



Habitat Regulations Assessment Survey and Monitoring

Year 3 Interim Report

November 2012



The Strood, Mersea Island.

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1. Introduction

In accordance with the Habitat Regulations 2004 (as amended) Colchester Borough Council, Tendring District Council and Braintree District Council (hereafter the local authorities) have all carried out Appropriate Assessments of their spatial plans. The key purpose of an Appropriate Assessment is to ascertain whether a plan or program will have an adverse affect on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site.

Natura 2000 sites are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). SPAs are sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC), more commonly known as the Birds Directive. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds, listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive, and for regularly occurring migratory species. SACs are classified in accordance with EC Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive). Article 3 of this Directive requires the establishment of a European network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the 189 habitat types and 788 species identified in Annexes I and II of the Directive. Ramsar Sites are designated under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention, Iran 1971 and amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although Ramsar Sites are not protected in law by the Birds and Habitats Directives, as a matter of policy, government has decreed that unless otherwise specified procedures relating to SPAs and SACs will also apply to Ramsar Sites.

The Appropriate Assessments of the local authorities' spatial plans (Colchester Borough Council's Core Strategy and Site Allocations; Tendring District Council's previous Local Plan and emerging Core Strategy; and Braintree District Council's Core Strategy) all identified recreational disturbance, as a result of a growing population, as a potential impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites. Recreational users can damage habitat and cause severe disturbance to wildlife, particularly nesting birds in spring and feeding and roosting waterfowl in winter. Recreational disturbance can be broken down into direct and indirect impacts.

Direct, physical disturbance relates to actual damage or degradation of habitat from direct human activities. Examples in the context of the local authorities' Appropriate Assessments relates to damage to habitat from walking (trampling of vegetation, etc.) and the abrasion of intertidal or freshwater habitat from boat use/anchoring etc. Indirect effects to habitats typically occur through visual or acoustic disturbance to fauna from actual human presence. The most obvious example of this in the case of the international sites in Colchester and Tendring is the impact of recreational walking or dog walking both in and around Natura 2000 sites.

In order for the local authorities to be able to conclude no adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites an agreement was reached with Natural England to undertake a programme of survey and monitoring of visitors to the Natura

2000 sites within Colchester Borough and Tendring District. Colchester Borough Council will survey and monitor visitors on behalf of all the local authorities throughout the lifetime of the spatial plans.

Whilst there are no Natura 2000 sites in Braintree, it is still possible that as a result of growth and an increase in population in the district, people will visit Natura 2000 sites in neighbouring boroughs/districts. It is therefore necessary to include Braintree District in the survey and this is acknowledged in Braintree's Core Strategy.

Colchester Borough Council's Local Development Framework Committee requested that boat numbers should be recorded as part of future surveys. For each site the number of boats observed was recorded every hour. This is a crude measurement as some of the boats may have been visible for several hours and so may have been double counted. However, this data does give an approximate measure of the number of boats and will be used to show if there are significant increases or decreases in pressures from recreational boating over time as part of the visitor monitoring programme.

This is the year 3 interim draft report, which summarises the results of the winter 2012 surveys. The final 3rd year report will be produced after the summer surveying period is completed in June 2013.

The report begins by setting out the aim and objectives of the monitoring programme and outlines the methodology (sections 2 and 3). Section 4 summarises the current condition of each area surveyed and includes an analysis of the results of the visitor survey. Section 5 outlines any observations relevant to each of the local authorities and looks at the housing completions of each of the local authorities. Clearly as the monitoring programme progresses more information will be available and trends will begin to be established.

2. Aim and objectives

The aim of this monitoring programme is to investigate whether housing growth in Colchester, Tendring and Braintree will result in increased recreational disturbance to Natura 2000 sites and/or deterioration in site condition.

The objectives are:

1. Establish baseline data on visitors to Natura 2000 sites in Colchester Borough and Tendring District.
2. Investigate visitor trends to Natura 2000 sites in Colchester Borough and Tendring District.
3. Identify whether there is a link between site condition and housing completions.
4. Identify management measures needed to mitigate and manage the impacts of increased visitor numbers.

3. Methodology

The overwintering and breeding periods are the most sensitive times of year for the Natura 2000 sites within Colchester Borough and Tendring District. It was therefore agreed with Natural England that visitors should be monitored at these times of year. As this is a visitor survey it was decided to monitor visitors in November and June. This strikes a balance between the most sensitive times of year and more popular visiting times.

To establish a good baseline for the first three years of the monitoring programme visitors will be monitored every November and June. After this initial period it is envisaged that survey work can take place every 2-3 years. The local authorities and Natural England will need to agree the frequency after the initial three years.

The following Natura 2000 sites were identified in the local authorities' Appropriate Assessments and monitoring will look at each of these sites:

- Abberton Reservoir
- Blackwater Estuary
- Colne Estuary
- Hamford Water
- Stour Estuary.

Clearly these are incredibly large sites and it is not possible to monitor visitors to every single part of the sites. Therefore, with the exception of Abberton Reservoir, which is a more contained site, surveys have taken place at two different locations within the sites. Sites were selected based on their proximity to key centres of population, extent of the public footpath network and the availability of car parking. In several cases survey work took place within nature reserves and country parks. However, it is important to note that this monitoring is not attempting to look specifically at visitors to these nature reserves and country parks. It seeks to understand why people visit the SPAs and if/how this changes over the lifetime of the local authorities' spatial plans. Owing to limited resources the survey work can only ever be a snapshot of visitors.

To ensure that weekday and weekend disturbance is monitored, survey work took place throughout the week. Whilst days were randomly chosen the decision was taken to avoid bad weather days (i.e. heavy rain, very cold temperatures) in order to maximise the response rate. Only the most popular sites were surveyed at the weekend. All half day surveys were carried out between 10am and 2pm to ensure consistency across all sites. The June 2012 interviews were carried out by four spatial policy officers from Colchester Borough Council. Three of the surveyors were new to the process. This may have introduced an element of inconsistency in terms of how interviews were conducted and the amount of data collected. A briefing will be held with all the surveyors involved in the November 2012 surveys to address these issues and ensure greater consistency in future survey work.

Opportunistic/convenience sampling was used, which is a type of non-probability sampling. The sample population was selected on the basis of availability and convenience. The surveyors walked along public footpaths within the Natura 2000 sites and approached all visitors where possible. It was not possible to interview all groups as some groups were spotted some distance from the surveyor; details of these people were however recorded. On some occasions a group was spotted whilst the surveyor was already interviewing another group and in these instances brief details of the group were recorded. The main difficulty with this type of sampling is that generalisations about the total population cannot be made as it is not representative enough. However, this difficulty will be overcome over the course of the monitoring programme as samples will be taken at different times of the year.

It is important to note that some of the questions asked are multi-choice and so total answers may not correspond to the total number of groups. For example, many of the groups interviewed gave multiple reasons for the purpose of their visit and reason for visiting the site.

In order to determine the degree to which disturbance is affecting site integrity Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment data from Natural England will be monitored. It is important to recognise that SSSI site condition (as measured under Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) common standards monitoring methodology) does not equate to site integrity as determined by the Habitats Regulations as condition monitoring is more of a snapshot of the status of the site. Thus, a threat to a site which is not currently manifest in the site's condition could constitute an adverse effect on site integrity, but may not result in a determination of unfavourable condition. Nevertheless, SSSI condition assessment data is of value in the current context and will be monitored as part of this programme. Information on SSSI condition has been taken from Nature on the Map and Natural England updates this condition survey every 3-5 years.

All survey responses were analysed on SNAP, Colchester Borough Council's electronic survey system.

4. Natura 200 sites

Abberton Reservoir

Abberton Reservoir is a large fresh water reservoir located approximately 6 miles south west of Colchester.

There is an Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) Visitor Centre at Abberton Reservoir that is accessible from the B1026. There is no public access around the reservoir itself however there are a number of permissive routes around the reserve leading to bird hides which provide excellent wildlife and bird watching opportunities.

Planning permission was granted to extend Abberton Reservoir in 2009. The construction work to extend the reservoir is underway and this is scheduled for completion by 2013. As part of development proposals, a new Essex Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre was approved along with new permissive rights of way and a range of habitat enhancement projects. Essex Wildlife Trust moved into the new visitor centre on 5 March 2012 with an official public opening on 23rd June 2012.



Photo 1. Abberton's new visitor centre which opened in June 2012.

While the improvements to facilities has the potential to increase recreational opportunities and visitor numbers at Abberton Reservoir, the Visitor Centre manager felt that it would take a few months for visitor numbers to settle down at Abberton. It will therefore be important to continue to monitor changes in visitor numbers at Abberton in the future.

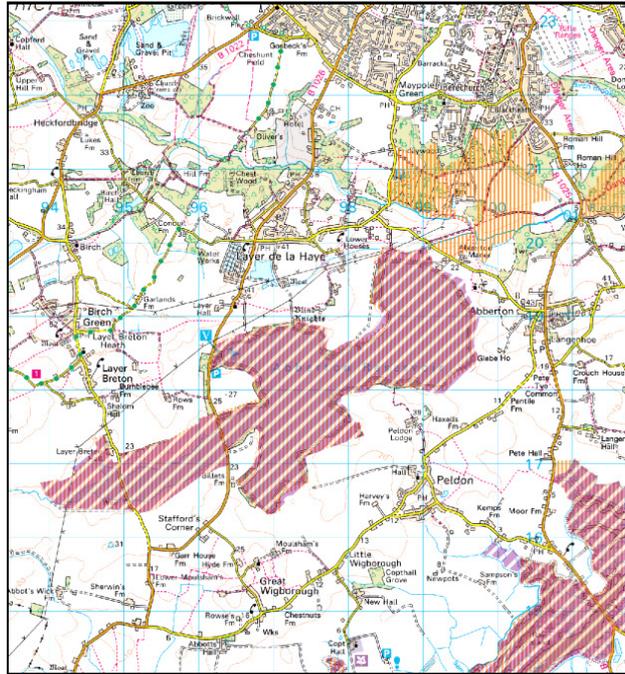


Figure 1. Abberton Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site.

The site is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site principally for the internationally important populations of regularly occurring Annex 1 and migratory bird species. There are three SSSI units at Abberton Reservoir. The condition of the SSSI units within the survey area is summarised in Table 1 below. The latest SSSI condition survey has indicated that none of the units are currently adversely affected by recreational disturbance.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
1	Favourable	-	18 Aug 2010
2	Favourable	-	18 Aug 2010
3 *	Favourable	-	18 Aug 2010

Table 1. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area. The * indicates the units where the interviews took place.

Surveys were carried out at Abberton Reservoir during the November 2012 period over 2 ½ days, on Sunday 10 November and mid week on the 13 November. On both survey days the weather was mild, dry and windy however there were also occasional showers during the weekend survey period.

During November 2012, a total of 33 groups were interviewed at Abberton. The weekend was the busier of the two surveys periods with 22 groups interviewed at the weekend and 11 mid week. Overall in November 2012, 68

people were recorded with 50 of these observed at the weekend and only 18 mid week. People were mainly visiting in pairs however two larger groups comprising four people and one group of over five people were observed at the weekend.

Abberton was busier in November 2012 compared to the November 2011 survey period when only 15 groups and a total of 34 people were recorded. The increase in visitor numbers may be attributed to the new centre at Abberton. During November 2012, 12% of the groups interviewed at Abberton said that they were visiting to see the new centre and the ongoing works at the reservoir.

None of the visitors at Abberton had dogs with them. Although dogs are not permitted on the reserve there is a restricted dog walking area towards the front of the Visitor Centre. During the November 2012 survey period this was closed due to the fact that Ash Dieback (*Chalara Fraxinea*) had been reported at Abberton. Access was restricted in the infected areas of woodland at Abberton until more information was known about how the disease spreads.

During November 2012, 32 out of the 33 groups travelled by car to visit Abberton while one group arrived on a tandem. This is consistent with the previous winter survey results where the majority of the groups had also driven. This is not surprising given that Abberton is in a rural location with limited public transport.

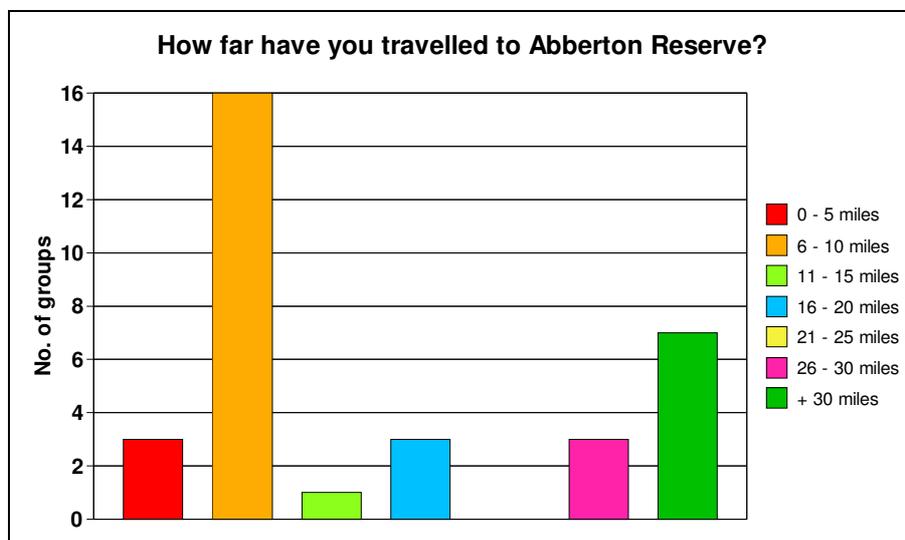


Figure 2. showing that over half (57%) travelled 10 miles or less to visit Abberton.

Figure 2 above shows that the majority of the groups interviewed at Abberton during November 2012 had travelled 10 miles or less to the reserve. 16 groups had travelled up to 5 miles while three groups had travelled 10 miles or less. Abberton also attracts visitors from further afield with seven groups travelling at least 30 miles to visit the site.

15 of the groups lived within Colchester Borough with seven actually living in Colchester Town. Six groups lived in Braintree District (Braintree, Coggeshall,

Witham and Halstead), one group lived in Tendring (Clacton) and three groups lived in Maldon (Tollesbury and Heybridge). Four groups who had travelled the furthest distances lived in south and south west Essex in Upminster, Castle Point, Leigh on Sea and Wickford. A further three groups lived outside Essex in Bromley in Kent, Hadleigh and Trimley St Mary in Suffolk and Stradbroke in Norfolk as shown in Figure 3 below.

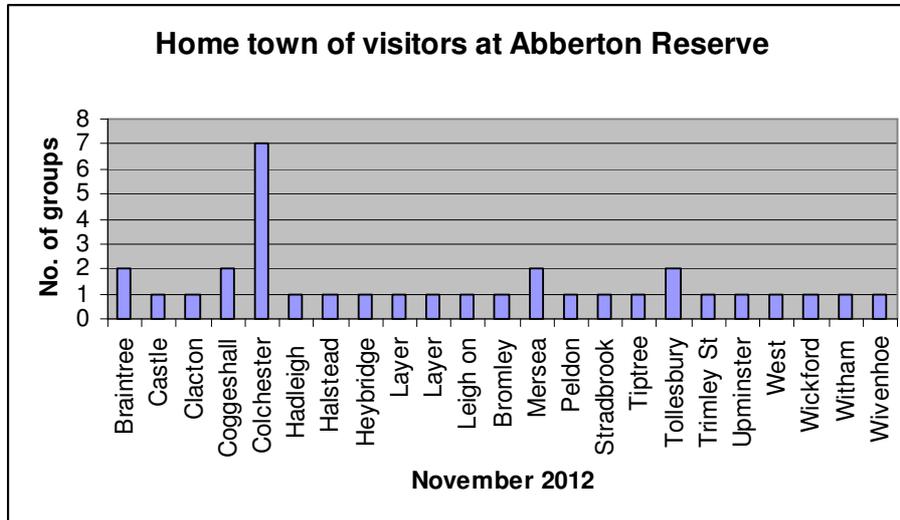


Figure 3. Abberton attracts a high proportion of visitors from around Colchester: 45% of those surveyed in November 2012 lived in Colchester Borough.

For most of the groups surveyed at Abberton during the November 2012 period, the main reason given was to bird watch. As shown in Figure 4 below 22 of the groups were there for this reason. Only two groups were visiting to go for a walk and to get some exercise. Four groups also stated that they were visiting to see the new visitor centre that opened in the summer of 2012. One group was also visiting Abberton to take photographs of birds at the reserve.

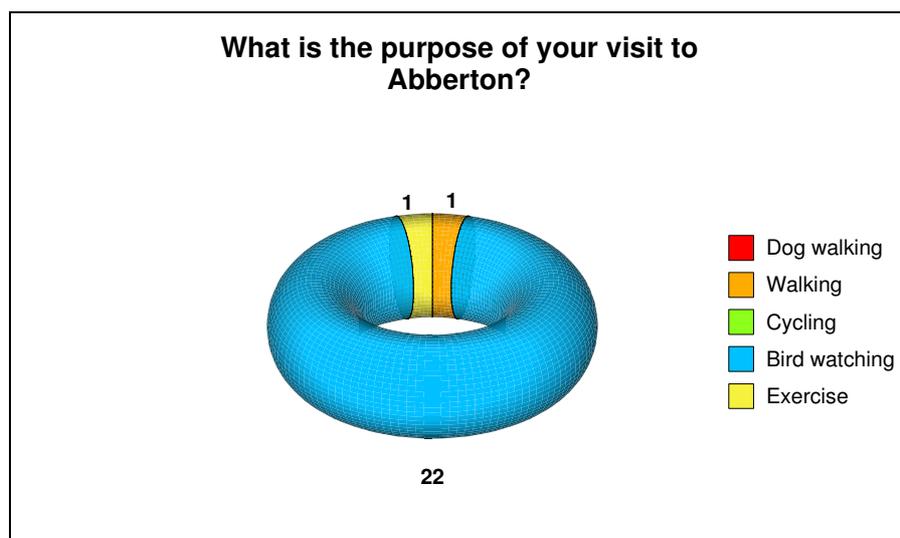


Figure 4. Abberton is an important area for ornithologists: 66% of visitors were visiting to watch birds during November 2012.

12 groups had chosen to visit because they liked the area, while for 10 groups it was because they lived close to Abberton. Four groups also liked the habitat. This was an interesting response as many of the habitats particularly around the Visitor Centre are new and still maturing. Parts of the reserve were also closed during November 2012 because of Ash Dieback Disease. These results mirrored the findings from the November 2011 survey in terms of reasons given for choosing to visit Abberton.

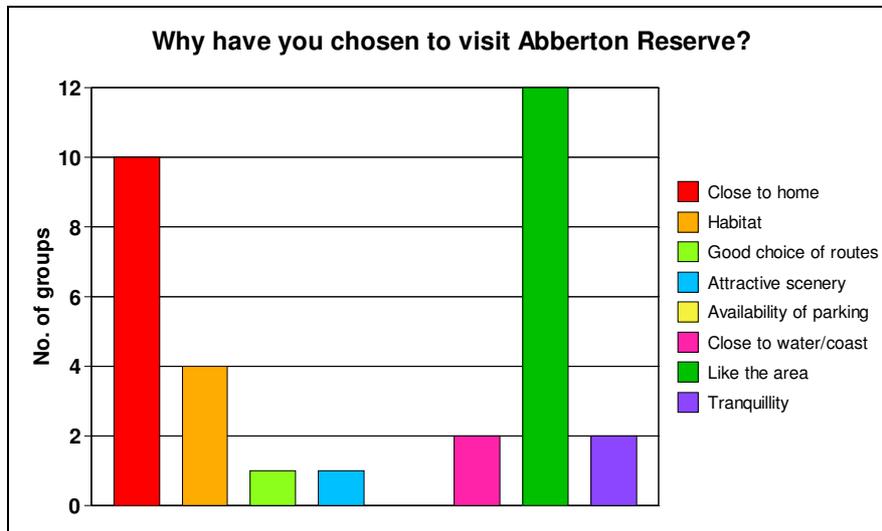


Figure 5. Most of those surveyed at Abberton in November 2012 had chosen to visit the reserve because they liked the area and because it was close to where they lived.

As shown in Figure 6 below no one visited Abberton on a daily basis although one group did say that they visit almost everyday. This isn't surprising given that Abberton is a rural nature reserve where dogs are restricted. Seven of the groups visited Abberton once a week. This included the group of regulars who meet every Saturday to watch birds and catch up with friends and the group who visit Abberton, Hanningfield and Fingringhoe each weekend. Eight of the groups visited less frequently, less than once a month and another eight groups were first time visitors at the reserve.

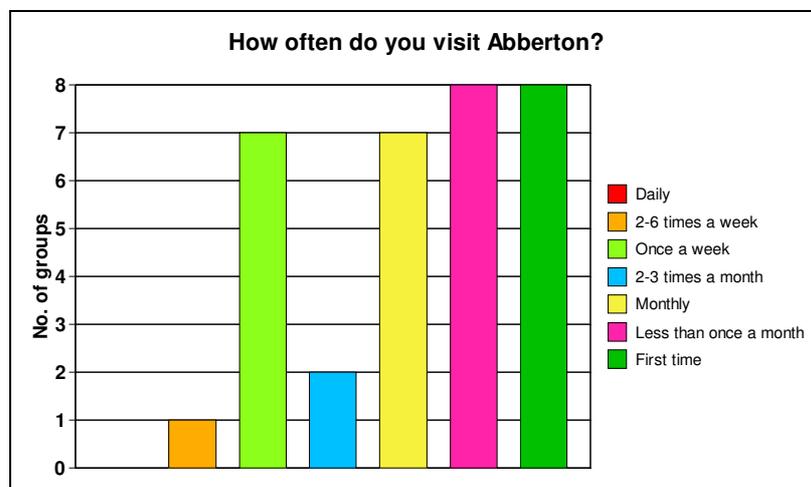


Figure 6. During the Nov 2012 survey period no groups visited Abberton on a daily basis. Most people visit less frequently either monthly or

less than once a month. 24% of visitors in this period were first time visitors.

