

Nature Recovery Survey Conducted in November and December 2021

Executive Summary

The survey was completed by 70 respondents. By far the majority of these stated that:

- It is easy to connect with wildlife, However, for many this means driving to areas of the New Forest
- Nature is important to their wellbeing
- They are supportive of a Nature Recovery Plan that protects or increases the green spaces in Ringwood

Improvements to existing green spaces were suggested, in particular

- Wildflower meadows – especially along roads and in estates, should not be mown more than twice a year.
- Wildlife corridor and habitats – around the whole town. Bird boxes were mentioned as specific habitats.
- Native trees – Hedging was also mentioned, and both were thought desirable along main roads.

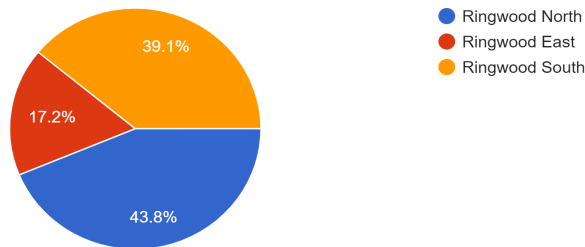
There was concern about the impact that new housing developments are having on nature and wildlife corridors

Detailed Results

There were 70 responses, 65 of whom were from the Ringwood Parish

Which Ward do you live in?

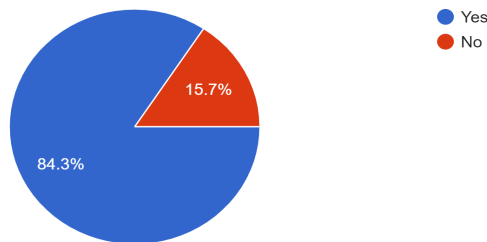
64 responses



Almost 85% of people said that it was easy to connect with wildlife where they lived

Is it easy to connect with wildlife where you live?

70 responses



Why?

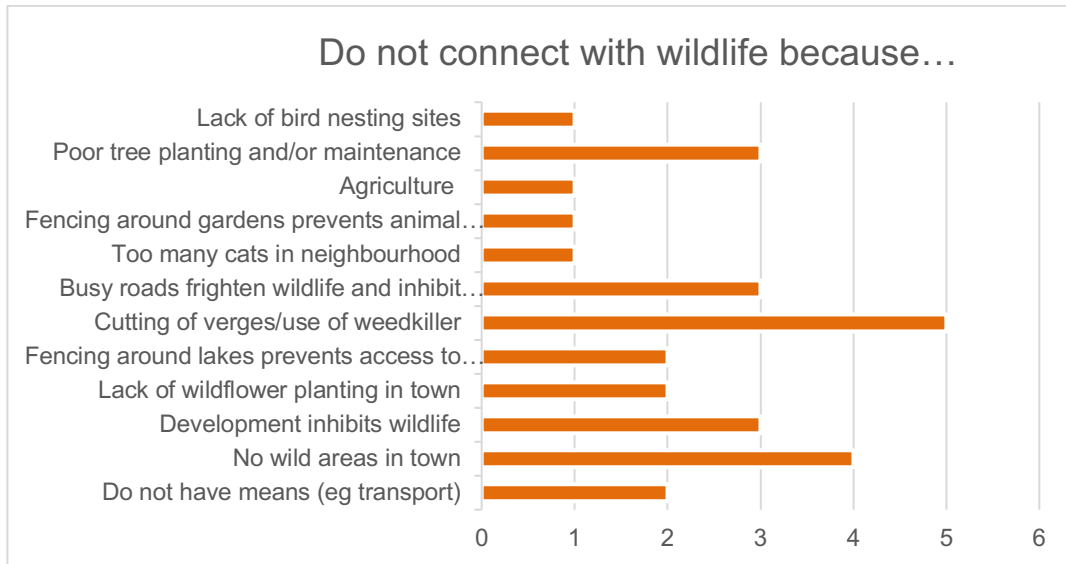
- All those who replied 'Yes' to this question, gave the reason as either living within or close to green spaces, and most went on to mention specific location(s).
- New Forest is, not surprisingly, the largest category – 35% of respondents mentioned it. However, many of those who access the NF referred to driving there – either because too far to walk or, for example, 'roads are unsafe for 4-year old' or 'no easy walking links to New Forest'.
- Other includes: Hightown Lake, Bickerley and Moors Valley.
- Unspecified includes: 'fields', 'green spaces', 'the countryside', 'trees in our area'.

