

# **Marline Valley Woods SSSI Visitor Survey**

**Report for  
Hastings Borough Council  
by Applied Ecology Ltd**

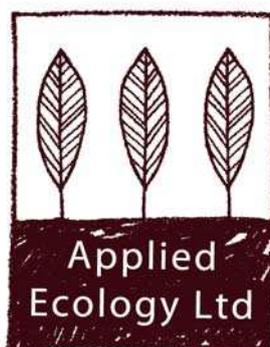
August 2009

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VISITOR SURVEY**

Report for

**Hastings Borough Council**

August 2009

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**Client:** Hastings Borough Council

**Title:** Marline Valley Woods SSSI Visitor Survey

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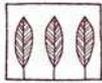
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## Contents

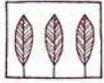
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background.....	1
<b>2</b>	<b>Methods .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Questionnaire .....	2
2.2	Survey .....	2
<b>3</b>	<b>Results.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	General .....	5
3.2	The Questions.....	6
3.3	Other Visitor details.....	14
<b>4</b>	<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>16</b>

### APPENDIX 1 DRAFT QUESTIONS - VISITOR SURVEY MARLINE VALLEY WOODS

### APPENDIX 2 QUESTIONNAIRE

#### List of Figures

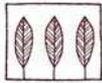
- Figure 1** Site location, access points and pathways  
**Figure 2** Origin of visitors  
**Figure 3** Route usage by visitors



# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1.1 Applied Ecology Ltd (AEL) was commissioned by Hastings Borough Council to undertake a survey of the visitor use of Marline Valley Woods SSSI, Hastings. The site is adjacent to an area known as Land at Breadsell Lane, St Leonards, where the identification of land for development (including housing) is being considered as part of the preparation of Hastings Local Development Framework Core Strategy.
- 1.1.2 Natural England have raised concerns about the proposed development with regard to the potential deleterious effects of increased visitor pressure on the SSSI, which may result from increased housing and human population on land adjacent to it.
- 1.1.3 The present visitor survey was designed to investigate the current level and pattern of visitor use at Marline Woods.



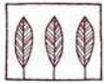
## 2 METHODS

### 2.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

- 2.1.1 Discussions were held with Natural England (NE) in relation to the scope of a questionnaire to be used at Marline Valley Woodlands SSSI. A list of nineteen points for the visitor survey, designed to address the interest of Natural England in current visitor use of the site were supplied (**Appendix 1**). AEL designed a 13-question form accommodating these points.
- 2.1.2 The questionnaire (**Appendix 2**) was designed for ease of use in the field, with the questions and a series of possible answers, mostly with tick-boxes, formatted to fit on one side of a single sheet of paper.
- 2.1.3 On the reverse of the sheet, a map of Marline Valley Woods SSSI and its immediate surroundings was printed so that each visitor's parking and access point, and on-site route could be drawn, either directly by the visitor, or by the surveyor, based on a description of the route given by the respondent.
- 2.1.4 Further information was added by the surveyor to each survey sheet completed, concerning aspects such as the time, weather conditions, group size and numbers of dogs present with the respondent.

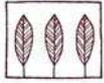
### 2.2 SURVEY

- 2.2.1 Prior to the start of the survey, as an aid to planning the execution of the survey, the site was visited in order to assess access points and pathways used by visitors and to gain some idea of visitor use and distribution.
- 2.2.2 Preliminary inspection of the Ordnance Survey map indicated that two footpaths crossed the SSSI, more or less from east to west (**Figure 1**). It was, at first, assumed that these would prove to be the main pedestrian thoroughfares on which the surveyor should concentrate his work. However, it became apparent during the pre-survey visit that this was far from the case. Bare earth pathways, clearly heavily used, were found throughout much of the site, and visitors to the Marline Valley Woods gained access from several places, especially to the north of the site and from the Queensway, east of the site (**Figure 1**). The two formal footpaths appeared to be relatively under used.
- 2.2.3 It also became clear that the numbers of visitors using the Marline Valley Woods

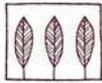


were small and that usually their presence and locations were easily determined owing to the narrowness of the site and the noise that they and, more frequently, their dogs made. Most visitors appeared to walk a large proportion of the length of the site, using paths running along the valley-side through woodland and small fields.

- 2.2.4 Given the large number of potential access points and the relative ease of locating visitors, it was decided that the survey could be best executed by using a single surveyor adopting a 'roving approach', actively patrolling and searching for visitors in either the northern half or the southern half of the site. The northern of the two formal footpaths crossing the site was used as the dividing line between north and south.
- 2.2.5 The survey was conducted in 2009 during the six day period Saturday 25 July – Thursday 30 July; two weekend days and four weekdays. On all six days the survey was carried out between 07.00 hrs – 18.00 hrs, with a one-hour break every two hours; thus eight hours of survey time were conducted each day, totalling 48 hours over the six days. Both halves of the site were covered equally in terms of hours and times of day and week in this way.
- 2.2.6 The 'roving approach' method involved the constant and fairly rapid walking of the major pathways in either the northern or the southern sector of the site, so that each sector was traversed between five and ten times during each two hour survey period. When visitors were seen or heard on other paths, even if they were in the sector (north or south) not being covered by the surveyor at the time, the surveyor actively sought and intercepted them. All were asked if they had encountered other visitors, and though some of them had, there was never an occasion when the surveyor had not already identified them himself.
- 2.2.7 There is no doubt that Marline Valley Woods were visited by members of the public earlier in the morning and later in the evening than the survey period, but casual observations by the surveyor between 06.00 hrs and 07.00 hrs, and between 18.00 hrs and 19.00 hrs did not indicate increased usage during these periods, though it is likely that some individuals visiting at these times did not visit at other times of day and were therefore probably missed by the survey.
- 2.2.8 It was confidently concluded that the majority of visitors to the site during the survey periods were encountered, and that many visitors would have been missed had the surveyor adopted a more static approach, for instance manning



