

Section Three The Wider Environment Around Us



Almost everyone in the community had highly positive things to say about living in such a beautiful area. However, there is a widespread concern that the beauty we have is sometimes threatened by careless and thoughtless behaviour including dumping litter, dog fouling at beauty spots and forest entrances, other rubbish and speeding.

How we use and regard the wider environment

An overview

Some people who attended focus discussions knew of and regularly used forest walks and some footpaths and well-known walks. Those people who were walking enthusiasts had better knowledge of all local walks and had particularly pointed things to say about the state of some footpaths, the need for better signposting and the need to do something about emerging trouble spots such as, the growth of fly tipping at the entrance to some of the forest walks.

Footpaths and rights of way

The survey responses show that 39% think footpaths and rights of way are well maintained and signposted. On the other hand, many people are not sure. 28% think they are not well maintained or signposted.

Table 3.1 Views on maintenance of footpaths

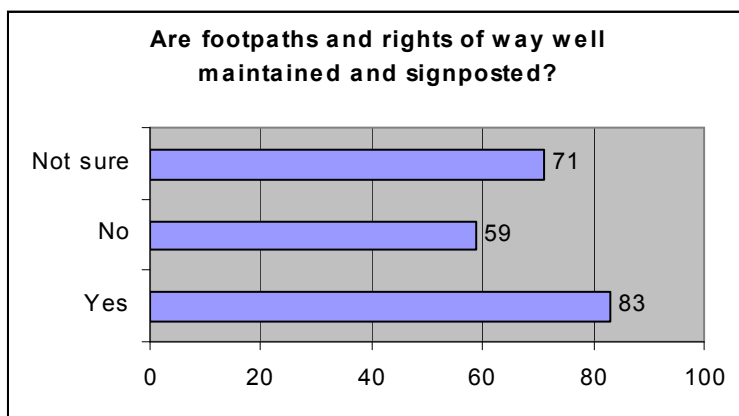
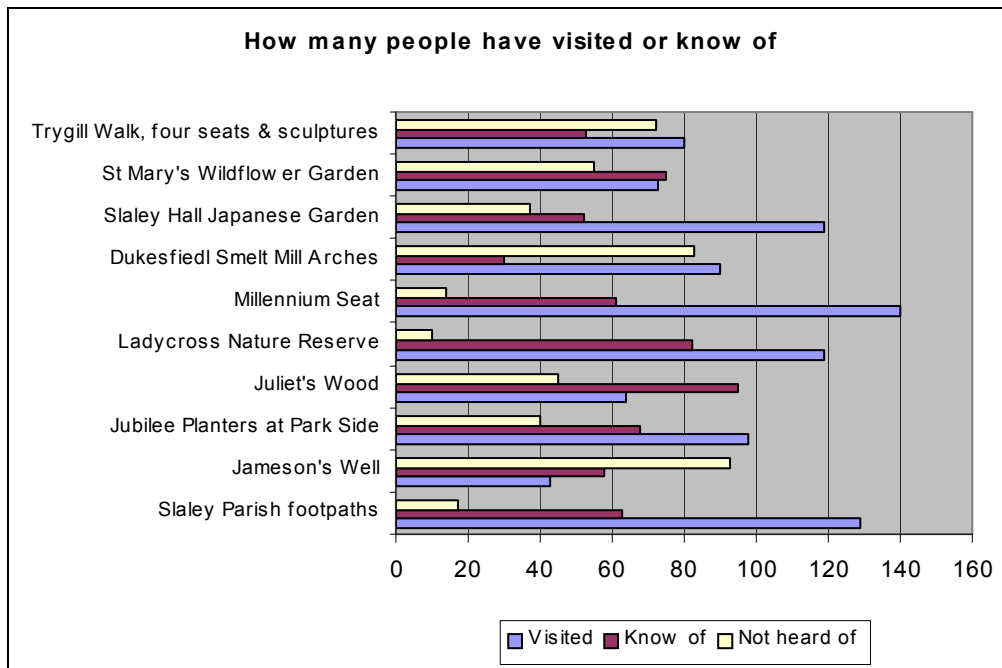


Table 3.2 Knowledge of and familiarity with local places of interest



176 people said they would like to see more signs that told them how to get to places of interest (see table 3.2). As a result, therefore, it seems that although the survey doesn't tell us anything conclusive about the state of maintenance of footpaths and rights of way the fact is that most people don't know where they are and could do with better signage.

Slaley Hall

Opinion is divided on the merits of Slaley Hall. Focus group discussions reflected very different views. Some valued the good golf and facilities. Some of us enjoy the firework displays and the sense that we might meet someone famous because of Slaley Hall. One person said

It's put Slaley on the map

It is generally agreed that Slaley Hall brings business to the local area but the survey indicated that some people think it brings more problems than benefits to people living here. Eight out of the eleven focus group discussions had some negative comments and criticisms. The problems mentioned most regularly in focus discussions and the survey were:

- Adverse impacts on the local environment such as

Light pollution

Noise

Traffic

- Speeding traffic near to and caused by people leaving or going to Slaley Hall (particularly through the village)
- Excessive and too frequent firework displays.

There is also great distrust over possible future housing development at Slaley Hall, largely because existing development has turned out to be different to that anticipated by local people.

