



Have your say

Hoylake Beach Consultation Report

Hoylake Beach

Consultation: 29 June – 10 August 2022
Report: 21 September 2022



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1.0 Executive Summary

Wirral Council is moving forward on developing a new beach management plan for Hoylake. The work is being carried out in a number of stages.

The first stage in the work was to develop an expert-led, independent scientific study of the beach which will help to give everyone a clear understanding of the ecology of the beach; how it has changed in the past and how it is likely to change in future with rising sea levels as a result of climate change. Survey work on the beach was undertaken in August 2021 and the final Ecology and Geomorphology Study has now been published.

Following the publication of the report phase one of engagement was carried out with residents and stakeholders. The results of this engagement are provided in this report. The outcome of this initial consultation has been used to develop draft objectives for Hoylake beach and future management options taking into account the public and stakeholder feedback.

Following this a second public engagement exercise will be carried out to allow review of the objectives and options included in the draft future management options. The preferred options from that consultation will be reported to Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee where Councillors will make the decision on future beach management.



1.1 Key Findings

- The Hoylake Beach engagement generated local, national and some international interest. 3,199 people responded to the consultation. In response to the consultation 2,046 respondents were from Wirral and 1,130 were outside Wirral. 23 had no valid location.
- Monitoring responses over time there was a large peak in online response on the 10 July 2022 with 868 responses on one day. This coincided with a Facebook post from Chris Packham, Naturalist, and television presenter on the morning of that day. On this day 266 of the responses were from Wirral and 602 from outside Wirral.
- Including all respondents walking is the main reason people use the beach (17.4%), followed by a place to be close to nature (15.9%) and the ability to enjoy the views from the promenade third (15.1%). Wirral residents use the beach for exercising (12.5%) more than a place to be close to nature (12.0%). (Question 1).
- When asked to rank statements about Hoylake beach, 'I believe it's an important habitat for birds and other wildlife,' was considered by all respondents as the most important. However, Wirral residents voted 'I believe it's a valuable open space for the community,' as the most important. External responses seem to view the environmental statements as more important, while residents have a greater emphasis on the beach as a community asset. (Question 2).
- 42.6% of all respondents favoured allowing the area to become a saltmarsh. However, for Wirral residents only, there was a more even spread of responses; a greater proportion favoured a balance of some saltmarsh (35.1%) with a similar proportion against any saltmarsh (34.8%) and 30.1% wanted to allow the area to become a saltmarsh. (Question 3).
- 45.3% of all respondents want sand dunes to be allowed to develop across the entire area, 17.4% are against any sand dunes. Only 35.3% of Wirral responses favoured sand dunes developing across the entire area and 25.4% are against any sand dunes. The most popular answer for Wirral responses favoured allowing some sand dunes to develop (39.3%). (Question 4).
- 53.8% of respondents favoured a natural looking beach, whilst 18.0% prefer Hoylake beach to look managed and maintained and 28.2% favoured a balanced aesthetic. 37.1% of Wirral residents preferred a natural looking beach however 26.6% favoured a managed and maintained look. (Question 5).
- 47.1% want mud and silt on the beach due to the environmental benefits and 26.5% people don't want mud and silt. Among Wirral residents, 39.5% do not want mud and silt, 29.7% would like the mud and silt and 30.8% favoured a balance. (Question 6).

- 48.2% of people don't believe a natural beach will be any less accessible, meanwhile 25.7% were concerned with the impact naturalisation could have on disabled access. Of Wirral resident respondents, 37.9% believe naturalisation could deny disabled access however, 36.4% do not believe a natural beach will be less accessible. (Question 7).
- Hoylake beach's hazards should not be managed any different to other coastal areas, believe 62.8% of respondents. Similarly, 46.4% of Wirral residents who responded believe Hoylake beach's hazards should not be managed any different to other coastal areas. However, Wirral residents were more concerned about the beach's potential hazards, 27.4% believe Hoylake beach could become hazardous if unmanaged, and 26.2% believe Wirral council should manage all potential hazards. (Question 8).
- When asked what is more important; local ecology or business/tourism, Local ecology (35.4%) was the most agreed with statement, followed by the desire for a balance between the needs of the local business community and the developing natural environment, 22.3%. Wirral residents agreed with the statements in the same order as the overall response. (Question 9).
- For a beach management plan, five options were provided, with which respondents could choose to agree or disagree on a Likert scale from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree. The preferred management option overall, with highest net agreement, was option b, "Explore with Natural England further intervention to support more Natural Succession of the ecology of this area of beach, thus encouraging more floral growth with no maintained access route from the adjoining promenade." However, amongst Wirral residents option d was most agreed with "Explore with Natural England the most extensive management programme possible to return the entire beach to as it was pre-2019. (i.e., maintained beach)." (Question 10).
- The preferred sand management option with the highest net agreement was, "I would support an option that is based around limiting the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions." Wirral respondent's favoured option was, "I would support an option that would seek to find a compromise between Full Management and Natural Succession that would limit as far as practical the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions." (Question 11).
- When asked to provide specific health concerns if Hoylake beach were to be rewilded, the most common was the potential increase in mosquitos, flies, and biting insects. This was commented by 330 survey respondents, 96.3% of these being Wirral residents. Additionally, Vermin, stagnant water and unmaintained surfaces which could become uneven, slippery or unstable were also popular concerns. However, 246 commentors, 55.7% being Wirral residents, believed the potential increases in hazards are worth the environmental benefits rewilding would provide. (Question 12).



- When asked to provide any additional comments, the most common category favoured naturalisation, agreed with by 737 respondents – 46.9% of which were Wirral residents. 205 comments specifically mentioned the habitat the beach could become for plants including rare grasses, and wildlife. However, the second most common category mentioned by 385 respondents favoured managing the beach, 95.8% of these respondents were Wirral residents. Alternatively, 194 comments favoured a middle ground approach, allowing some beach to be managed and some rewilded. 93.8% of respondents in favour of a managed approach were Wirral residents. (Question 13).



2.0 Methodology

Through the Hoylake Beach Consultation people were asked to provide their views about future development of Hoylake Beach.

The consultation was carried out between 17 May – 28 June 2022. The approach used was an online public consultation through the ‘Have your say’ consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.Wirral.gov.uk with a page dedicated to the Hoylake Beach Consultation.

Documents provided on the site included a Hoylake Beach Ecology and Geomorphology Study Non-Technical Summary February 2022. The Council also collated a set of reports, including the full Ecology and Geomorphology Study and supporting information, maps and photographs related to Hoylake Beach which were published in an online Document Library enabling access to a range of information about the Beach. A set of Frequently Asked Questions was also provided on the site to provide additional useful information.

The online questionnaire was provided for residents and stakeholders to engage with. Respondents were also able to request paper copies or Easy Read versions of the questionnaire, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the ‘Have your say’ website alongside the online tool.

Residents and stakeholders also had an opportunity to speak with officers in person to get background information and have any questions answered about the process of developing the new Beach Management Plan. These events were held at Hoylake Community Centre on:

- Tuesday 12 July – 11:00 – 19:00.
- Wednesday 13 July - 11:00 – 19:00.
- Thursday 14 July - 11:00 – 19:00.
- Friday 15 July - 11:00 – 19:00.

2.1 Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was developed to gain views of residents and stakeholders on future Hoylake Beach management and the questions had agreement of all political parties within the Council. To enable informed understanding of people’s views, respondents were invited to provide free-text comments to expand on their ideas or concerns.

Following closure of the consultation, the responses to each of the direct questions were collated and the responses included in this report. For the free-text comment questions, a text



coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report.

There was wide scale interest in the Hoylake engagement including high profile social media coverage and a large number of responses were submitted from people outside Wirral. To ensure thorough interpretation of the results analysis has been undertaken to allow responses to be viewed from within the Wirral, outside the Wirral and all the responses combined.

2.2 Analysis of Respondents

All respondents were asked to provide their postcode to complete the questionnaire. This was to enable understanding of where those completing the survey reside and what proportion of responses were from Wirral residents. All those completing the online survey were asked to register and only one survey response per individual registration was entitled.

Respondents to the questionnaire were also given the option to provide additional demographic information about themselves. It must be noted that this is an option and that not all respondents included this information. This data allows the demographic results to be included in this report to enable analysis of the scope of responses and representation from different demographic groups.

2.3 Interpretation of Results

In terms of the results, it is important to note that:

- The public consultation is not representative of the overall population of Wirral but provides information on the opinion of those residents, non-residents, and other stakeholders who engaged.
- For specific tools where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to rounding, or the question is multi-coded. All free-text questions and ideas that offered respondents the option to provide written feedback could have covered multiple themes. Therefore, with free-text responses being categorised using a coding system, some comments will be multi-coded and therefore add up to more than 100 percent.

2.4 Community Drop in Sessions

Residents and stakeholders had opportunity to speak with officers in person to get background information and have any questions answered about the process of developing the new Beach



Management Plan. People could arrange bookable slots per hour via the Eventbrite online tool and drop-in slots, with no booking required were also available.

These events were held at Hoylake Community Centre on:

- Tuesday 12 July – 11:00 – 19:00.
- Wednesday 13 July - 11:00 – 19:00.
- Thursday 14 July - 11:00 – 19:00.
- Friday 15 July - 11:00 – 19:00.

2.5 Community Connectors

To raise awareness of the live consultation with local residents the Community Connectors Team were deployed to Hoylake to speak to local people and inform them about the consultation. Community Connectors are a service commissioned by Wirral Council that support local communities on a range of topics and work directly in the community. For this role they provided leaflets, mini-posters and paper copies to residents and spoke to people to raise awareness of the survey and how to complete it. They also asked people if they already knew about the survey, if they did how they had heard of it, and if they had already completed it. Two connector staff worked in Hoylake on the 25, 27 and 29 July 2022.

2.6 Stakeholder Representations

In order to ensure all key stakeholders were able to be included in the consultation stakeholder analysis was carried out. Eight key stakeholder organisations were identified. These were contacted on the 12 July 2022 by letter, with a request to submit any representations they would like to make regarding the initial phase of consultation to hoylakebeach@Wirral.gov.uk by 10 August 2022.

The following stakeholders were contacted:

- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- North West Fisheries Inshore Conservation Authority
- HM Coastguard
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- Wirral Wildlife

- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

2.7 Communication

To raise awareness about the consultation amongst as many residents and stakeholders as possible, a consultation communication campaign was carried out.

The consultation and four in-person information sessions were promoted through a mix of print and digital channels to raise awareness and encourage participation in the online survey. The launch of the consultation was featured in local print editions of the Wirral Globe and Liverpool Echo and across their digital platforms as well as in hyper local sites West Kirby Today and Birkenhead News and special interest sites such as Wirral Family Guide and Cheshire Wildlife Trust. The consultation was picked up by and featured on ITV Granada reports including a statement from the council encouraging the public to take part and have their say.

The consultation was published throughout the consultation on the council's own digital channels to encourage digital click through to the Have Your Say website. This included social media channels, weekly residents e-newsletter, Wirral View website and targeted emails to those who had previously subscribed to receive updates about Hoylake beach management. The council's social media posts were shared and featured on local interest groups and residents own social media accounts extending the reach both locally, regionally, and nationally. Conservationist and television presenter Chris Packham shared the post on his Twitter and Facebook accounts encouraging people to take part.

Outdoor media was used in Hoylake with banners along the beachfront and an 'A' board outside the information session venue to attract attention within the local community and people visiting the beach. Outdoor media also contained a QR code that linked through to the online survey.

Eventbrite was used to manage attendance at the information session in Hoylake with the public able to pre book a space; an allocation for walk in spaces was also made available. 165 people prebooked a place at the information sessions.

Paper surveys were made available at local libraries and an Easy Read consultation paper also developed and shared with 14 local groups. A letter outlining the consultation was sent to care homes in Wirral to advise them on the consultation and the availability of paper surveys.

In addition to digital reminders a follow up print advert featured in the local newspaper to remind people to take part.

Following the Information drop in events Community Connectors carried out face to face engagement and door knocking in the local community to continue to raise awareness and



reach those who may not be able to access digital channels. As part of this work further paper copies, posters and leaflets were distributed.