particular access points or sections of path. Where groups, rather than lone visitors were encountered, only one member was questioned, thus the number of responses by the end of the survey was fewer than the total number of visitors to the site. Each questionnaire took just a few minutes to complete but in many cases, informal conversation with the respondent extended the period to about 10 minutes, sometimes longer, during which useful information was received.



## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 GENERAL

#### Effects of days of the week, time of year and weather on visitor patterns

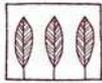
- 3.1.1 The site appeared to be used by visitors a little more on weekend days than on weekdays but no clear or significant pattern of usage was evident (**Table 1**). Heavy rain fell between 07.00hrs & 12.00hrs on Monday 27 July and though visitor numbers were slightly lower than during corresponding times on other days, the difference was not large. The rest of the survey period was characterised by sunny and hot weather, which was unlikely to deter visitors.
- 3.1.2 Dialogue with a number of visitors made it apparent that visitor numbers in the winter and during prolonged spells of wet weather were perceived to be very much lower than those during the period of survey.
- 3.1.3 Numbers of visitors interviewed or noted as repeat visitors during the six days of 4 x 2 hour survey periods are given in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Total numbers of visitors recorded across whole site during each survey period**

Day	0700-09.00	10.00-12.00	13.00-15.00	16.00-18.00	Total visits each day
<b>Saturday</b>	3	4	4	5	16
<b>Sunday</b>	4	4 + 3 repeats	2	0 + 1 repeat	14
<b>Monday</b>	1	0	3 + 1 repeat	5 + 2 repeats	12
<b>Tuesday</b>	1 +2 repeats	3 + 2 repeats	1	2	11
<b>Wednesday</b>	0 +1 repeat	0 + 1 repeat	4 + 1 repeat	2	9
<b>Thursday</b>	0 +6 repeats	1 + 1 repeat	1 + 2 repeats	1	12

- 3.1.4 Summer visitor numbers may be roughly extrapolated from the results. These ignore the possibility that very small numbers of visitors entering and remaining in the south of the site or entering and remaining in the north, when the opposite end of the site was being surveyed, were missed by the surveyor. Also, it was considered that a likely period of the day when visitors would use the site was 14 hours (06.00 hrs – 20.00 hrs) rather than the eight hours covered by the survey. Thus:

- Average number of visitors per two 14-hour weekend days (1.8 visitors/hr):  
**50.4**



- Average number of visitors per five 14-hour weekdays (1.38 visitors/hr):  
**96.6**
- Average number of visitors per week (assuming 14 hours per day):  
**147**

### 3.2 THE QUESTIONS

3.2.1 Over the 48 hour survey period, every individual visitor or group encountered was approached with the questionnaire, resulting in a total of 50 responses. Only three approaches were met with a refusal.

3.2.2 Most interviews included a period of informal conversation and any comments made, relevant to the respondent’s perception of the site and its use by the public, were noted.

#### Question 1: Frequency of visits

3.2.3 The majority of respondents (62%) visited at least daily with 14% of these respondents, mainly dog-walkers, visiting more than once a day (**Table 2**).

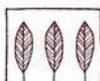
**Table 2. Frequency of visits**

Frequency of visit	Number of respondents (%)
More than once a day	7 (14)
Daily	24 (48)
Weekly	12 (24)
Monthly	4 (8)
Less than once a month	1 (2)
Less than once a year	0
First time	2 (4)

#### Question 2: Main purpose of visits

3.2.4 By far the greatest proportion of visitors (78%) revealed that the need to walk their dogs was the main purpose of their visit (**Table 3**). From informal conversation it was clear that they usually often appreciated the exercise, and sometimes combined walking the dogs with taking their children out, but in each case, walking the dogs was the primary reason given for the visit.

3.2.5 Single respondents gave main reasons for their visits as bagpipe practice, wildlife photography and environmental survey, and a frequently visiting group of young children gave their main reason as ‘adventure’ – which included using bikes, playing games and using a rope-swing. These are listed under ‘Other’ in **Table 3**.



- 3.2.6 The potential answers, 'Shortcut' and 'Commute', listed on the questionnaire were clearly not relevant to people's use of the site.

**Table 3. Main purpose of visits**

What is the main purpose of your visit?	Number of respondents (%)
Dog walking	39 (78)
Walking	2 (4)
Outing with children	3 (6)
Cycling	1 (2)
Shortcut	0
Commute	0
Other	5 (10)

### Question 3: Length of time usually on site

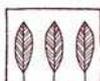
- 3.2.7 The duration of half of all visits was between half and one hour, with a further 32% spending between one and two hours on the site (**Table 4**). Longer visits were unusual, but 10% of respondents spent a brief period (fewer than 30 minutes) on the site.
- 3.2.8 These results were considered to equate with the commonest main reason for visits (i.e. dog-walking). The small number of visitors staying on-site for more than two hours was there for other purposes, such as survey, photography and adventure.