Forest problems

Various problems were mentioned, although it is unclear if these have been taken up with Forestry Enterprise or landowners abutting Forest areas. The main problems were:

- Disturbances caused by husky sled racing in the forest
- Unexpected dangers from unauthorised off-road vehicles, including motorbikes, using forest trail and off road tracks
- Tipping rubbish near and in forest entrances (including a fridge on one occasion)
- Dog fouling near entrances to forests
- Litter in Forest areas
- Problems caused by visitors whose dogs are not on leads.

Looking after the countryside and the environment

These subjects were looked at in most depth in a focus group that included farmers, people involved in rural industries and crafts, people with an interest in local heritage and people involved in managing Slaley Hall and, people representing Forest Enterprise. It was generally agreed in this group that dog fouling was a problem everywhere. Forest Enterprise has had serious problems at the forest entrance areas and is considering prosecution for fly tipping.

It was agreed by the farming and forestry people who participated in this group (and also by people in the small business group) that it was necessary to have a good balance between looking after the countryside and making sure it was accessible and could be

‘worked’ by landowners. For example, Ladycross is a working quarry and has to be open for quarrying first. Similarly the forest areas are working forests and tree felling is a regular occurrence.

It was suggested that there was a level of ignorance about matters such as rights of way, how to behave when walking through footpaths and a general lack of knowledge of the country code.

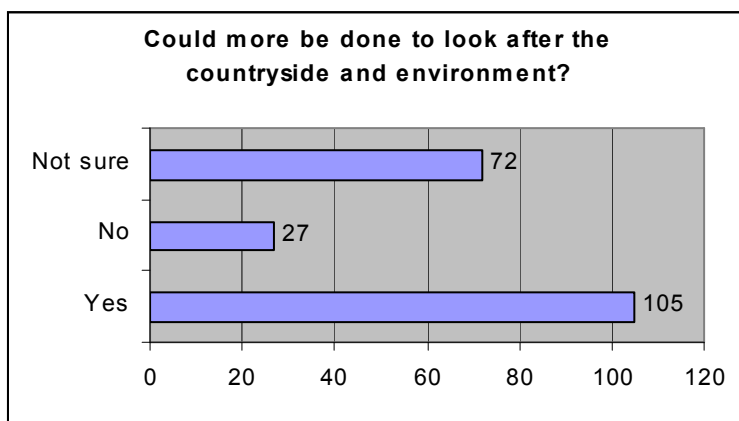
We should also say that many children and adults commented that although we live in a beautiful place, we are often not allowed to walk through it, or we are unsure if we are allowed to. One young person spoke for many when she said:

We have all this open land and countryside and there is nowhere for us to play

Looking after the countryside

A survey question aimed to gauge opinion on the need to do more to look after the countryside and the environment.

Table 3.3 Could more be done to look after the countryside?

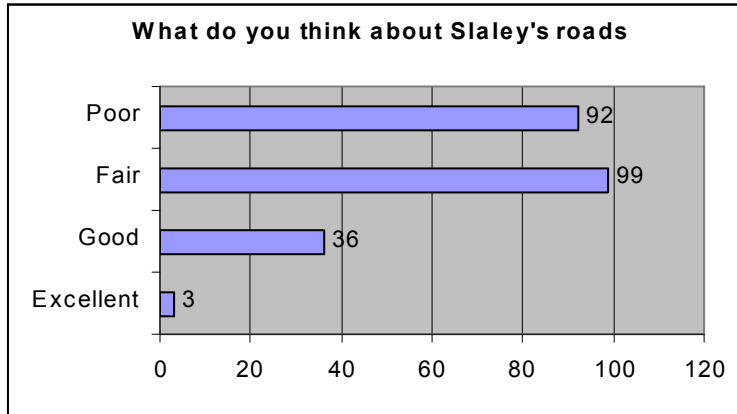


The responses shown in table 3.3 suggest that while the majority think the answer is yes, substantial numbers of people are unsure. Taken together with comments in the focus discussions which suggest that people are concerned and want to discuss possible solutions, it seems that a community discussion on this topic would be helpful.

Local roads

The survey found that Slaley's Roads are generally judged to be in a fair to poor condition. However, comments from a sizeable minority of people who think otherwise indicate that there are specific spots where roads need attention.

Table 3.4 Views on Slaley's roads



Specific roads in need of attention

- Wooley Road – pot holes and no sign posts
- Cornersfield Road to Fell Cottages
- Village to and including Glen Road and the crossroads
- Dukesfield Road
- B6306 (Slaley to Minsteracres especially).
- A68 from Durham border – north, white lines and 'cat's eyes' are hardly visible. Also road from Barley Hill to A68 deep ruts both sides and no white lines.
- Slaley – Hexham
- Kellas Road to Consett
- Access to High Clear complex
- Slaley to Blanchland road, has potholes on sides of road from Village
- Slaley to Riding Mill
- Slaley to Hexham at S-bend near Linnels Wood. Water running across road, froze during winter and caused an accident. Drainage needs to be improved
- Ladycross Bank - problems with drainage and edges

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- Road from Rye Hill
- Whole of village street
- Road from The Glen to Scales Cross
- Access road at the southern perimeter of Slaley Hall
- Espershields Road
- Old Lead Road, very pitted and pot holed.

Focus groups also identified problems such as, collapsing verges, poor drainage and inadequate markings.