Given the fact that many of the groups interviewed at Abberton were regular visitors with a keen interest in ornithology and wildlife it is not surprising that 66% of those interviewed said that they visited all year round while the remaining 11% said that they visited in the winter months when the bird interest is higher. None of the groups specifically stated that they visited in the summer again reflecting the sites greater bird interest during the autumn, winter and spring seasons.

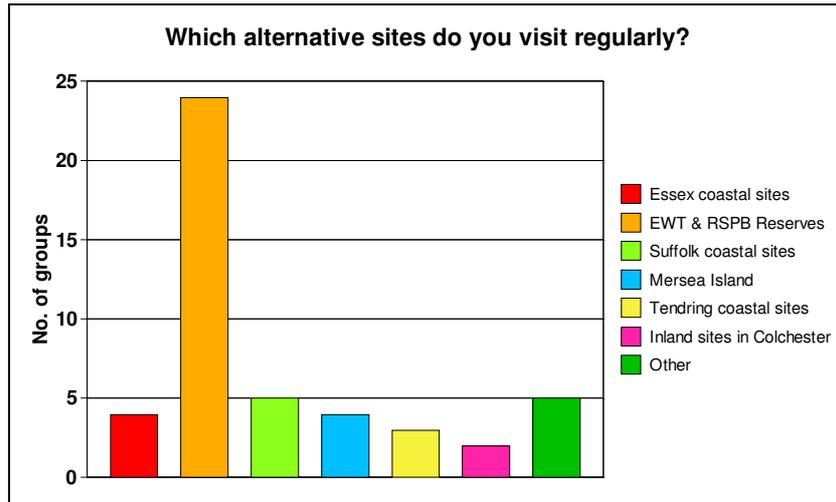


Figure 7. The most popular sites visited by visitors to Abberton were other Essex Wildlife Trust and RSPB reserves.

In addition to Abberton Reserve, 87% of those surveyed during November 2012 said that they visited alternative sites regularly. The alternative sites visited most regularly are shown in Figure 7.

Many of the groups surveyed at Abberton also visited other nature reserves. 24 groups said that they visited other Essex Wildlife Trust/RSPB reserves (Old Hall, Fingringhoe, Hanningfield and Abbots Hall). Five groups visited coastal sites in Suffolk (Minsmere and Lackford Lakes), four visited coastal sites in Essex (Tollesbury, Bradwell-on-sea, two in Tree Island), four visited Mersea Island, three visited Tendring coastal sites and two groups visited inland sites in Colchester (Highwoods). Other sites visited regularly included Rainham Marshes, Rye House Meadows, North Warren in Suffolk and Strumpshaw Fen and Titchwell Marsh in Norfolk which are also RSPB reserves outside Essex.

69% of the groups surveyed at Abberton during November 2012 stated that they had good access to open space close to where they lived that they used regularly. Two groups responded negatively while six groups were not asked this question as they lived outside the county.

As shown in Figure 8 the majority of the groups surveyed at Abberton stated that they used small open spaces close to where they lived. 11 groups used these open spaces. Eight groups regularly visited Fridays Woods, 11 used

Cudmore Grove and the beaches at Mersea while three groups used Castle Park, another three used Highwoods Country Park and three made regular use of the Roman River Valley. Only two groups used the local footpath network regularly while 4 groups visited Holland Haven Country Park on a regular basis.

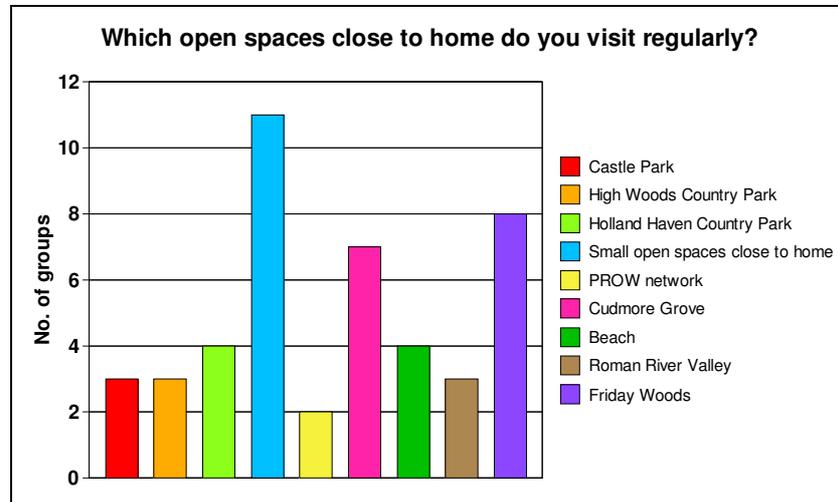


Figure 8. Visitors interviewed at Abberton in November 2012 also visited small open spaces close to home, Friday Woods and Cudmore Grove regularly.

The small open spaces most regularly used by Colchester Borough residents included Gosbecks Archaeological Park, Colchester Zoo, The Moors, Hillyfields, Ferry Marsh, Layer Breton Heath and Hill House Woods in Dedham. Residents from Braintree used the Phyllis Curry Reserve, The Discovery Centre and Marks Hall Arboretum. Around Maldon people made use of Chigborough Lakes, the Blackwater Estuary, Heybridge Gravel Pits and Tollesbury Wick. The groups from south Essex used Belfairs Woods and Jubilee Park in Southend.

Between November 2011 and November 2012 the number of visiting groups had more than doubled (see Table 10). Some of the groups interviewed as already mentioned are repeat visitors to Abberton. The new Visitor Centre has clearly contributed to the increase in visitor numbers.

There is no direct footpath access around Abberton Reservoir and recreational boating and fishing are prohibited on the Reservoir. In addition to the Visitor Centre there are number of hides around the reserve from which visitors can watch birds and wildlife. Even if visitor numbers continue to grow at Abberton, because such restrictions are in place, direct disturbance from increasing recreational pressures at the reserve is unlikely to significantly impact on the SPA, Ramsar and SSSI in the future.

Blackwater Estuary

The Blackwater Estuary is the largest estuary in Essex and is one of the largest estuarine complexes in East Anglia. Its mud-flats are fringed by saltmarsh on the upper shores, with shingle, shell banks and offshore islands a feature of the tidal flats. The surrounding terrestrial habitats: the sea wall, ancient grazing marsh and its associated fleet and ditch systems, plus semi-improved grassland, are of high conservation interest. The diversity of estuarine habitats results in the sites being of importance for a wide range of overwintering waterbirds, including raptors, geese, ducks and waders. The site is also important in summer for breeding terns.

Old Hall Marshes

Old Hall Marshes is located in Maldon District, close to the village of Salcott, which is in Colchester Borough. Mersea Island is located to the north, across Salcott Channel.

The map below shows the location of Old Hall Marshes.

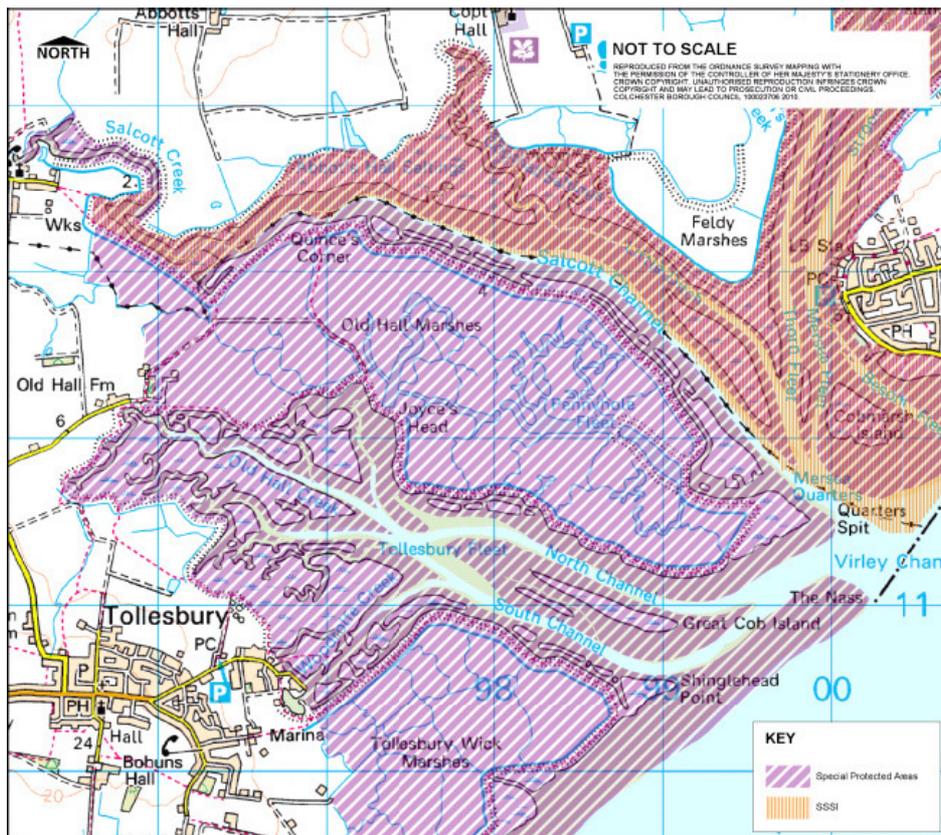


Figure 9. Map of Old Hall Marshes showing the extent of the Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest notifications.

Visitors at Old Hall Marshes Reserve were surveyed on 23 November 2012 which was a weekday. The weather was cold and dry in the morning with the occasional rain shower in the afternoon.

Old Hall Reserve is owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The reserve is accessed via a small car park off Old Hall Lane, near Salcott. Within the site there is a short walk and a long walk (10.5km). Both walks follow public footpaths and the long walk follows the sea wall. As advised by the warden, Old Hall Marshes do not normally receive many visitors and this was reflected in the findings of the November 2012 survey. On the day of the survey only one car was recorded in the reserve car park.

Old Hall Marshes Reserve is both a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The condition of the SSSI units within the survey area are summarised in Table 2 below. None of the units are currently adversely affected by recreational disturbance.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last Assessment Date
10*	Unfavourable recovering	The saltmarsh within Abbot's Hall Saltings has generally remained stable between 2000 and 2008 with some accretion within the saltmarsh body of creek channels. Of the 41.24ha of saltmarsh mapped in 2000, a total of 1.82ha was lost to erosion, but 2.45ha gained elsewhere through natural accretion resulting in a net gain of +0.63ha by 2008. Sufficient habitat re-creation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until Dec 2010.	31 Mar 2010
12	Unfavourable recovering	Of the 31.3469 ha of saltmarsh present in 1997/2000, 1.0542ha were lost to erosion, with 0.5990ha gained through accretion resulting in a net LOSS of 0.454ha. Sufficient habitat re-creation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 21 Oct 2010 'recovering' up until Dec 2010. Beyond Dec 2010 further additional habitat recreation will need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'recovering' status.	21 Oct 2010
14*	Favourable	Fields managed as wildfowl pasture. High water table with standing water in places. Even sward - approx height 5-6 cms. Supporting up to 3000 brent geese, also wigeon, dunlin and godwit. Full report and photos on file	23 Jan 2009
16*	Favourable	Collectively creates a good mosaic of structural habitats and surfaces for brackish wetland invertebrates and breeding birds. The Fleets themselves contribute open expanses of water displaying typical brackish conditions with no signs of pollution (or significant concerns).	27 Aug 2010
18*	Unfavourable recovering	Erosion of the seaward marsh edge has occurred among all the saltmarsh areas, particularly along both banks of Old Hall Creek. Of the 79.73ha of saltmarsh present in 2000, a total 4.58ha was lost to erosion, but an additional 2.62ha was gained elsewhere through natural accretion resulting in a net loss of -1.95ha by 2008.	31 Mar 2010

Table 2. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area. The * indicates the units where the interviews took place.

During the 2012 November survey period no footpath closures were in operation.

Only two groups were surveyed during November 2012. The Reserve was therefore even less busy than the previous November 2011 survey period when six groups were interviewed.

One person surveyed in November 2012 had driven to Old Hall Marshes from Coggeshall (Braintree district) while the other person had walked from Tollesbury. Surprisingly no local dog walkers were recorded during the November 2012 survey period. This contrasts to the November 2011 survey period when three local dog walkers from Salcott were recorded.

The person interviewed from Coggeshall regularly visits Old Hall Marshes throughout the year and their main reason for visiting is usually to bird watch. The other interviewee was a first time visitor to Old Hall who was visiting to take photographs, get some exercise and explore all the local footpaths in the vicinity of Tollesbury.

Both people interviewed stated that they had good access to open space close to where they lived. The person from Tollesbury however said that they did not visit other similar sites on a regular basis, but when he did reported that he tended to visit Mersea Island and local beaches there. The visitor from Coggeshall visited a range of other sites including Abberton Reserve, Minsmere in Suffolk, Cley in Norfolk and Great Dunmow inland in Essex and also made regular use of the Public Rights of Way network around Coggeshall.

Visitor pressure remained very low at Old Hall Marshes Reserve during the November 2012 survey period. This may be due to its relative remoteness, lack of facilities and poor access by public transport. Visitor numbers are not likely to increase significantly in the future to a point where disturbance levels to birds using the site becomes an issue. Even if visitor numbers do rise the RSPB has already put measures in place to help reduce or manage visitor impacts. In the more sensitive parts of the reserve i.e. around Quarters Spit, signs have been erected requesting that visitors walk at the base of the seawall to reduce disturbance to wild birds. Owners are also requested to keep dogs on leads to minimise disturbance to livestock and wildlife. Finally access is also restricted to certain parts of the Reserve, mainly the central area, through the use of a permit system.



Photo 2. Just one of the measures in place at Old Hall Marshes to reduce disturbance to wildlife at the SPA/SSSI.

No boats were recorded using Salcott Channel, Virley Channel, The Blackwater Estuary or Tollesbury Fleet during the November 2012 survey period. The risk of disturbance from recreational boating on the creeks around Old Hall and the Blackwater Estuary is likely to be higher in summer. It will be interesting to record the level of boat use during the June 2013 survey period to help determine if disturbance from recreational boating is likely to adversely impact on Old Hall Marshes and the species that use them in the future if demand rises from increased housing locally.

Whilst disturbance from visitor pressure at Old Hall Marshes is generally low there are also other external factors that can cause disturbance. During the survey period a low flying helicopter flew over the marshes three times and each time large numbers of geese feeding on the grassland adjacent to the seawall leading to Salcott (SSSI unit 16) took flight. It is not clear how this type of disturbance could be mitigated as a 'no low fly' policy is unlikely to be realistic. Any similar disturbances should be noted at least in the 2013 summer survey.

Strood Channel

The Strood Channel runs north-west from West Mersea towards The Strood Causeway as shown in the Figure 10 below.

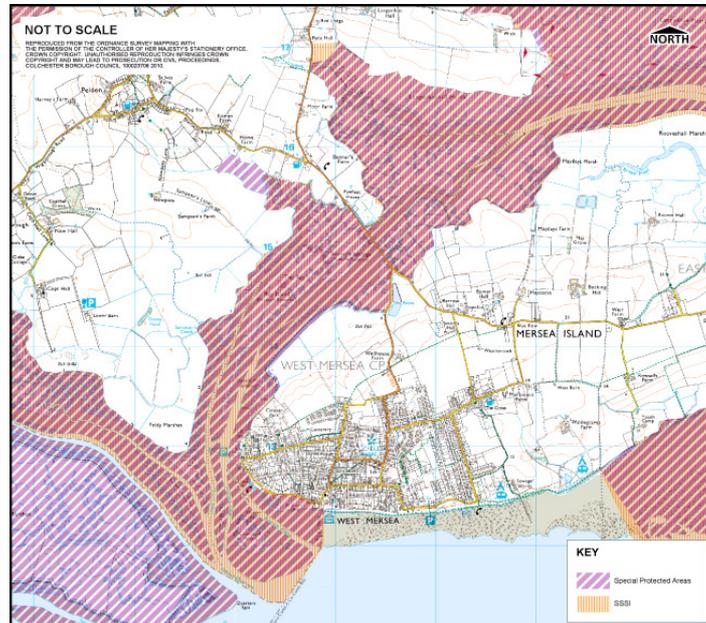


Figure 10. Showing the location of The Strood, Mersea Island.

There is informal parking immediately off Strood Causeway and there is also a designated car park situated off Coast Road along West Mersea hard. The site is accessible by foot via public footpath (No.154) which runs along the seawall along Strood Channel.

The site abuts the Blackwater Estuary SSSI, Blackwater Estuary SPA (Phase 4) and it is also a Ramsar Site (Blackwater Estuary Phase 4).

The condition of the SSSI unit within the survey area is summarised in Table 3 below.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
4	Unfavourable recovering	Of the 67.7724 ha of saltmarsh present in 1997/2000, 3.5 ha were lost to erosion, with 0.2504 ha gained through accretion resulting in a net LOSS of 3.2496 ha. Sufficient habitat recreation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until Dec 2010.	14 January 2010

Table 3. A summary of SSSI unit 4 condition at The Strood where the interviews were completed.

Surveys were conducted during the November 2012 winter period at The Strood mid week on 28 November 2012. The weather was cold and dry.

During the November 2012 survey period, only four groups were interviewed at The Strood, which was a lot lower than the previous November when 16 groups were surveyed at the site. The majority of these groups were

ornithologists visiting The Strood to see the rare Red Breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*). In November 2012, a total of five people were recorded at The Strood compared to November 2011 where 21 people were recorded. Group sizes tended to be small in November 2012 with three groups comprising one person and one group comprising two people.

All four of the groups interviewed in November 2012 were dog walkers and three of the groups had one dog while the fourth group had two dogs. In November 2011, five out of the 16 groups were dog walkers while the remaining 11 groups were ornithologists. All the dogs were on leads and none were swimming in the Strood Channel during the 2012 winter survey period.

All the groups interviewed in November 2012 were dog walking and not surprisingly they had all walked to the site. With the exception of one of the groups, they all lived locally in West Mersea. The fourth person interviewed worked on Mersea and walked her dog almost daily.

Without exception all four groups surveyed said that their main reason for visiting was to walk their dogs while one also said they were getting some exercise.

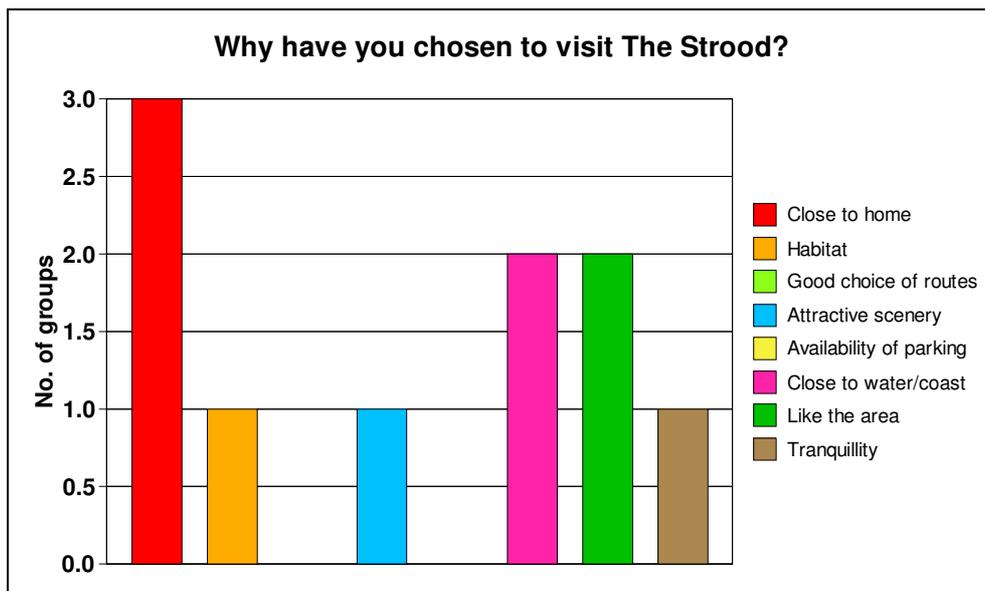


Figure 11. For most groups surveyed in November 2012 proximity to home was the key reason for visiting The Strood. This contrasts to the November 2011 results, where 75% of the groups were visiting to see the rare Red Breasted Goose.

Those visiting The Strood did so for a variety of reasons. From the responses given, three groups were visiting as it was close to home. Two groups cited that they liked the area and being by the water, while one group liked the habitat and one group found the scenery attractive.

As all the groups interviewed were dog walkers they visited The Strood daily or almost daily (two to six times a week) throughout the year.

Three of the groups interviewed said that in addition to The Strood they visited other sites regularly. These included mainly inland sites in Colchester including Welshwood Park, Great Wigborough and Friday Woods and the beach at Mersea. The fourth person interviewed only used The Strood because his dog was old and it was close to where he lived. All the groups surveyed stated that they had good access to open space that they regularly used close to where they lived.