**Table 4. Length of visits**

Length of visit	Number of respondents (%)
Under 30 minutes	5 (10%)
30 minutes - 1 hour	25 (50%)
1 - 2 hours	16 (32%)
2 - 3 hours	2 (4%)
More than 3 hours	2 (4%)

### Question 4: Method of transport to the site

- 3.2.9 The majority of respondents (68%) travelled to the site on foot, usually from housing complexes immediately adjacent to the site to the north-east (**Table 5**). Those respondents visiting from further afield travelled to the site by car (28%).
- 3.2.10 Two respondents accessed Marline Valley Woods by bicycle, and in these cases the use of the bikes on site was more important than their use as a mode of transport to it. Thus, one respondent represented a group of three children using



the terrain for 'fun' biking, and the other was a serious off-road cycling competitor, using the location's terrain for training.

**Table 5. Transport to the site**

Method of transport	Number of respondents (%)
Car	14 (28)
Bike	2 (4)
Foot	34 (68)
Other	0

### Question 5: Parking places and access points

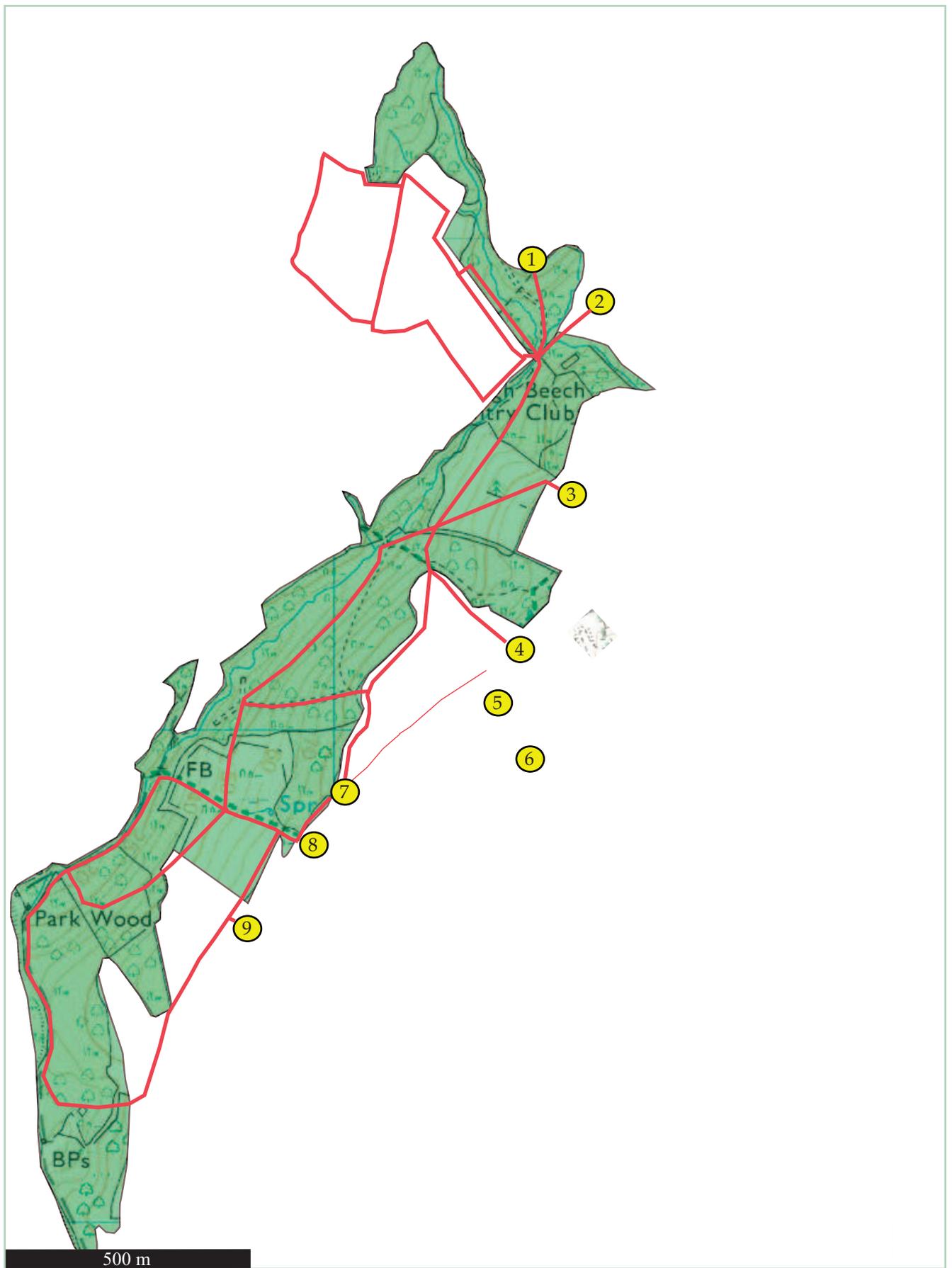
3.2.11 A map, with the locations of parking places and access points to the site used by visitors is given in **Figure 1**. Access points and parking locations are numbered for ease of reference, in both **Figures 1 and 3** and in **Table 6**.