Many who responded that they do not connect with wildlife mentioned more than one reason for this.

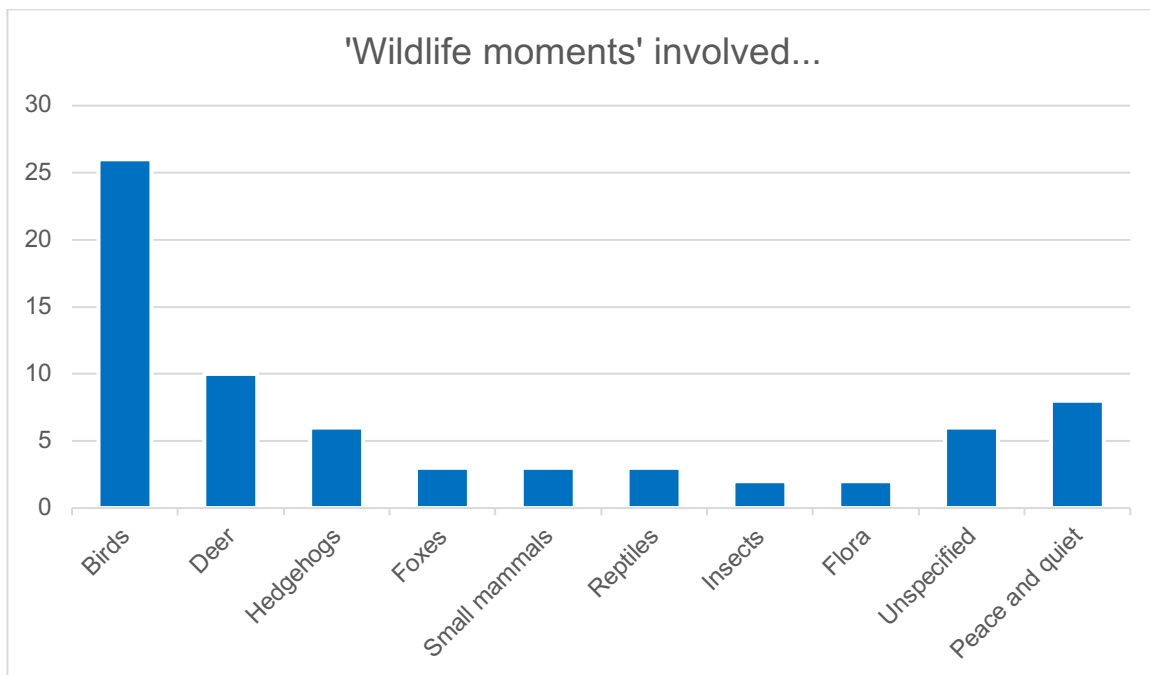
- There seems to be a general perception that there is little wildlife in Ringwood, itself.
- Interestingly, the most common reason cited was the practice of cutting verges and one respondent mentioned 'spraying weed killer around telegraph poles etc'.
- Generally, more tree planting, better tree maintenance (particularly the tree corridor along the A31) and more wildflower planting in town would be appreciated.
- Development is clearly a concern, both in terms of what existing development has done ('Lots of infill builds disrupt connected gardens, wildlife find it difficult to forage') and in

proposed development ('It is easy at the moment as there is a nearby field as a route out to the Forest, sadly this is earmarked for a large number of houses so will soon be destroyed.'

- Connected with this, lack of wildlife routes, such as hedges, in residential areas was mentioned as a concern and a hindrance for wildlife.



Was there a wildlife moment?