The opens spaces regularly used included Cudmore Grove, the beach at Mersea, Friday Woods, Welshwood Park, Wigborough and Friday Woods. One of the group occasionally used The Glebe on Mersea.

Numbers at The Strood remained low during the November 2012 survey period. They were much lower than during the November 2011 survey period when visitor numbers at The Strood were higher than usual due to the presence of the rare Red Breasted Goose. The site however continues to be an important area for local dog walkers in West Mersea. Numbers were lower in November 2012. One person interviewed in the November 2012 survey had been interviewed in the previous summer survey period. November was a very wet month and The Strood was very churned up and muddy.

One person interviewed in November said that there were probably fewer dog walkers than normal at The Strood because of the condition of the footpaths and that people were walking their dog on the beach or at other local sites that were less muddy.

The 2010 SSSI condition survey did not identify recreational pressures as a problem at The Strood. Boat numbers recorded using The Strood in November 2012 remained low. Only two fishing boats were recorded on the water. While quite a few boats moor up along The Strood Channel, none were in use at the time of the survey. This is consistent with the November 2011 boat records. Although evidence would suggest that boat usage on The Strood Channel is generally low this may not accurately reflect true boat usage levels at other times of the year. In the summer 2012 period, there was slightly more boating activity noted at The Strood. Two yachts, a motor boat and a RIB were recorded using The Strood Channel.



Photo 3. Boats moored along The Strood Channel in November 2012.

In the summer months The Strood is popular with jet skiers. Given that The Strood forms part of the Mid-Essex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) it will be important to continue to record recreational boating levels to assess the likelihood of these activities to cause erosion of the salt marsh or to disturb birds. If winter boating levels remain as low as they are now disturbance to birds is not likely to become a problem in the future however any increased demand for jet skiing linked to housing growth has the potential to increase erosion of the salt marshes.

Colne Estuary

The Colne Estuary is a comparatively short and branching estuary, with five tidal arms that flow into the main channel of the River Colne. The estuary has a narrow intertidal zone predominantly composed of flats of fine silt with mud-flat communities typical of south-eastern English estuaries. The estuary is of importance for a range of wintering wildfowl and waders, in addition to breeding Little Tern which nest on shell, sand and shingle spits. There is a wide variety of coastal habitats which include mud-flat, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, sand and shingle spits, disused gravel pits and reedbeds which provide feeding and roosting opportunities for the large numbers of waterbirds that use the site.¹ Surveys took place at Cudmore Grove and Brightlingsea Marshes.

Cudmore Grove

Cudmore Grove Country Park lies at the eastern end of Mersea Island. The Country Park which is owned and managed by Essex County Council is accessible from Broman's Lane however it is not well served by public transport. There are pay and display parking meters in use and there are also toilets and basic refreshment facilities available at the Country Park.

Cudmore Grove Country Park itself is not a designated site however the beach/cliff area to the south, north and east forms part of the Colne Estuary SSSI. This same area is also designated as part of the much larger mid-Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation and Mersea Flats immediately north east of the site is a National Nature Reserve.



Figure 12. Cudmore Grove Country Park and surrounding designated areas.

¹ JNCC (2001) SPA Description: Colne Estuary (Mid-Essex Coast Phase 2).
<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=2018>

The condition of the SSSI units within the survey area are summarised in Table 4 below. None of the units are currently adversely affected by recreational disturbance.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
1*	Unfavourable recovering	This unit is encompassed within the Essex Estuaries complex. Sufficient habitat re-creation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until Dec 2010. Beyond Dec 2010 further additional habitat recreation will need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'recovering' status. Saltmarsh loss of 3.14ha (31,400m ² / 7.76 acres) has occurred between 1997 and 2008 - This loss represents a significant loss of saltmarsh i.e. 31.56% from the 1997 baseline area. Saltmarsh change shows a downward trend with a net loss of 2.82 ha (28,200m ² /6.97 acres) over the reporting period. A full account of the pattern of losses or gains throughout the whole estuary is required to develop understanding of the morphological changes taking place in the estuary.	31 March 2010
2	Favourable	The cliff profile is exposed indicating that erosive processes are operating on the cliff face.	5 November 2008
3	Unfavourable recovering	Of the 1.38ha of saltmarsh present in 1997, a total of 0.28ha were lost to erosion, with only 0.08ha gained elsewhere through natural accretion resulting in a net loss of 0.20ha by 2008. Saltmarsh was lost along the seaward marsh edge. This unit is encompassed within the Essex Estuaries complex. Sufficient habitat re-creation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until Dec 2010. Beyond Dec 2010 further additional habitat recreation will need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'recovering' status.	28 June 2010
4*	Favourable	This unit is managed as wildfowl pasture to support birds in winter and breeding birds. It is managed by mowing and aftermath grazing, and water levels are raised by a water control structure on the central drainage ditch where it discharges into the borrow dyke.	05 Nov 2008
5*	Unfavourable recovering	This unit is encompassed within the Essex Estuaries complex. Sufficient habitat re-creation has commenced within the estuary complex for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until Dec 2010. Beyond Dec 2010 further additional habitat recreation will need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'recovering' status. Saltmarsh loss of 3.14ha (31,400m ² / 7.76 acres) has occurred between 1997 and 2008 - This loss represents a significant loss of saltmarsh i.e. 31.56% from the 1997 baseline area.	31 Mar 2010

		Saltmarsh change shows a downward trend with a net loss of 2.82ha (28,200m ² /6.97 acres) over the reporting period. A full account of the pattern of losses or gains throughout the whole estuary is required to develop understanding of the morphological changes taking place in the estuary.	
43*	Favourable	Widespread erosion exposing underlying clay beds. Alluvial gravels deposited by the proto Thames are evident in the upper shore. Full report and photos on file.	5 November 2008

Table 4. A summary of SSSI unit conditions around Cudmore Grove.

* indicates the units where surveys were held.

During November 2012 surveys were carried out at Cudmore Grove over 2 ½ day periods, the first mid week on 7 November and the second on Sunday 25 November. On both survey days the weather was bright but cold and breezy.

Interviews were conducted from public footpath (131) which runs south west of Cudmore Grove along the beach, north/north west towards Mersea Stone and Mersea Flats National Nature Reserve and in the Country Park which is not part of the SSSI but which is quite busy.

In November 2012, a total of 43 groups were interviewed at Cudmore Grove. In total in November 2012, 107 people were recorded at the Country Park, with 28 of these observed during the week and 79 during the weekend survey period. During the week and weekend just under half (20) of the groups comprised two people. Group sizes tended to be larger during the weekend survey period with eight groups comprising four people and three groups comprising over five people. Cudmore Grove was busier in November 2012 than November 2011 when only 30 groups comprising 70 people were interviewed during the same winter period.

Cudmore Grove remained a busy area for dog walking. Over both survey periods in November 2012, a total of 35 dogs were recorded at the Country Park. 14 of the groups surveyed had a single dog with them while five groups had two dogs. Only two groups had four or more dogs and one of these were regular dog walkers at Cudmore Grove. There was no significant difference between the number of dogs at the park during both survey periods with 17 dogs observed in the week and 18 recorded at the weekend. In November 2012, 21 of the groups had no dogs with them while in November 2011, 63% of the groups were without dogs.

The two main modes of transport used by visitors surveyed in November 2012 at Cudmore Grove was the car and on foot. 39 groups had driven to the Country Park while the remaining 9 groups had walked. This mirrors the findings from the November 2011 surveys where 90% had driven to the Country Park and 10% had driven.

As shown in Figure 13 below, just under three quarters of the groups surveyed in November 2012 had travelled 10 miles or less to visit the Country Park. 16 of the groups had travelled up to five miles while another 16 travelled

up to 10 miles to visit Cudmore Grove. Seven of the groups surveyed had travelled 30 or more miles.

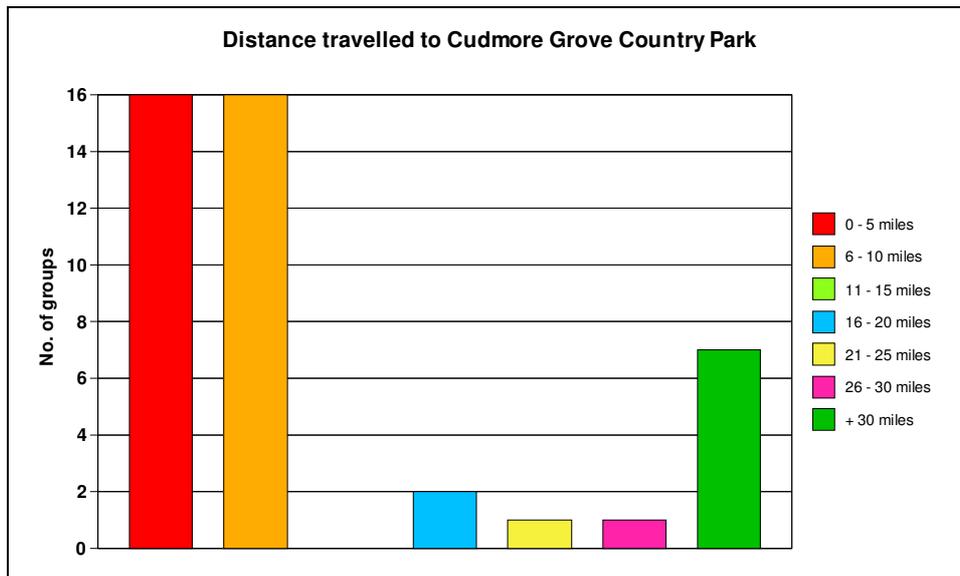


Figure 13. Showing that in November 2012 74% of the groups travelled 10 miles or less to visit Cudmore Grove Country Park.

The home towns of the visitors interviewed at Cudmore Grove in November 2012 are shown in Figure 14 below. It shows that over two thirds of the groups lived locally in Colchester Borough. 30 out of the 43 groups lived in Colchester Borough, with 13 living on Mersea Island and 10 in Colchester Town. Three groups lived in Braintree District (Halstead, Kelvedon and Great Notley), three groups lived in Maldon District (Maldon and Tollesbury), three groups lived in Chelmsford City, and one group lived in Brentwood Borough (Blackmore). Three of the groups lived outside of the Borough in London, Long Melford and Australia. This latter group were holidaying locally. In November 2011, 50% of those interviewed at Cudmore Grove lived in Colchester Borough.

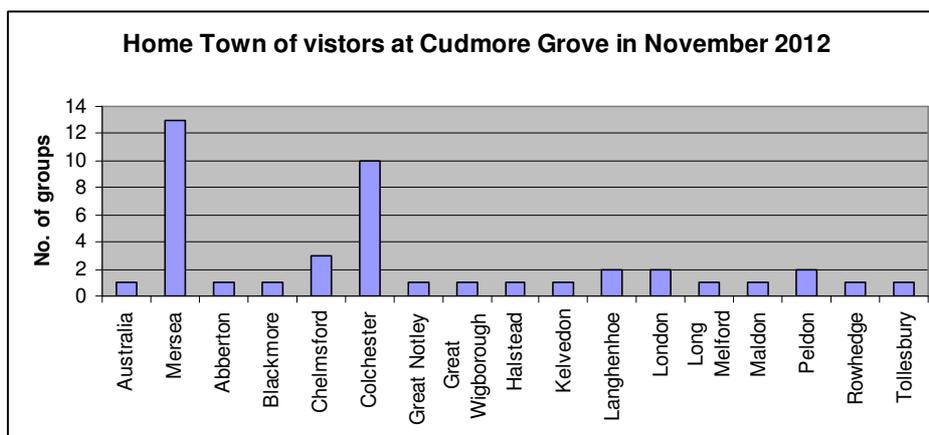


Figure 14. Showing that while Cudmore Grove attracts visitors from neighbouring areas, 53% of those surveyed lived locally in Colchester Borough principally on Mersea and in Colchester Town.

Figure 15 shows that Cudmore Grove Country Park remains an important area for dog walking. During the November 2012 survey period, 21 of the groups stated that they were visiting to dog walk, 11 groups were out walking, six groups were visiting to get some exercise while four also said that they were at Cudmore Grove to watch birds. These were consistent with the November 2011 survey results however there were slightly more people at Cudmore Grove bird watching in November 2011 due to the presence of three rare birds; Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*), Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) and Snow Bunting (*Plactophenax nivalis*).

As well as these reasons, people said that they were also visiting Cudmore Grove for a family day out, to take photographs, to enjoy the break in the weather and to kill time before lunch at the Company Shed.

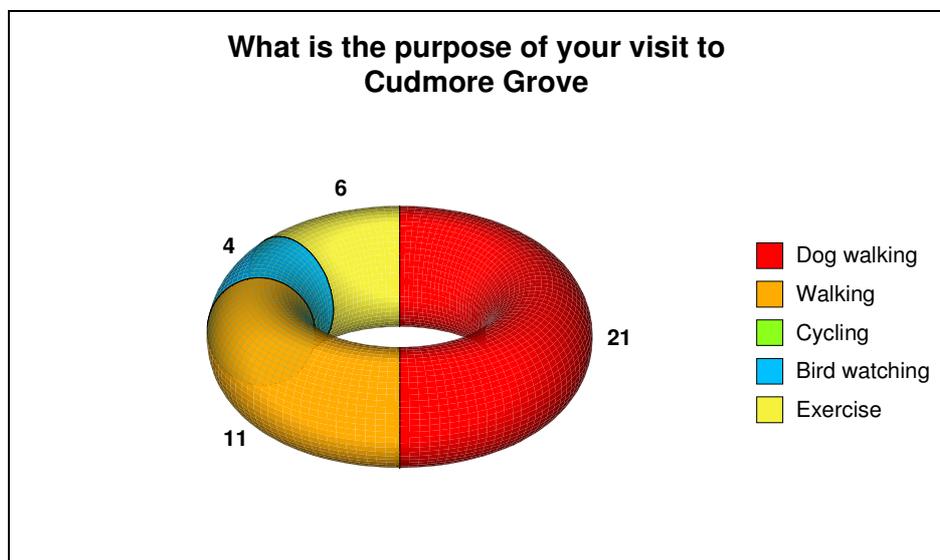


Figure 15. In November 2012, Cudmore Grove remained an important area for dog walking and as an area to go walking.

Visitors identified a number of reasons for visiting Cudmore Grove. As Figure 16 below shows the two main reasons why people choose to visit Cudmore Grove was because they liked the area and because it was close to home. 20 of the groups liked the area while 15 groups were at Cudmore Grove because it was close to where they lived. For 12 of the groups the Country Park offered a good choice of routes for dog walking and walking. The availability of parking was not cited by any of the groups as a factor for choosing to visit the country park in November 2012.

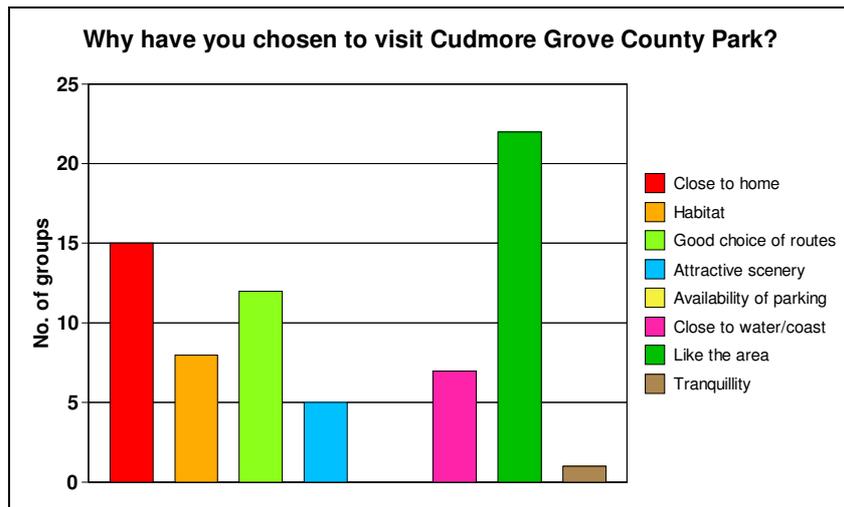


Figure 16. During November 2011 and November 2012 the majority of visitors visited Cudmore Grove because they liked the area. For local residents its proximity to home was a key reason for visiting the country park.

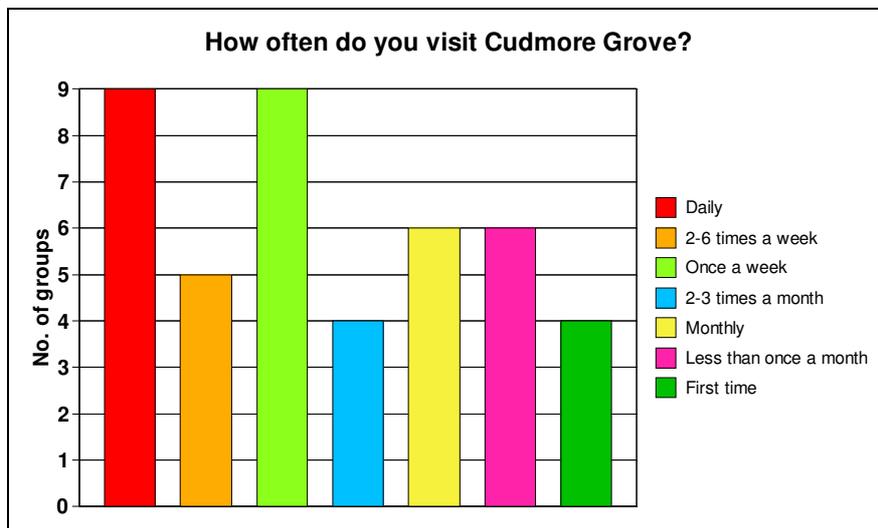


Figure 17. In November 2012 32% of visitors visited daily or almost daily; many of these were local dog walkers and 30% of these lived locally on Mersea.

The frequency of visits varied amongst the groups surveyed in November 2012. Figure 17 above shows that 14 of the groups visited the Country Park on a daily or almost daily basis. This is not surprising as approximately 50% of the groups surveyed in November 2012 were dog walkers and many lived on Mersea Island. Four groups visited two to three times a month, while six visited monthly and six groups visited less than once a month. Four of the groups were visiting the Country Park for the first time. In November 2011, despite the fact that 33% the visiting groups were dog walkers, no groups visited daily. The highest number of groups visited two to three times a week.

The majority, 34 groups, of those surveyed in November 2012, stated that they visited all year round reflecting the main activities undertaken by those

visiting the Country Park i.e. dog walking and walking/exercise. Six groups said they only visited in the winter and this included the first time visitors.

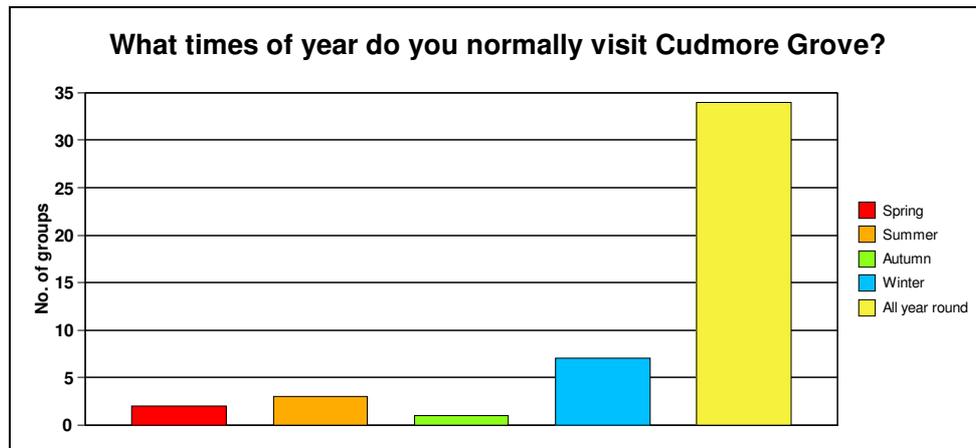


Figure 18. 79% of visitors interviewed at Cudmore Grove in November 2012 visited throughout the year reflecting the key activities i.e. dog walking and walking undertaken at the country park.

Out of the 37 responses given, 24 groups said that they visited other sites while 13 responded negatively. The groups holidaying or who lived a significant distance from Cudmore Grove were not asked if they ‘visited other alternative sites regularly’ because they not considered relevant in the context of the scope of the monitoring project.

Respondents were able to select multiple alternative sites. From the responses given Figure 19 below shows that 15 of the groups visited other parts of Mersea Island regularly (The Glebe and Mersea beach), 10 also visited inland sites in Colchester regularly (Wivenhoe, Hillyfields, Peldon, Donyland and Friday Woods, Gosbecks, Tiptree Heath and the Colne Estuary), seven were also regular visitors at Essex Wildlife Trust and RSPB reserves (Abberton, Old Hall, Fingringhoe and Hanningfield). Only two of the groups surveyed at Cudmore Grove visited coastal sites in Suffolk (Pin Mill) while one group visited Heybridge in Maldon. Four groups visited Tendring coastal sites (Clacton, Walton, Holland-on-sea and Brightlingsea). Other sites visited included Hylands Park in Chelmsford and Thorndon Country Park near Brentwood.

