Code, balance nature and human use by creating spaces (brushwood hedges for regeneration alongside grassy areas for play) (146/30.9%) and the creation of outdoor learning resources such as forest school areas for children (150/31.8%).

Many (140/29.7%), would like better information and signposting, including wildlife identification, history, and labelled heritage trees and (138/29.2%) supported providing heritage-related information about the site.

Lower priorities included creating more naturalised areas for wildlife (113/ 23.9%), dedicated bike areas and trails (89/18.9%), larger areas for play and picnics (82/17.4%).

67/14.2% saw value in adding water taps to the site, 51/10.8% supported creating a youth specific area and 61/12.9% wish the Gala Policies to remain as they are now.

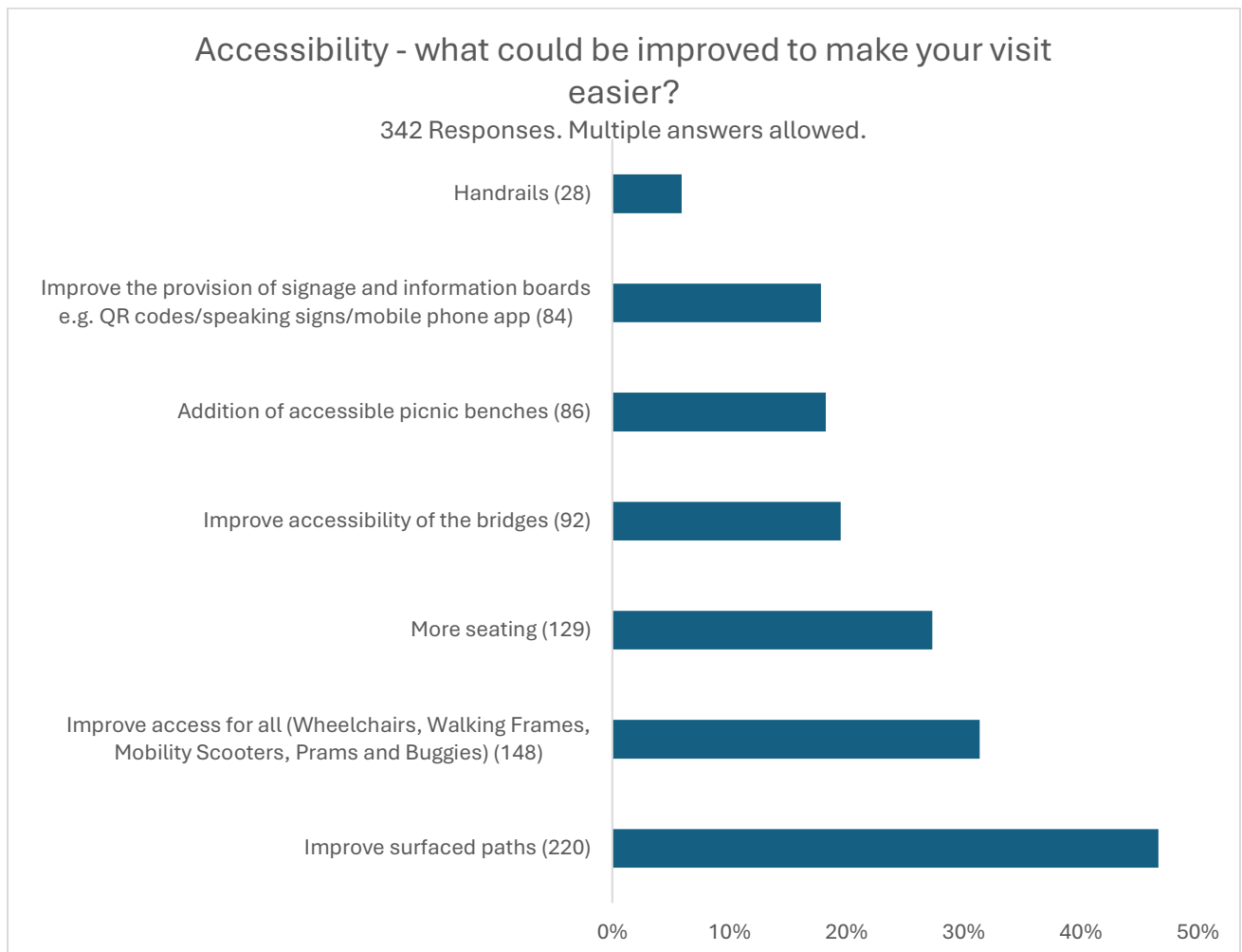


Question 17: Accessibility - what could be improved to make your visit easier? (Tick all that apply)

High on respondents list of suggestions was improving surfaced paths to make them safer and more navigable (220/46.6%), better access for wheelchairs, walking frames, mobility scooters, prams, and buggies (148/31.4%) and more seating to provide rest areas along walking routes (129/27.3%).