Comms output highlights:

- 165 people prebooked a place at the information session
- 1497 page views on Hoylake beach Wirral View story
- 95 people received targeted email with an open rate of 75.8% and click rate of 19.4%
- 1193 residents clicked through Wirral View email to consultation
- 62 people used the QR code.
- 75.9k reach of from 14 Wirral Council social media posts
- 6,906 total engagements through Council's social media posts
- 91.9k print media circulation
- 397.5k Monthly unique browsers on Wirral globe
- 970k Liverpool Echo daily online reach



3.0 Results

3.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was responded to by 3,199 people, 2,972 through the online portal and 227 using paper copies. No Easy Read surveys were completed. No questions were mandatory so respondents could choose which questions to respond to.

Of the 3,199 total responses, 2046 (64.0%) came from Wirral residents and 1,130 (35.3%) from non-Wirral residents. 23 respondents did not provide their location. Due to the interest from those outside Wirral, the findings provided show responses for the response from Wirral residents, the response from non-Wirral residents and the combined overall response.

3.1.1 Question 1: Hoylake Beach is used by a variety of people for many different reasons – please select which are important to you.

Respondents to this question were allowed to select multiple categories they believed were important reasons to use Hoylake beach. The most popular was walking, voted as important by 17.4% of respondents. 'A place to be close to nature' was voted the second most important use from the options provided, voted for by 15.9% of respondents, and 'the ability to enjoy the views from the promenade' was third most important (15.1%).

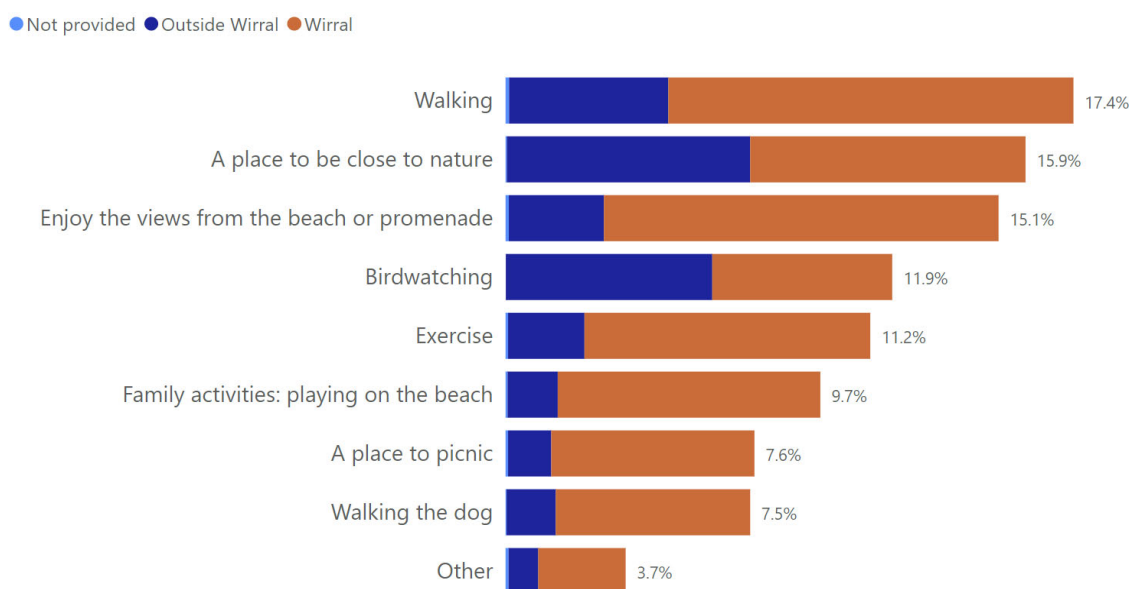


Figure 1: How people use the beach, % of overall responses.

The primary use of the beach for Wirral residents was also walking, voted for by 17.7% of Wirral respondents, closely followed by 'enjoy the views from the promenade' (17.2%). In contrast to the overall response, Wirral residents used the beach more for the purpose of exercising (12.5%) than 'a place to be close to nature' (12.0%).

Q1	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
Walking	14	638	1623	2275
A place to be close to nature	5	975	1103	2083
Enjoy the views from the beach or promenade	13	381	1581	1975
Birdwatching	1	827	721	1549
Exercise	10	306	1145	1461
Family activities: playing on the beach	8	201	1052	1261
A place to picnic	10	173	814	997
Walking the dog	4	197	779	980
Other	12	119	350	481
Grand Total	77	3817	9168	13062

Table 1: How respondents use Hoylake beach.

3.1.2 Question 2: Hoylake Beach is an important natural asset - please rank the following in order of their importance to you, (with 1 being the most important).

Contributors were asked to rank the importance of Hoylake Beach's natural assets, with 1 being most important. Therefore, the lower the average ranking, the more important the asset is considered.



Q2	Average Score			Ranking		
	Overall	Wirral	Difference	Overall	Wirral	Wirral Difference
I believe it's an important habitat for birds and other wildlife.	2.86	3.42	+ 0.56	1	2	+ 1
I believe its environmental status is important.	3.04	3.57	+ 0.52	2	3	+ 1
I believe it's a valuable open space for the community.	3.90	3.21	- 0.69	3	1	- 2
I believe it's important to manage flood risk.	4.39	4.36	- 0.02	4	4	
I believe it's important because saltmarsh traps carbon dioxide.	4.90	5.60	+ 0.70	5	8	+ 3
I believe it's an important visitor attraction.	5.09	4.59	- 0.50	6	5	- 1
I believe it's important because it captures windblown sand.	5.19	5.27	+ 0.09	7	7	
I believe it's an important space for community events.	5.77	5.07	- 0.70	8	6	- 2

Table 2: Order of importance ranking

Overall, 'I believe it's an important habitat for birds and other wildlife,' was ranked the most important, followed by 'I believe its environmental status is important.' However, Wirral residents voted 'I believe it's a valuable open space for the community,' as the most important but this was only ranked third most important overall.

Wirral responses appear to view the beach more so as a community asset than the overall response. However, the residents and overall response consistently voted 'I believe it's important to manage flood risk,' as fourth most important, and 'I believe it's important because it captures windblown sand,' as seventh most important.

3.1.3 Question: 3 Saltmarsh (these are coastal wetlands that are flooded and drained by salt water brought in by the tide and colonised by vegetation – for further information see the frequently asked questions).

Respondents favoured allowing the area to become a saltmarsh (42.6%), 23.3% of respondents were against any saltmarsh. Overall, 34.2% of respondents favoured a more balanced beach management scheme, with some saltmarsh being acceptable.

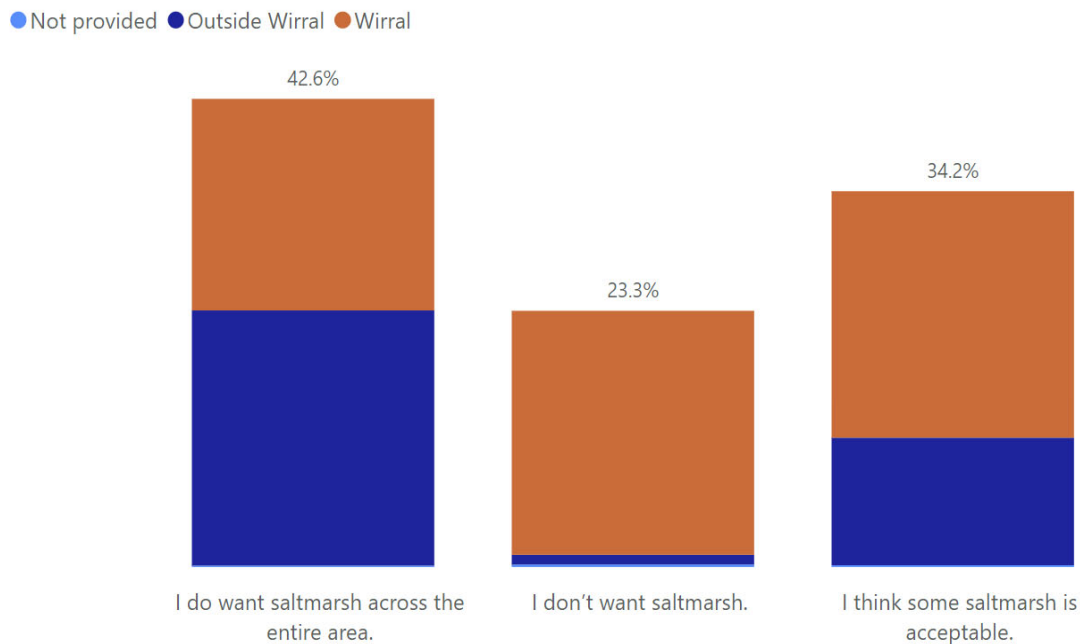


Figure 2: Saltmarsh

However, Wirral residents were less in favour of allowing the entire area to become saltmarsh (30.1%) and a greater proportion were against any saltmarsh (34.8%). A similar proportion of respondents favoured a balance of some saltmarsh (35.1%).

Q3	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I do want saltmarsh across the entire area.	4	732	607	1343
I don't want saltmarsh.	7	28	700	735
I think some saltmarsh is acceptable.	5	366	707	1078
Grand Total	16	1126	2014	3156

Table 3 : Summary of responses to Q3 by location

3.1.4 Question 4: Sand dunes.

45.3% of respondents wanted sand dunes to develop across the entire area, and 37.3% of respondents were in favour of sand dunes being allowed to develop in some areas. 17.4% were against any sand dunes.

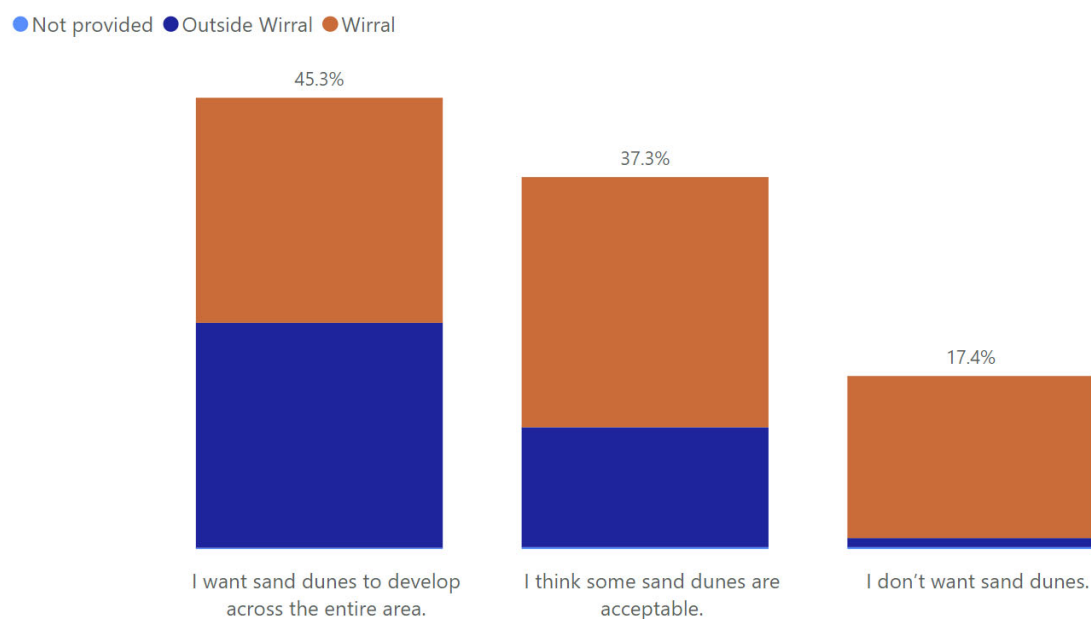


Figure 3: Sand Dunes

Responses from Wirral were mixed, with 35.3% favouring sand dunes developing across the entire area and 25.4% being against any sand dunes. The most common answer was in favour of some sand dunes being allowed to develop (39.3%).

Q4	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I don't want sand dunes.	6	29	515	550
I think some sand dunes are acceptable.	6	381	795	1182
I want sand dunes to develop across the entire area.	4	715	715	1434
Grand Total	16	1125	2025	3166

Table 4: Summary of responses to Q4 by location

3.1.5 Question 5: Aesthetics.

“It doesn’t matter how it looks, it’s natural,” was the most common response when asked about the beach’s aesthetics (53.8%). 18.0% preferred for Hoylake beach to look managed and maintained. 28.2% favoured a balanced aesthetic.