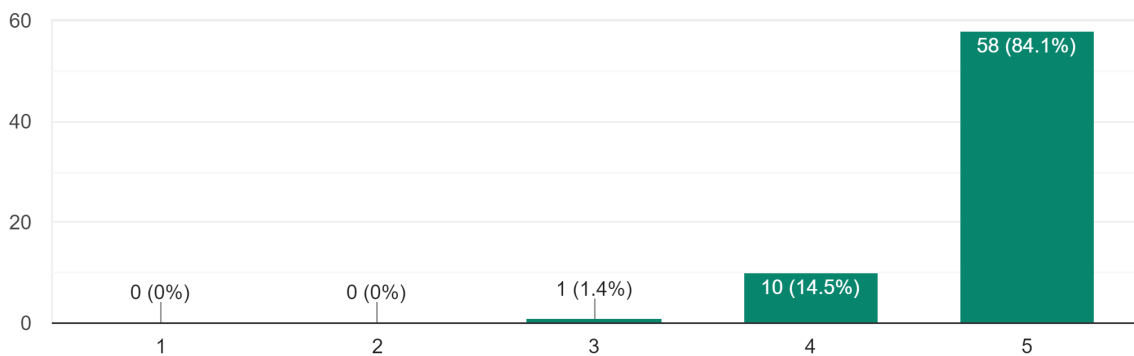
- Many who responded referred to more than one special moment.
- Birds were the most quoted providers of 'wildlife moments', among those species mentioned were owls, starlings, nightingales, song thrushes, red kites, kingfishers. Hearing birdsong was described almost as frequently as sightings.
- Small mammals include bats, squirrels, rabbits, badgers.

- Unspecified includes comments such as ‘Any wildlife viewing is precious’, ‘Everyday there is something special’, ‘water and colours etc’.
- Peace and quiet – Many whose ‘wildlife moments’ involved birds, mentioned that lack of traffic sound in lockdown made hearing birdsong more possible. Many other respondents referred to the circumstances of lockdown and talked about ‘having safe space at a time of restrictions’, ‘the lack of traffic noise was wonderful’, ‘because I wasn’t in a rush I noticed more’ and ‘hearing wildlife without motor and air traffic pollution’.

How important is nature to your wellbeing?

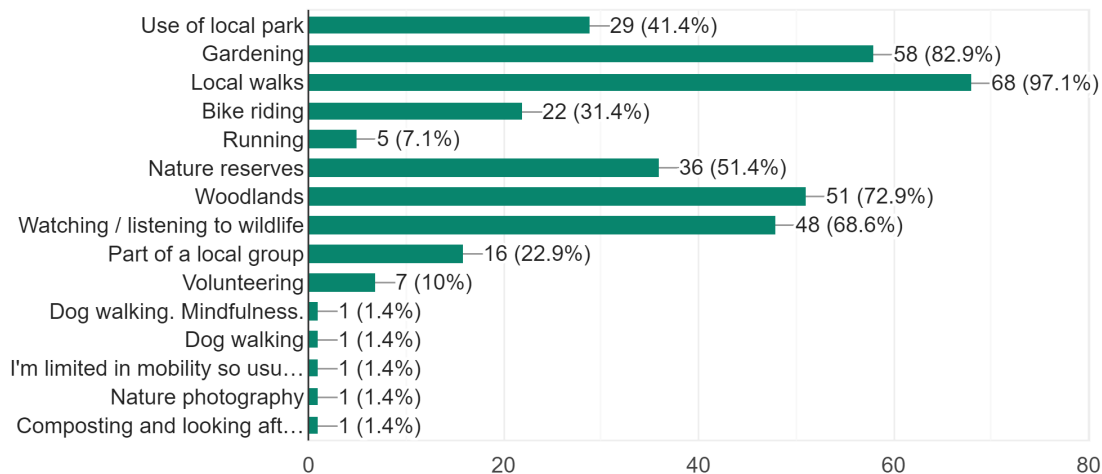
How important is nature to your wellbeing? (physical or mental health)