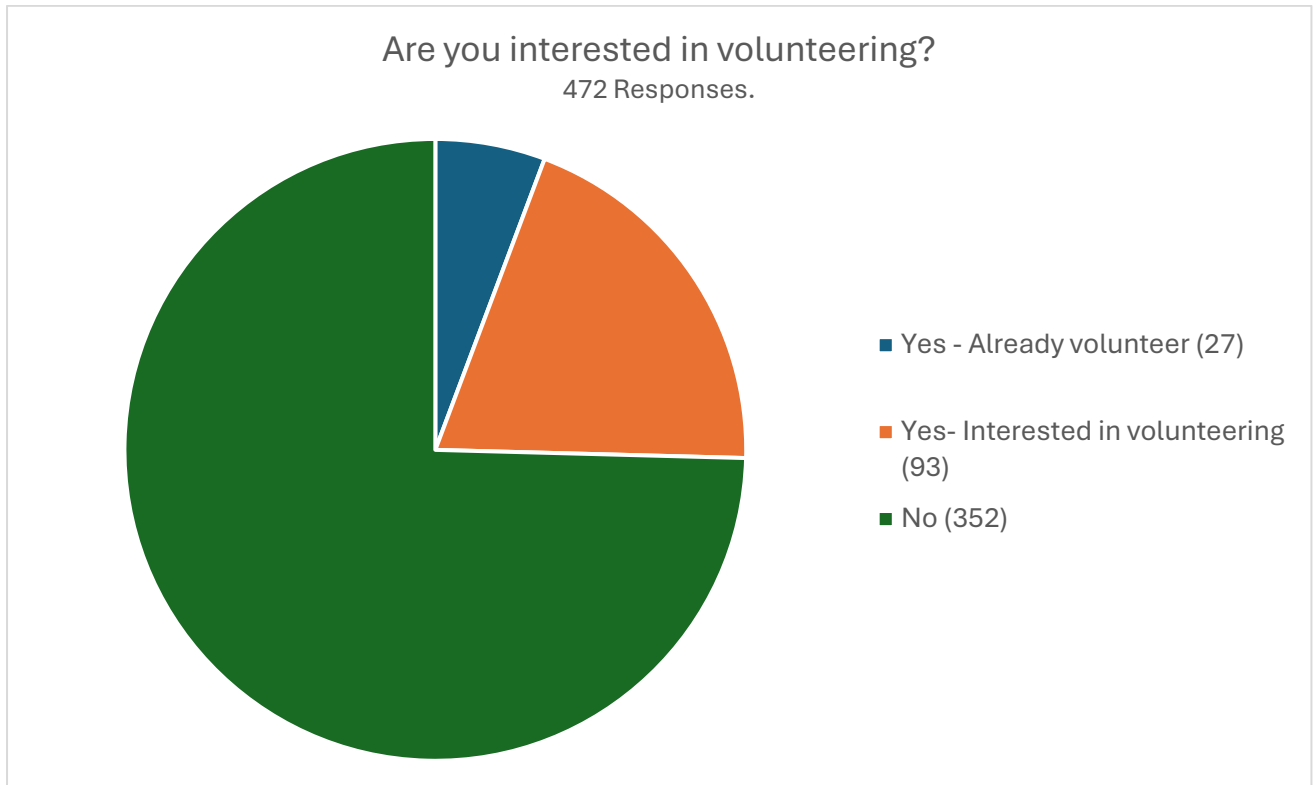
Many were concerned about the lack of accessible bridges (92 /19.5%) and picnic benches (86/18.2%) on site and respondents would like enhanced signage, QR codes, speaking signs, or apps for site navigation and education (84/17.8% respondents).

28/5.9% of respondents thought there was a need for handrails.



Question 18: Are you interested in volunteering?

352/74.6% were not interested in volunteering. 93/19.7% were interested in volunteering although only 86 provided contact information. 27/5.7% of respondents already volunteer at Gala Policies.