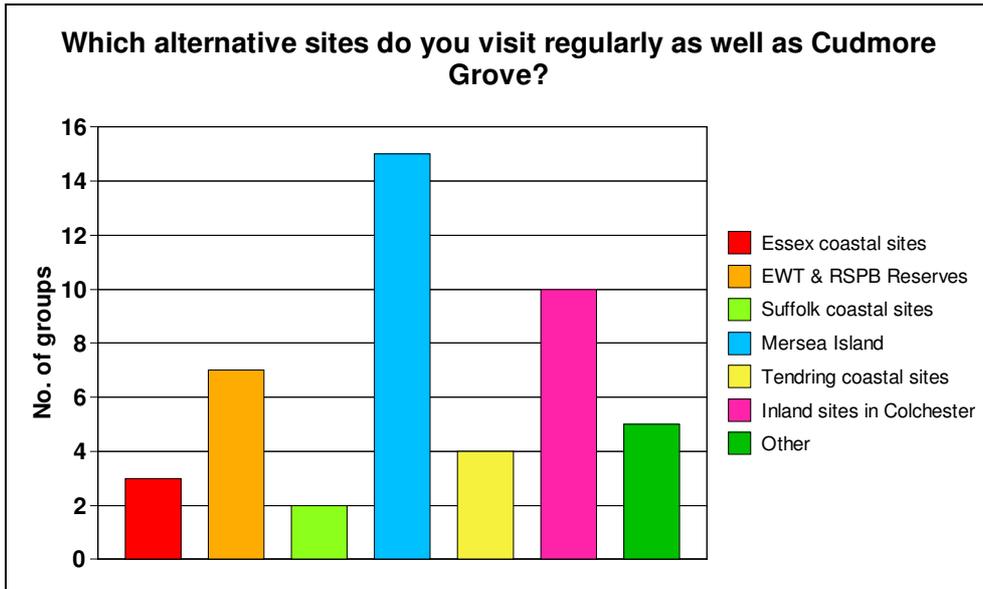


Figure 19. During November 2012 visitors at Cudmore Grove also tended to visit other sites on Mersea Island including The Glebe and local beaches.

Of the 43 groups interviewed, 32 said that they had good access to open space close to where they lived that they used regularly. Six of the groups responded negatively to this question while three groups were not asked this question as they lived a significant distance from Cudmore Grove.

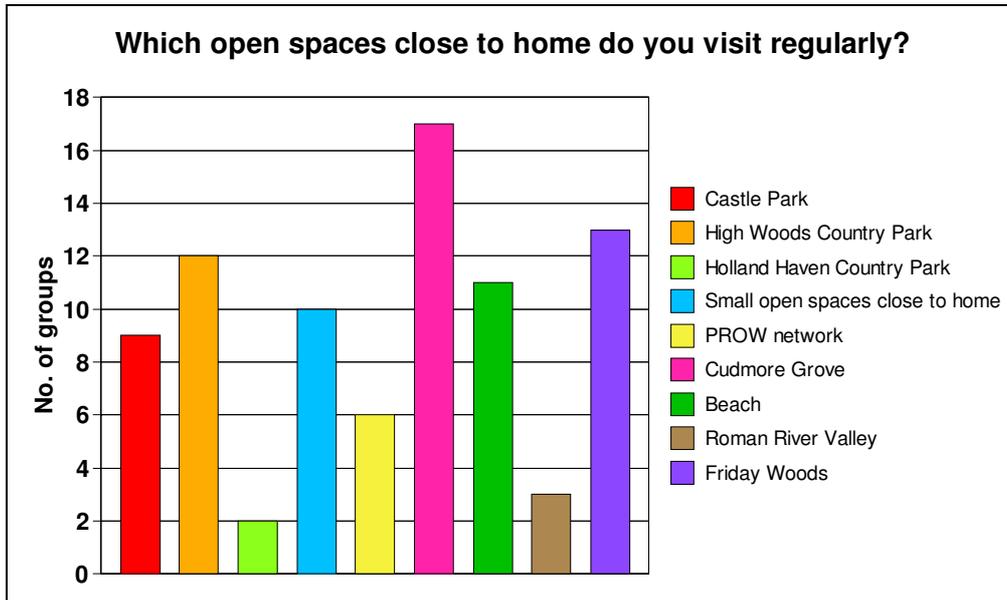


Figure 20. In addition to Cudmore Grove, Friday Woods, Highwoods Country Park and small local open spaces were the three most popular alternative sites visited during November 2012.

From the 32 groups who responded positively, 17 groups regularly used Cudmore Grove, 13 used Friday Woods and 12 regularly visited Highwoods Country Park. 11 also used the beach at Mersea. 10 groups made regular use of small open spaces close to where they lived and only two groups visited Holland Haven Country Park on a regular basis.

Other local sites used on a regular basis by visitors at Cudmore Grove were the beaches, The Glebe, the British Legion field and Monkey Steps on Mersea. Inland sites around Colchester included Copt Hall, Peldon, Langenhoe Common and Fingringhoe. Sites used around Colchester included Spring Lane, Lexden Park, Baden Powell Park, Friday Woods, the Wivenhoe Trail and privately owned woods at Welshwood Park. In Maldon some of the groups said they walked the seawalls at Tollesbury and used the local beaches. One group used Danbury Common and Hanningfield Reserve near Chelmsford while the group from Blackmore in Brentwood mainly used local footpaths as there were no parks. In Tendring the local sites most regularly used were the beaches at Walton and Frinton. One group were regular visitors to the water meadows at Sudbury and Long Melford while five groups said they did not use any of the sites listed in the survey. One group identified the lack of parking as a deterrent for using Castle Park in Colchester more often.

A total of nine boats were recorded at Cudmore Grove over the two and a half survey periods in November 2012. These included five yachts, one lifeboat, one tug and two fishing boats. All of the boats were recorded during the week. The weather during the weekend survey period was extremely windy and not ideal for sailing. In the winter periods pressure from recreational boating is unlikely to cause significant disturbance for overwintering and migratory birds in the vicinity of Cudmore Grove Country Park.

Brightlingsea

Brightlingsea Marshes and beach form part of the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation, Colne Estuary Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site, and Colne Estuary SSSI (see Figure 21).

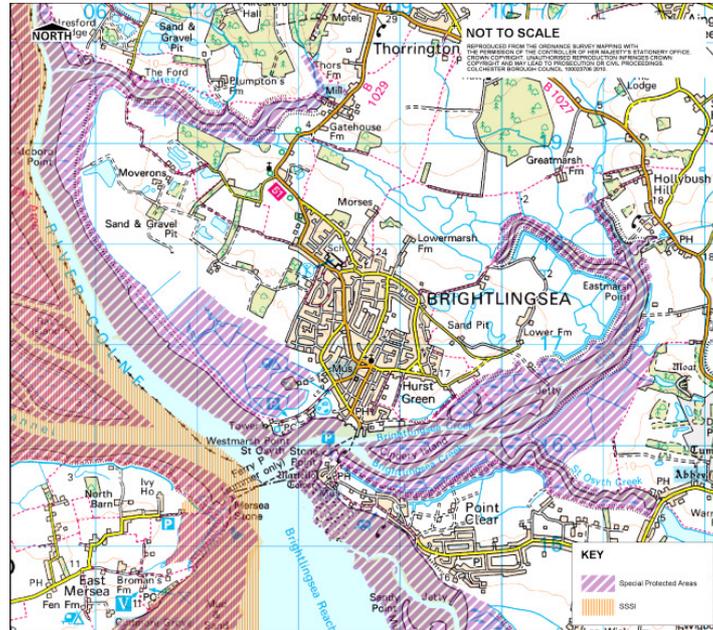


Figure 21. Map showing Brightlingsea Marshes and the extent of the Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest notifications.

Table 6 outlines the condition of the SSSI unit within which the survey took place. Recreational disturbance is not referred to in the unit summary.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
23	Unfavourable recovering	The main vegetation types recorded within the Alresford and Brightlingsea saltmarsh sections of this unit, concur with those mapped by the Posford survey (2003). The current survey records patches of SM6 <i>Spartina anglica</i> (common cord grass) marsh within these sections, which were not mapped previously. Comparing the field survey observations with the mapping of changes in extent of saltmarsh undertaken by the University of Newcastle in 2000, and circa. 2000 aerial photos, around 80% of the marsh area continues to be stable. Erosion was noted to be more extensive along the outer edge of the saltmarsh according to the studies quoted, with erosion also evident in many of the creeks, particularly along the eastern edge in the north section of the Alresford marsh. The current survey noted erosion of the marsh at this end with slumping of sections of marsh; erosion of the seaward edge was also noted. It is not considered currently that significant erosive changes have occurred in the marsh since the Newcastle study, notably the stable areas have not noticeably deteriorated. Though, there may still be an erosive trend within these marshes the rate of change is not currently considered to be resulting in a significant decline.	18 November 2010

Table 5. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area.

Surveys were carried out at Brightlingsea Marshes over two and a half day sessions. The mid week surveys were split over two sessions due to the poor weather. The mid week surveys were carried out on 9 November and 28 November 2012. The weekend survey was conducted on 25 November 2012. The weather during all the survey periods was dry, very cold and windy. During November 2012, the surveys were conducted along the promenade adjacent to the beach huts.

A total of 76 groups were interviewed at Brightlingsea Marshes during the November 2012 survey period, with 25 of the interviews conducted mid week and 51 at the weekend. A total of 137 people were recorded at the site; 39 during the week and 98 at the weekend. This compares with the November 2010 results when 32 groups were surveyed and the November 2011 results when 54 groups were interviewed. While groups sizes varied, the majority of groups were either visiting alone (30 groups) or in pairs (34 groups). Group sizes were slightly larger at the weekend than during the week when six groups comprising three people and three comprising four people were recorded.

The majority of visitors interviewed at the Brightlingsea Marshes site had driven. 43 groups had arrived by car, 33 had walked and one group had cycled. The large number of visitors on foot coincides with the fact that a large proportion of those surveyed at this site lived in Brightlingsea.

As shown in Figure 22 below the majority of the visitors lived fairly locally to the Brightlingsea Marshes. 50 groups lived within five miles of the site, nine groups lived within 10 miles of Brightlingsea Marshes and 12 groups lived within 15 miles or less. Only one group had travelled 30 miles or more to visit the site.

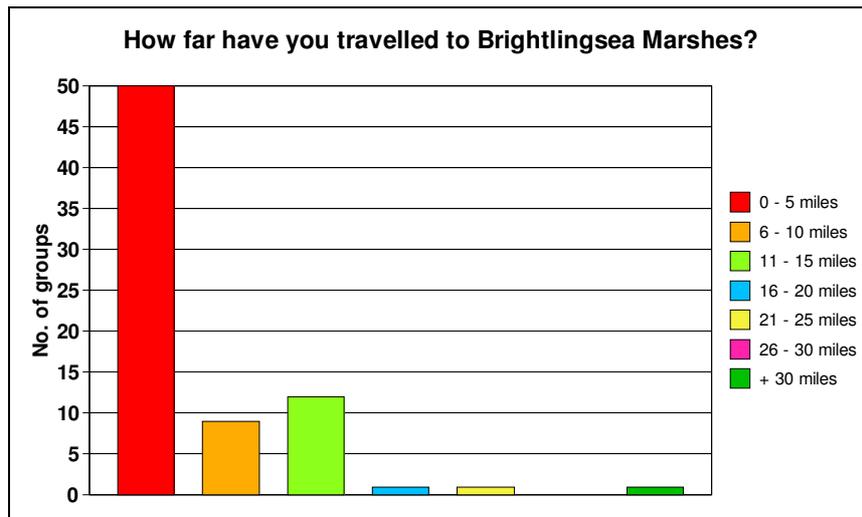


Figure 22. During the November 2012 survey period 65% lived within five miles of the site.

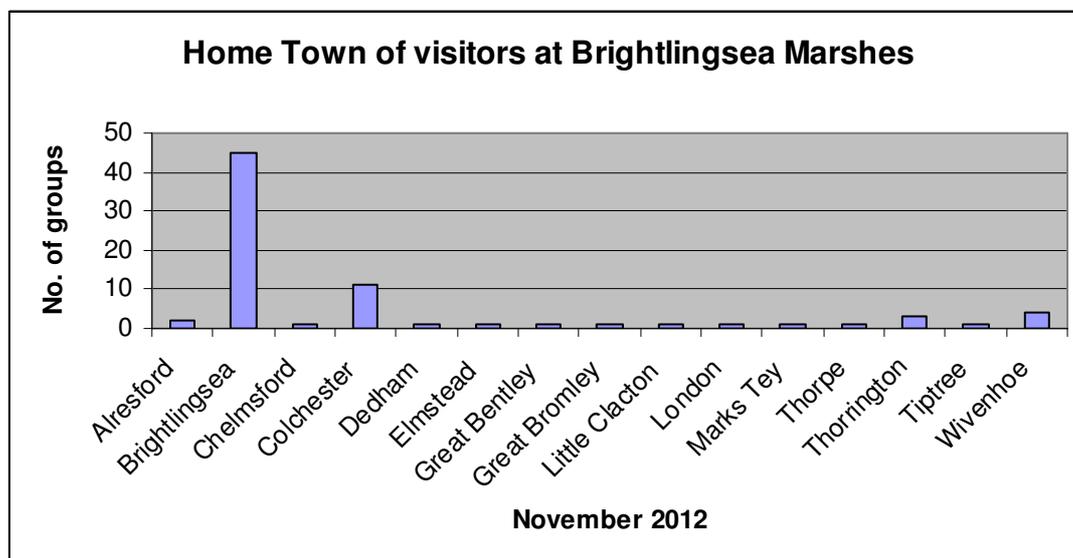


Figure 23. 72% of those surveyed in November 2012 lived in Tendring District.

As Figure 23 above shows, many of the groups surveyed at Brightlingsea Marshes lived in Tendring District. 55 of the groups came from the Tendring area and 45 of these lived in Brightlingsea itself with the remaining groups living in smaller villages throughout Tendring District. 18 groups lived in

Colchester Borough while only two groups lived further afield in Chelmsford and London.

A number of activities took place at Brightlingsea Marshes. As Figure 24 shows the two key reasons for visiting Brightlingsea Marshes was to dog walk and to go walking. 50 of the groups were visiting to dog walk while 23 groups were out for a walk. One group was cycling, two groups were bird walking and two were getting some exercise. These were also the primary activities undertaken by visitors interviewed in the November 2011 survey.

Brightlingsea Marshes is an important area for dog walking. 61 dogs were recorded at Brightlingsea during the November 2012 surveys with 23 recorded mid week and 38 during the weekend survey. 24 groups had no dogs with them at all. 23 of the groups had a single dog with them and only one group had three dogs with them during the weekend survey.



Figure 24. Brightlingsea Marshes is popular with dog walkers with 65% visiting mainly for this reason.

During the November 2012 surveys respondents gave a number of reasons for visiting Brightlingsea Marshes with many stating multiple reasons. As shown in Figure 25, 34 of the groups interviewed were visiting Brightlingsea Marshes due to the attractive scenery, for 28 groups it was because it was close to home while for 16 groups it was because they liked the area. 11 groups liked being by the water. Even though there is a pay and display car park with free winter parking close to the site, this was only identified as an important factor for one group. These results are consistent with the November 2011 results.

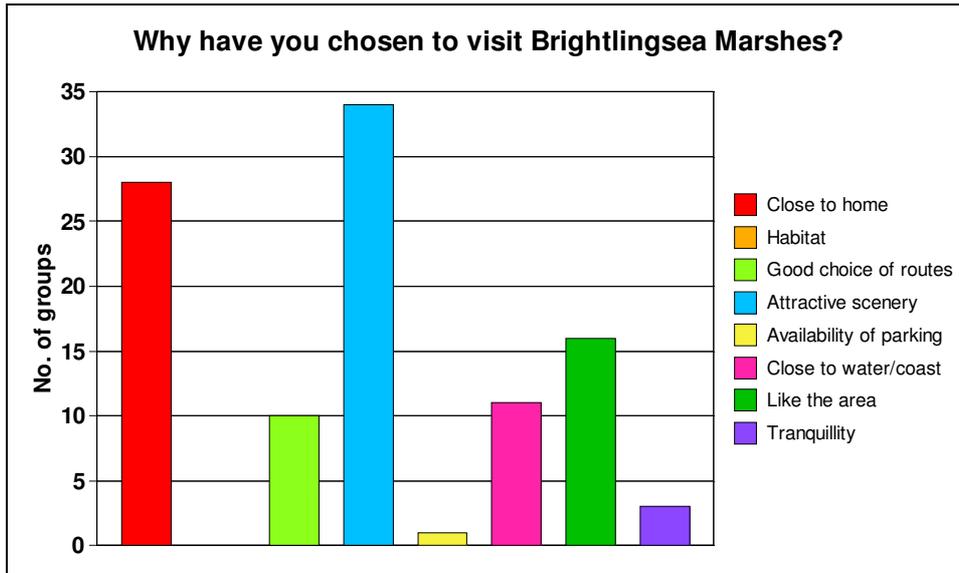


Figure 25. Whilst a wide variety of reasons were given for visiting Brightlingsea Marshes in November 2012, the most frequent reason given was the attractive scenery and proximity to home.

There was variation in terms of the frequency of visits made by visitors to Brightlingsea Marshes in November 2012. As 64% of the groups were dog walkers and 59% lived in Brightlingsea, 43 of the groups not surprisingly said that they visited Brightlingsea Marshes on either a daily or almost daily basis. 12 groups visited once a week, five visited monthly and eight visited less than once a month. Two groups were visiting the site for the first time. These findings are consistent with the November 2011 results where the majority of the groups interviewed said that they visited daily or almost daily, lived close to Brightlingsea and were dog walkers.

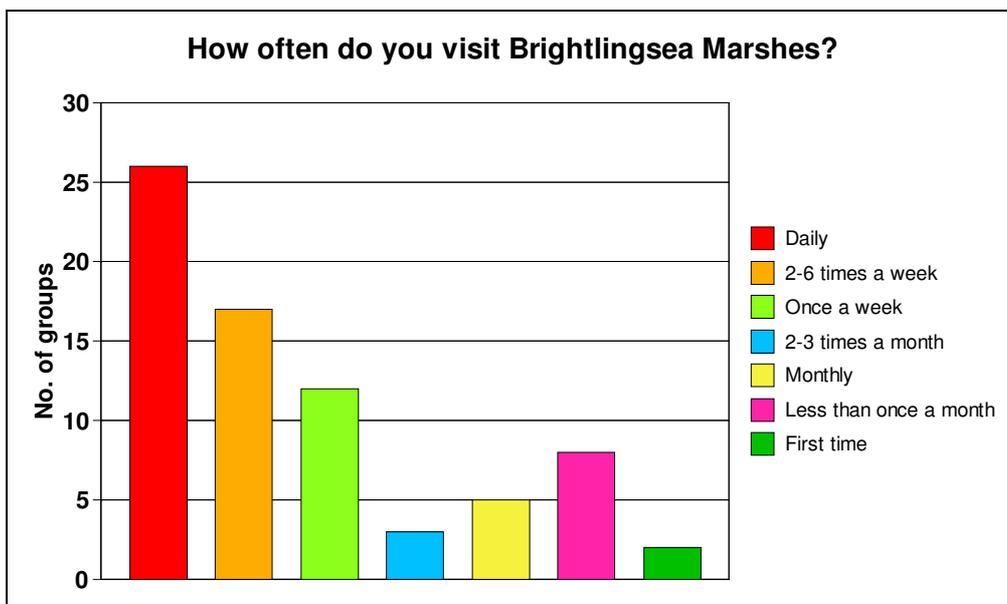


Figure 26. The majority of visitors at Brightlingsea Marshes visited very frequently; 56% visited daily or almost everyday. There were fewer first time visitors in November 2012 than in November 2011 with two groups visiting for the first time in 2012 and four in 2011.

During the November 2012 survey, 67 of the groups said that they visited the site all year round reflecting the fact that the area is well used by local dog walkers and walkers. This represents 88% of those surveyed in November 2012. The November 2012 results are consistent with the same period the previous year where 86% of those surveyed said they also visited Brightlingsea Marshes throughout the year. In November 2012, five groups also stated that they mainly visited the site in the summer months.

As well as Brightlingsea Marshes, 46 of the groups said that they visited other sites regularly while 24 groups responded negatively.

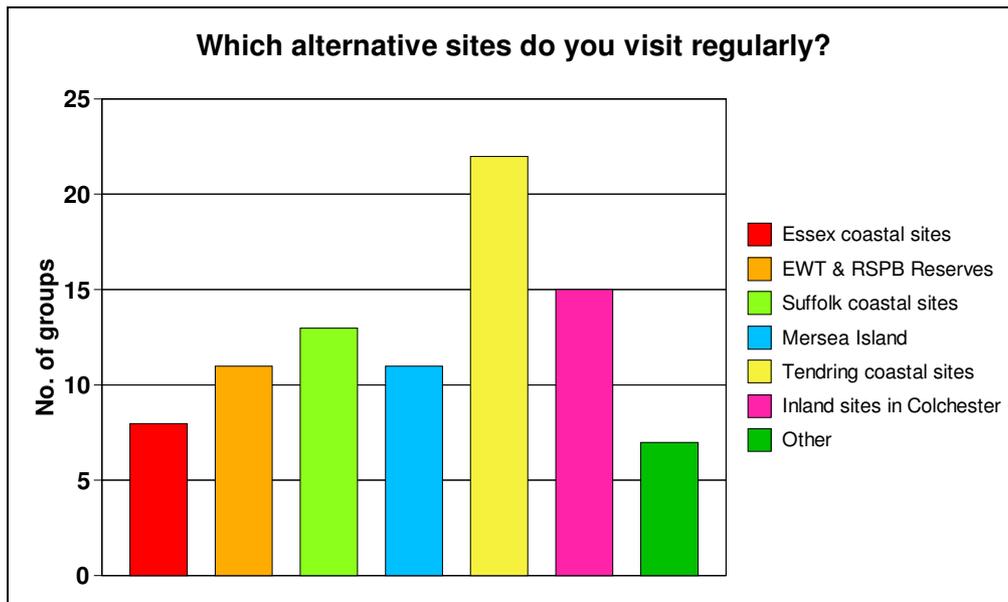


Figure 27. During the November 2012 the most popular alternative sites visited were other coastal sites in Tendring. These were visited by 28% of visitors while 19% visited Mersea Island.