69 responses

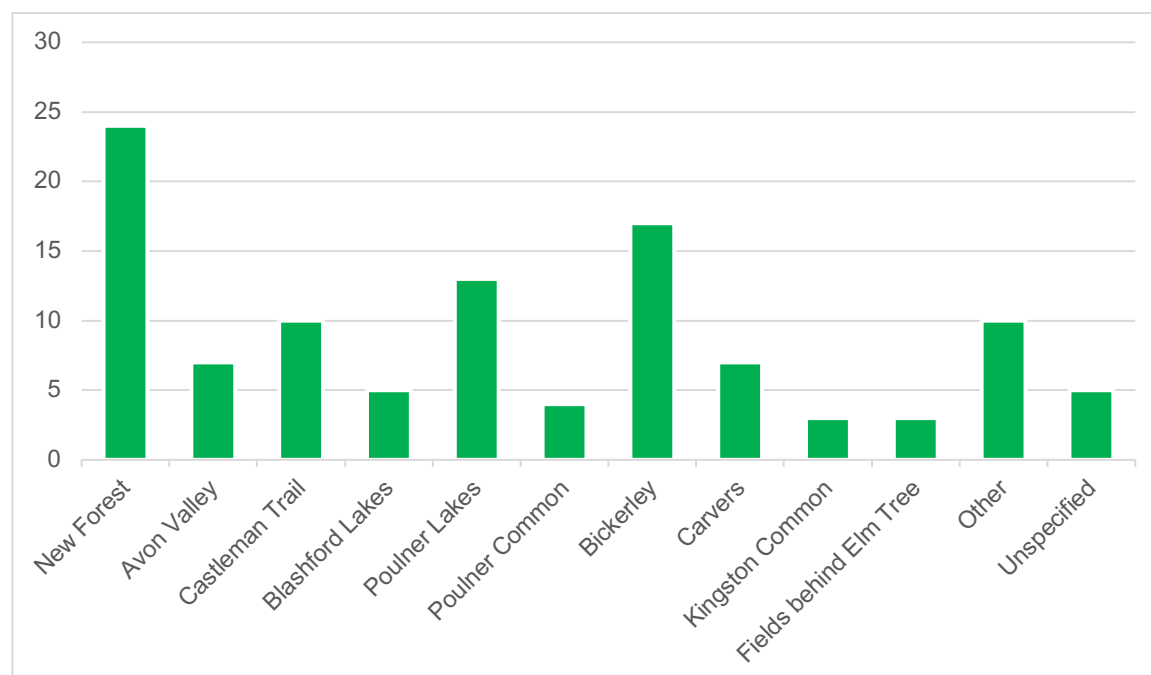


How do you engage with nature? (tick all that apply)

70 responses

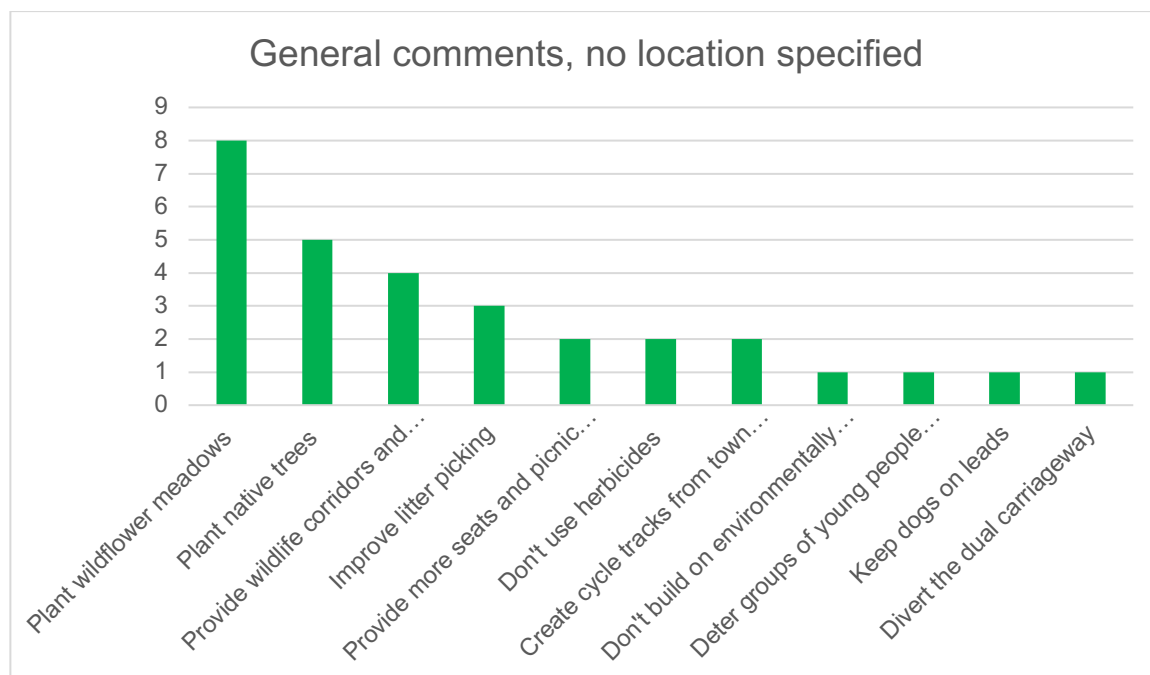


What local green spaces are important to you?