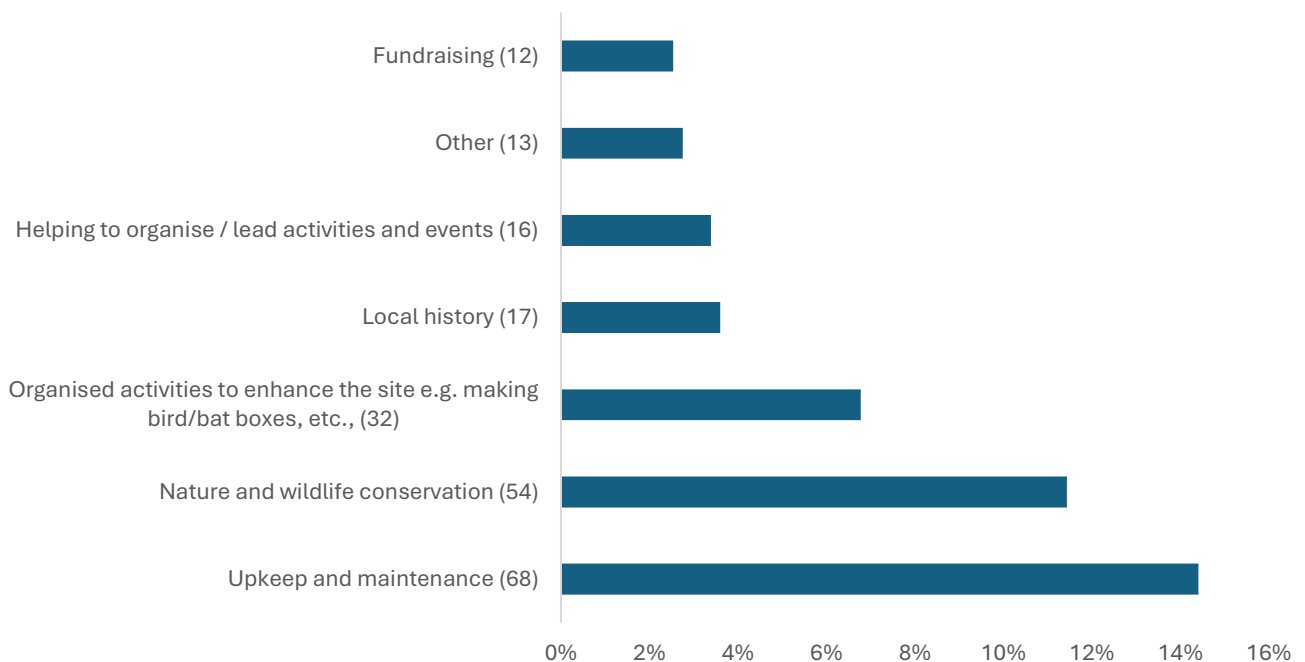
19: Which of the following activities would you be most interested in doing as a volunteer?

The most popular volunteer activity, reflecting a strong interest in hands-on tasks to preserve and improve the site was upkeep and maintenance (68/14.4%), with nature and wildlife conservation (54/11.4%) a close second. 32/6.8% were interested in making bird boxes, creating wildlife habitats, and ranger training.

Local history attracted 17/3.6%, organising activities and events 16/3.4% and fundraising 12/2.5%.

Which of the following activities would you be most interested in doing as a volunteer?

121 Responses. Multiple answers allowed.



Question 20. Do you have any final thoughts about the Gala Policies?

There were 277 comments to this question which have been organised into 13 themes below

Family-Friendly Spaces and Play Areas

There were suggestions for the creation of more family-friendly spaces for picnics and play such as open grassy areas around the pond and safe places for children to play in woodland. The idea of creating low-maintenance play areas that blend with the natural surroundings (e.g., wooden play equipment or areas created from fallen trees) were popular, as long as the development wouldn't interfere with wildlife or the overall ecosystem.

Some people mention the loss of park space in Scott Park and want to ensure there are still accessible areas for children to play.

Accessibility

There is a strong desire to make the Gala Policies more accessible to people with mobility issues, including those using wheelchairs, mobility scooters, or pushing buggies. Several residents stated that they or their loved ones have difficulty accessing much of the site due to rough terrain, muddy paths, and uneven surfaces.