As shown in Figure 27 above the most popular alternative sites visited were coastal sites in Tendring; 22 groups said that they visited these sites (Mistley Park Farm, Stour Woods, St Osyth, Frinton, Clacton, Walton, Alresford, Mistley, Harwich, Bradwell and Holland Haven). 15 groups visited inland sites in Colchester, Lexden Springs, Wivenhoe, Highwoods, Dedham, West Bergholt, Friday Woods and Gosbecks Archaeological Park), 11 were regular visitors to Mersea Island, 13 visited coastal sites in Suffolk (Dunwich, Alton Water, Southwold, Aldeburgh and Orwell Bridge), 11 regularly visited Essex Wildlife Trust/RSPB reserves (Abberton, Fingringhoe and Minsmere), while eight were regular visitors to coastal sites in Essex. During November 2011 the most regularly visited alternative sites were also Tendring coastal sites and Mersea Island.

Other sites identified by visitors that they regularly visited included Stoke by Nayland, Coggeshall, Tollesbury in Maldon and Norfolk.

Of the visitors to Brightlingsea Marshes 92% said they had good access to open space close to where they lived that they used on a regular basis.

The majority of those interviewed, 51 of the groups said that they used small open spaces close to home. Seven groups used Highwoods regularly, three groups used local beaches, three regularly walked the local footpaths network, two used Castle Park and one group made regular use of Friday Woods (see Figure 28).

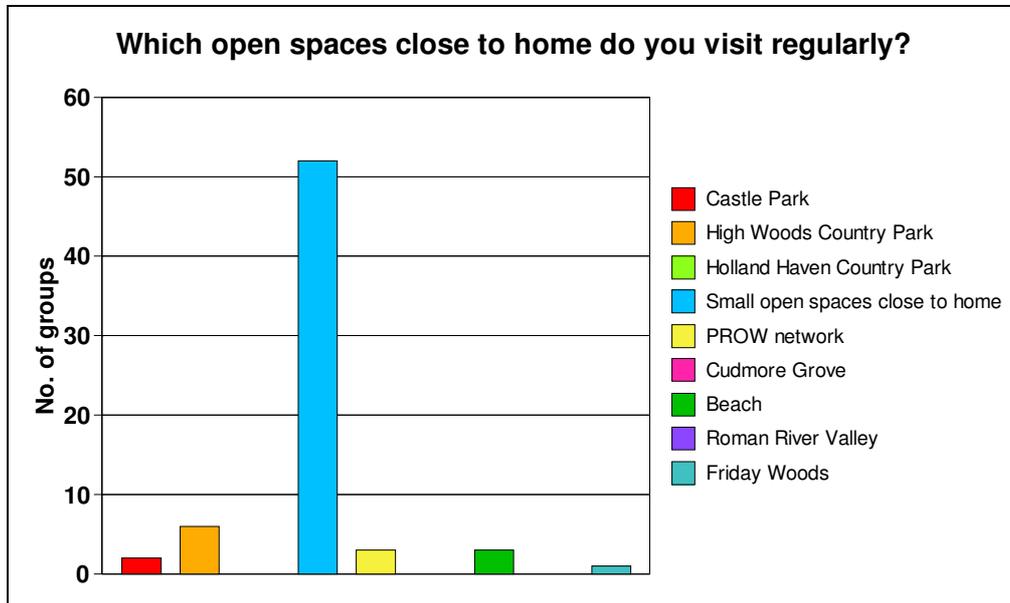


Figure 28. Given the fact that 59% of those surveyed in November 2012 at Brightlingsea Marshes lived in Brightlingsea, not surprisingly the majority of visitors used small open spaces around Tendring close to where they lived.

Those interviewed at Brightlingsea Marshes also identified a number of sites around Colchester and Tendring that they visited regularly. In Colchester these were Dedham, Lexden Springs, Roman Sites and Wivenhoe Woods the Wivenhoe Trail and Wivenhoe Park. In Tendring, other local sites identified included Alresford Creek, Beach Huts, Brightlingsea woods and church, Robinsons Road, Howlands Marsh, Hurst Green, Mill Street, Moverons Pits, The Lozenge, Ropewalk, Partridges, St Osyth, Strangers Corner and Wrabness.

The weather was too rough for sailing during the weekend survey period and only one yacht was recorded during the weekday survey in November 2012.

Hamford Water

Hamford Water is a large, shallow estuarine basin comprising tidal creeks and islands, intertidal mud and sand-flats, and saltmarsh. The rich invertebrate fauna and sheltered nature of the site results in its importance for internationally important numbers of waterbirds during the passage and winter periods, as well as for breeding terns in summer. The shallow and sheltered nature of the complex provides refuge for waterbirds, especially in periods of severe weather. Survey work took place at Kirby Quay and The Naze. A total of 59 groups were surveyed at these sites. Hamford Water is a difficult site to access and only Walton-on-the-Naze was identified as an access point with car parking. The map below shows the extent of the Hamford Water Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest notification.

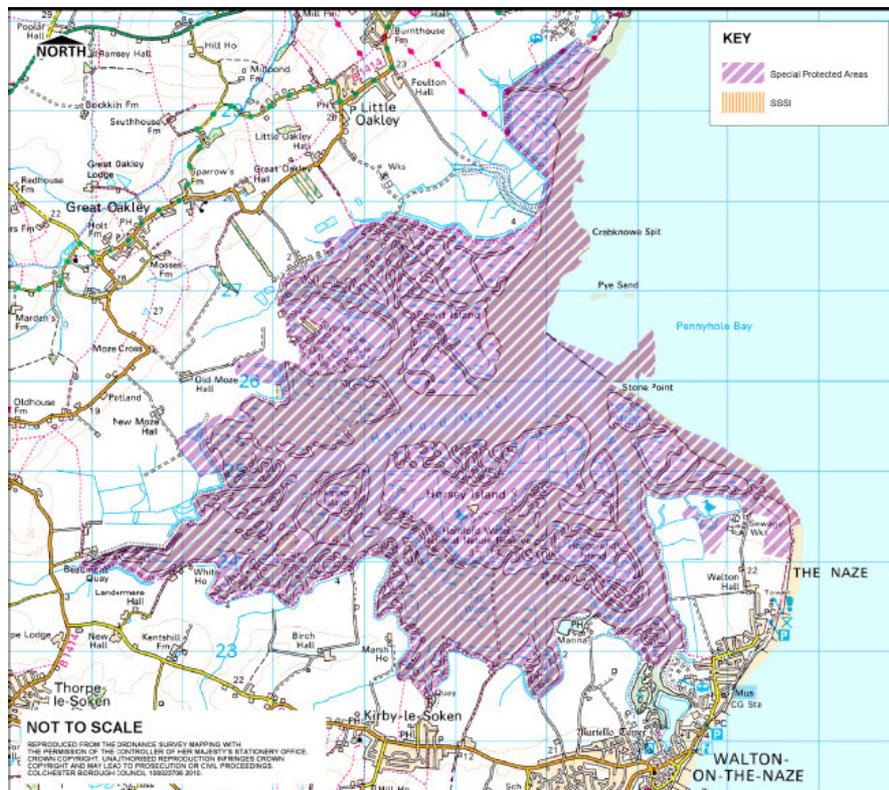


Figure 29. Hamford Water Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest 2 JNCC (2001) SPA Description: Hamford Water. <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=2012>.

Kirby Quay

Kirby Quay is located at the southern end of Hamford Water Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest. This site was selected as it is accessible from Kirby-le-Soken and with the exception of The Naze, is the only location where Hamford Water can be accessed adjacent to a settlement. The map below shows the location of Kirby Quay and Table 6 summarises the condition of the SSSI units within the survey area.

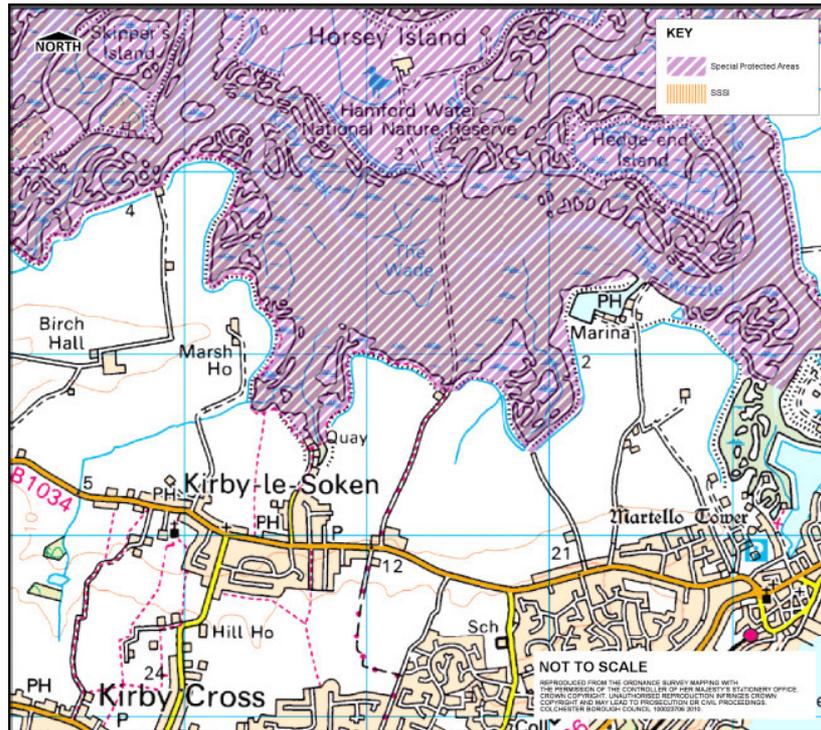


Figure 30. Map showing Kirby Quay & the Walton Backwaters and the extent of the Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest notifications.

Table 6 below shows the SSSI units in the survey area.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
3	Unfavourable recovering	Evidence indicates that the extent of mud/sandflat habitats within the outer coastal units of the SSSI likely to have decreased due to coastal squeeze. The proposed creation of sufficient intertidal habitat has commenced adjacent to Hamford Water SSSI for this unit to be assessed as 'recovering' up until end Dec 2010. Saltmarsh is broadly favourable in habitat terms (structural and plant variety) but likely to have been eroding at a site level and therefore not regarded as favourable on a precautionary basis. The population figures for Ringed Plover are below the required threshold, however proposed work should help address this. The WeBS counts are above thresholds for all listed species.	25 June 2010
24*	Favourable	Seawall - maintained by annual mowing creating a mixed structure due to cutting regime being split between top and bottom of the seawall.	11 December 2008

Table 6. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area. * indicates where survey work took place.

The site at Kirby Quay was visited on 30 November during the winter 2012 period for a full day survey. As in previous survey periods the site at Kirby Quay was very quiet with only six groups surveyed during the day.

All the groups surveyed had travelled less than five miles to the site. Only Kirby-le-Soken or Kirby Cross was given as the home town in each survey. This demonstrates that Kirby Quay continues to be used predominately by people from the local area who live in close proximity to the site.

Out of the six groups surveyed, five had walked to the site whilst the other group had travelled by car. The site at Kirby Quay does not benefit from dedicated car parking provision therefore those wishing to visit the site by car would have to park on public roads nearby. Access by foot is the most popular option and this reflects the short distances travelled by visitors to the site in November 2012.

The six groups surveyed in November 2012 said that they visited the site all year round and also multiple times a week. Dog walking was the most popular reason for visiting Kirby Quay; five groups had a dog with them. Although the site is not used by a large number of visitors, those who do visit the site appear to be regular and benefit from the access provided by the public rights of way in the area.

When the groups were asked which alternative sites they visited regularly Tendring coastal sites were a popular choice with four groups citing these locations. With regards to other open spaces close to home that groups visited regularly, the Public Right of Way Network (five groups) and local beaches (three groups) at Walton and Frinton were popular choices. This is similar to the findings from previous survey periods at Kirby Quay.

Due to the fairly remote nature of Kirby Quay and the lack of parking, this site is not likely to attract high visitor numbers in the future.

The Naze

The Naze is located to the north of Walton-on-the-Naze town and to the south east of Hamford Water. The Naze is designated as a SSSI, Ramsar and Special Protection Area.

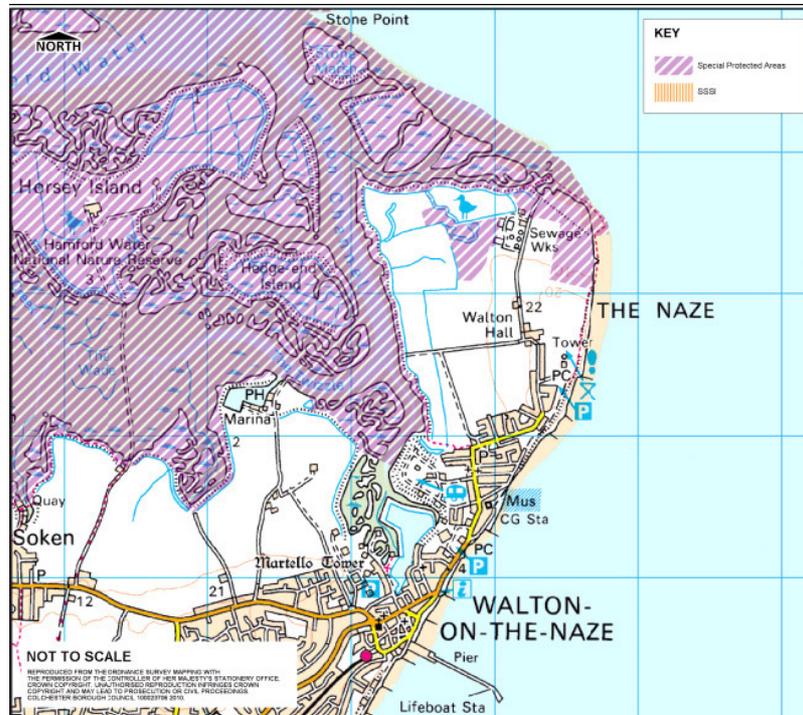


Figure 31. The location of The Naze and SPA designation.

The condition of the SSSI units within the survey area are summarised in Table 7. The Naze SSSI unit is in favourable condition however the SPA units have been recorded as being in unfavourable condition. None of the SSSI units are currently adversely affected by recreational disturbance.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
1*	Favourable	-	16 Jul 2008
14	Favourable	Good structure of beach communities, regular overtopping on spring tides providing good water exchange in lagoon. Oystercatcher and ringed plover nested in small numbers during breeding period. Regular visits from wildfowl and waders.	11 Dec 2008
18*	Favourable	Scrub control has been undertaken. Grass cutting in open areas on regular basis. Good structure throughout.	11 Dec 2008

Table 7. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area. * indicates the units where the interviews took place.

Surveys were undertaken at Walton in November on 10 November and 20 November 2013. During the November 2012 survey period a total of 36

groups were interviewed. 61% of the surveys conducted were carried out at the weekend whilst 39% were conducted during the week which is consistent with other Natura 2000 sites included in the survey.

Out of the 36 groups surveyed, 29 had travelled less than five miles to visit the site. Three groups had travelled 11-15 miles whilst a further two groups had travelled in excess of 26 miles. From the survey results it is clear that the site is well used by those in the local area but also attracts visitors from further afield who are prepared to travel greater distances to visit the site.

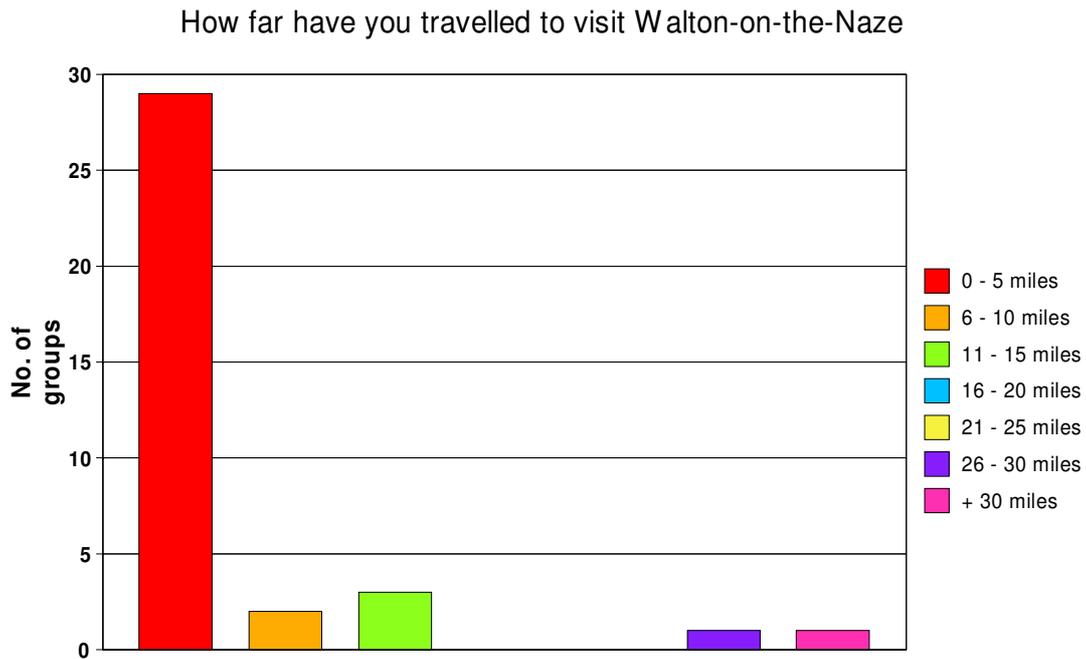


Figure 32. 80% of visitors interviewed in November 2012 lived very close to the Naze.

When groups were asked their home town it was clear that a large proportion of those visiting Walton-on-the-Naze had travelled a short distance. Figure 33 shows that of the 36 groups surveyed, 24 of these lived in Walton with a further six groups travelling from Frinton. The winter survey only recorded four groups who lived outside of Tendring District. Three of these groups were from Colchester whilst one group was visiting from Cambridge.

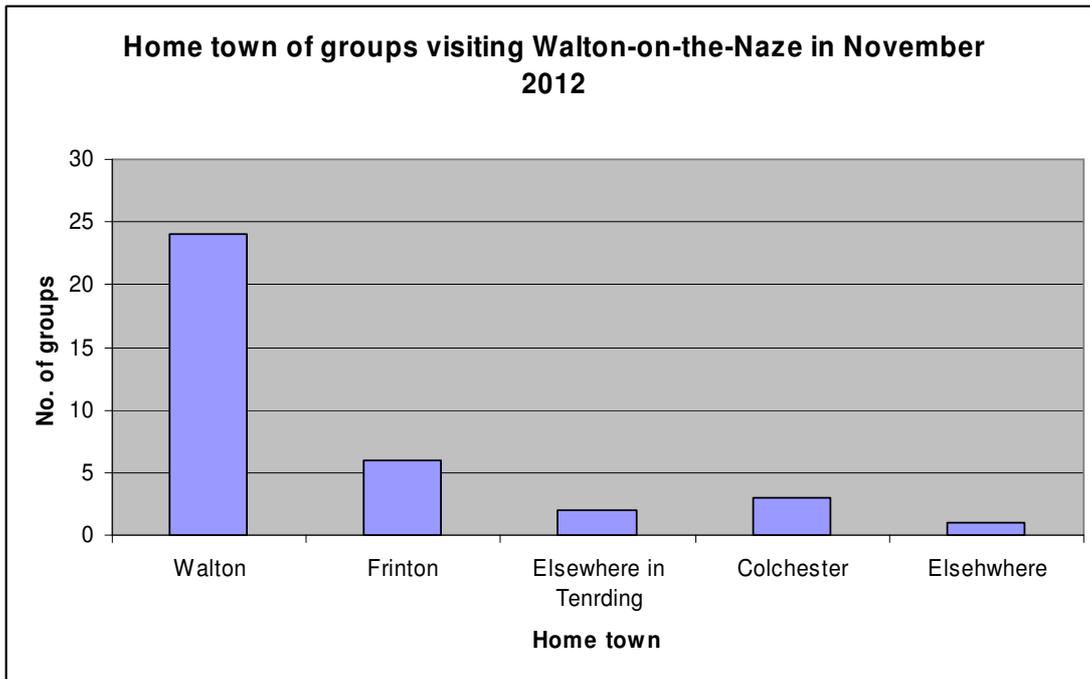


Figure 33. The majority of those interviewed at in November 2012 were local residents from Walton and Frinton.

As in previous years the most popular reason for visiting the Naze was to dog walk. 26 groups cited this as their reason for visiting. A total of seven groups said that they were visiting Walton to go walking while a further three groups were there to get some exercise. Over 70% of the groups surveyed were accompanied by one or more dogs. More groups had multiple dogs (38%) than those visiting the site without a dog (28%).