**Table 6. Parking and access points**

Parking location/access point (numbered as in Figures 1 and 3)	Car park No. of respondents	Foot access point No. of respondents	Bike access point No. of respondents
1. Carvel Court	1	14	1
2. Delaware Drive	2	12	
3. High Beech		2	1
4. Queensway (Northern Footpath)		1	
5. Queensway (Napier Drive)	1 ( with foot access (above) to Northern Footpath)		
6. Recreation Pitch Car Park	1 (with foot access (above) to Southern Footpath)		
7. Queensway (Green Gate)	5	2	
8. Queensway (Southern Footpath)	4	4	
9. Queensway (Southern Access)	Used by a repeat visitor, originally interviewed elsewhere		

3.2.12 Of the 14 respondents who travelled to the site by car, nine parked on the verge of Queensway and gained access to the site directly from their parking area (nos. 7 and 8). One parked in Napier Drive (no. 5) close to the Northern Footpath access point (no. 4), which the respondent used, and another parked in the Recreation Park (no. 6) south of Queensway, gaining site access via the Southern Footpath (no. 8).

3.2.13 The three remaining respondents parked in the residential housing estates immediately to the north-east of the site and entered at the Carvel Court (no.1) or Delaware Drive (no. 2) access points.



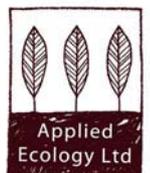
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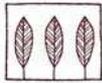
Notes

-  Marline Valley Woods SSSI
-  Car parking area and/or entry point to SSSI (numbered as in Table 6, page 9)
-  pathways
-  public footpaths

Site location, access points and pathways  
Figure 1.

August 2009





- 3.2.14 It was clear, from observation and conversations held with respondents, that parking on the verges of Queensway was considered hazardous owing to the need to negotiate curb stones and some deep ruts, as well as to contend with fast moving traffic. Access points nos. 7 and 8 presented limited parking with space for about three vehicles. The latter location provided the main access for Sussex Wildlife Trust staff, who manage the site.
- 3.2.15 One roadside parking and access point, referred to as Queensway Southern Access, (no. 9) was used only on two occasions and by the same person, a repeat visitor originally interviewed when entering the site at another access point.
- 3.2.16 Of those visitors arriving by car, approximately 79% parked by, or close to, Queensway and entered the site from there, the remaining 21% entering the site from the north-eastern housing estates.
- 3.2.17 Visitors accessing the site on foot primarily did so from these housing estates (80%), with the rest gaining access from the Queensway entry points.

#### **Question 6: Sources of visitors**

- 3.2.18 Visitors were asked to give the postcode of the location of start of their journey to the site. **Figure 2** shows these locations. It shows that the majority of visitors to the Marline Valley Woods live immediately adjacent to the site, to the north-east, and gain access easily on foot, via paths and other access routes.
- 3.2.19 Visitors away from this cluster generally lived on the west side of Hastings and the east side of Bexhill, from where access to the site, via road, is quick and straightforward. Ninety per cent of respondents lived within 2km of the site. In addition, a single respondent's home address, not shown on **Figure 2**, was at Polegate – 20 km to the west of the site.

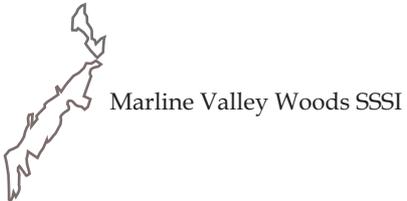
#### **Question 7: Travelling time to the site**

- 3.2.20 Eighty-six percent of visitors lived within 10 minutes of the site, including, all those travelling by foot and ten of those arriving by car, and of these, 66% lived within 5 minutes (**Table 7**). This shows, together with the results of Question 6, above, that the Marline Valley Woods is overwhelmingly important as a site for local people to visit, and is not used significantly by visitors from further afield.



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**Key**

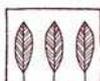


○ Indicates home postcode of respondent

**Origins of visitors**  
Figure 2.

August 2009



**Table 7. Travelling time to the site**

Time taken to get to site	Number of respondents (%)
1 - 5 minutes	33 (66)
6 - 10 minutes	13 (26)
11 - 20 minutes	2 (4)
21 - 30 minutes	1 (2)
More than 30 minutes	1 (2)

**Question 8: What is attractive about the site?**

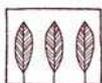
3.2.21 Respondents were asked what attracted them to the site. Multiple answers were encouraged but visitors were not prompted with any of the potential answers on the questionnaire. The most frequent responses to the question best equated with the answer 'naturalness' and was given by 72% of respondents, and 'woodland character', given by 42% of respondents (**Table 8**).

**Table 8. Attractiveness of the site**

What attracts visitors to this site?	Number of Respondents
Close to home	17
Easy parking	1
Naturalness	36
Good path network	0
Great for dogs	23
Size of site	0
Level of use	0
Woodland character	21
Fresh air	2
Peace and quiet	10
Adventure	2
In addition, single responses for, presence of the river, work, open-space, beauty, challenging terrain, familiarity, solitude, fresh air, meeting other dog walkers,	

3.2.22 Answers closely equivalent to 'close to home' (34%) and 'peace and quiet' (20%) were also frequent. From the responses given it is clear that the woodland environment and the peace and solitude that it can offer were extremely important factors in attracting visitors to the site.