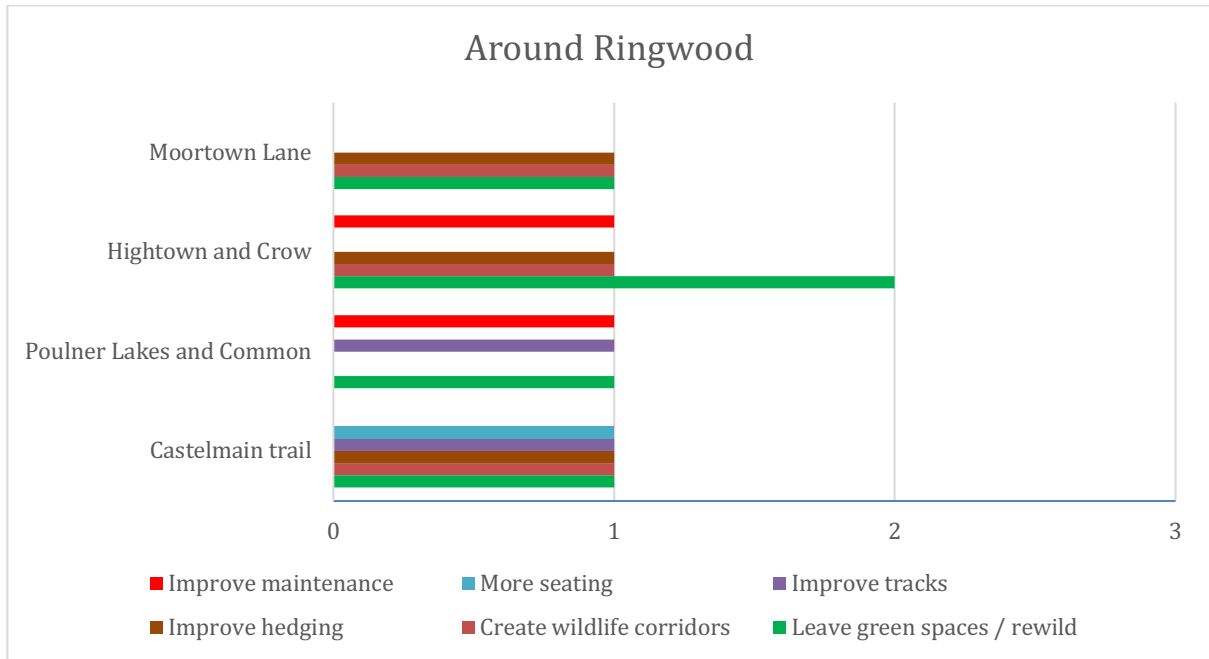


- This question, not surprisingly, has resulted in many of the same responses as the first part of the first question – ie 'Is it easy to connect with wildlife where you live? Why?' Almost all those who responded to this actually answered the question 'Where?' – so there is a lot of overlap here. However, more locations were referred to in this section, most likely because they are used for relaxation, recreation and dog walking but are not necessarily associated with connecting to wildlife.
- New Forest - As in the responses to question 1, this is the favourite 'green space'. Many respondents simply wrote 'the New Forest' or 'the National Park'. Included here, also, are specific places within the national park mentioned, e.g., Smuggler's Road, Linford Bottom and Godshill.
- Other includes 'My garden' (2), Crow Arch Lane (2), Moors Valley (2), Hightown Lakes (2), Hatchett Trail (1), Ringwood Churchyard (1), Poulner playing field (1).
- Unspecified – includes comments such as 'Parks and all existing green spaces'; 'There aren't enough open spaces and the ones that are there are very tiny'; 'More important are the little pockets we have dotted about that are currently just mown to death'; 'All local green spaces are important to me but too many have no trees or bushes and are essentially mown deserts. Habitats, food sources for wildlife plus shading, cooling and visual pleasure etc are all absent'.