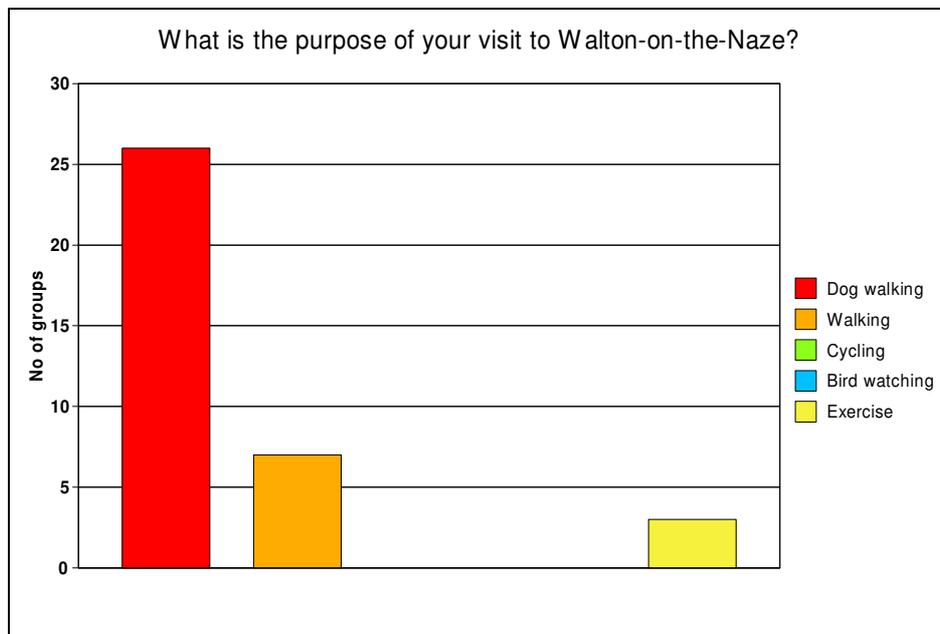


Figure 34. Highlighting The Nazes' continuing importance as a dog walking area for local residents.

As can be seen from Figure 35 below the most popular reasons for visiting Walton were because the site was close to home and because people liked the area. 19 groups chose to visit this site because it was close to home which relates well to the fact that most groups travelled short distances to access the site. A total of 20 groups reported that they liked the area with a further 11 groups choosing to visit due to the site's close proximity to the water and coastline.

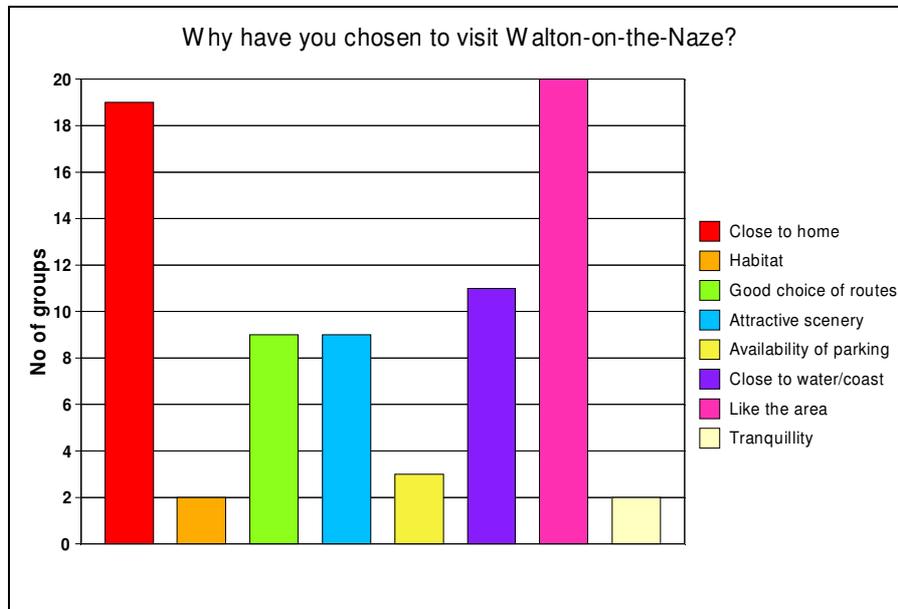


Figure 35. The majority of groups surveyed in November 2012 were attracted to The Naze because it was close to home and because they lived the area.

Out of the 36 groups that were surveyed in November 2012, 33 groups visit the site all year round with 26 of these groups visit daily or multiple times a week which demonstrates that the site is visited regularly throughout the year.

When groups were asked which open spaces close to home they visited regularly, the beach and other small open spaces close to home dominated the results once again. 12 groups regularly use the small open spaces close to their home whilst a further 10 groups regularly make use of the beach where they live. These findings are similar to previous years' results which can be seen in the Year 1 and Year 2 reports previously published.

Stour and Orwell Estuaries

The Stour and Orwell estuaries straddle the eastern part of the Essex/Suffolk border in eastern England. The estuaries include extensive mud-flats, low cliffs, saltmarsh and small areas of vegetated shingle on the lower reaches. The mud-flats hold *Enteromorpha*, *Zostera* and *Salicornia* spp. The site also includes an area of low-lying grazing marsh at Shotley Marshes on the south side of the Orwell. In summer, the site supports important numbers of breeding Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, while in winter they hold major concentrations of waterbirds, especially geese, ducks and waders. The geese also feed, and waders roost, in surrounding areas of agricultural land outside the SPA.²

Stour Estuary

The Stour Estuary RSPB reserve includes Stour Wood, Copperas Wood and extends along the Stour estuary. Stour and Copperas Woods do not form part of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area or the Stour Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest. The map below shows the extent of the Special Protection Area notification. Stour and Copperas woods are notified as the Stour and Copperas Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest. The condition of the Site of Special Scientific Interest units within the survey area are summarised in Table 12.

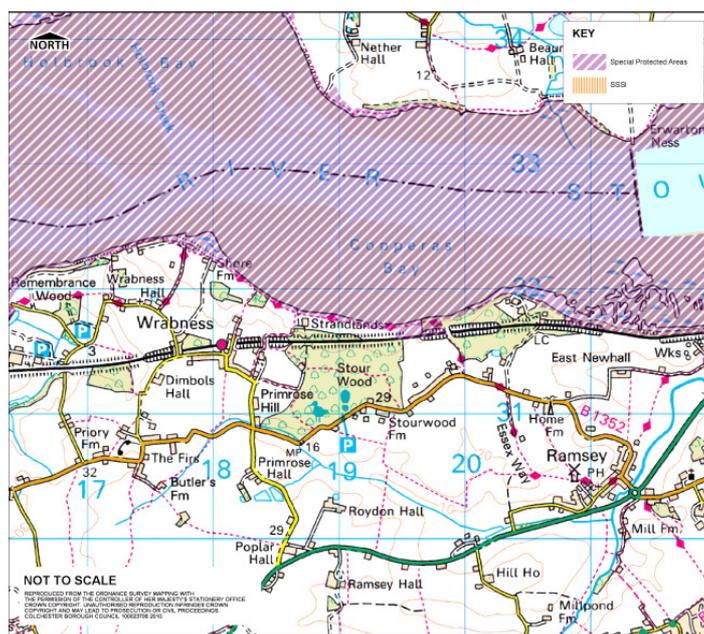


Figure 36. Map showing part of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area.

² JNCC (2001) SPA Description: Stour and Orwell Estuaries.
<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=2011>

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
10*	Favourable	The features assessed for this site are littoral sediment and vascular plants. The condition of the plants is recorded as viable and/or subject to natural change and likely to be subject to geomorphological changes due to historical impacts. The sediment character, biotope composition and distribution, and species composition of representative biotopes appears to be favourable. The biotopes change position but there do not appear to be any adverse changes. The extent of littoral sediment appears to be reducing, eroding at the seaward edge and the shoreline profile is changing and appears to be lowering. The condition of the littoral sediments is subject to natural change and likely to be subject to geomorphological changes due to historical impacts.	6 October 2010
Stour & Copperas Wood 1*	Favourable	Management plan being adhered to.	2 August 2009
Stour & Copperas Wood 2*	Favourable	No comment	2 August 2009
Stour & Copperas Wood 4	Favourable	No comment	2 August 2009

Table 8. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area. * indicates where survey work took place. The condition of the Stour and Copperas Wood SSSI units within the survey area are included in the table.

Survey work took place at the Stour Estuary and RSPB reserve and at The Walls in Manningtree. A total of 125 surveys were completed at these two sites during November 2012 compared to November 2011 when 104 surveys were completed.

Surveys were carried out at the Stour Estuary over two half day sessions, the first mid week on 6 November and the second on 11 November 2012, which was a weekend day. On both survey days the weather was dry, but cool and windy. The surveys were carried mainly at Stour Wood and along the footpaths adjacent to the estuary.

During November 2012, a total of 64 groups were surveyed at the Stour Estuary. Weekends at this location were far busier than during the week. 60 groups were surveyed at the weekend while only four were surveyed during the week. A total of 168 people were recorded at the site with six people recorded during the week and 162 at the weekend. In November 2011, 42 groups were interviewed at the Stour Estuary representing a 34% increase in visitor numbers

During both survey periods, groups mainly comprised one or two people. 53% of visitors surveyed during November 2012 were visiting alone or in pairs.

Larger groups were recorded at the weekend where 12 groups with four people and five groups with five or more people per group were recorded during this period.

Of the 64 groups interviewed at the Stour Estuary, 42 had no dogs with them. A total of 28 dogs were recorded at this location. 17 of the groups had one dog, four groups had two dogs while one group had three dogs. All the visiting groups with dogs except for one were recorded at the weekend.

60 of the groups interviewed in November 2012 had travelled to the Stour Estuary by car while 1 group had walked. Another group were on bicycles but they had been prevented from cycling through Stour Woods by the site ranger and did not stay around to complete a survey. The November 2012 results are consistent with the November 2011 survey results where the majority of visitors had also arrived by car.

Figure 37 below shows that 35 groups of those interviewed at the Stour Estuary had travelled five miles or less to visit the site. Another 11 groups had travelled between six and 10 miles. While the Stour Estuary clearly attracts mostly local people Figure 37 also shows that it attracts visitors from further afield with five groups travelling at least 30 miles to visit this site.

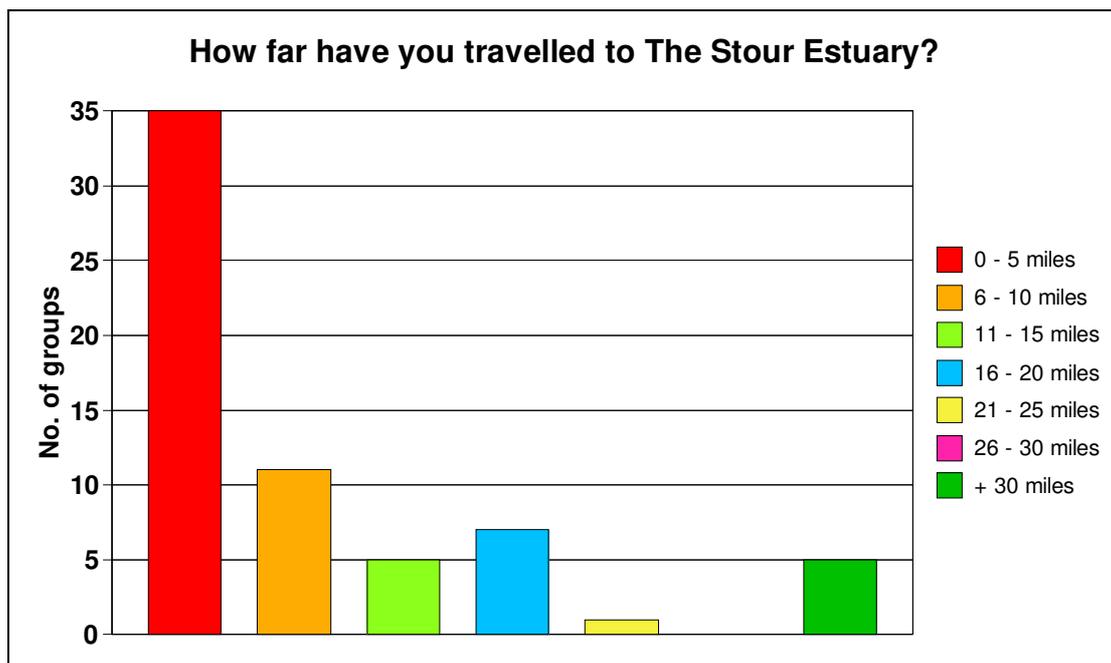


Figure 37. Showing 71%, of those interviewed at The Stour Estuary were local to the Tendring area having travelled 10 miles or less to reach the site.

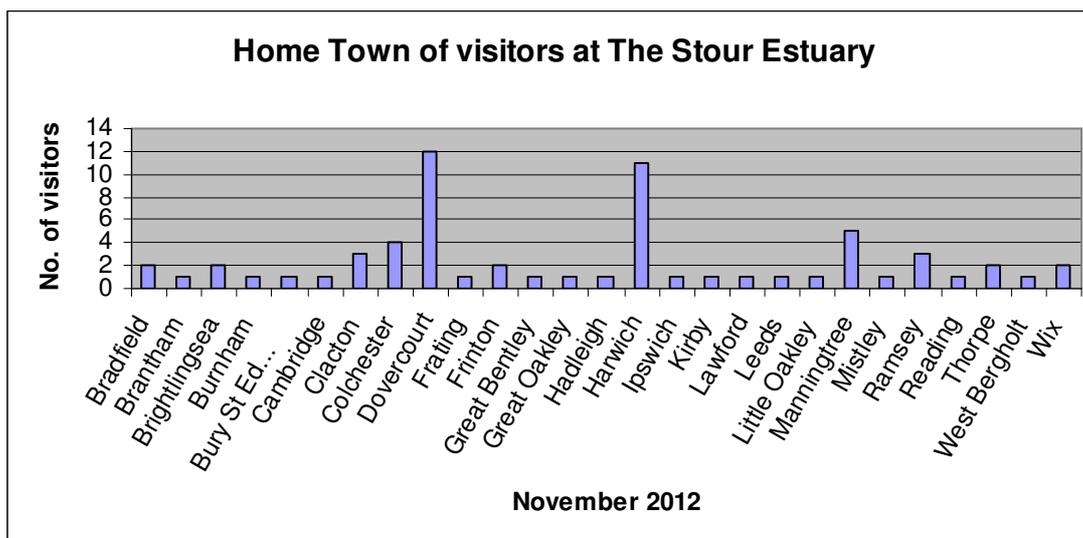


Figure 38. While the Stour Estuary attracts visitors from a variety of locations, many live in Tendring District. 26% of those surveyed in November 2012 lived in the urban areas of Clacton, Harwich and Dovercourt.

Figure 38 shows the home towns of visitors interviewed at The Stour Estuary in November 2012.

Of those surveyed, 51 groups lived in Tendring District. This equates to 79% of visitors at this site. Of these 51 groups, 26 groups lived in the urban centres of Clacton (3) Dovercourt (12) and Harwich (11). Five of the remaining groups lived in Colchester Borough (Colchester and West Bergholt), four lived in Suffolk (Ipswich, Hadleigh, Bury St Edmunds and Brantham) while the remaining four groups lived in Cambridge, Burnham on Crouch, Leeds and Reading.

For 41 of the groups surveyed in November 2012, their main purpose for visiting the Stour Estuary was to walk while 17 groups stated they were visiting to walk their dog (see Figure 39). Only three groups were there to bird watch. Three groups also said that they were visiting to gather chestnuts, one group of RSPB volunteers were checking footpaths and four groups were taking photos of the autumn leaf colours. During the November 2010 and November 2011 surveys, dog walking and walking were also cited as the two key reasons for visiting the Stour Estuary.

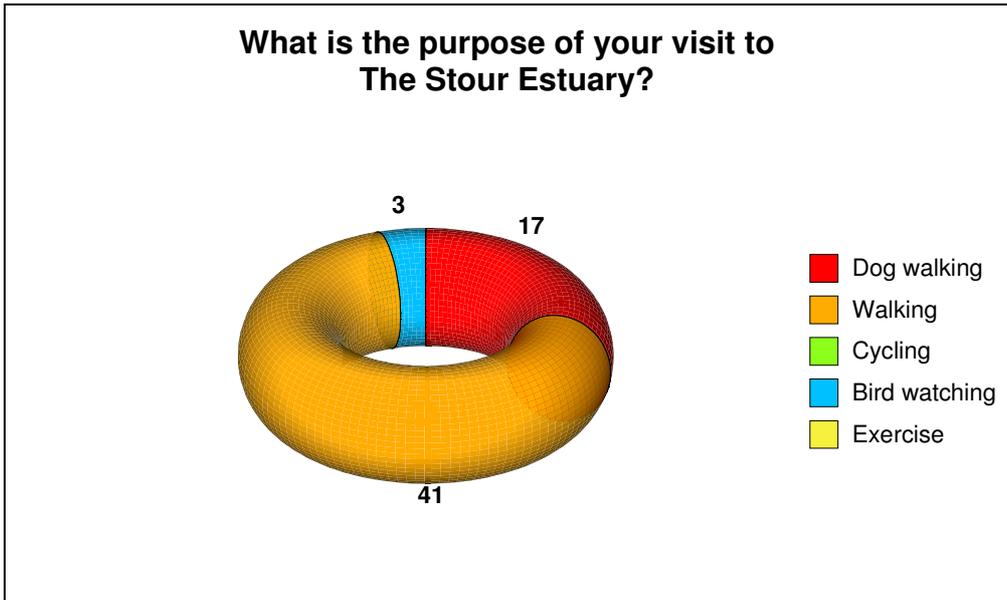


Figure 39. During November 2012, 64% of the groups surveyed visited Stour Wood to walk. A small number of groups were collecting sweet chestnuts which is a seasonal activity.

During the November 2012 survey period, visitors gave a variety of reasons for visiting the Stour Estuary. As shown in Figure 40 below, 38 of the groups had chosen to visit the Stour Estuary because of the attractive scenery. 21 groups liked the area and 16 groups had chosen the Stour Estuary as it was close to where they lived.

The availability of parking was a consideration for only three of the visiting groups and being close to the water coast was only selected by two groups during the survey.

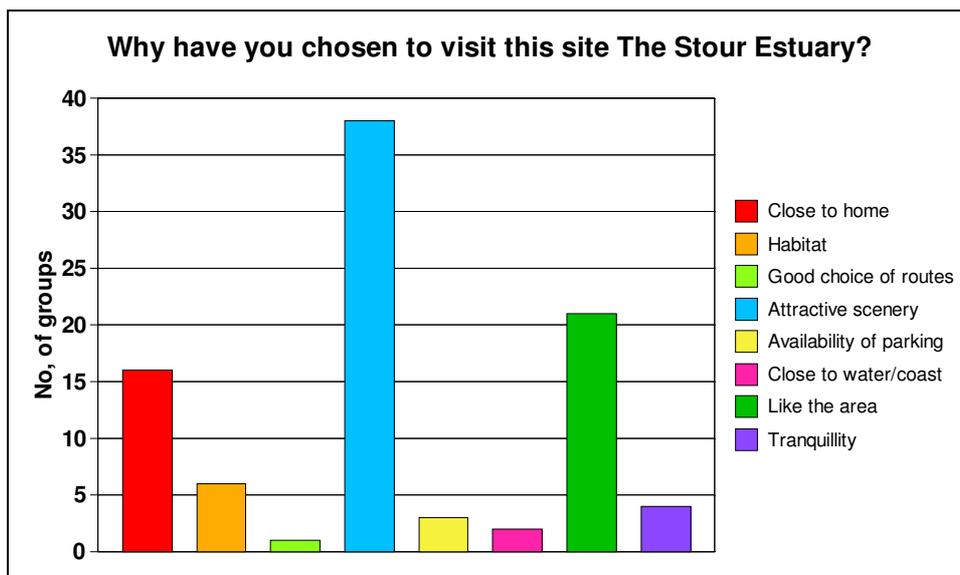


Figure 40. While people visited the Stour Estuary for a variety of reasons, 59% of visitors were attracted by the scenery and 32% because they liked the area.

There was a mixed response regarding the frequency of visits as shown in Figure 41 below.

Only nine of the 64 groups surveyed were daily or almost daily visitors to the Stour Estuary. This is surprising considering that 26% of the groups were dog walkers and 54% lived within five miles of the site. Four groups visited once a week, while 18 groups visited either monthly or two to three times a month. 27 of the groups were less frequent visitors to The Stour Estuary visiting less than once a month. This may reflect the relatively rural nature of this site. Six groups surveyed in November 2013 were visiting for the first time.