3.2.23 The fact that such a large percentage of visitors lived immediately adjacent to the site would suggest that its closeness to their home was an important factor in attracting them to the site. Thirty-four percent gave this, or words such as 'convenience' as a response, but it was believed that this answer may have been so obvious that it was overlooked by many of those questioned. Nevertheless, the



Marline Valley Woods' proximity to many of its users was clearly a major reason for its attractiveness to them.

3.2.24 Eighty percent of respondents were walking dogs but only 46% gave the response 'great for dogs' as the reason that they were attracted to the site. Again, it is likely that this obvious answer was overlooked by respondents. Single respondents gave the following reasons for visiting:

3.2.25 Small numbers of respondents gave 'other' answers, which though usually given by one visitor only, were probably also relevant in terms of many other visitors' perceptions of the site.

#### **Question 9: Is the site perceived as busy?**

3.2.26 Visitors were asked whether they perceived the site usually to be busy during their normal visiting times. Two respondents were new to the site so could not answer, but both indicated that they felt it was not busy at the time of their visit.

3.2.27 The overwhelming majority (97%) of the remaining 48 visitors considered the site to be either occasionally or never busy, with 56% stating that they felt the site never to be busy (**Table 9**). Casual conversation invariably made it clear that what most people considered 'occasionally busy' constituted their meeting three or four other dog-walkers on the same visit and this usually only happened at weekends. Others agreed that this level of use could occur at weekends but did not judge this to be busy at all.

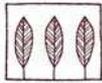
**Table 9. Perception of whether the site is busy or not**

<b>Do you find the site...</b>	<b>Number of Respondents (%)</b>
Always busy	0
Usually busy	1
Occasionally busy	20 (41)
Never busy	27 (56)

#### **Question 10: Effect of doubling visitor numbers on present usage**

3.2.28 Visitors were asked whether they would change their visiting habits if the numbers of visitors they were used to on the site doubled. Results are given in **Table 10**. Two respondents were new to the site so felt unable to answer.

3.2.29 Most respondents considered the site to be very lightly used by visitors and therefore even the doubling of the usual number of people they encountered at



their normal visiting time would not cause them to change their own visiting habits. Many visitors said that they enjoyed meeting other dog-walkers and would sometimes welcome a greater number, and it was clear from what others said that their regular visiting times were more or less fixed within their daily routine, so increased numbers of visitors would have little effect on their habits.

**Table 10. Effect on visiting habits of doubling visitor numbers**

If visitor numbers doubled at your usual visiting time, would you...	Number of Respondents (%)
Continue to visit as normal	42 (88)
Probably visit at another time	5 (10)
Probably visit other open spaces	1 (2)
Stop coming to this site	0

3.2.30 Three of the five visitors who would elect to visit at another time if visitor numbers doubled perceived the site as 'occasionally busy'; the remaining two, and the single respondent who would go elsewhere, considered it never to be busy. Their responses to Question 10 seemed anomalous given their perception of visitor numbers.

3.2.31 Several other visitors, all females, qualified their answers by indicating that if a doubling of visitor numbers was mainly owed to larger numbers of 'rowdy or ill-behaved youths', then they would be likely to change their visiting habits by walking their dogs elsewhere, or by more carefully selecting the times of their visits.

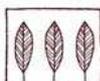
### Questions 11 and 12: Other green spaces visited

3.2.32 Eighty-eight per cent of visitors to the Marline Valley Woods also habitually visited other local green spaces, with a total of 11 such sites mentioned by respondents (**Table 11**). The most popular locations were Battle Great Wood (visited by 17 respondents) (**Table 11**). Other local green spaces visited and Hastings Country Park and its adjacent areas (visited by 15 respondents).

3.2.33 Twelve percent of respondents did not visit any green spaces other than Marline Valley Woods.

**Table 11. Other local green spaces visited**

Nearby green spaces also visited	Number of Respondents
Battle Great Wood	17



Hastings Country Park/Firehills/ Fairlight	15
Queensway Recreation Area/Helipad, Hastings	5
St Helen's Wood, Hastings	4
The beach	3
Church Wood, Hollington, Hastings	2
High Woods, Bexhill	2
Battle Powder Mills	2
Alexandra Park, Hastings	1
Brede High Wood	1
Fore Wood, Crowhurst	1