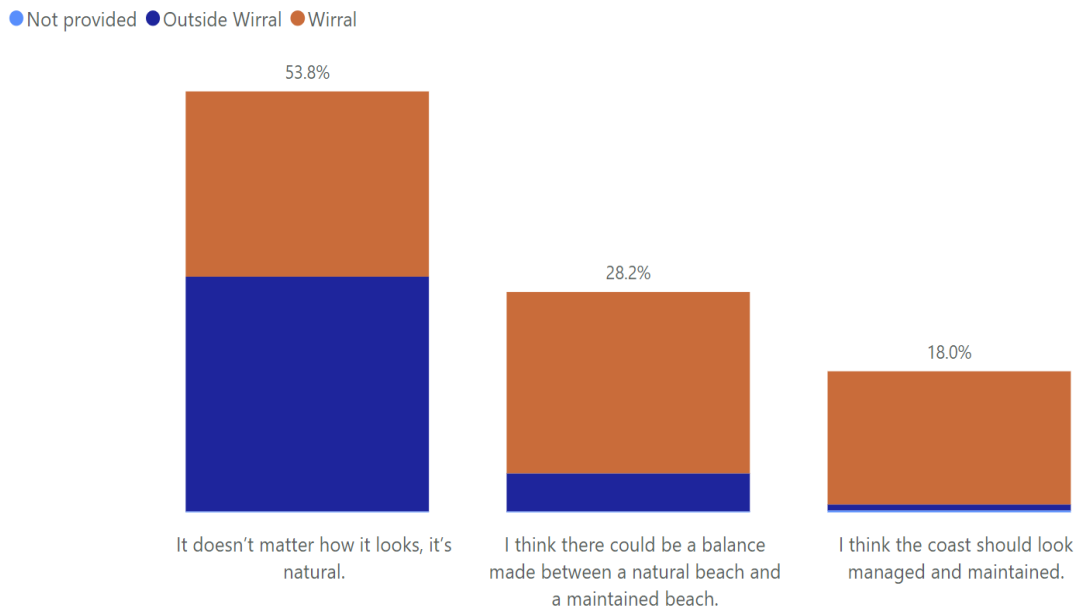


Figure 4: Aesthetics

Wirral residents also preferred a natural looking beach (37.1%); however, a greater share of respondents also favoured a managed and maintained looking beach (26.6%). 36.3% would like Hoylake beach to have a balanced aesthetic.

Q5	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I think the coast should look managed and maintained.	8	24	539	571
I think there could be a balance made between a natural beach and a maintained beach.	4	154	734	892
It doesn't matter how it looks, it's natural.	4	950	750	1704
Grand Total	16	1128	2023	3167

Table 5: Summary of responses to Q5 by location



3.1.6 Question 6: Accessibility.

The most common answer was that people want mud and silt on the beach due to the environmental benefits (47.1%). 26.5% of respondents don't want mud and silt closely followed by a desire for a balanced approach which allows some mud and silt (26.4%).

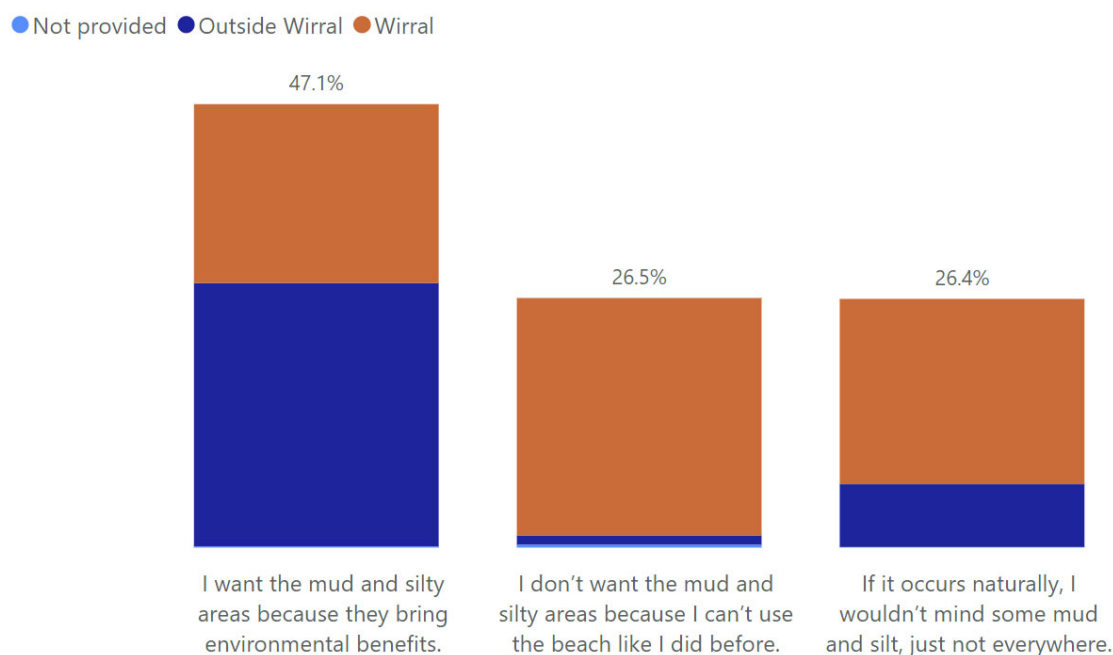


Figure 5: Access

The most popular answer among Wirral residents was that they don't want any mud and silt (39.5%). 30.8% of Wirral residents wouldn't mind some mud and silt, and 29.7% would like the mud and silt for the environmental benefits.

Q6	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I don't want the mud and silty areas because I can't use the beach like I did before.	10	30	798	838
I want the mud and silty areas because they bring environmental benefits.	4	884	601	1489
If it occurs naturally, I wouldn't mind some mud and silt, just not everywhere.	2	211	622	835
Grand Total	16	1125	2021	3162

Table 6: Summary of responses to Q6 by location

3.1.7 Question 7: Accessibility.

The most common answer was that people don't believe a natural beach will be any less accessible (48.2%). 26.1% of respondents would like a balance to provide access while allowing natural development, meanwhile 25.7% were concerned with the impact naturalisation could have on disabled access.

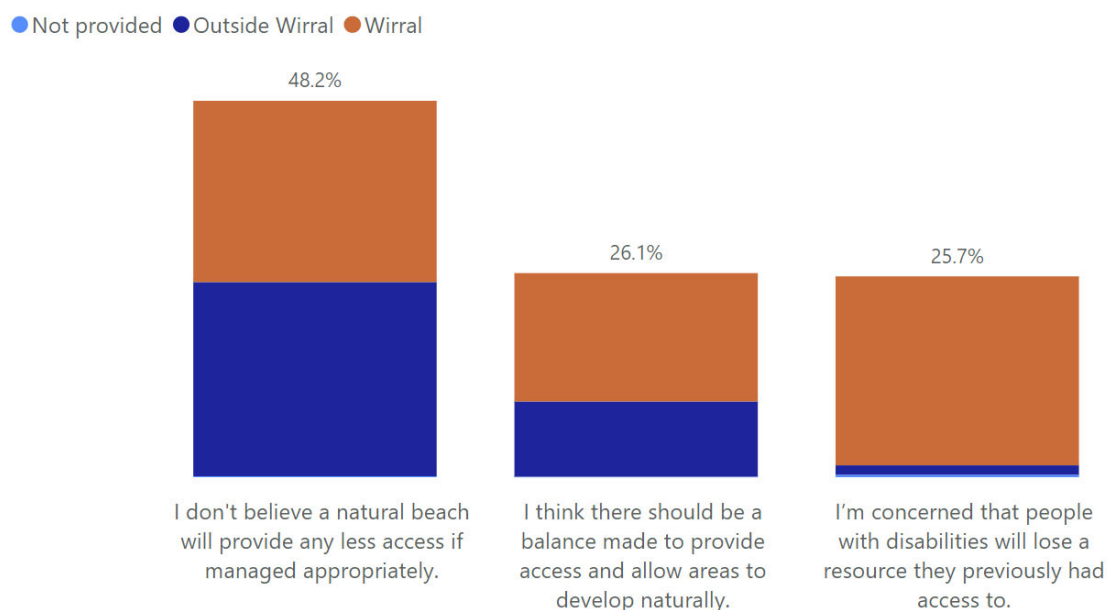


Figure 6: Accessibility

37.9% of Wirral resident respondents are concerned that naturalisation could deny disabled people access. 36.4% do not believe a natural beach will be less accessible, and 25.7% think there should be a balance of accessibility and naturalisation.

Q7	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I don't believe a natural beach will provide any less access if managed appropriately.	4	782	730	1516
I think there should be a balance made to provide access and allow areas to develop naturally.	2	303	517	822
I'm concerned that people with disabilities will lose a resource they previously had access to.	10	38	761	809
Grand Total	16	1123	2008	3147

Table 7: Summary of responses to Q7 by location

3.1.8 Question 8: Health.

The most common answer was that Hoylake beach's hazards should not be managed any different to other coastal areas (62.8%). 18.9% believe Wirral council should be managing all issues people believe to be hazardous at Hoylake beach and 18.3% believe if left unmanaged Hoylake beach would become hazardous.

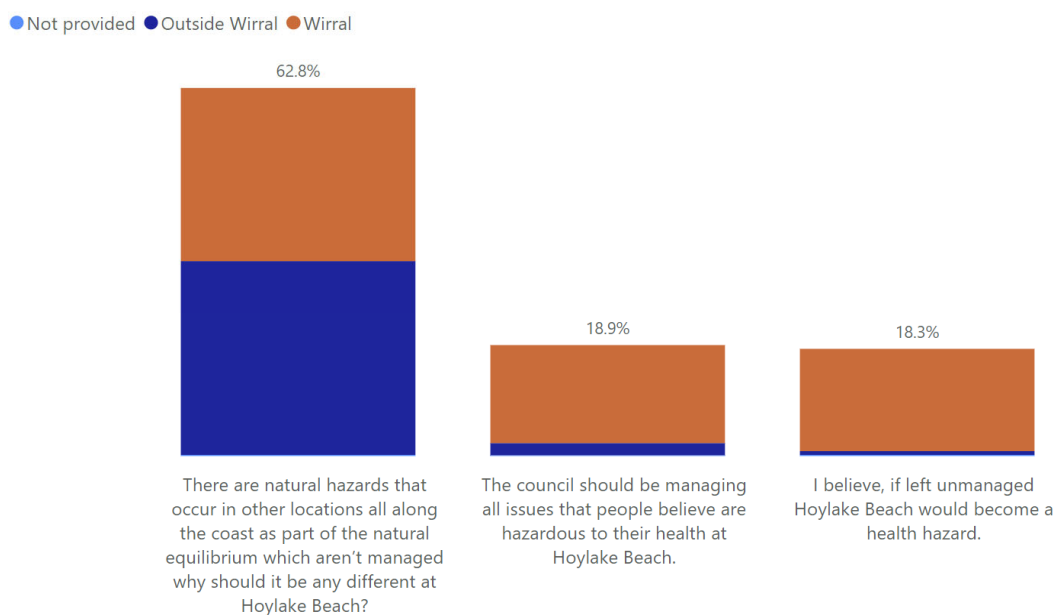


Figure 7: Health

Similarly, 46.4% of Wirral residents who responded believe Hoylake beach's hazards should not be managed any different to other coastal areas. However, Wirral residents were more concerned about the beach's potential hazards. 27.4% believe Hoylake beach could become hazardous if left unmanaged, and 26.2% believe Wirral council should manage all potential hazards.

Q8	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
I believe, if left unmanaged Hoylake Beach would become a health hazard.	6	20	545	571
The council should be managing all issues that people believe are hazardous to their health at Hoylake Beach.	4	65	522	591
There are natural hazards that occur in other locations all along the coast as part of the natural equilibrium which aren't managed why should it be any different at Hoylake Beach?	6	1037	922	1965
Grand Total	16	1122	1989	3127

Table 8: Summary of responses to Q8 by location

3.1.9 Question 9: Please select the statements you agree with:

Respondents could select multiple responses they believed were important. Local ecology (35.4%) was the most agreed with statement, followed by “a balance needs to be found between the needs of the local business community and the developing natural environment,” 22.3%. Excluding ‘other’ responses, “business and tourism are my priorities, and a natural developing beach will be beneficial,” were the least agreed with (8.0%). Of the ‘other’ responses, many highlighted the benefits of eco-tourism, however some were concerned that naturalisation will reduce Wirral’s beach capacity and discussed the knock-on effects this could cause, such as fewer visitors and reduced exercise space.