Powered wheelchair users and people with balance issues have specifically mentioned that the current paths are not suitable for them, and they are unable to enjoy the full extent of the

Policies. Improving accessibility would allow people with disabilities and health issues, families with young children, and elderly residents to better enjoy the space.

Suggestions for improving paths included upgrading existing walkways to be smoother, more even, and less muddy. Creating new paths and better parking arrangements more suited to wheelchairs and mobility scooter users. There were suggestions around installing cats' eyes or reflective markers for safer use of the paths at night and for increased signage or apps for those with hearing and sight impairments.

People also recommended more seating, especially in scenic areas, to allow those with health issues or the elderly to access to frequent rest stops.

Balancing Development with Natural Preservation

There is a desire for minimal intervention that maintains the Policies' natural character while still addressing the key issues, of safety, accessibility, and cleanliness.

Whilst many residents want to see improvements and more facilities, there's a strong sentiment to preserve the natural beauty of the Gala Policies. The idea of turning the area into an entertainment facility or overdeveloping it is not widely supported, with many people advocating for a balance between improvement and preservation.

There are concerns about the encroachment of development on the Policies, especially in light of the new school development at Gala Academy. Many respondents felt that both the Policies and Scott Park are essential to the community and should not be sacrificed for further development. The message was clear: development for development's sake was not viewed as an improvement if it threatened the unique character of the Gala Policies and the natural green space it offers.

There was a strong sentiment of wanting to maintain the Policies as a natural woodland. Many people liked the wild, untamed character of the area, which included aging trees, scrubland, and areas of tall grass. There was clear opposition to creating solid, paved paths that might detract from the woodland experience.

While the majority of responses are in favour of preserving the space as it is, there was also recognition that certain developments could enhance the experience for all users, as long as they were thoughtfully and sustainably undertaken and did not compromise the sites natural state.

The idea of creating informal zones for different activities (such as mountain biking, walking, or events) were welcomed but the idea of adding too many human-centric features, such as formal parks or increased access points, were viewed as disadvantageous.

Respondents stressed the importance of maintaining the Gala Policies as a retreat from urban life and a place where people could connect with nature. There were fears that further losses (area of Scott Park) or developments (e.g., for parking, new roads, encroachment of new

school facilities) along the boundaries could be of serious detriment to the site. There was clear preference for maintaining a balance between recreational use and environmental conservation.

Educational Resource

Many respondents highlighted the importance of using the Gala Policies as an educational resource for local schools and children and emphasised the opportunity for children to connect with nature, learn about wildlife, and engage in practical, hands-on learning in the natural environment. It was thought that outdoor classrooms could help local schools teach children the value of the Gala Policies, fostering respect for the space and potentially reducing antisocial behaviour.

Teachers and staff from local schools (St Margaret's RC Primary, Balmoral Primary) expressed a desire for more opportunities for educational programs, such as outdoor learning, and better facilities to support such activities (e.g., safe, screened off areas for Forest Schools, natural benches from fallen timber, and rudimentary, natural looking shelters for bad weather) whilst ensuring these spaces are safe and free from hazards such as dog mess, glass and litter.

People appreciated how the Gala Policies bring the community together, both as a space for relaxation and for educational activities, and there was a desire for continued collaboration and community involvement with local schools and groups to ensure its future.

Many respondents referred to the wildlife value of the Gala Policies and would like to see more educational initiatives, such as signage to inform visitors about the local wildlife and heritage trees. One suggestion is to reinstate a natural barrier at the back of the pond to support a wildlife shelter. Similarly, providing educational tools like QR codes, bird boxes, and viewing areas at the pond could make the space more engaging and informative for children and school groups.

One suggestion to reduce future antisocial behaviour was to teach children how to use the space responsibly, instilling values about nature, wildlife, and community care. This would help nurture a future generation of visitors who appreciate and take care of the area.

Multi-Use and Recreation

Many users mentioned the diverse recreational opportunities the Gala Policies offer, from walking and cycling to mountain biking and family activities. Respondents made several suggestions in the survey for enhanced facilities including:

- The Policies are appreciated by families, especially for activities like walking, exploring the pond, and playing in nature. Some respondents suggest adding more family-friendly amenities such as seating areas, play equipment (e.g., natural play structures such as a balance trail or wobbly bridges), a safe area for children to explore, and a small, sheltered area to protect from bad weather but only in designated areas, to maintain the woodland's integrity.