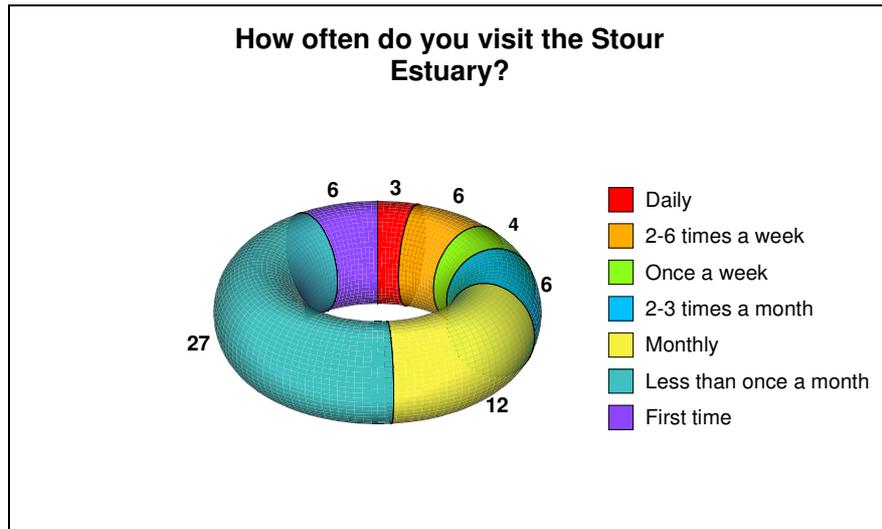


Figure 41 During the November 2012 survey, 60% of the groups interviewed visited fairly infrequently either 2-3 times a month or monthly

79% of those surveyed in November 2012 at the Stour Estuary said that they visited all year round. 12 groups visited mainly in the winter, one group visited only in the spring and two visited in the autumn. The frequency of use generally reflects the main types of activities undertaken at the site during different seasons i.e. dog walking and walking year round, bird watching and chestnut picking in the autumn winter months. This is consistent with the November 2011 results where 78% of visitors also visited all year round.

From the responses given, 36 of the groups said that they visited other sites regularly, while 23 responded negatively to this question. The groups who did not live in Colchester, Braintree or Tendring were not asked this question.

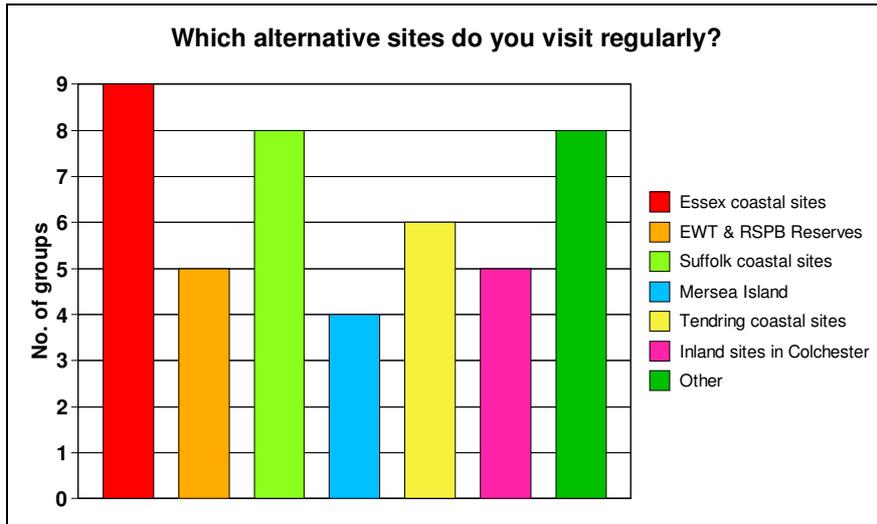


Figure 42. Essex coastal sites were the most frequently visited alternative sites during November 2012 followed by coastal sites in Suffolk and Tendring.

As shown in Figure 42 above, nine of the groups visited other Essex coastal sites, eight visited coastal and non-coastal sites in Suffolk (Minsmere, Orwell Bridge, Rendlesham, Alton Water, Hadleigh, Wolves Wood and Flatford Mill). six groups also visited coastal sites in Tendring (Mistley, The Naze, Wrabness, Walton, Furze Hill and Manningtree) while five said that they were regular visitors to other Essex Wildlife Trust/RSPB reserves (Hanningfield Reservoir, Fingringhoe and Abberton). Five groups regularly visited inland sites in Colchester (Dedham, Friday Woods, Highwoods and Marks Hall) while only four groups said they visited Mersea Island.

In addition to the sites listed above in Figure 42 the groups identified other sites that they regularly used. These included Thorndon and the Essex Way. two groups also said that they visited sites along the Norfolk coast regularly.

57 of the groups interviewed stated that they had good access to open space close to home that they used regularly. Two groups replied negatively. Four of the groups were not asked about open space provision close to where they lived as they lived outside Essex. During the November 2011 survey, six groups were dissatisfied with open space provision close to where they lived.

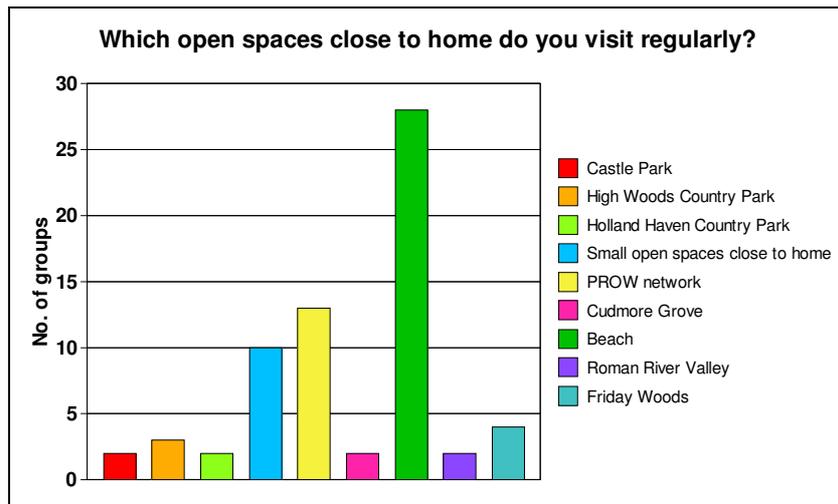


Figure 43. For many of the visitors surveyed at the Stour Estuary in November 2012, the beach was the most popular alternative open space close to home visited.

For those who responded to the question ‘which open spaces close to home do you regularly visit?’ 28 groups at the Stour Estuary selected the beach (see Figure 43); this was the most popular response. 13 groups said that they regularly used the local Public Rights of Way network while 10 groups made use of small open spaces close to home. A total of 13 groups used open spaces in or near Colchester including Castle Park, Highwoods Country Park, Cudmore Grove, Roman River Valley and Friday Woods.

The small local open spaces used around Colchester included Hill House Wood, Roman Sites, Flatford and Wivenhoe. In Tendring people said that they also used Brightlingsea, Mistley Woods, Great Bentley Green, Furze Hill, Wrabness, Copperas Wood and also Burr Meadow. One group also walked along the River Chelmer on a regular basis.

During the November 2012 survey period, only two boats, one sailing boat and one motor boat (commercial) were recorded on the Stour Estuary. These were observed during the weekend survey period in November 2012.

The Walls, Mistley

The Walls is a popular area of open space and busy footpath between Manningtree and Mistley located on the southern banks of the Stour Estuary.

The site abuts the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area and Ramsar site.

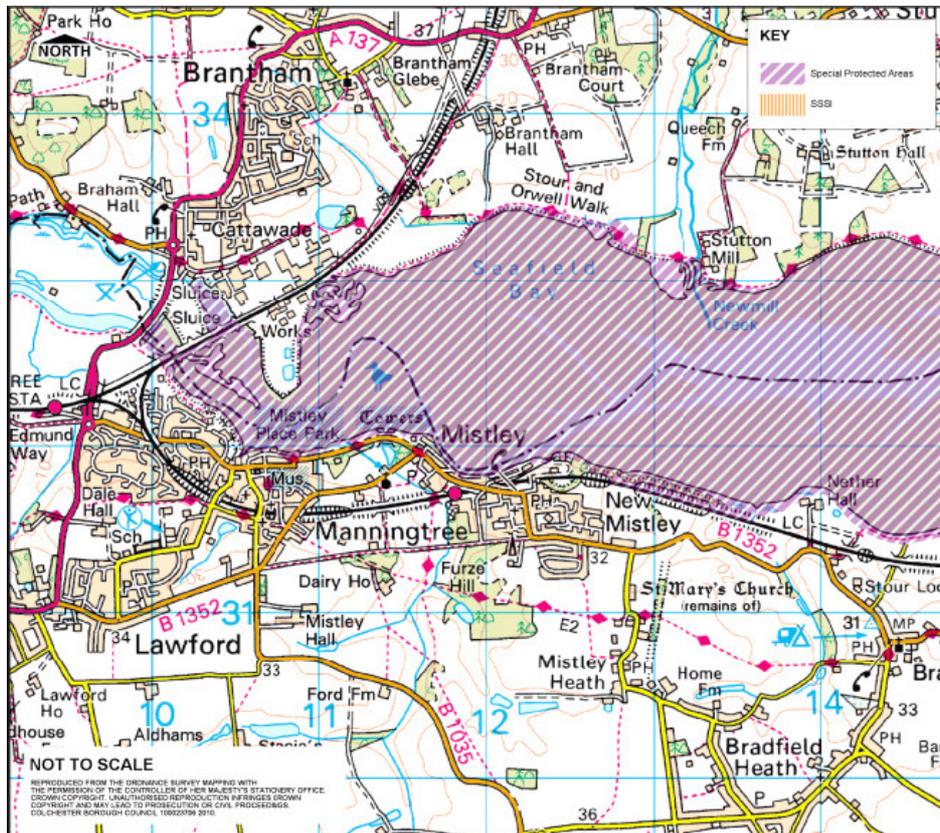


Figure 44. The Walls, Mistley.

The condition of the SSSI unit within the survey area is summarised in Table 9; this unit is unfavourable declining. Coastal squeeze, water pollution and agricultural run off have been identified as potential reasons for adverse condition. The previous site condition (2002) identified recreational disturbance as a reason for adverse condition, however this is not identified as an issue referred to in the 2010 unit summary.

SSSI Unit	Condition	Summary	Last assessment date
1	Unfavourable declining	The unit contains the biotopes typically associated with upper estuarine soft muds and sandy muds. It also contains the biotope known to support the burrowing anemone, <i>Nematostella vectensis</i> , and the tentacled lagoon worm, <i>Alkmaria romijni</i> - notified features. There is some upper foreshore erosion and evidence of active erosion of saltmarsh types associated with the notified feature, <i>Limonium humile</i> (lax-flowered sea lavender). However it is difficult to assess whether this has significantly increased since the Environment Agency (2000) report on saltmarsh losses between 1988 and 1998. On balance the unit is assessed as unfavourable declining and coastal squeeze may be a key contributory factor. The sea wall length in this unit maintained by the Environment Agency is approximately 1.58 km out of a total shoreline in this unit of approximately 3.29 km. The remainder of the frontage is in private ownership or possibly local authority responsibility. The assessment of this unit should be revisited following consideration of the findings of a Royal Haskoning report on saltmarsh change and changes in land surface elevation commissioned by Harwich Haven and due to report in March 2011. Field recording forms and photos are stored on file.	27 November 2010

Table 9. A summary of SSSI unit conditions within the survey area.

During the winter 2012 survey period the site was visited twice, firstly on Sunday 18 November and again on Tuesday 4 December. Surveys were carried out for half day periods on both weekday and weekend visits to provide a good cross section of data and to capture the different visitors to the site. During the winter 2012 survey period a total of 62 interviews were conducted with 20 of these being undertaken during the week and the remaining 42 conducted at the weekend. In the Year 2 surveys it was noted that The Walls was significantly busier at weekends and this pattern continued in the winter 2012 survey.

In winter 2012, the number of dogs recorded at the site was generally much lower than at other sites. As can be seen from Figure 45 below over 51 of the groups surveyed had no dog with them. This is very different from the other Natura 2000 sites visited as part of this monitoring project. Nine groups only had one dog while two groups had multiple dogs with them. The lower number of dogs recorded at this location can be partially explained by the character of The Walls. The surveys are undertaken alongside the river which is home to a large number of swans and adjacent to a busy road which restricts the opportunities to let dog(s) off their leads. The site is also regularly used by people visiting Manningtree to do either their shopping or to attend appointments. The site clearly therefore does not present the same leisure opportunities as some of the other Natura 2000 sites in the survey.

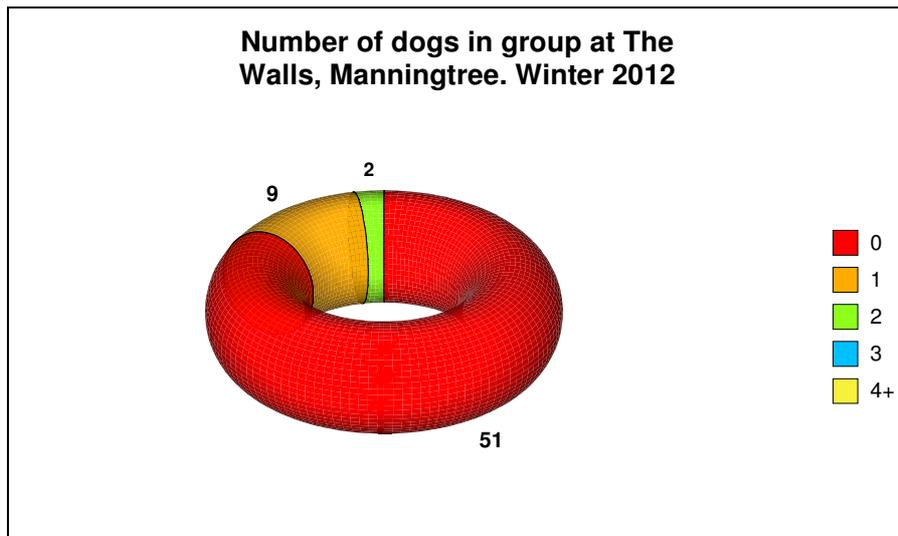


Figure 45. The Walls is not as popular an area for dog walking as other Natura 2000 sites. 82% of those surveyed had no dog with them in November 2012.

As in previous years the distance people travelled to visit the Walls was dominated by those travelling a short distance of less than five miles. As seen from Figure 46 below over 75% of those surveyed had travelled a short distance with a further 15% travelling between 6-10 miles. A total of two groups travelled over 30 miles to visit the site and these groups indicated that they were visiting the Manningtree area for family reasons but did not consider themselves to be regular visitors to the site.

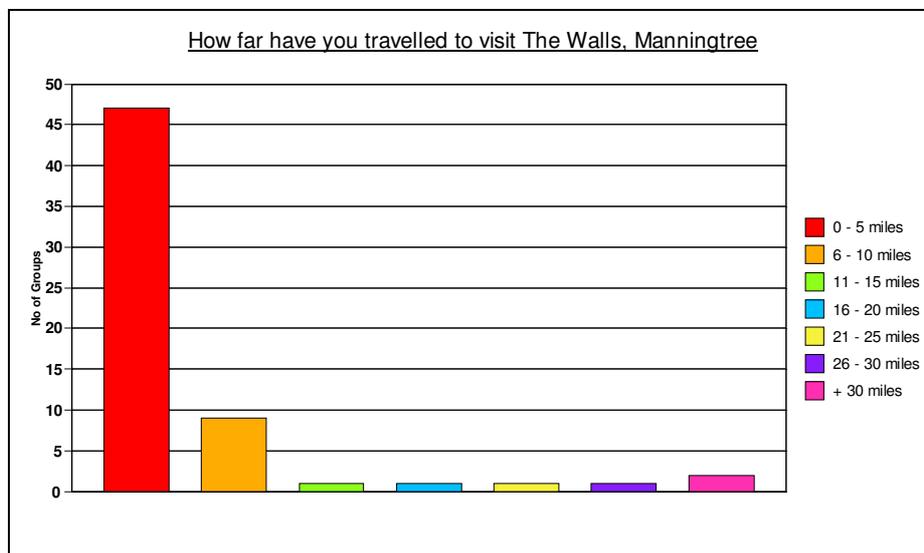


Figure 46. 90% of those surveyed in November 2012 lived within ten miles of the site.

Alongside asking how far people had travelled, the home town of each group surveyed was also recorded. The results are shown in Figure 47 below. A wide range of home towns were recorded but many of these have been grouped into local authority areas to show the visitor demands from neighbouring authorities. By far the most regular home town recorded was Mistley and together with Manningtree accounts for over half of the

responses. Other villages in Tendring District (such as Weeley, and Harwich) have been grouped together along with locations in Suffolk (such as Ipswich, Felixstowe, Great Blakenham and East Bergholt) to show that the Walls attracts people from neighbouring authorities. Visitors were surveyed from Romford, Norwich and Surrey and these have been included in the 'other locations' category (see Figure 47).

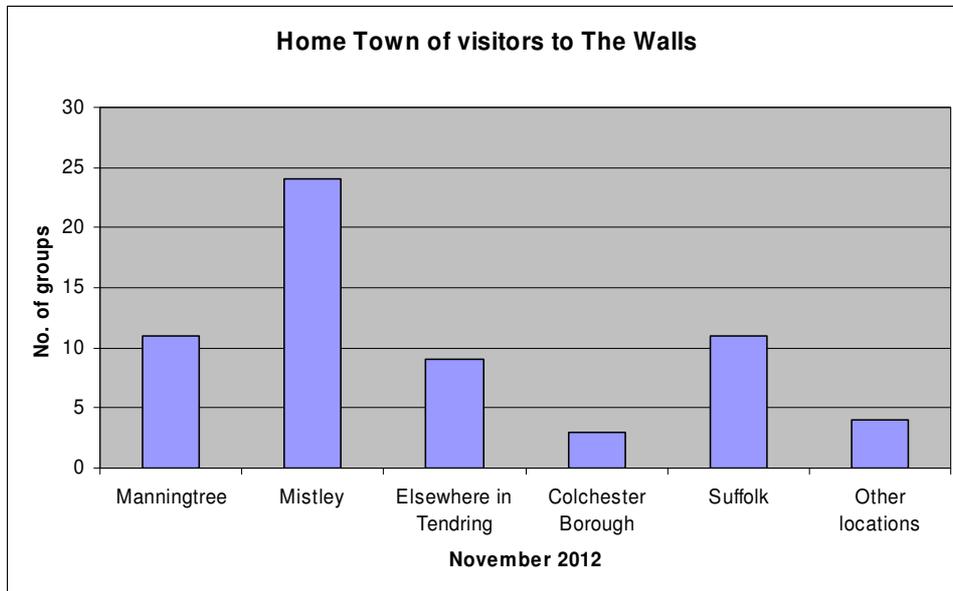


Figure 47. Over 50% of those surveyed at The Walls in November 2012 lived in the Mistley/Manningtree area.

During the winter 2012 surveys a wide variety of reasons were given about why people were visiting The Walls. Most noticeably 41 groups were visiting the area for a walk. Walking was by far the most popular reason given for visiting as shown in Figure 48. This is perhaps in part due to the high number of people who lived in the local area who were visiting Manningtree and going about their daily business. Eight groups visited the area to walk their dog(s) whilst a further eight groups were exercising in the area. Bird watching accounted for only four groups as highlighted in Figure 48. This is quite low and surprising given that The Walls has a high number of resident swans as well as the estuary birds. Overall The Walls appears to be used for a wider variety of uses than other Natura 2000 sites used in the project. This is perhaps due in part to its close proximity to Manningtree and the facilities on offer there as a shopping centre.

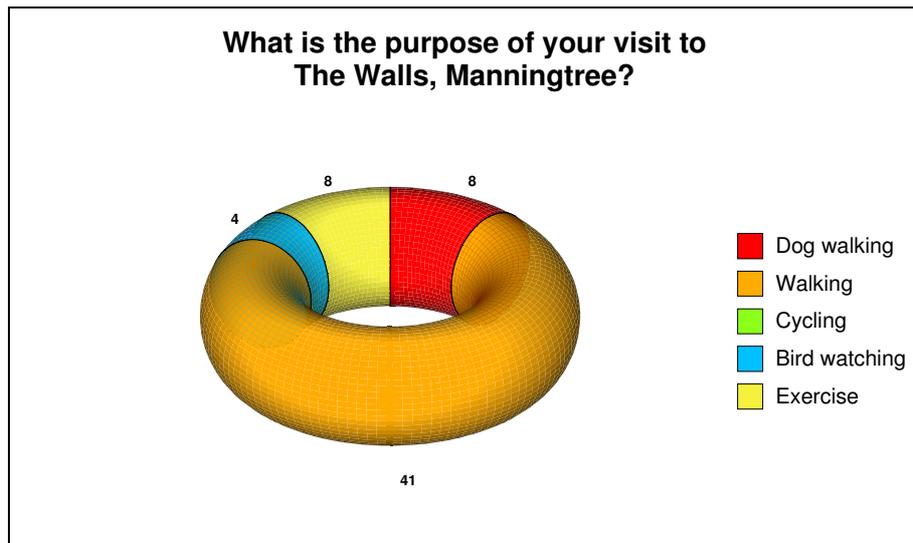


Figure 48. Walking was the most popular reason cited by those interviewed at The Walls in November 2012. The number of groups bird watching was surprisingly low given the areas ornithological interest in the winter.

The survey site is well located between Manningtree and Mistley and as observed in previous years a large number of local people were recorded at this location. Out of the 62 groups surveyed in November 2012, 26 of these visited the site because it was close to their home. 20 groups said they liked the area whilst 19 groups visited because of the attractive scenery found at this location as seen in Figure 49. In response to this question 35 groups gave other reasons for choosing to visit The Walls. Of these 35 groups, 20 of these gave shopping and the use of other local facilities in Manningtree as their reason for visiting. Seven groups had chosen to visit the area as part of a walk or ramble. One of these groups said they were visiting the site as part of a longer walk which was recommended by the East Anglian newspaper and a further group was visiting the site as part of a geo-caching trail across various sites in North Essex.