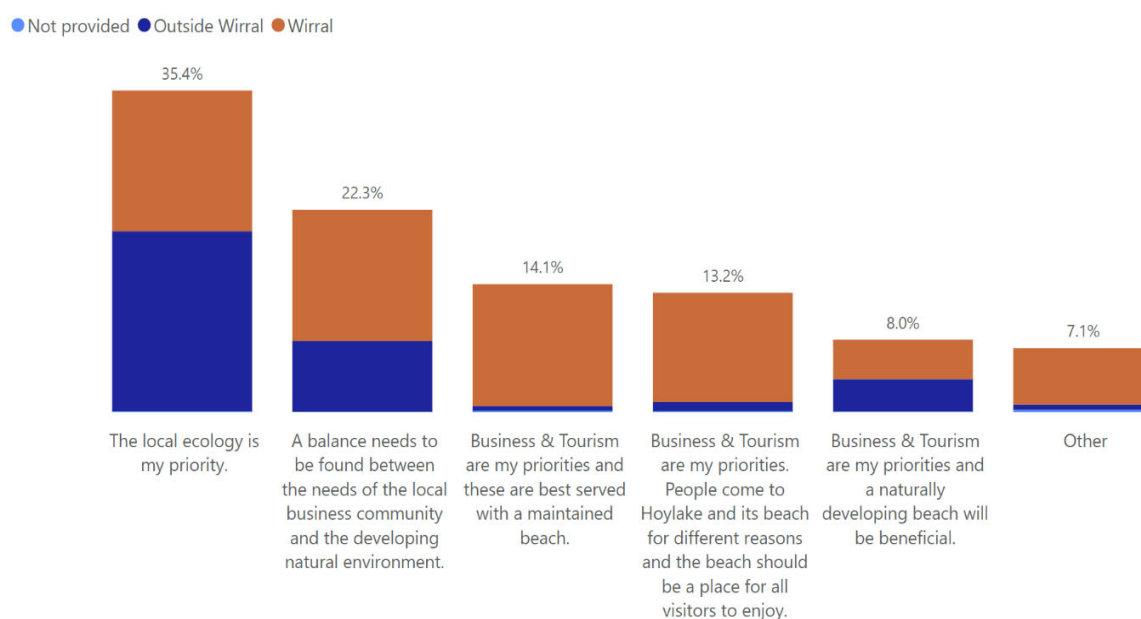


Figure 8: Tourism

Wirral residents agreed with the statements in a similar order as the overall response, however provided a more balanced view with more agreement given to the business and tourism statements. A greater proportion provided ‘other’ statements, many of which showed greater concern that tourists will not be attracted to a ‘natural’ beach.

Q9	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
A balance needs to be found between the needs of the local business community and the developing natural environment.	2	362	670	1034
Business & Tourism are my priorities and a naturally developing beach will be beneficial.	3	166	201	370
Business & Tourism are my priorities and these are best served with a maintained beach.	7	24	623	654
Business & Tourism are my priorities. People come to Hoylake and its beach for different reasons and the beach should be a place for all visitors to enjoy.	5	47	558	610
Other	12	27	288	327
The local ecology is my priority.	4	920	719	1643
Grand Total	33	1546	3059	4638

Table 9: Summary of responses to Q9 by location

3.1.10 Question 10: Please let us know if you agree or disagree with the following options in the development of a beach management plan.

Q10. Please let us know if you agree or disagree with the following options in the development of a beach management plan.	1. Strongly agree	2. Agree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	4. Disagree	5. Strongly disagree
a. Explore with Natural England an area of beach with the vegetation partially controlled to prevent full natural succession with a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.	5.6%	15.4%	17.3%	30.3%	31.4%
b. Explore with Natural England further intervention to support more Natural Succession of the ecology of this area of beach, thus encouraging more floral growth with no maintained access route from the adjoining promenade.	33.3%	17.1%	10.3%	10.7%	28.5%
c. Explore with Natural England identifying a sizeable fully maintained area of beach (cleared of all vegetation) which has a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.	18.9%	11.6%	9.5%	22.1%	37.9%
d. Explore with Natural England the most extensive management programme possible to return the entire beach to as it was pre-2019. (i.e. maintained beach).	26.0%	7.3%	5.1%	11.5%	50.2%
e. Work with Natural England to agree a maintained vegetation free access route to an unmaintained beach with maintenance intervention only to protect the access route from the adjoining promenade.	10.7%	25.4%	16.5%	19.1%	28.3%

Figure 9: Beach Management Plan - Overall Response. Colours represent popularity of response. Lighter colours represent less popular responses, darker colour shows more popular responses.

Q10. Please let us know if you agree or disagree with the following options in the development of a beach management plan.	1. Strongly agree	2. Agree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	4. Disagree	5. Strongly disagree
a. Explore with Natural England an area of beach with the vegetation partially controlled to prevent full natural succession with a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.	7.7%	17.8%	16.2%	28.8%	29.5%
b. Explore with Natural England further intervention to support more Natural Succession of the ecology of this area of beach, thus encouraging more floral growth with no maintained access route from the adjoining promenade.	22.1%	13.3%	8.6%	13.8%	42.2%
c. Explore with Natural England identifying a sizeable fully maintained area of beach (cleared of all vegetation) which has a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.	27.9%	15.7%	9.6%	18.3%	28.5%
d. Explore with Natural England the most extensive management programme possible to return the entire beach to as it was pre-2019. (i.e. maintained beach).	36.3%	9.6%	5.6%	10.4%	38.0%
e. Work with Natural England to agree a maintained vegetation free access route to an unmaintained beach with maintenance intervention only to protect the access route from the adjoining promenade.	9.0%	19.2%	13.7%	22.4%	35.6%

Figure 10: Beach Management Plan - Wirral Response. Colours represent popularity of response. Lighter colours represent less popular responses, darker colour shows more popular responses.

Option A: *Explore with Natural England an area of beach with the vegetation partially controlled to prevent full natural succession with a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.*

Overall, most people disagreed (30.3%) or strongly disagreed with this option (31.4%). When looking at responses from just Wirral residents, the sentiment was similar, with 28.8% in disagreement, and 29.5% in strong disagreement.

Option B: *Explore with Natural England further intervention to support more Natural Succession of the ecology of this area of beach, thus encouraging more floral growth with no maintained access route from the adjoining promenade.*

Whilst overall, most people strongly agreed (33.3%) with this option, only slightly fewer (28.5%) strongly disagreed. When isolating Wirral residents' responses, there is a clear difference to the overall sentiment, with many more (42.2%) strongly disagreeing with the option than strongly agreeing (22.1%).

Option C: *Explore with Natural England identifying a sizeable fully maintained area of beach (cleared of all vegetation) which has a maintained vegetation free access route to the beach from the adjoining promenade.*

Overall, most respondents (37.9%) strongly disagreed with this option. When looking at Wirral residents only, sentiment is more divided. A smaller proportion (28.5%) strongly disagreed with this as an option and a similar proportion of people (27.9%) strongly agreed.

Option D: *Explore with Natural England the most extensive management programme possible to return the entire beach to as it was pre-2019. (i.e., maintained beach).*

Overall, there was strong disagreement (50.2%) to this option. When isolating Wirral residents' responses, the sentiment is more divided. Whilst 38.0% strongly disagreed with the option, a similar amount strongly agreed (36.3%).

Option E: *Work with Natural England to agree a maintained vegetation free access route to an unmaintained beach with maintenance intervention only to protect the access route from the adjoining promenade.*

28.3% of respondents strongly disagreed with this option, overall. The level of strong disagreement is more pronounced amongst Wirral residents, with 35.6% strongly disagreeing.



In order to analyse the responses to the five options to allow comparison a 'net agreement' approach has been used. For this each option has been assigned a rank based on net agreement, calculated by summing the percentage of respondents in agreement (agreed or strongly agreed) and taking away the percentage of respondents in disagreement (disagreed or strongly disagree). The option with the greatest net agreement, the preferred option, is assigned rank 1, and the option with the lowest is given rank 5.

Option	Net Agreement	Rank	Net Agreement - Wirral	Rank - Wirral
A	-40.7%	5	-32.8%	5
B	11.3%	1	-20.5%	3
C	-29.6%	4	-3.0%	2
D	-28.3%	3	-2.6%	1
E	-11.3%	2	-29.8%	4

Table 10: Beach Management Plan - Net agreement

The preferred management option for respondents is option B, "Explore with Natural England further intervention to support more Natural Succession of the ecology of this area of beach, thus encouraging more floral growth with no maintained access route from the adjoining promenade."

However, 42.2% of Wirral residents strongly disagreed with this option. Wirral respondents would prefer option D "Explore with Natural England the most extensive management programme possible to return the entire beach to as it was pre-2019. (i.e., maintained beach)."



3.1.11 Question 11: The Geomorphological study has predicted that the sand levels on this beach area will rise significantly over the next 50 years irrespective of which management option is chosen. Therefore, there will be considerable future costs for the Council to manage the sand which will accrete along this beach. Please let us know if you agree or disagree with the following options.

Q11.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
▲					
a. I support a management option for the beach which will require the removal and transport of the sand from the beach which will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.	15.2%	11.4%	13.7%	18.5%	41.3%
b. I support a management option for full Natural Succession which will require the management of the sand which will impact on the public infrastructure (drains, pavements and roads). This will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.	12.7%	20.0%	23.6%	21.5%	22.2%
c. I would support an option that would seek to find a compromise between Full Management and Natural Succession that would limit as far as practical the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.	18.0%	33.6%	21.4%	15.1%	11.9%
d. I would support an option that is based around limiting the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.	23.1%	30.0%	25.3%	10.9%	10.7%

Figure 101: Beach sand Management Plan - Overall Response. Colours represent popularity of response. Lighter colours represent less popular responses, darker colour shows more popular responses.

Q11.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
▲					
a. I support a management option for the beach which will require the removal and transport of the sand from the beach which will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.	22.4%	15.3%	14.3%	15.6%	32.5%
b. I support a management option for full Natural Succession which will require the management of the sand which will impact on the public infrastructure (drains, pavements and roads). This will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.	13.8%	20.5%	22.9%	20.2%	22.8%
c. I would support an option that would seek to find a compromise between Full Management and Natural Succession that would limit as far as practical the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.	18.8%	31.7%	20.4%	15.8%	13.3%
d. I would support an option that is based around limiting the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.	19.0%	28.5%	25.3%	13.5%	13.7%

Figure 112: Beach sand Management Plan - Wirral Response. Colours represent popularity of response. Lighter colours represent less popular responses, darker colour shows more popular responses.

Option A: *I support a management option for the beach which will require the removal and transport of the sand from the beach which will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.*

Overall, the highest proportion of people strongly disagreed with this option (41.3%). This is reflected among Wirral responses where 32.5% of people strongly disagreed. A higher proportion of Wirral residents did strongly agree (22.4%) with the option but not enough to alter the overall sentiment of strong disagreement.

Option B: *I support a management option for full Natural Succession which will require the management of the sand which will impact on the public infrastructure (drains, pavements and roads). This will incur increased costs and a potential increase in carbon dioxide emissions linked to fuel transport.*

This option attracted no strong sentiment both overall or amongst Wirral residents, and in both cases the highest proportion of people neither agreed nor disagreed with the option.

Option C: *I would support an option that would seek to find a compromise between Full Management and Natural Succession that would limit as far as practical the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.*

Overall, the highest proportion of people (33.6%) agreed with this option, and this is reflected amongst Wirral residents where 31.7% agreed.

Option D: *I would support an option that is based around limiting the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.*

The highest proportion of respondents agreed with this option, both overall (30.0%) and amongst Wirral residents (28.5%).

In order to analyse the responses to the five options to allow comparison a 'net agreement' approach has been used. For this each option has been assigned a rank based on net agreement, calculated by summing the percentage of respondents in agreement (agreed or strongly agreed) and taking away the percentage of respondents in disagreement (disagreed or strongly disagree). The option with the greatest net agreement, the preferred option, is assigned rank 1, and the option with the lowest is given rank 4.