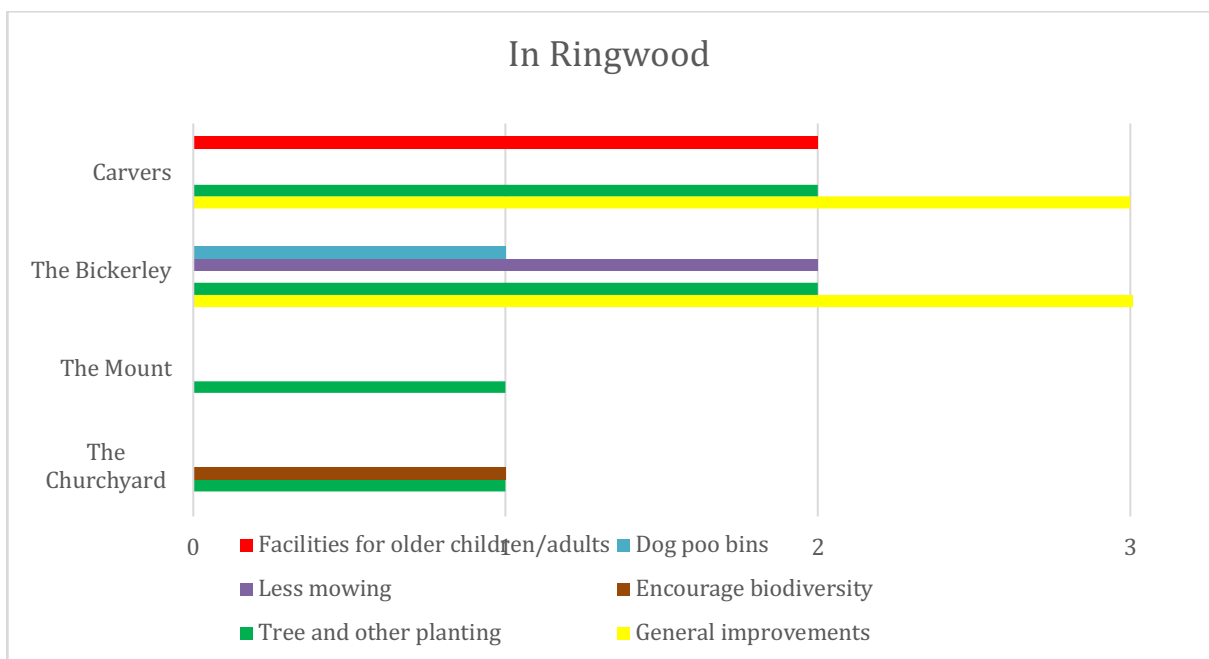
Are there any green spaces local to you that you would like to see improved?



- Wildflower meadows – Points made included: especially along roads and in estates, should not be mown more than twice a year.
- Wildlife corridor and habitats – Those who mentioned corridors thought they should be around the whole town. Bird boxes were mentioned as specific habitats.
- Native trees – Hedging was also mentioned, and both were thought desirable along main roads.
- Litter picking – Graffiti was also referred to, as was fly tipping.
- Groups of young people – Smoking, littering, using drugs, intimidating, etc were all concerns of one respondent.



- Most answers were very specific – a specific improvement to a specific place. Most, therefore, were only suggested by single respondents. However, the same improvements were suggested in different locations.
- Other locations that were mentioned either for improvement generally (in which case no specific improvement example was given) or mentioned only in connection with one specific improvement:
 - Kingston Common (footpaths impassable)
 - Hightown Common (no specific improvement suggested)
 - Linford Bottom (no specific improvement suggested)
 - Rockford (no specific improvement suggested)
 - Hightown Lakes (no specific improvement suggested)