- Cycling groups, like Cycling Without Age Scotland, expressed interest in using the Policies for their Tri-shaw rides, which take elderly residents out during the summer but improvements to the paths would be required.
- There was some support for creating a mountain bike pump track aimed at young people or a skills area to help them learn the basics before progressing to more advanced trails at places like Gala Hill, Ladhope, and Glentress. Respondents thought this would provide a safe space for young cyclists and attract families. A few believed separate trails for different activities (e.g., cycling trails separate from walking paths) were the answer.
- The idea of highlighting connected routes such as Gala Hill, Holly Bush, and the Southern Upland Way was also suggested, offering a more extensive network for walkers and cyclists.
- While some propose the introduction of play areas for younger children, there was a clear desire to maintain a balance between nature, wildlife, and play spaces. Many want to see minimal disruption to the natural environment, with suggestions that any play equipment should blend seamlessly with the woodland, avoiding bright colours or large-scale constructions.
- Several comments reflect the belief that there are other areas within the town (e.g., Scott Park) that can serve as play parks, and the Gala Policies should remain a more natural, wildlife-friendly area.
- Some suggestions were made for creating more social spaces and events in the Gala Policies, such as a small café, orienteering, foraging courses, art installations and summer fairs where people could gather and enjoy the space. This would encourage more people to visit and help foster a sense of community in the area especially for those who might not otherwise use the outdoor facilities available.

Tree Management Balmoral Avenue Boundary

Many residents were worried about the height and growth of trees near their properties (Balmoral Avenue residents). The trees block sunlight, creating damp gardens, and cause safety concerns due to their height and instability in strong winds. There was strong desire for a tree management program that would maintain the trees without removing them, to ensure safety and allow more sunlight into gardens.

Some residents would prefer trees to be felled only if they are directly impacting their properties (e.g., blocking light, interfering with TV reception, or causing safety concerns due to wind).

A common sentiment is that fallen trees should be left to rot unless they are blocking paths or causing safety risks.

Long-Term Care, Improvements and Maintenance

There is a perception that the council has not been fully engaged with the long-term care and improvement of the Gala Policies. Some respondents felt the area was neglected and that greater action was needed to ensure it remains a safe and valuable space for the community. It was suggested that any future investments should be mindful of long-term sustainability and include local involvement perhaps through volunteer groups or community councils, to ensure decisions aligned with community values and ecological priorities.

Many respondents are in favour of a management plan that focuses on maintaining and enhancing the ecological value of the Policies, rather than transforming it into a formal park or recreational space. Key recommendations include succession planting, careful path management, and avoiding over-zealous tidying that could disrupt habitats. There were calls for more inviting entrances to the Gala Policies, particularly tidying up verges, rusted railings and improving the overall first impression of the space.

Preservation of the Natural Environment

There is a strong sentiment to preserve the natural state of the Gala Policies, whilst enhancing its accessibility and usefulness for children and families. Many people are concerned about overdevelopment or the introduction of features that could disrupt the many wildlife habitats, tranquil environment and woodland charm.

Some respondents called for the Gala Policies to remain 'untouched'. The Gala Policies were viewed as a natural oasis that should be preserved in its current state. Many respondents highlighted its importance for both wildlife and people, stressing that it is one of the few remaining green spaces in Galashiels where people could experience nature without commercial interference.

Ensuring that the Policies remain a safe haven for wildlife and a valuable green space for people is a priority, with a focus on maintaining its semi-natural character and making it more welcoming for everyone through environmental stewardship.

There is strong support for maintaining the woodland and its wildlife, with concerns about the impact of any developments, such as removing undergrowth or creating larger, open grassy areas that could disrupt habitats. It was thought that efforts should be made to ensure the area remains a safe haven for wildlife, including hedgehogs, birds, and deer with minimal interventions to improve accessibility, such as clearing overgrowth or ensuring pathways are safe and passable.

Preservation of wildflower meadows and wildlife habitats by avoiding the disruption of native plants and the extension of paths (particularly solid, surfaced paths) into sensitive areas was key. As was a desire to see fallen trees left to rot naturally, except when blocking paths as this would support the natural ecological processes in the woodlands.

Suggestions to expand woodland or encourage wildflower diversity were popular, with people advocating for "untidy" areas, deadwood, and long grass, which support biodiversity.

Tree care and protection of veteran oaks and other mature trees were mentioned, with a focus on sustaining biodiversity through thoughtful management (e.g., succession planting).