Option	Net Agreement	Rank	Net Agreement - Wirral	Rank - Wirral
A	-33.1%	4	-10.4%	4
B	-11.0%	3	-8.7%	3
C	24.6%	2	21.4%	1
D	31.5%	1	20.3%	2

Table 11 : Beach sand Management Plan - Net agreement

The preferred option for respondents with 31.5% net agreement was option D, “I would support an option that is based around limiting the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions.” While Wirral respondents supported option D (20.3% net agreement), option C was preferred “I would support an option that would seek to find a compromise between Full Management and Natural Succession that would limit as far as practical the increase in costs and carbon dioxide emissions,” with 21.4% net agreement.



3.1.12 Question 12: If you believe Hoylake Beach left unmanaged could become a health hazard, please note any specific health concerns here.

Wirral based? ● Not provided ● Outside Wirral ● Wirral

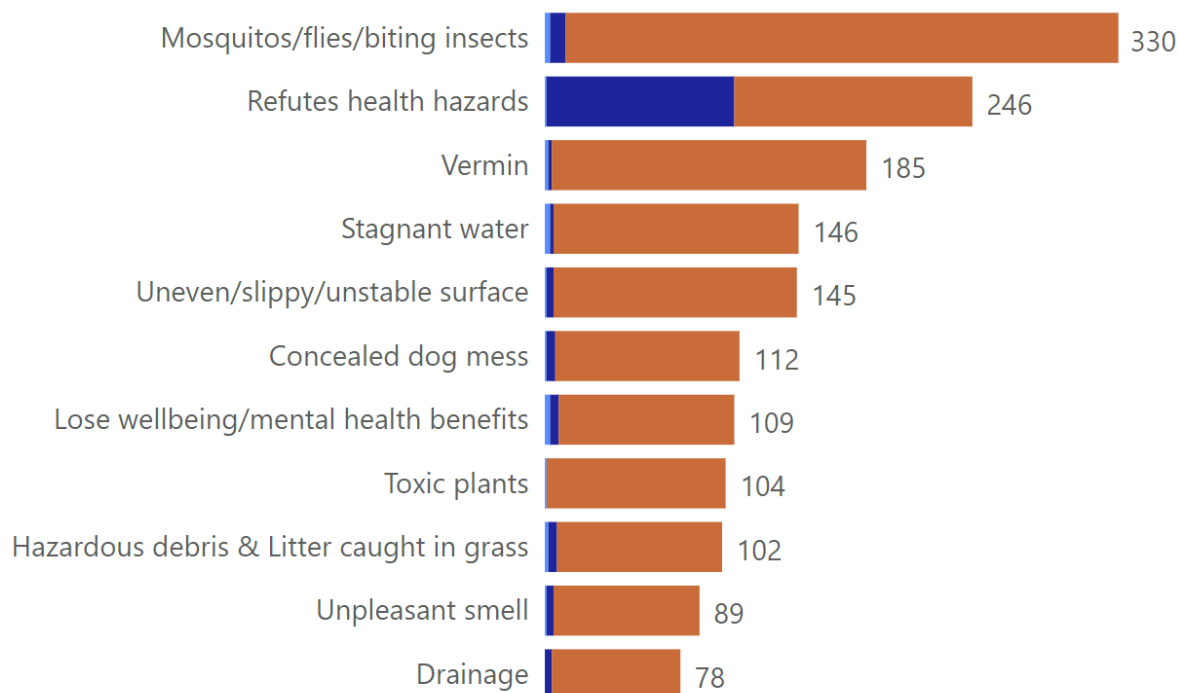


Figure 12: Top 11 categories (75+ responses) outlining specific health concerns.

Mosquitos/flies/biting insects

330 comments were made in total, with 96.3% being from Wirral residents concerned about Hoylake beach potentially causing an increase in Mosquito and other insects' numbers if left unmanaged. The main concern is that biting insects can spread disease to humans and animals and can be considered pests.

Refutes health hazards

246 comments outlined their belief that the potential increase in health hazards is acceptable. The main reason for this is due to the natural benefits the naturalisation will bring to the local environment. 55.7% of these comments came from Wirral residents.

Vermin

Similarly, to the health issues caused by potential increases in insect numbers, 185 comments expressed concern that the naturalisation of Hoylake beach could encourage Vermin to infest the area, which could result in health hazards for humans and other animals. 97.8% of these comments came from Wirral residents.

Stagnant water

146 comments showed concern that stagnant water on Hoylake beach could become a health hazard, particularly if ingested. This could be a hazard for local humans and animals, in particular dogs. 96.6% of these comments were from Wirral residents.

Uneven / slippery / unstable surface

Many are concerned that an unmanaged beach could become unsafe and inaccessible due to uneven/slippery/unstable surfaces. Comments suggested that unsafe surfaces will result in injuries. 145 comments related to this concern, with 96.6% coming from Wirral residents.

Other

406 comments related to less common concerns have been grouped under this heading. In total 371 'Other' comments came from Wirral residents. The most popular 'other' health concerns include: the idea that a natural beach may impede the RNLI, the beach may become a fire hazard; particularly from public barbecues in the summer, and that by reducing access to Hoylake beach people may have to travel further to find sand.

In total, 90.2% of the 2052 comments came from Wirral residents.

Comment Category	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
Mosquitos/flyes/biting insects	3	9	318	330
Refutes health hazards	1	108	137	246
Vermin	2	2	181	185
Stagnant water	3	2	141	146
Uneven/slippery/unstable surface	1	4	140	145
Concealed dog mess	1	5	106	112
Lose wellbeing/mental health benefits	3	5	101	109
Toxic plants	1	0	103	104
Hazardous debris & Litter caught in grass	2	5	95	102
Unpleasant smell	1	4	84	89
Drainage	0	4	74	78
Other	3	32	371	406
Grand Total	21	180	1851	2052

Table 12 : Health hazard comments by category.

3.1.13 Question 13: If you have any additional comments related to Hoylake Beach, please provide them here.

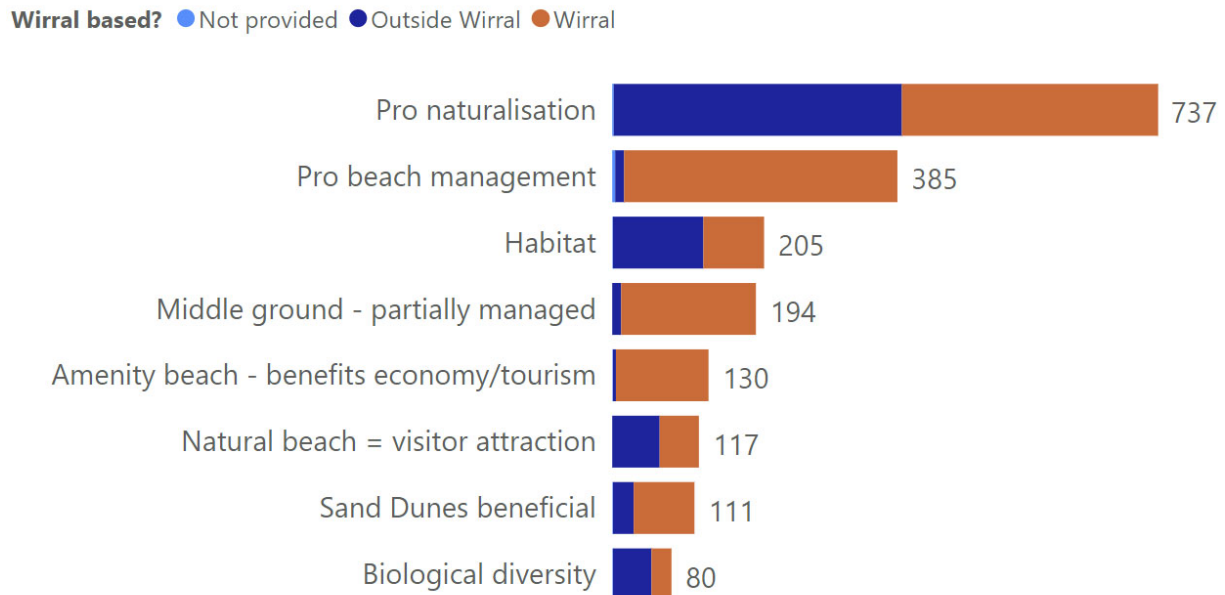


Figure 12: Top 8 categories (75+ responses) outlining additional comments.

Pro-naturalisation

The most common category of additional comments favoured naturalisation. 737 comments were 'pro-naturalisation,' 46.9% of these comments came from Wirral residents who valued the environmental benefits greater than the trade-offs.

Pro beach management

The second most common comment category was in favour of managing Hoylake beach. In total 385 commentators favoured management, with 95.8% coming from Wirral residents. The commentators valued the beach as a community asset, and do not want to risk what many consider an increase in health hazards. Many also believe that a natural beach would be an eyesore.

Habitat

205 comments mentioned the habitat that Hoylake beach could become if rewilded. The presence of rare grasses on Hoylake beach are commonly referred to, while many also would like the beach to be home to other plants and wildlife. 40% of comments came from Wirral residents.

Middle ground - Partially managed

194 comments, with 93.8% coming from Wirral residents, were in favour of a middle ground approach of partial management, whereby some areas of the beach were left to rewild, while others were managed, and access maintained. Most accept that chemical spraying cannot continue but raking the surface would be a possibility.

Other

1695 comments were made which related to categories with a smaller number of respondents mentioning them and will be grouped under 'other'. The most common categories mentioned were against the use of chemicals in beach management, against stopping the beach serving as a leisure asset, some want access to be retained, and some think the unmanaged beach would become an eyesore.

In total, 72.5% of the 3654 comments came from Wirral residents.

Comment Category	Not provided	Outside Wirral	Wirral	Grand Total
Pro naturalisation	2	389	346	737
Pro beach management	4	12	369	385
Habitat	1	122	82	205
Middle ground - partially managed	0	12	182	194
Amenity beach - benefits economy/tourism	1	4	125	130
Natural beach = visitor attraction	0	64	53	117
Sand Dunes beneficial	1	28	82	111
Biological diversity	1	52	27	80
Other	7	305	1383	1695
Grand Total	17	988	2649	3654

Table 13: Additional comments by category.

3.2 Community Drop in Sessions

Community drop-ins allowed people to discuss the Hoylake beach consultation with informed officers. This enabled questions to be answered, people provided with access to the consultation documents through advice about the online questionnaire or provision of paper copies as required. Approximately 157 people attended the sessions over four days.

Meeting	Attendees
Tuesday 12 July – 11:00 – 19:00.	27
Wednesday 13 July - 11:00 – 19:00.	63
Thursday 14 July - 11:00 – 19:00.	43
Friday 15 July - 11:00 – 19:00.	24

Table 14: Table showing the attendees at community drop-in sessions.

Whilst the Community Drop-in sessions were arranged to encourage participation in the survey many attendees took advantage of the opportunity to talk with officers and other attendees about specific issues relating to the beach. Many of the hour-long sessions turned into debates with broad, well informed, and good-mannered discussion. Many attendees highlighted the division that had been caused in the community because of the differing views held. Officers were able to explain that the consultation process sought to establish that future management options would be best aligned with the consultee feelings and that were deliverable within the environmental regulatory framework protecting North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest.

3.3 Community Connectors

The Community Connectors spoke with 525 people in Hoylake about the questionnaire. 77% of people (403) already knew about the consultation and 23% (122) were not aware. 17% of people (89) had already completed the questionnaire, 72% (376) were provided with leaflets and 5% (24) were provided with paper copies of the questionnaire.

Residents had heard about the consultation from a range of sources including TV, Wirral Globe, Email, leaflets, and local meetings. 30% had heard about it through word of mouth, 22% through social media, 19% through posters and 8% through banners.



3.4 Stakeholder Representations

Three stakeholder direct representations were received via the dedicated email address supplied for the consultation process. These were from Wirral Wildlife, Natural England, and the Environment Agency. The response from the Environment Agency had no comments to add at the time. The two other representations are included in Appendix 1 of this report.