### Question 13: Age of visitors

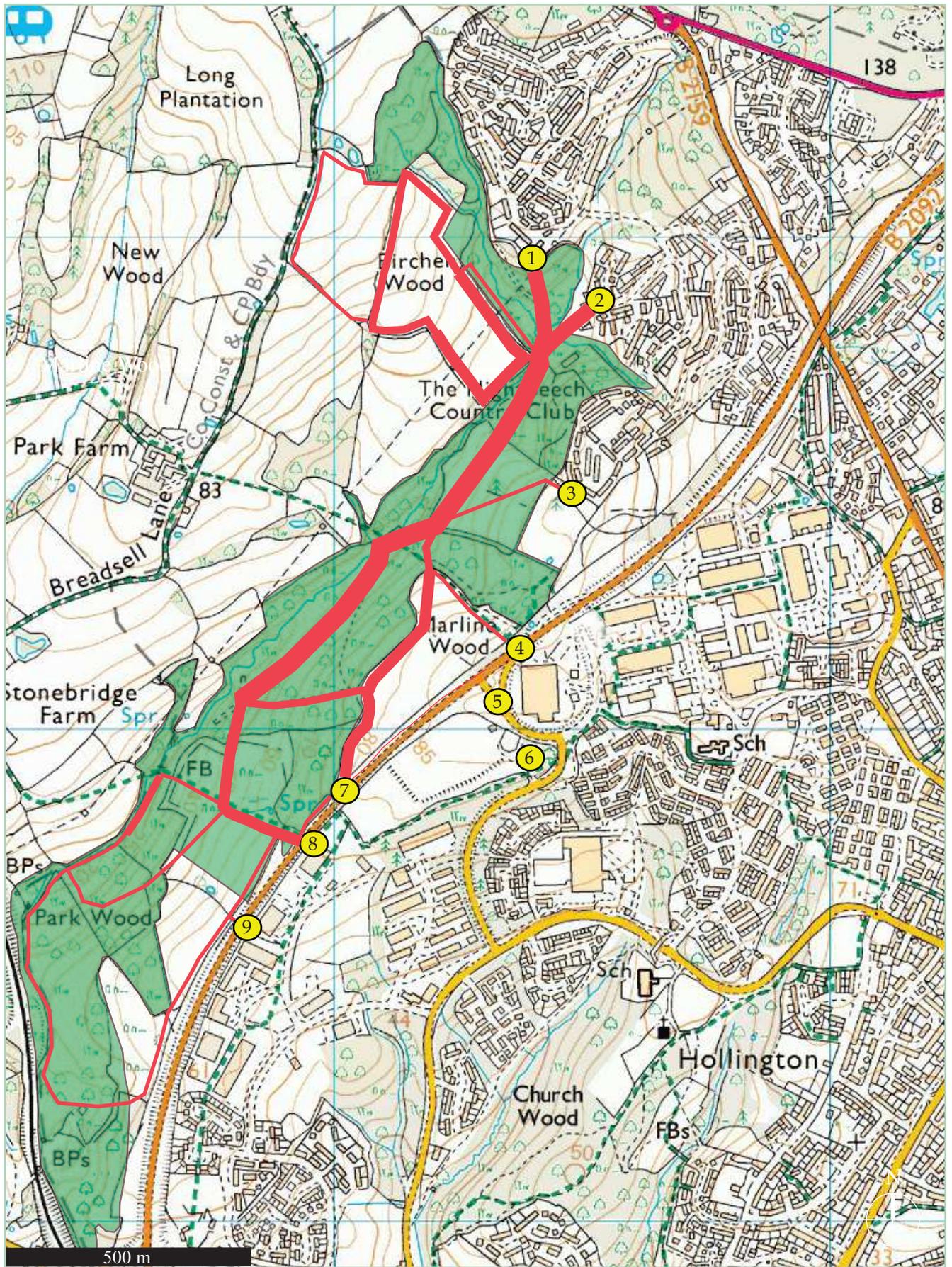
- 3.2.34 A little over half respondents (56%) were over 45 years of age, with the majority of these (60%) falling into the 45 – 59 age group. Only 16% of visitors were aged below 25, with only 25% of these aged below 15 (**Table 12**).
- 3.2.35 The questionnaire was carried out during the school holiday period, which might have had a small effect on the numbers of visitors found using the site. Conversations with the few children encountered led the surveyor to understand that the numbers of children present were probably not affected by individuals being away on holiday.
- 3.2.36 No children were encountered during the weekend days of the survey.

**Table 12. Ages of visitors**

Age group of respondent	Number of Respondents (%)
0 - 15	2 (4)
16 - 24	6 (12)
25 - 34	5 (10)
35 - 44	9 (18)
45 - 59	17 (34)
60+	11 (22)

### Routes used on site

- 3.2.37 **Figure 3** shows the on-site routes and the relative frequency with which they were used by the respondents. The most heavily used route was that running through the centre of the SSSI, along the south side of the valley through woodland and small fields, and connecting with access points no.1 and no.2 (**Figure 3**) (Carvel Court and Delaware Drive) on the edge of the housing estate immediately to the



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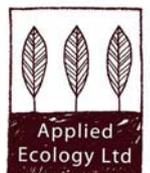
**Notes**

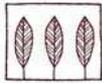
-  Marline Valley Woods SSSI
-  Car parking area and/or entry point to SSSI (numbered as in Table 6, page 9)
- Pathways:**
-  1 - 5 visitors
-  11 - 15 visitors
-  6 - 10 visitors
-  16 - 20 visitors
-  21 - 25 visitors

**Route usage by visitors**

Figure 3.

August 2009





- north-east. The majority of the dog-walking visitors used this path, some also walking a circuit of the field outside the SSSI boundary on the northern edge of the site.
- 3.2.38 The southern of the two footpaths crossing the SSSI was moderately well-used. On-verge parking, which gave access to this path (**no. 8, Figure 3**), though involving the negotiation of a curb and rutted ground, was relatively spacious, with room for about three vehicles. Furthermore, it formed a continuation of footpaths crossing the recreation areas on the opposite side of Queensway, so was attractive to some visitors on foot.
- 3.2.39 Access to the northern footpath (**no. 4, Figure 3**) was more difficult as there was no close roadside parking. Visitors using this footpath parked in Napier Road (**no.5, Figure 3**) and walked from there across Queensway; an awkward operation involving dogs on leads and fast traffic. This footpath was moderately overgrown and clearly not used much. A short public footpath joining this one through woodland to the north was very indistinct with no easy access to it and was probably never used.
- 3.2.40 Most of the many other routes were clearly secondary, in terms of use, to the major central path and the field circuit to the north.
- 3.2.41 The northern and southern extremities of the site appeared to be unused during the survey period, except by one person, who camped for a night in the far south. To the far north, an access point from the housing estate had become severely overgrown, making access very difficult. Though paths in the wood appeared well-worn, there were no other recent signs of human or canine use. Similarly, to the far south, though foot access was possible, it appeared to be awkward and there were no recent signs of use.