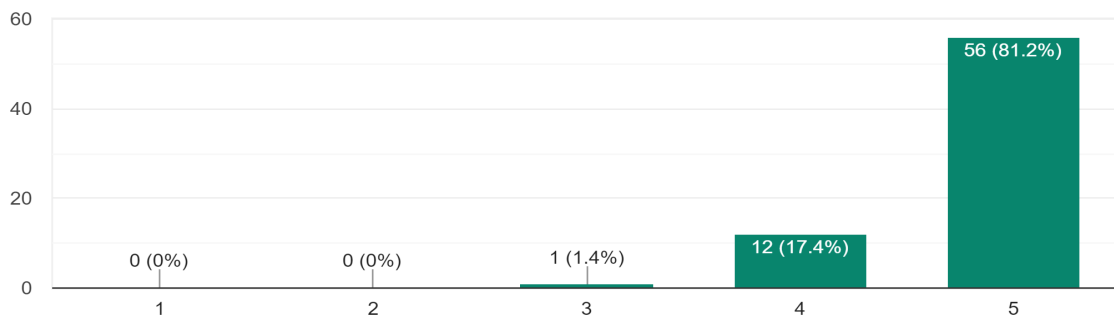


- As above, there were many non-specific responses, suggesting general improvement to areas. These, and more specific suggestions, focused largely on Carvers and The Bickerley, which are clearly much-appreciated spaces, but there is a feeling that they have declined in recent years.
- Generally, tree planting was the most common suggestion for improvement and is seen as multi-beneficial: e.g. improves appearance, improves biodiversity, provides sound barrier from roads, provides shade.
- There were several responses that indicated a negative view of road and residential development, and little faith that anything will be done to improve wildlife and biodiversity in response to it, e.g. '[What I have suggested] needs the council to have a step change in how they see wildlife and biodiversity against amenity. I do not think the council has the will to re-prioritise areas for wildlife and biodiversity, too scared of public reaction.'

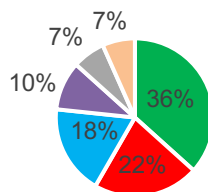
The Importance of Nature Recovery

How important to you is Nature's Recovery; one that makes restoring the natural world a cornerstone of the UK's economic renewal plan?

69 responses



Reasons why nature recovery is essential



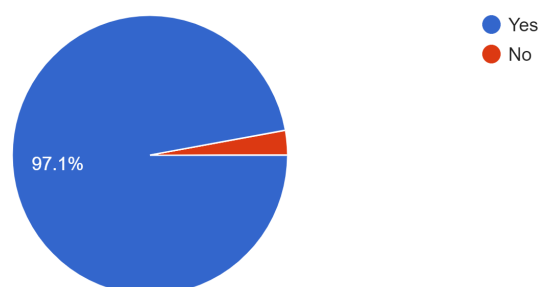
- Belief that balance is essential to avert climate crisis
- Concern about preservation/conservation of species
- Awareness that physical/mental health are improved by connection with nature
- Belief that economic recovery is secondary to nature recovery
- Concern about pollution
- Concern about development of green spaces

- There is huge overlap between all these categories, and respondents' comments reflected that awareness.
- Belief that balance is essential to avert climate crisis – Most respondents recognise the emergency that the planet is facing and believe that only fundamental change can avert that. Many respondents used the word 'balance' and expressed grave concern that the actions of the human race, driven by a focus on the economy and big business, have destroyed that balance. E.g. 'Without it, we can't exist.' 'Upsetting the balance of nature will be catastrophic.'
- Concern about preservation/conservation is clearly central to everything else here, and it underpins the climate emergency.
- Awareness that physical/mental health are improved by connection with nature was perhaps the most 'standalone' set of responses, in that they focused on the benefits to people in the present. Personal anecdotes were shared. Lockdown was mentioned. Cost and resources benefit to the NHS were frequently cited.
- Belief that economic recovery is secondary to nature recovery could also be viewed alongside concerns about climate change and conservation. However, this percentage acknowledges those respondents who, while recognising that a healthy economy is desirable, recognise that it cannot be at the expense of depletion of natural resources, as this will only accelerate climate emergency. E.g. 'Economic renewal is a fallacy unless we respond meaningfully to the climate crisis.'
- Concern about pollution is clearly linked to all other concerns – conservation of species, climate emergency, physical health, in particular. However, it is worthy of inclusion here because it was mentioned in terms of local concerns – especially in relation to the traffic on A31, burning of hazardous waste, bonfires, building practice and agricultural practice.
- Concern about development – as above. It is seen to go hand in hand with concern about erosion of green spaces and biodiversity. E.g. 'Ringwood is being raped by developers at the moment and the local authority are doing nothing to protect the area. This does not bode well to the natural world.'
- Many respondents indicated that making improvements identified in their suggestions would make Ringwood a much more attractive, pleasant, healthy and enjoyable place to live, which would benefit residents and visitors alike. Many stressed that routes into Ringwood could be made much more attractive with more trees, green verges, wildflowers etc, that would represent more clearly what Ringwood is (or should be) about.