4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic

4.1 Demographics

Registration was required to engage in the online Hoylake Beach Consultation. The registration form included questions regarding demographics including gender, age group, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, however not all questions in the registration form were compulsory and respondents could choose to select 'prefer not to say' or skip the question. The demographics results are summarised below. The same questions were included on the paper-copy questionnaires, this information was merged with the online results.

Most respondents (61.1%) classified themselves as residents. Of those who registered as 'other', 979 respondents did not provide any further details, while 12 said they were residents at a local care home.

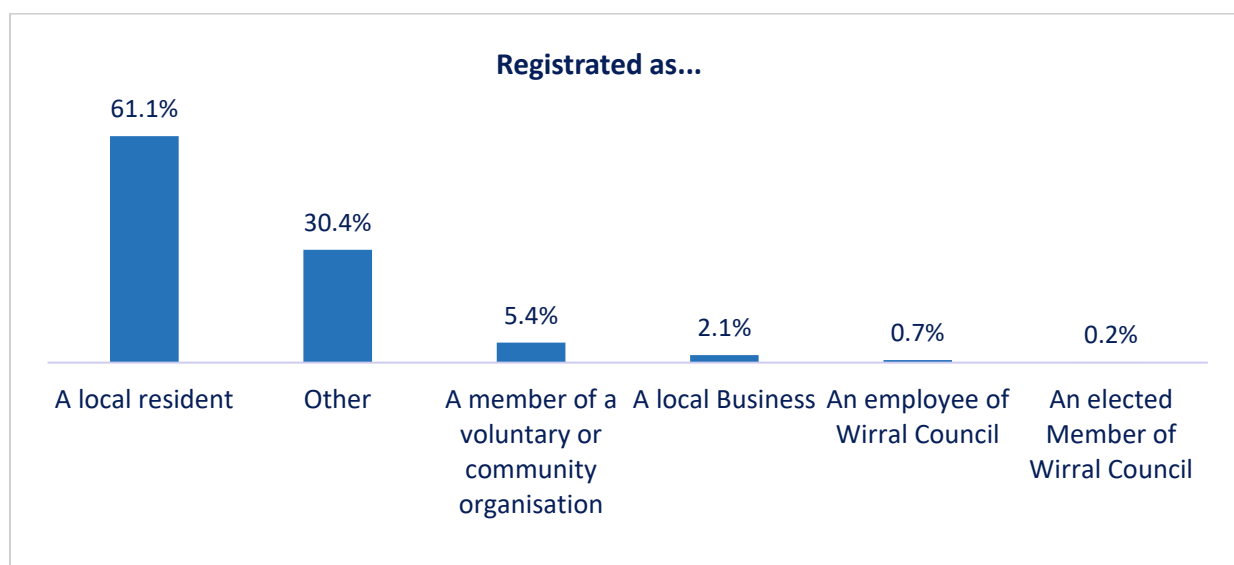


Figure 13: Who are you registering as?

The gender breakdown of respondents was 60.4% female, 35.0% male, with 4.3% preferring not to say and 0.2% preferring to use their own term.

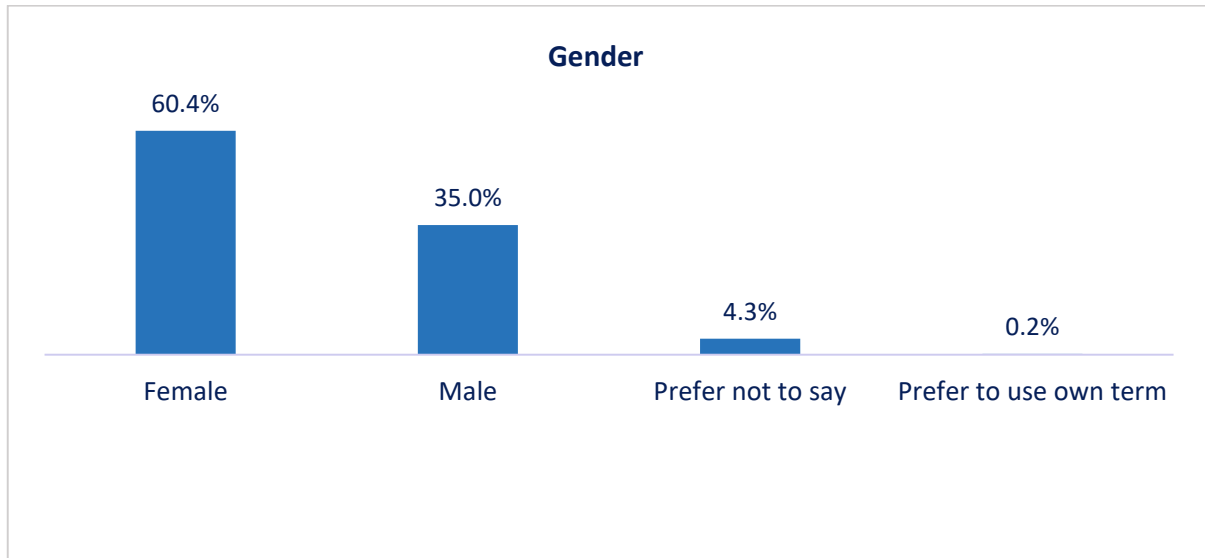


Figure 14: Gender of respondents

The age group profile is illustrated with the most common age groups were 55-64 years (27.3%), followed by 45-54 years (24.7%). Under 25's made up 1.7% of respondents.

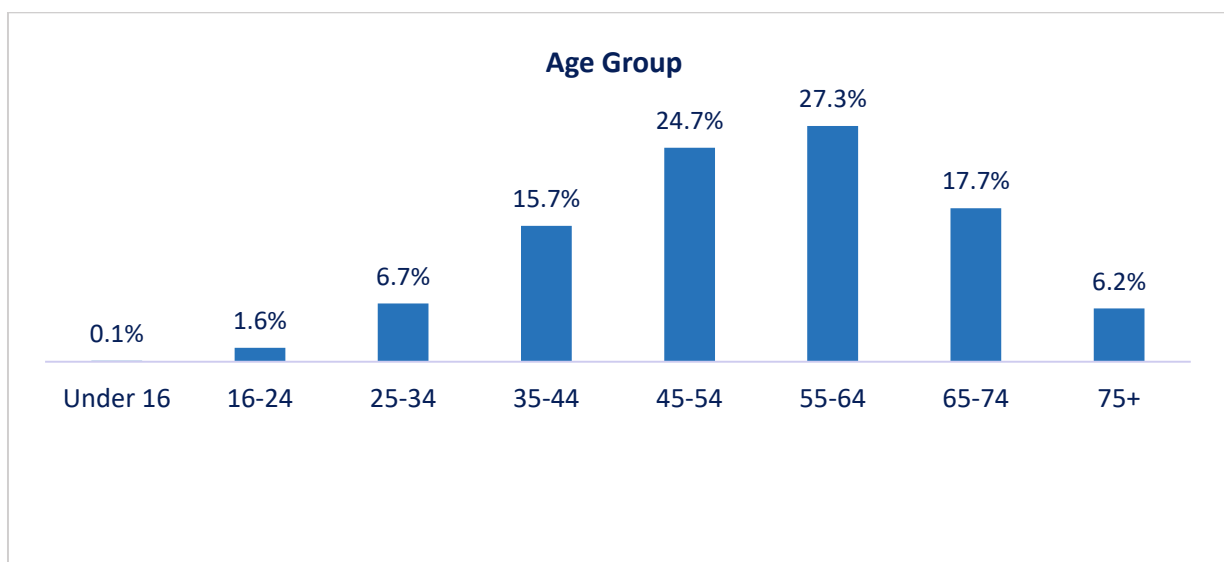


Figure 15: Age group of respondents

92.4% of respondents were of White British ethnicity. Of the 3.0% who registered as 'other,' 22 preferred not to say, and 69 did not provide any further details.

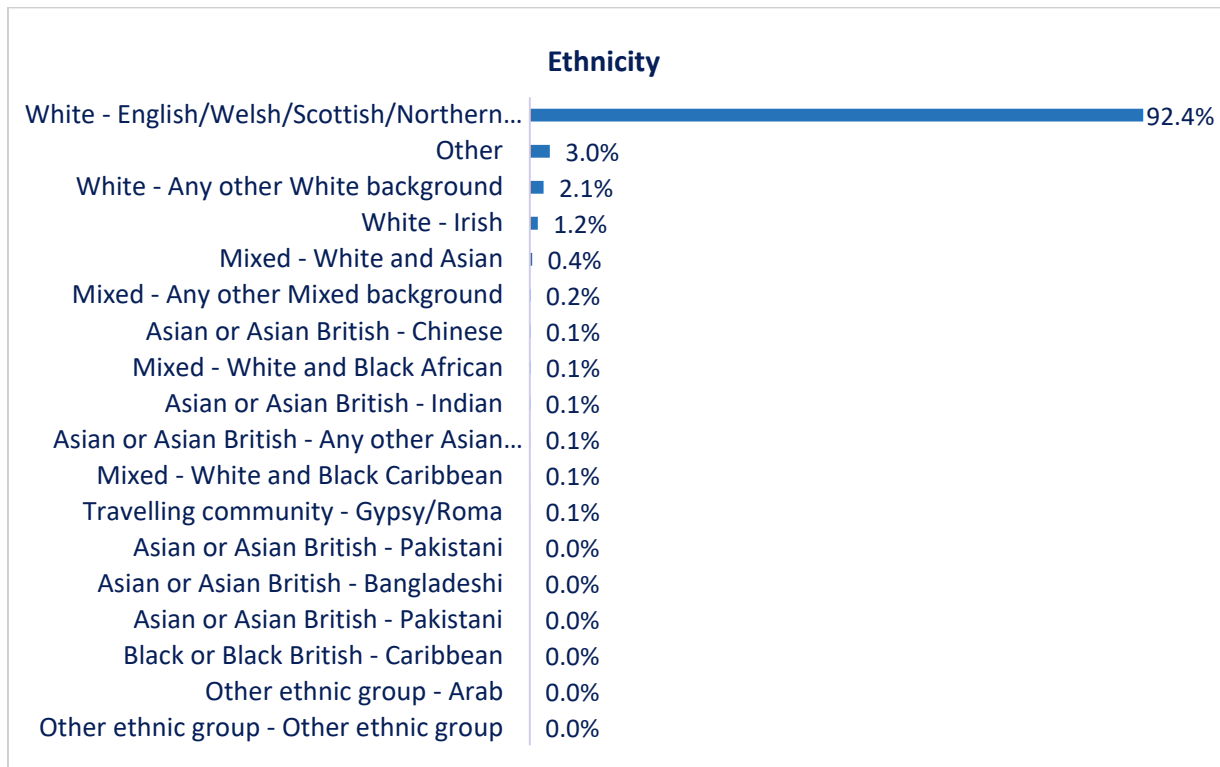


Figure 16: Ethnicity of respondents

75.6% of respondents were heterosexual, 1.7% were gay/ lesbian, 1.8% bisexual and 20.9% preferred not to say.

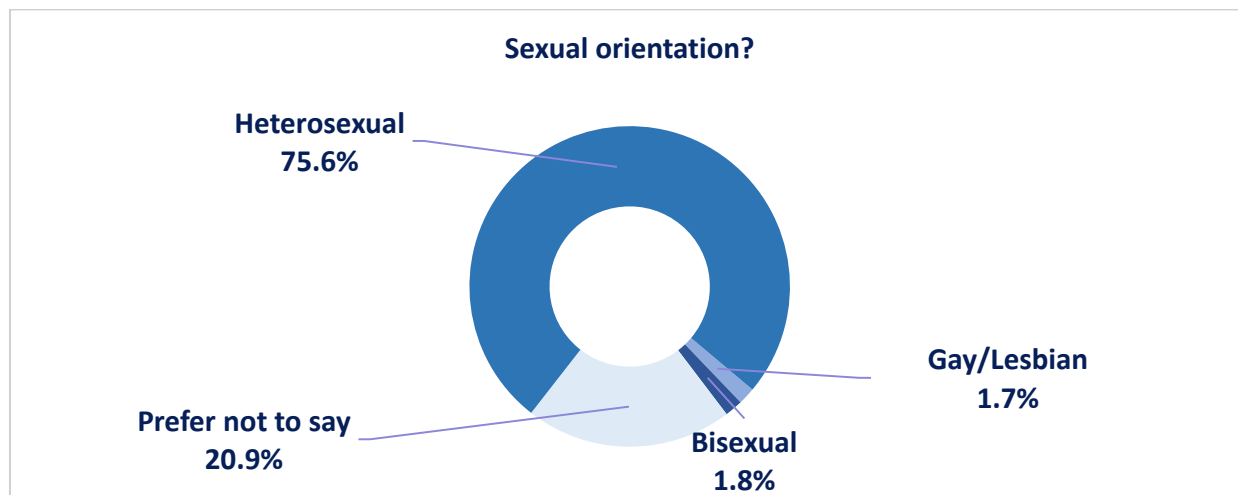


Figure 17: Sexual orientation of respondents

80.6% of respondents did not have a disability, 10.0% had a disability and 8.4% preferred not to say.