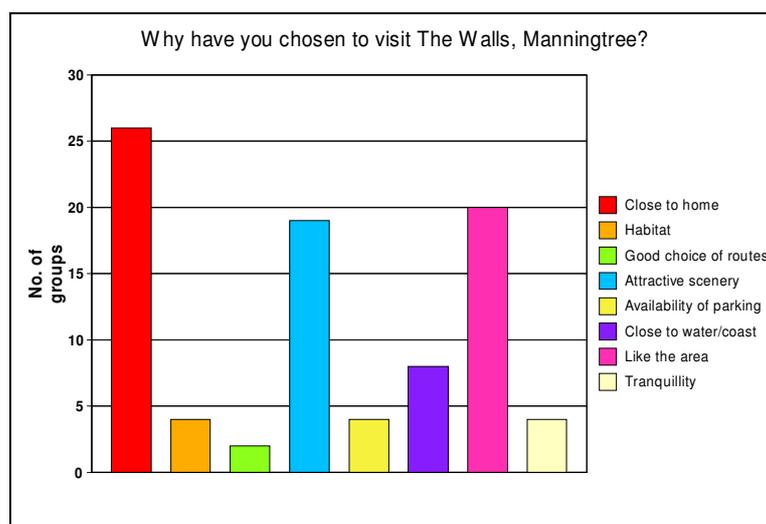


Figure 49. 42% of those surveyed visited the walls because it was close to their home, with 32% of those surveyed choosing to visit the area because they liked the site.

Half of the groups surveyed (31 in total) visited the site on a daily basis or multiple times a week demonstrating that the site is a popular choice for visitors and those living in the local area.

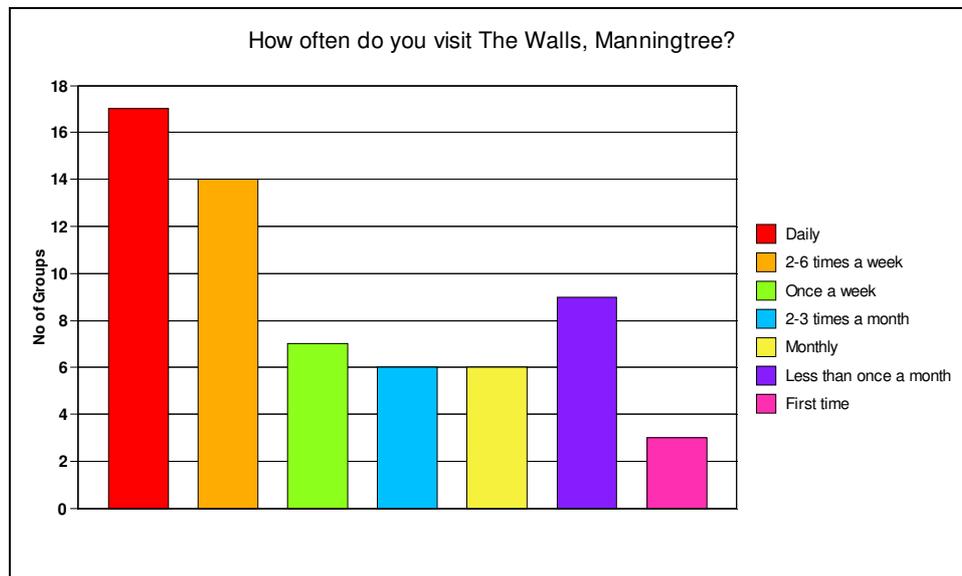


Figure 50. 50% of those surveyed visited The Walls very regularly reflecting that it is used by local people going about their daily activities e.g. shopping.

Alongside the regularity of the majority of visitors, over 87% of the groups surveyed indicated that they visit the site all year round which further supports the continuous use and visitor pressure at this site. During both survey periods it was noted that a number of cars would stop at the side of the road to enjoy the view of the river or to get a drink from the mobile cafes which operate along the Waterfront. These visitors were not interviewed but it is clear that The Walls is a popular location and draws a number of visitors to the area. The groups that were surveyed who were visiting the site for the first time were visiting the area for a family occasion but commented that they would likely visit again in the future.

Due to Manningtree's location on the border of Suffolk and Essex it is of no surprise that other coastal sites in Suffolk and Tendring were popular choices for groups to visit. Locations such as Walton, Harwich, Felixstowe and Aldeburgh were specified by these groups which shows that some groups are willing to travel quite long distances to visit certain locations. Other coastal sites elsewhere in Essex and Essex Wildlife Trust/RSPB reserves were also popular as shown in Figure 51 below.

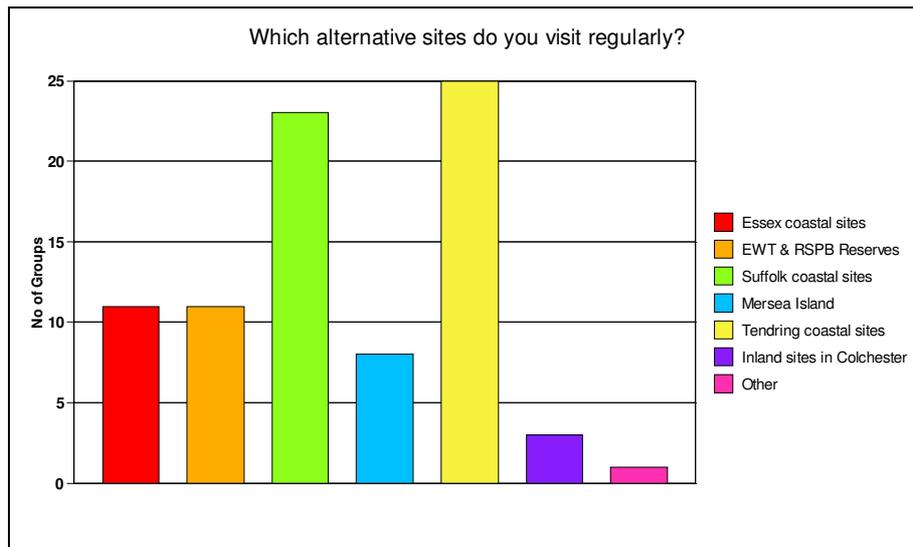


Figure 51. Tendring and Suffolk coastal sites were the most popular alternative sites by 77% of the groups interviewed at The Walls in November 2012.

Out of the 62 groups surveyed at the Walls during the winter 2012 period, 47 of these said they had access to open spaces close to their home that they used regularly. Although a large number of people provided an answer to this question, the responses were mainly grouped between small open spaces (25 groups), public rights of way network (34 groups) and the beach (six groups) as illustrated in Figure 52. Locations such as Furze Hill and Wrabness Woods were given as popular locations as well as the public rights of way in and around Manningtree and Mistley.

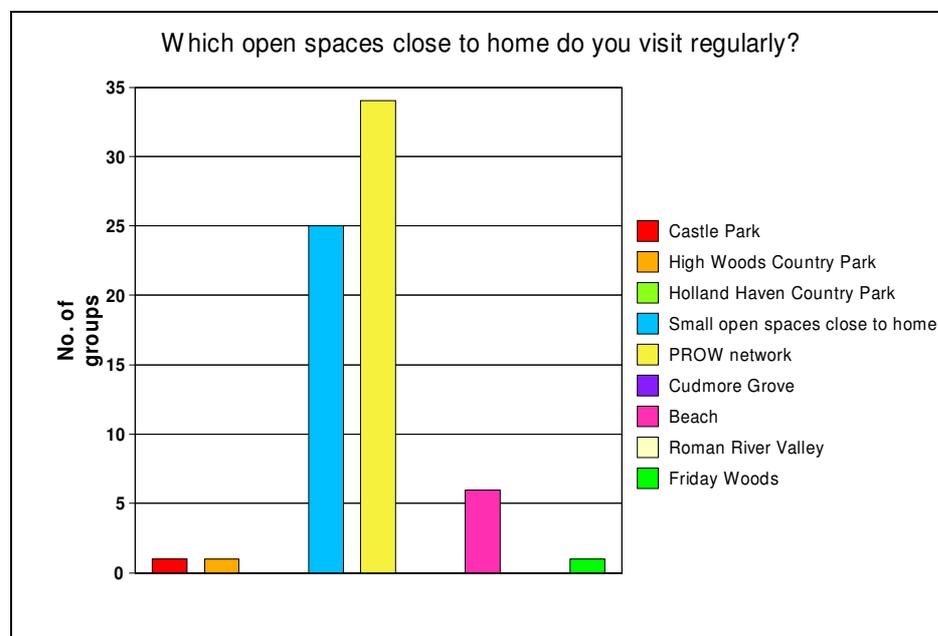


Figure 52. Shows that a large proportion of those surveyed use small spaces close to home and the Public Rights of Way Networks regularly.

The Stour and Orwell is generally a busy area for both commercial shipping and for recreational boating but only a very small number of boats were

recorded using the Stour Estuary at Manningtree on the survey days. Three small rowing boats were recorded and these were only used to undertake maintenance work on the boats anchored in the main channel. The impact of any increase in demand for recreational boating associated with housing growth will be considered in the final report at this location.

5. Summary and conclusion

A total of 326 groups were interviewed during November 2012 compared to November 2011 when 286 groups were surveyed. This represents a 13% increase in visitor numbers across the Natura sites between the 2011 winter survey period and November 2012. Since the surveys began in November 2010 there has been a 143% increase in visiting groups across the Natura 2000 sites as shown in Table 10 below.

Site	Nov 2010	November 2011	November 2012	% increase in visiting groups between Nov 2010 & Nov 2012
Abberton Reservoir	12	15	33	175%
Old Hall Marshes	2	6	2	No change
Strood Channel	12	16	4	66% drop
Cudmore Grove	25	30	43	72%
Brightlingsea Marshes	32	56	76	137%
Walton-on-the-Naze	18	52	36	100%
Kirby Quay	6	7	6	No change
The Walls,	16	62	62	287%
Stour Estuary	11	42	64	481%
Total	134	286	326	143%

Table 10. Showing the % change in the number of groups recorded at all the Natura Sites between November 2010 and November 2012.

Over two thirds of the groups (225) were interviewed at the weekend during November 2012. In November 2012, 253 (77%) of the groups were made up of groups of one or two people. This is similar to the results for November 2011, when 225 of the groups were made up of small groups of one or two

people. This ties in with the finding that the most popular reason for visiting the Natura 2000 sites was to dog walk.

Whilst the aim of this survey and monitoring programme is to establish whether increased levels of housing is increasing visitors to Natura 2000 sites and affecting site condition, the amount of housing built in one year is not significant enough to explain the huge increase in visitors between last year and this year. Other factors also need to be considered. Weather-wise November 2012 was quite unsettled with long wet periods interspersed with bright, cool, windy days. The surveys were carried out on the dry days and this may account in part for the increase in visitors from November 2011. A number of the groups interviewed in November 2012 certainly said that they were visiting the sites to take advantage of the break in the wet weather. The Strood was very wet underfoot and one of the Cudmore Grove interviewees stated that regular visitors were using less muddy sites on Mersea Island. A number of interviewees also mentioned that they were at Cudmore Grove as opposed to other sites because it had lighter soils and was therefore better for walking when the weather was wet. It will be interesting to compare the number of groups visiting next summer to better understand the effect of weather on visitor numbers at the Natura Sites.

A variety of activities took place within the Natura 2000 sites during November 2012. Across all the sites with the exception of Abberton Reservoir and Old Hall Marshes, dog walking and walking were the two key reasons why people visited the Natura 2000 sites in November 2012. This is consistent with the results from the previous November survey periods in 2010 and 2011. The main exception to this was bird watching which was more popular at more sites during November 2011 due to the presence of rare visiting winter birds particularly at The Strood and Cudmore Grove. The Walls, Old Hall Marshes and Abberton were visited by birdwatchers regularly across all three survey periods, however the number of visitors bird watching at The Walls was very low considering it attracts a large number of estuary birds.

It was observed that there were a greater number of larger groups at the weekend than during the weekday surveys. There were 65 groups of three people or more recorded during the weekend survey periods compared to 15 groups of three or more people recorded during the weekday surveys in November 2012. Cudmore Grove and The Stour Estuary attracted the largest groups in this survey period. This reflects the results for November 2011 where 15 groups with three or more people visited in the week and 45 with three or more people visited over the weekend.

Groups visited the Natura 2000 sites in November 2012 for a number of reasons as highlighted in Figure 53 below. The most frequent reason cited was because it is close to where people live. This was also the key reason given in previous survey periods. The second most popular reason for visiting the sites was because people liked the area, closely followed by the fact that they found the scenery attractive. In November 2011 'attractive scenery' was the second most common reason for visiting, compared to 'like the area' in November 2010. During the November 2012 surveys, 43 groups said that

they had chosen to visit because of the desire to be close to the coast. This is similar to the results from November 2011 when 46 groups gave this as a reason for visiting the Natura 2000 sites. This demonstrates the low but constant appeal coastal sites have for people.

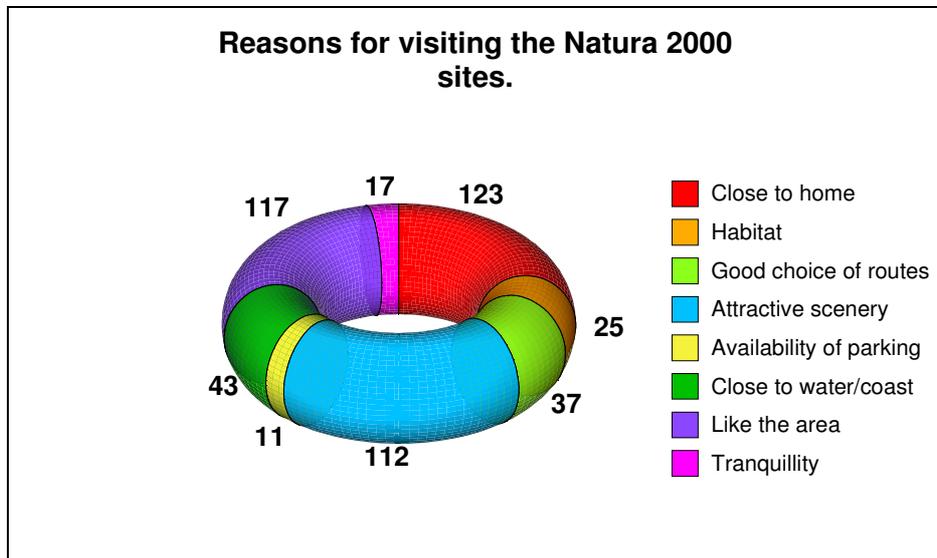


Figure 53. The top three reasons for visiting the Natura 2000 sites in November 2012 was because it was close to home, people liked the areas, and the attractive scenery.

As in previous years during November 2012, very few visitors were encountered at Kirby Quay (six groups) and Old Hall Marshes (two groups). This perhaps is due to the fairly remote locations, the lack of facilities at Old Hall and in the case of Kirby Quay, the lack of car parking. Kirby Quay and The Strood continue to be predominantly used by local residents from Kirby-le-Soken and West Mersea respectively. Abberton Reservoir experienced a 120% increase in visitor numbers between November 2011 and November 2012 most likely due to the opening of the new Visitor Centre which many people were visiting to see.

In November 2012, as in previous years' survey periods, the majority of groups travelled to the sites by car. 225 groups arrived this way while 96 groups walked to the various sites. Overall this is fairly consistent with previous survey results. In the winter 2012 survey, only one group arrived by train. In the previous year, 10 groups had used public transport to visit the sites.

Out of the 304 groups who were asked or responded to question nine about which other sites they visited, just under two thirds of the groups said that they visited alternative sites regularly. Not all the groups were asked this question particularly those that were on holiday or those groups who lived a considerable distance away from Essex. During November 2012 survey, the highest number of groups that said they visited alternative sites were interviewed at Tendring sites i.e. Brightlingsea Marshes, The Walls and The Stour Estuary as shown in Table 11 below. This is fairly consistent with the previous Year 2 findings.

Counts Respondents	Total	Do you visit alternative sites regularly?	
		Yes	No
Base	304	197	107
Natura 2000 site			
Abberton Reservoir	34	30	4
Blackwater Estuary	2	1	1
Colne Estuary	110	73	37
Hamford Water	42	15	27
Stour & Orwell Estuaries	116	78	38

Table 11. Number of groups that visit alternative sites for each of the international sites.

The alternative sites visited by groups at each of the Natura 2000 sites is summarised in Table 12. Some of the groups surveyed listed several sites that they regularly visited. 35% of the groups who visited alternative sites visited Tendring coastal sites. This was consistent with the results from years one and two of the project. Essex Wildlife Trust and the RSPB were the second most popular alternatives sites visited. Many of those interviewed at Abberton were keen birdwatchers or were very interested in wildlife. It is not surprising therefore that they visit similar nature reserves.

What alternative sites do you visit regularly?	Abberton Reservoir	Blackwater Estuary	Colne Estuary	Hamford Water	Stour & Orwell Estuaries	Total
Tendring coastal sites	3	-	26	9	32	70
EWT & RSPB reserves	24	1	18	3	16	62
Essex coastal sites	4	1	11	8	20	44
Suffolk coastal sites	5	-	15	2	31	53
Mersea Island	4	-	27	-	12	43
Inland sites in Colchester	2	-	26	2	8	38
Other	5	1	12	3	9	30

Table 12. During the November 2012 surveys Tendring coastal sites were the most popular alternative sites visited, followed by EWT and RSPB nature reserves and coastal sites in Suffolk.

During the November 2012 surveys, 27 groups stated that they did not have good access to open space close to where they lived that they could use regularly. 11 of these groups lived in Colchester Borough (6 groups lived in Colchester Town, one lived in Tiptree, one lived in Marks Tey, one group lived in Peldon, one in Great Wigborough and one group lived in Langenhoe). 14 of the groups lived in Tendring District (six groups lived in Mistley, four lived in

Manningtree, two groups lived in Harwich and one lived in Harwich). Two of the groups who were not happy with open space provision lived in Braintree District; in Witham and Great Notley. No reasons were given about why the groups were not happy with open space provision where they lived but this could be explored in more detail in the June 2013 survey.

As shown in Figure 54 below small open spaces close to home was the most common answer given to the question ‘which open spaces close to home do you visit regularly?’ The second most popular response was beaches. These are similar to the results from years one and two, reflecting the attraction of the coast and the fact that Tendring coastal sites were the most popular alternatives sites visited during November 2012.

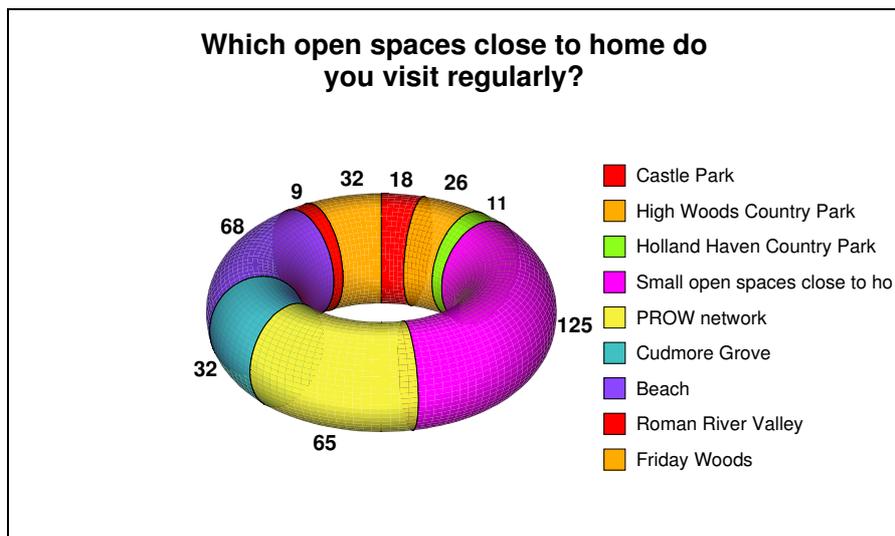


Figure 54. Showing that during November 2012, that many of the groups surveyed regularly visited small open spaces close to home being the most frequent answer given.

Whilst there were significantly more visitors during the November 2012 survey period than the previous winter, the analysis shows that the reasons for visiting, the frequency of visits and the times of year people mostly visit the Natura 2000 sites remains very similar.

During November 2011, no leisure boats were recorded at any of the sites. During November 2012 a total of 16 boats were recorded comprising a mix of yachts, fishing boats, tugs, RIBs and a lifeboat. The water off Cudmore Grove around Mersea Stone was busiest with nine boats recorded. The end of November 2012 was very windy which reduced the number of boats on the water around Brightlingsea and Cudmore Grove. Some of the sites do not permit sailing e.g. Abberton, while other smaller channels were not heavily used for either commercial or recreational boating in the November 2012 survey period. These include Salcott Channel and the Strood Channel. Generally Mersea Island, the Stour Estuary and Walton are busy boating areas but during the winter period boating activity was low. The Strood Channel is well used by jet skiers during the summer months which could erode the salt marshes due to the wash generated which in the longer term could have implications for the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

The final third year report, which will be produced following the June 2013 survey, will explore more fully the wider impacts affecting all the Natura 2000 sites included in the monitoring project alongside an assessment of the impact of housing growth on visitor numbers at the designated sites in Colchester Borough and Tendring District.