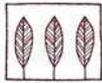
### 3.3 OTHER VISITOR DETAILS

#### Groups sizes and gender of respondents

- 3.3.1 The total number of visitors encountered during the survey was 74. Most visitors visited the site on their own (68%), with the average group size being 1.6 people (**Table 13**). Sixty per cent of respondents were male and 40% were female.

**Table 13. Group sizes**

Group Size	Number of Respondents (%)
1	34 (68)



2	7 (14)
3	6 (12)
4	1 (2)
5	2 (4)

### Dogs

3.3.2 Eighty per cent of respondents visited the Marline Valley Woods in order to walk their dogs. Of those people with dogs, 20 had a single dog, 13 had two dogs, five had three dogs and two had four dogs, making a total of 69 dogs using the site during the survey. Thirty-six of the 40 respondents walking dogs had them off the lead at the time of interview.

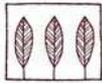
### Other visitor comments

3.3.3 A number of relevant visitor comments are included under appropriate headings elsewhere in the Report. The most frequent unsolicited comments received were concerned with the potential effects of greater numbers of visitors to the site. In particular, female (but some male as well) respondents, though accepting the idea of increased visitor use generally, would be very concerned if the new visitors were young people intent on causing damage to the woods and other habitats within the site.

3.3.4 ‘Damage’ constituted cutting down, damaging and defacing trees, lighting fires, smashing glass and leaving bottles, cans and other litter on the site. These, it was said by several respondents, did occur from time to time already, and were perceived by them to have increased with the expansion of residential areas adjacent to the site.

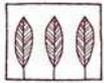
3.3.5 The surveyor noted a number of trees near the Delaware Drive access point (no.2) said to have been cut down by youths, and several of the trees there had been partially burned, spray-painted and cut. Litter, including beer cans and bottles, and used barbeque equipment was noted in the meadow areas of the SSSI.

3.3.6 It was assumed by most of the concerned respondents, that further residential development would be certain to increase vandalism and other damaging pressure on the site. Nevertheless, it was also commonly admitted that such a view may be considered hypocritical because the respondents themselves came from similar new housing close by.

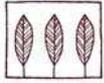


## 4 SUMMARY

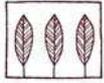
- 4.1.1 In summary, Marline Valley Woods SSSI is used daily by small numbers of visitors. Extrapolation of the numbers of visitors encountered during the eight hours of survey within an 11-hour period, per day over six days gave an average number of visitors to the site over a week (where it was considered likely that visits would take place over a 14-hour period, 06.00 hrs to 20.00 hrs) of nearly 150. Small numbers of visitors were probably missed during the survey and the fact that the survey took place during the school holidays may have affected, to a small extent, the numbers of visitors encountered. Visitor numbers were said to be lower in the winter than at the time of the survey.
- 4.1.2 The majority of visitors to the site had at least one dog with them, and dogs were almost invariably off the lead. Dogs therefore were able to run throughout the site. Many dogs remained close to their owners and rarely left the path, but many others covered a great deal of ground away from the paths. Only one visitor was noted clearing up after her dog, and it was obvious that most dog-owners allowed their animals to defecate wherever they chose, and did not remove dung from the site. The result was that ground near the heavily used northern access points, and along pathways relatively near access points, was heavily fouled by dogs. Elsewhere, the effects were not so obvious.
- 4.1.3 During the survey there were very few parts of any day when at least one dog was not present on the site. However, it was not easy to ascertain any disturbance or damaging effects of the presence of dogs off leads. The surveyor found no signs of the presence of deer, and this may be an indication of some disturbance.
- 4.1.4 The ecological value of the site is related primarily to its ancient woodland nature and to its important lower plant community. The presence of dogs on the site at their current level is considered unlikely to affect either of these aspects negatively.
- 4.1.5 Most visitors live very close to the Marline Valley Woods, and gain access by foot near the north of the site, particularly from Carvel Court and Delaware Drive; roads forming part of relatively new residential areas adjacent to the site. They use a major footpath parallel with the valley, and many extend their walk around fields to the north-west outside the SSSI boundary. Two public footpaths crossing the site are little used compared with the major unofficial 'arterial' path. Visits generally last more than half an hour but less than two hours.