Residents were concerned about the long-term management of the site, suggesting that a succession plan for the trees and plants is needed to ensure Gala Policies thrives in the future. There was also concern for the preservation of native species. Respondents wanted to see wildlife, including birds, deer, red squirrels, and pollinators, preserved, with specific suggestions such as grey squirrel control to protect red squirrels and doing more to encourage endangered species such as hedgehogs.

Ideas for enhancing the space and improving wildlife habitats without significant development included: limiting new paths or grassy areas to avoid disturbing wild undergrowth, which is crucial for wildlife habitats, native planting, wildlife education, expanding wildflower meadows, adding native trees, and introducing more wildlife-friendly features, such as restoring natural barriers around the pond for shelter. People also felt that community events that foster a greater connection to the natural environment would be beneficial.

Many respondents express a desire to protect the pond area, which some believe is becoming overgrown, and to preserve its role as a habitat for local wildlife.

Antisocial Behaviour

Antisocial behaviour, such as vandalism and fires, were mentioned as major concerns. Some respondents believed that a police officer, dog warden or ranger presence could help deter littering, unauthorised use of motor vehicles and irresponsible dog ownership. Others suggest more community-driven action, such as coordinating litter picks, educational campaigns or involving local schools in fostering a sense of pride, ownership and respect for the space could help curb antisocial behaviour.

Some respondents felt that any improvements made to the Policies must consider the risk of vandalism, noting that new infrastructure such as benches, tables and bins could be damaged which would deter further investment. Respondents remarked that volunteer groups should not be left to carry the responsibility of managing antisocial behaviour. More support from the local council was needed, and regular communication with the community could help to address concerns around the lack of respect for public spaces.

There was also mention of gaps in the fencing around the school, which was believed to encourage students to use shortcuts through the Policies, potentially contributing to littering and anti-social behaviour.

Volunteer Engagement

The volunteer effort to maintain and improve the area is highly valued and the comments reveal a strong sense of community pride for the Gala Policies. However, many residents have expressed frustration with the lack of positive engagement and the negativity in certain

community spaces like social media pages which have become a source of tension and frustration.

Negative experiences have made it harder for some people to contribute and has deterred potential volunteers who have felt 'unwelcome' or have been discouraged by intimidation or unfriendly behaviour from within the community itself.

There's strong desire for the community to come together in a more positive, constructive way rather than through fostering conflict. A more supportive and welcoming atmosphere is needed to encourage wider community participation.

There was recognition that volunteer-run initiatives, such as maintaining tracks, etc., were not sustainable in the long term. It was felt that many local volunteers are already stretched with other commitments, so a long-term, council-led solution was needed to ensure the site could thrive.

Health and Safety Concerns

Health and safety were of particular concern to many respondents around the use of tools like chainsaws and motor vehicles in the woodland. Respondents suggest that people using such equipment should be properly qualified, insured, equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) and the area cordoned to avoid accidents.

Further concerns were raised regarding partially fallen trees and areas with high branches that might present hazards. There was also mention of unsafe discarded objects, such as barbed wire, glass, bottles and discarded needles which pose a risk to both people and animals.

Several people pointed out that the main paths (drive area) needed upgrading and regular maintenance. Whilst preserving the natural woodland was important, there was recognition that well-maintained paths were essential for safety especially during bad weather or when paths become boggy, given the high levels of use.

The pond was mentioned as an area needing attention, with some residents suggesting it should be made safer for children through a new viewing area.

Improved Litter Control

A consistent theme across all responses is the need for better litter management. The presence of litter, especially from school pupils, is a significant issue, with many pointing out that litter decreases during school holidays. The lack of sufficient bins is a common complaint, with suggestions for more dog waste bins and general waste bins to reduce litter and dog mess.

The idea of regular litter-picking sessions involving local students (particularly from Gala Academy) is also suggested to instil a sense of community responsibility.

The community felt that the existing amenities should respect both human and wildlife needs, with special attention to preventing food litter and dog waste.

Concerns Over Dogs and Dog Waste

One of the most common practical concerns is the presence of dog waste and there is a need for clean, safe spaces, especially when schools or families bring children to the site. More dog poo bins and perhaps designated dog-friendly areas (e.g. dog park) could help alleviate these issues. Some users noted the challenges of walking with dogs without proper waste disposal options close at hand.

Several residents suggest that stronger actions are needed from the council to address this issue, such as better enforcement of rules particularly around irresponsible dog ownership.