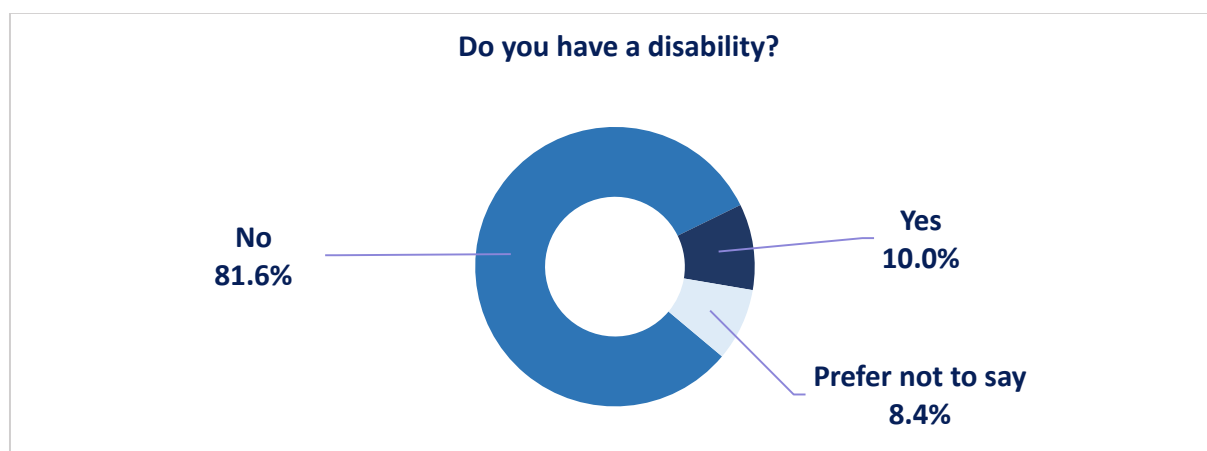


Figure 18 - Disability status of respondents

The survey was responded to locally, nationally, and internationally. The spread of responses is provided below in heat maps, based on postcodes provided.

The majority of responses from Wirral postcodes came from Hoylake and Meols (54.5%). The second highest responding wards was West Kirby and Thurstaston (9.4%). Each of the 22 Wirral wards had some representation in the survey findings.

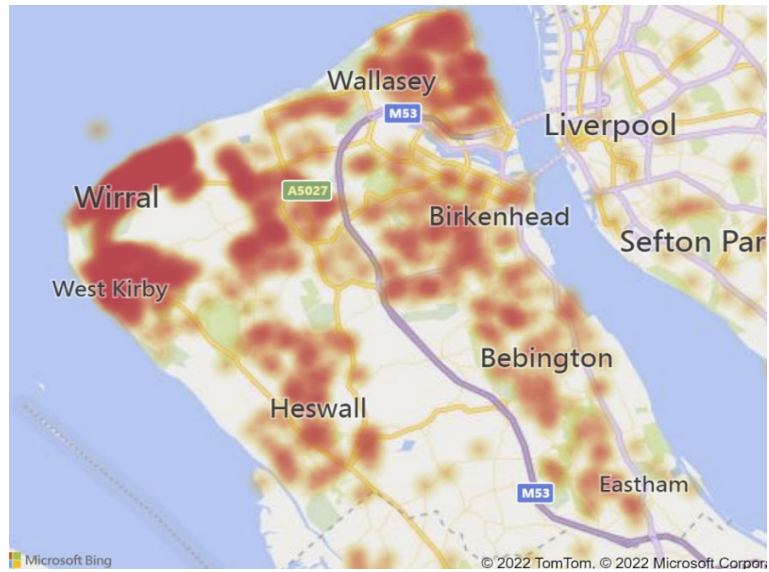


Figure 19 - Wirral heat map of respondents

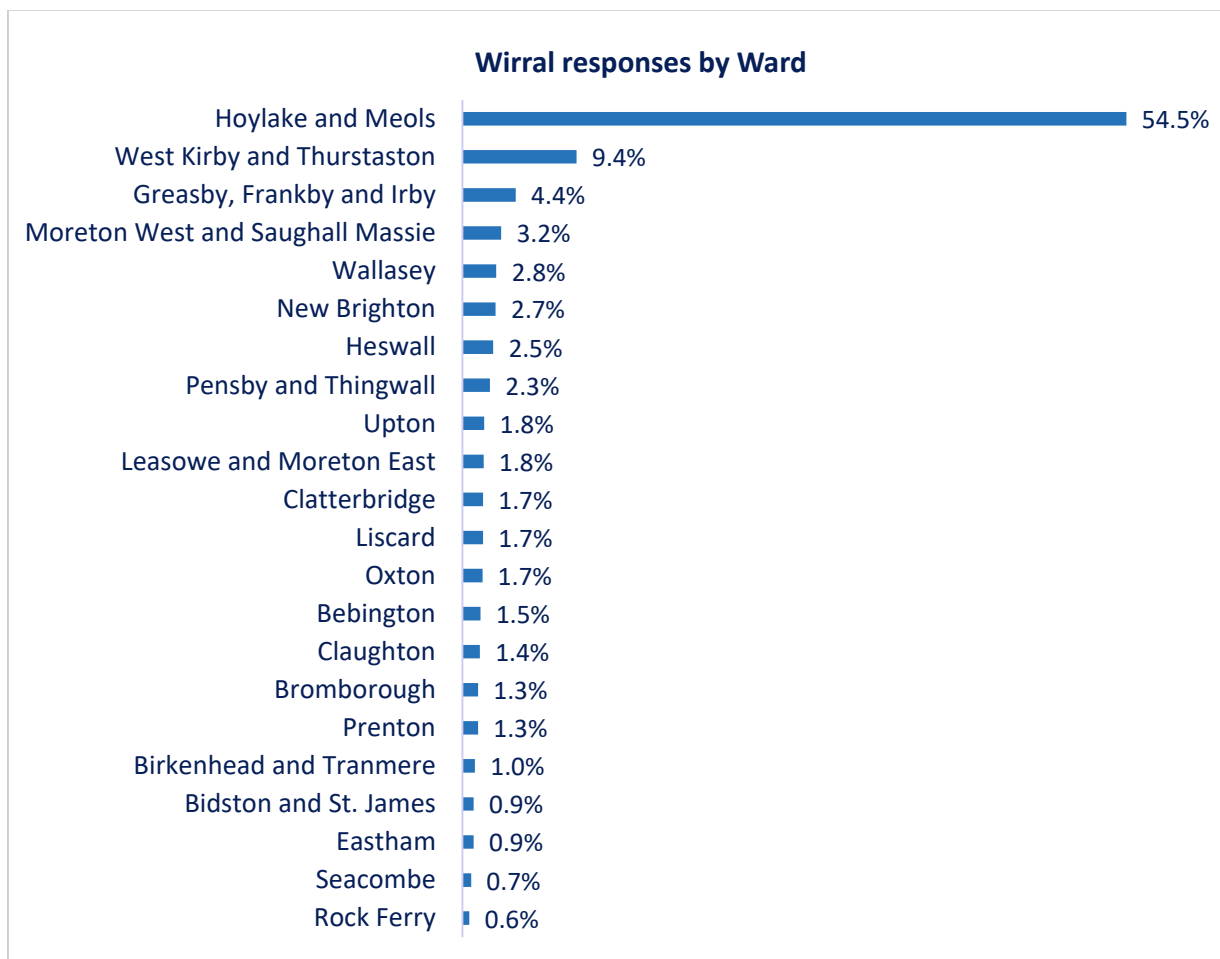


Figure 20 - Respondents in Wirral wards

Responses came from throughout the UK; however, the highest concentration of responses came from the Northwest of England.

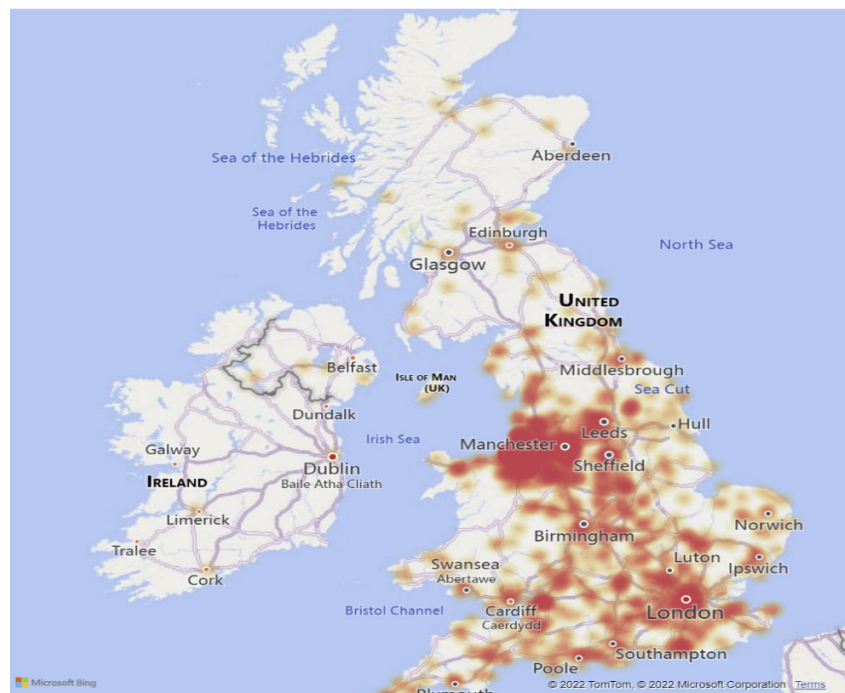


Figure 21 - Heat map of respondents from the United Kingdom.

Internationally, contributions came from Ireland, the USA, Mexico, Peru, Greece and the Phillipines.



Figure 22 – Map illustrating the location of international responses.

4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic

Reviewing the online site activity, visits, and how people visit the site can be useful to evaluate if people are aware of the site, as well as to ensure engagement activities are deployed effectively, and to a wide range of different people – enhancing public engagement in the future.

This information relates to the online Hoylake Beach webpages on the Have Your Say site and does not include paper copy responses.

18,627 visited the Hoylake Beach Consultation page of the Have Your Say site, of these 5,236 visited multiple project pages and 331 downloaded a document. 2,972 people in total completed the questionnaire.

These figures cannot be viewed as definitive as they are based on site tracking through ‘cookies’ and there are a number of factors that can impact on this. These include that cookies may be disabled or deleted, individuals may access the site multiple times through different devices or different browsers. However, the figures can be used to gauge how much interest has been generated in individual projects through the rate of engaged participants.

The route that people access the site is known as the traffic source. The ‘Have your say’ portal allows analysis to be carried out on traffic source, and if they lead to engagement in the site tools such as the questionnaire. This analysis allows a greater understanding of which communication and promotional tools to use to optimise engagement.

For this project a range of traffic sources have been reviewed and summarised in the table below. Most visits to the site were via links clicked from social media sites (14,033) or direct visits, where people typed the internet address into their web browser (5,330 visits). Social media visits generated a rate of engagement of 6.6%, meaning 6.6% of these visits resulted in completion of the survey, and direct visits had an engagement rate of 30.1%.