- 4.1.6 Access to the site is perceived to be difficult by many. Parking along the Queensway to the south is awkward and dangerous, with no official parking places and fast traffic. It is probably for this reason that the site's two official footpaths, which cross the SSSI from Queensway, are relatively little used.
- 4.1.7 Perceptions of whether the site was busy or not were almost entirely 'never busy' or 'occasionally busy', but it was clear that 'busy' usually only meant another three or four users in addition to the respondent. Related to this was the common answer that a doubling of visitors would have no effect on a respondent's present visiting pattern, since this would still not make the site busy.
- 4.1.8 The Marline Valley Woods is one of several green spaces in and near Hastings used by many of the respondents and it is valued mainly for its peaceful and natural woodland character, and its closeness to most of their homes.
- 4.1.9 Some young people value the area for its potential for adventure – related to its terrain, and the presence of the river and trees. However, the site is used mainly by middle-aged and older people, most of whom would not mind seeing more human use of the site, and would continue to use it themselves, unless it became popular with ill-behaved youths, a realistic concern in their view, if further residential development were to take place nearby.
- 4.1.10 Sixty-six percent of the questionnaire respondents lived in the housing complexes immediately adjacent, to the north-east of the site so it may be argued that a new development adjacent to the site, providing a similar number of homes, is likely to increase the estimated numbers of visitors and their dogs to the Marline Valley Woods by a similar percentage. Thus, rather than the current estimate of about 150 people during a summer week, the number of visitors (if the new housing provision is similar to that at present) may rise by 66% (a further 99 visitors) to nearly 250 per week; an average of something over 35 visitors per day compared with the current daily average of 21.
- 4.1.11 Given the primarily botanical nature of the SSSI's importance, it is considered unlikely that this potential increase in visitor numbers will, in itself, have a negative effect on the site. Nevertheless, there is a perception, based on local experience, amongst many local people interviewed, that increased numbers of visitors is likely to increase the likelihood of vandalism to the site and that once a site shows physical signs of damage, people value it less and tolerate yet more damage.



4.1.12 Therefore, strategies to reduce ease of access, prevent it in certain places, and otherwise manage human use of the Marline Valley Woods SSSI should be considered as part of the proposed development process of the land at Breadsell Lane.

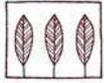


## **Appendix 1**

### **A. Draft questions – visitor survey Marline Valley Woods**

Draft Questions-Visitor Survey Marline Valley Woods

1. Time & Date (suggested times 7am-9am, 10am-12pm, 1pm-3pm, 4-6pm)
2. Access Point (Assess most appropriate survey point/s)
3. Weather Description
4. Age band (include number in group) Under 20, 20-40, 40-60, 60 +
5. Where have you come from today (Street/Town/Full Post Code)
6. How did you get here & what form of transport did you use: By car Bicycle, On foot, Other (please state)
7. If travelled by car where did you park.
8. How long did the journey take you: 1-5 mins, 6-10mins, 11-20 mins, 21-30 mins, 30+ mins
9. How frequently do you visit this site? More than once a day, At least once a week, At least once a month, Sporadically, Don't know/First visit
10. What was the main purpose of your visit? Walking, Dog walking, jogging, bicycling, other (please state).
11. How long do you expect the visit to last: under 30 mins, 30 mins & 1 hour, over 1 & less than 3 hours.
12. Where did you enter the site
13. Where have you walked /cycled/jogged today (show map)
14. What attracts you to this site: Site quality –natural setting, Features –ie woodland, location (closest open space to your home). size, level of use, other (please specify)
15. Do you consider this site to be busy: Yes, no, don't know.
16. How busy do you think the site is? Always quiet, usually busy, always busy, Neither
17. If the number of people using this area at the time that you normally visit doubled, how would it affect your use? I would continue to visit as normal, I would be likely to visit another time, I would be likely to visit other open spaces, I would be likely to stop using this space altogether.
18. Do you visit other local sites/ green space. Yes. No
19. Which other sites/ open spaces do you visit?



## **Appendix 2**

### **B. The questionnaire**

# Marline Valley Woods SSSI Visitor Survey

Questionnaire No.

**Q 1. On average, over the past year, how often have you visited this site?**

More than once a day	
Daily	
Weekly	
Monthly	
Less than once a month	
Less than once a year	
Don't know/first time	

**Q 2. What is the main purpose of your visit?**

Dog walking	
Walking	
Exercise	
Outing with children	
Cycling	
Shortcut	
Commute	
Other	

**Q 3. How long are you usually on site?**

Under 30 minutes	
30 minutes - 1 hour	
1 - 2 hours	
2 - 3 hours	
More than 3 hours	

**Q 4. How did you get here?**

By car	
By bike	
On foot	
Other	

**Q 5. Where did you park? enter site?**

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**Q 6. Where have you come from today? Town/Street/postcode**

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**Q 7. How long did it take you to get here?**

1 - 5 minutes	
6 - 10 minutes	
11 - 20 minutes	
21 - 30 minutes	
More than 30 minutes	

**Q 8 What attracts you to this site?**

Close to home	
Easy parking	
Naturalness	
Good path network	
Great for dogs	
Size of site	
Level of use	
Woodland character	
Other	

**Q 9. Do you find the site**

Always busy	
Usually busy	
Occasionally busy	
Never busy	

**Q 10. If visitor numbers doubled at your usual visiting time, would you**

Continue to visit as normal	
Probably visit at another time	
Probably visit other open spaces	
Stop coming to this site	

**Q 11. Do you visit other local sites/green space?**

Yes	
No	

**Q 12. If yes, Where?**

--	--

**Q 13. Which of these best describes your age group?**

0 - 15		35 - 44	
16 - 24		45 - 59	
25 - 34		60 +	

**For surveyor to complete**

Date	
Location	
Time band	
Weather	
Group size	
Gender of respondent	
Number of dogs	
Dogs off leads?	

**Notes**

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