

Outdoor Partnerships Annual User Survey 2023



Shropshire's
**GREAT
OUTDOORS**

The Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships Service is part of Shropshire Council. The service maintains and develops recreational access, conserves and enhances the natural environment and encourages people to be active outdoors. The annual survey considers the use, maintenance and protection of public rights of way, country parks, countryside and heritage sites, greenspaces and play areas.

The survey ran for 10 weeks between
29 May 2023 and 6 August 2023

319 people completed the survey



92%

Of respondents give 'improve health/exercise' as the main reason for enjoying the great outdoors

98% of respondents use footpaths, bridleways and other rights of way. **69%** visit countryside sites and **18%** participate in outdoor partnerships volunteering activity.

90%

Of respondents say 'walking' is one of their main activities when using outdoor partnership provision.

Other activities include

- Walking the dog (43%)
- Family activity (25%)
- Cycling (25%)
- Childrens play (12%)
- Horse riding (12%)

79%

of the survey respondents use outdoor partnerships provision once a week or more. This has reduced from 83% last year.

69%

use outdoor partnerships provision for 2 hours or more. This has increased from 67% last year.

41% of respondents are members or a local walking group, **30%** in a community or volunteer group and **17%** in a riding group.

Top reasons for joining walking groups and other outdoor groups (e.g. cycling, riding):

- To make friends (50%)
- To learn new walks/routes (55%)
- To get more active (45%)



69%

of people enjoy the great outdoors with a dog, friends or family. 10% with an organised group .

19%

enjoy the great outdoors alone.

When people last used Shropshire's rights of way network or parks and countryside sites.....

- 92% felt better for taking some exercise
- 85% enjoyed themselves and want to do more outdoors
- 35% found out more about the community
- 48% discovered something new

Example comments:

"Leisure, relaxation, escape from the daily routine"

"I work from home and go for a walk every day before starting work, as it helps me think about the day ahead"

Survey respondents top outdoor facilities:

- Circular walks (84%)
- Countryside parks and sites walks (64%)
- Log distance walking routes (50%)
- Circular bridleways (46%)
- Local parks and sites walks (54%)
- Linear Walks (A to B) (43%)

41% are satisfied with the rights of way network in their area.

49% are satisfied with parks and sites in their area.

25% of people have noticed improvements to the rights of way network and **13%** have noticed improvements to the parks and sites, in their area in the last 12 months.

1% of respondents said they are inactive and **7%** of respondents moderately inactive. This is the same as last year.

58% of respondents said they were either active or very active now. This has increased from **55%** a year ago.

Respondents were asked how they **found out about activities and facilities** within the great outdoors. These included:

- Social media feeds (33%)
- Printed leaflets and guidebooks (32%)
- Local websites (32%)
- Shropshire Great Outdoors website (25%)

Volunteering is one way to enjoy the great outdoors with **29%** of respondents saying they are involved in volunteering. Volunteer roles include:

- Parish paths partnership (11%)
- 'Friends of' groups (3%)
- Parish wardens (3%)

We asked about **improvements** to encourage more use of rights of way, country parks and heritage sites. Suggestions included:

- More circular walks
- Better signage
- More online guides and interpretation
- More information and map boards
- More walks with gates rather than stiles

Obstacles to enjoying the great outdoors:

- Overgrown vegetation (51%)
- Lack of signposts/ way markers (38%)
- Dog mess (26%)
- Physical obstructions (24%)
- Intimidating livestock (37%)
- Problems with stiles (29%)



When asked for the specific reasons if activity levels have decreased in the last year the main reasons were

- Ill Health (32%)
- Lack of companion (15%)

Example comments

"Struggling a bit with arthritis"

"I am worried about passing cows on public rights of way now I have a dog"

98% of people report that getting into the great outdoors has a positive or very positive impact on their **quality of life**.

Survey respondents commented on the range of other outdoor activities they participate in such as running, hill walking, family wildlife and nature activities, litter picking, out door swimming and many more....

Example comments:

"Very lucky to have what we've got in Shropshire. Its a wonderful and beautiful county"

"Continue to keep existing pathways open and clear by working with landowners to develop a welcoming attitude."

"Access to the countryside needs to be preserved. Too much is being buried under housing developments - once it's gone, we can't get it back"

"Too much litter. Need signs to encourage people to take litter home including dog poo bags"

"We moved to Shropshire 1 year ago. We have found the network of paths for walking excellent with endless options - we create our own routes from maps so don't need someone else to suggest routes. But cycling options are limited where we are by the A49. More off-road alternatives to main roads would be useful"

"Encourage more wildlife"