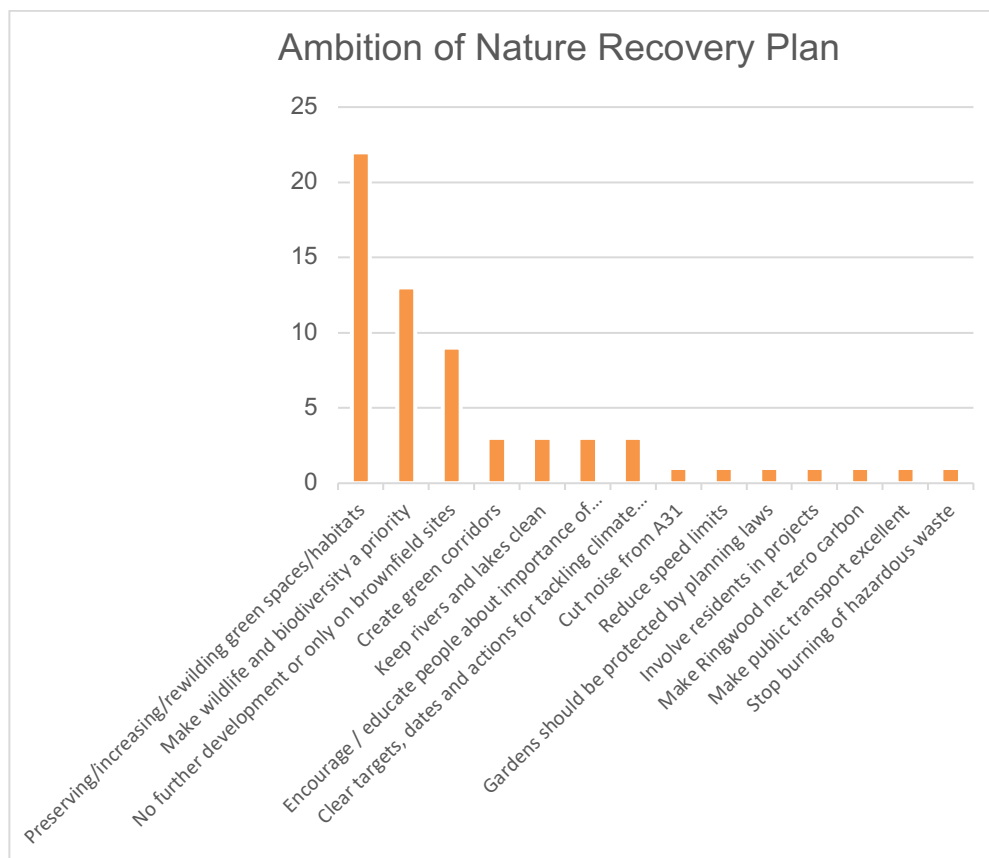
There was significant support for a Nature Recovery Plan

Do you support the idea of a Nature Recovery Plan for Ringwood?

70 responses



And the ambition should be to preserve or increase green spaces



- Green spaces are important to the majority of respondents – both for human access and for wildlife and biodiversity increase. Some said that areas should focus exclusively on wildlife and people should not have access to them. There was a lot of emphasis on creating green spaces where there are none, so that everyone has access to some green space without the need to get in a car.
- Many respondents think that changing attitudes is a priority and that nothing can be accomplished unless wildlife and biodiversity are the top priority – for residents, for visitors, for local politicians and for planners.
- Many are concerned with current and proposed development. Some quite simply said there should be no more, and that Ringwood does not have the infrastructure to support any increase in population. Others expressed that any new development must not impinge on any areas of wildlife habitat at all and should only be permitted on brownfield sites.
- The 15 other suggestions, each expressed by 1-3 respondents, were more specific and – while could have perhaps been included in one the three main response categories – put forward suggestions worthy of note.
- Some respondents stressed the importance of residents being involved in decision-making and the need for like-minded groups to work together. A long-term plan (suggestion 50 years) was also seen as essential if recovery is really going to happen.
- Perhaps the ideas of many can best be expressed in the words of one respondent who expressed the ambition that ‘Ringwood should be in the top quartile for biodiversity and wild green space when compared to other UK towns.’