TRAFFIC CHANNEL	AWARE VISITS	INFORMED VISITS (%)	ENGAGED VISITS (%)
DIRECT	5,330	2,415 (45.3%)	1,605 (30.1%)
SOCIAL	14,033	5,403 (38.5%)	927 (6.6%)
EMAIL	327	88 (26.9%)	37 (11.3%)
SEARCH ENGINE	891	488 (54.8%)	206 (23.1%)
.GOV SITES	278	136 (48.9%)	63 (22.7%)
REFERRALS	609	268 (44%)	118 (19.4%)

Table 15: Site traffic sources

Using the online site allows the tracking of response numbers over time. For this high-profile questionnaire, the response rate numbers were tracked throughout the process. Due to the national and some international interest the responses from within Wirral and those from outside Wirral were also calculated. The chart/table below shows the response rates over time from the online results.

In general, with many surveys there is often a peak in response in the last few days before the survey closes. In this case for the 8/9/10 August there was an increase in response rates. On the final day 10 August there were 155 responses in total, 125 responses from within Wirral and 30 from outside Wirral.

For this questionnaire two other peaks can be noted in the online data. On the 3 of July there was an increase in response rates to 185, 89 from outside Wirral and 96 inside Wirral and on 4 July there were 152 responses with 55 from outside Wirral and 97 inside Wirral. This coincided with a Tweet on the 3 July from Chris Packham, Naturalist and Television Presenter who noted Hoylake beach and shared the link to the online questionnaire.

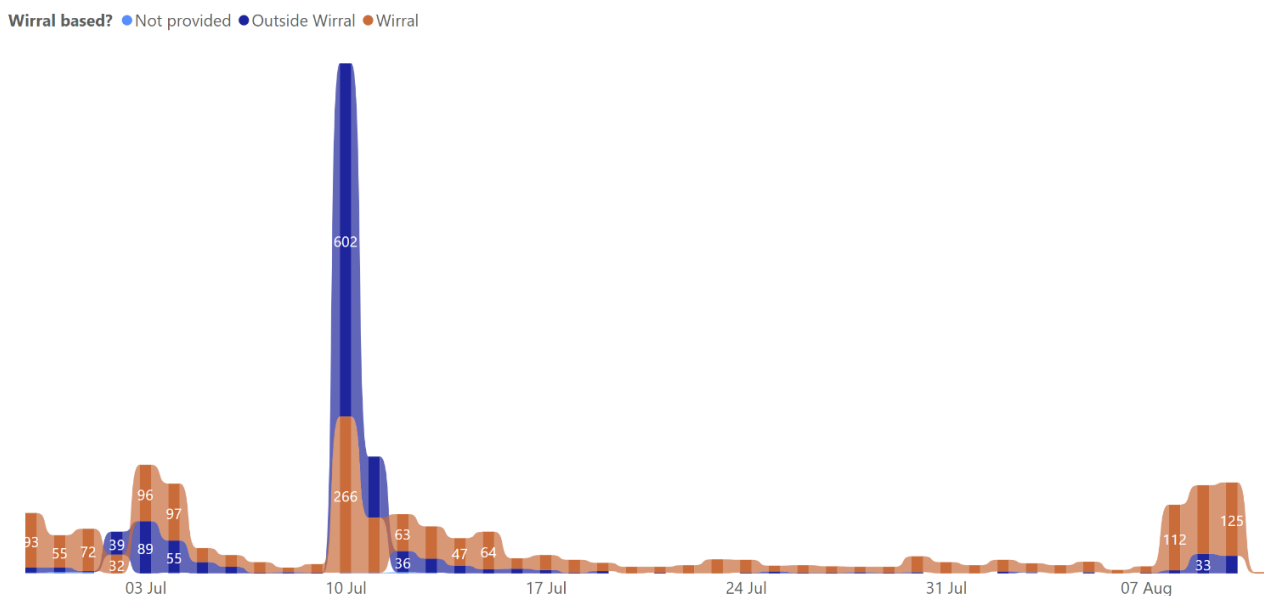


Figure 23: Responses by day

The main peak on the 10 and 11 July coincides with a Facebook post from Chris Packham on the morning of 10 July 2022. He noted Hoylake beach and shared the link to the online questionnaire. For this peak on the 10 July there were 868 responses, 602 from out of Wirral and 266 from inside Wirral. On the 11 July there were 198 responses with 104 from outside the Wirral and 94 inside the Wirral.

Date	Wirral		Outside Wirral		Total	
	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses
29/06/2022	93	93	9	9	102	102
30/06/2022	55	148	8	17	63	165
01/07/2022	72	220	2	19	74	239
02/07/2022	32	252	39	58	71	310
03/07/2022	96	348	89	147	185	495
04/07/2022	97	445	55	202	152	647
05/07/2022	24	469	19	221	43	690
06/07/2022	20	489	11	232	31	721
07/07/2022	18	507	1	233	19	740
08/07/2022	8	515	2	235	10	750
09/07/2022	15	530	1	236	16	766
10/07/2022	266	796	602	838	868	1634
11/07/2022	94	890	104	942	198	1832
12/07/2022	63	953	36	978	99	1931
13/07/2022	55	1008	24	1002	79	2010
14/07/2022	47	1055	13	1015	60	2070
15/07/2022	64	1119	7	1022	71	2141
16/07/2022	18	1137	8	1030	26	2167
17/07/2022	25	1162	6	1036	31	2198
18/07/2022	22	1184	1	1037	23	2221
19/07/2022	14	1198	4	1041	18	2239
20/07/2022	11	1209	0	1041	11	2250
21/07/2022	10	1219	1	1042	11	2261
22/07/2022	14	1233	0	1042	14	2275
23/07/2022	24	1257	0	1042	24	2299
24/07/2022	22	1279	1	1043	23	2322
25/07/2022	10	1289	3	1046	13	2335
26/07/2022	13	1302	1	1047	14	2349
27/07/2022	11	1313	1	1048	12	2361
28/07/2022	9	1322	2	1050	11	2372
29/07/2022	10	1332	1	1051	11	2383
30/07/2022	27	1359	2	1053	29	2412
31/07/2022	19	1378	0	1053	19	2431

continued

Date	Wirral		Outside Wirral		Total	
	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses	Responses by day	Cumulative Responses
01/08/2022	14	1392	0	1053	14	2445
02/08/2022	20	1412	3	1056	23	2468
03/08/2022	15	1427	1	1057	16	2484
04/08/2022	14	1441	0	1057	14	2498
05/08/2022	18	1459	2	1059	20	2518
06/08/2022	6	1465	0	1059	6	2524
07/08/2022	11	1476	1	1060	12	2536
08/08/2022	112	1588	5	1065	117	2653
09/08/2022	117	1705	33	1098	150	2803
10/08/2022	125	1830	30	1128	155	2958
11/08/2022	2	1832	0	1128	2	2960

Table 16 – Cumulative online survey responses, Wirral residents, External and Total. Online responses only.

Appendix 1: Stakeholder Representations

Wirral Wildlife Response

HOYLAKE BEACH



1/1

This article is written by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and its local group Wirral Wildlife, using the guidance issued to Wirral Borough Council by Natural England, and with further advice on geomorphology, sediment accretion and estuarine habitats from coastal experts who know Wirral. Coastal change is natural; we are fortunate that here it is providing new habitat to help tackle the climate, environmental and well-being emergencies we face.

During the last ice age, Wirral was under a thick layer of ice. This gouged out the Dee Estuary and pressed down our part of the earth's crust. Since the ice melted about 10,000 years ago, the Dee Estuary has been slowly filling up with nutrient-rich sand and mud, known as sediment. The sediment comes mostly from the sea, by longshore drift along the North Wales coast. It is this accumulated sediment that makes the Wirral shores internationally important for nature conservation. It is full of worms, snails, crabs and other invertebrates. On these feed the thousands of birds which winter here, which would not be able to survive without this rich food.

The seabeds of the Dee and Mersey estuaries also store lots of carbon that has been absorbed over thousands of years, sealed underwater. If disturbed, this carbon is released, making our climate warmer and our seas more acidic. Readers will know about the effects of the climate emergency and current efforts to tackle this: we are part of nature, not separate from it. Salt marsh is one of the best habitats at taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, on a par with peatlands and woodlands, while vegetated sand dunes fix appreciable amounts. Bare sand fixes little carbon. ([See Natural England report cited at end](#)).

Sea levels have fluctuated widely since the last ice age and are currently rising as a result of increasing sea temperatures. Our piece of crust has been slowly coming up again since the weight of ice was removed, so the net sea level rise at Liverpool is currently about 5mm a year - which does not sound much until it is added up over a century and more. Currently sand accretion at Hoylake is faster than sea level rise, and the geomorphological report done by Royal Haskoning (published February 2022) expects this to continue for the next 50 years. Our coasts are dynamic places, always changing. For the last century many of our coasts have been "frozen" in place by coastal defences. Can and should this be continued?

To help answer this, the national government has put in place a Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), about which there were local public meetings in 2012. Rev. Paul Rooney, Head of Geography and Environmental Science at Liverpool Hope University tells us that there has been a "tectonic change" in knowledge of coastal processes in the last 20 years - but we still cannot accurately predict the future from the past.

So what about Hoylake? The SMP decision for North Wirral, made by national experts, is to "hold the line" i.e. maintain the existing hard defences for at least 50 years from when the plan was made. After that defences may be removed at Leasowe Bay and natural sand dunes encouraged to take over. Before the 19th century, there were sand dunes all the way from West Kirby to New Brighton. The SMP principle is to work with nature - but Liverpool Bay is not entirely natural, being affected by the canalisation of the Dee and Mersey and the dredging of the Liverpool Port approaches for shipping. (See Facebook page Hoylake beach – the Evidence) At Hoylake, the energy of the water and sediment supply are key. The Hoyle Lake, a former deep anchorage just offshore, is now full of sediment, so the sand brought by the sea is all coming towards Wirral. Hilbre and the East Hoyle Bank break some of the energy of the waves, tides and currents. The result is sand and a little mud is being deposited on Hoylake shore, raising its level to the point where the sea rarely reaches the promenade, and conditions are excellent for specialist plants. The colonisation by coastal plants is the result. Sand dunes are wonderful habitats for a suite of fascinating plants which we need to respect and which provide us with service by holding the sand together, so less blows inland onto the promenade. An on-going study of Hoylake shore by an expert professional botanist (Joshua Styles) has so far (by summer 2022) recorded 180 plant species, including **twenty-four** rare and unusual ones of national or regional significance. Most of the species are now those characteristic of sand dune rather than salt marsh. Natural England opinion ([see guidance](#)) is that at Hoylake the balance would be more towards sand dune than salt marsh, and certainly this is what the developing vegetation indicates. This new sand dune habitat, known as embryo dune, is itself rare in the UK, where most coasts are eroding, and is very valuable in wildlife terms. It has considerable



protection under the legislation that governs internationally important wildlife sites (formerly EU Habitats Directive, now transposed into UK law through the Environment Act 2021). Spartina (Cord-grass) occupies much less than 5% of the vegetated area. Almost all the plant species present are native to the UK. This excellent collection has arrived naturally, because the shore provides the correct environment for their needs. This special and natural environment we now have on our shore is why every time the vegetation has been sprayed or scraped off, it returns.

In 2000, a report by Dr Alan Jemmett (then Dee Estuary Conservation Officer, now head of Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service) looked at the Hoylake foreshore and did a report to Wirral BC, which judged the continued removal of vegetation to be "unsustainable" on ecological and financial grounds. Just the current amount of sand arriving is equivalent to at least 11 large lorries daily. With money needed for other matters, surely we should embrace the natural opportunity that has developed on our coast.

At Parkgate, well up the Dee where there is less movement of waves, mostly mud was deposited, leading to permanent salt marsh. In contrast, Red Rocks Nature Reserve, round the corner from Hoylake shore, has been allowed to develop fairly naturally for the last twenty years. Here a complex of new salt marsh, reed-marsh and sand-dune line have formed and are still increasing. In these new habitats natterjack toads sing, rare moths breed and much other wildlife is flourishing. A survey this year by Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group found that common and even natterjack toads are starting to move into the western end of the new Hoylake habitat. Rats and cord-grass are not major problems at Red Rocks. West Kirby beach by the Sailing Centre is kept clear of plants by mechanical methods.

The best comparison to Hoylake, because it likewise faces Liverpool Bay, is in Sefton, all the way from Birkdale to Marshside, where coastal sediment has formed wildlife-rich new habitats. We encourage you to walk along the Sefton shore and enjoy the wildlife. New vegetated habitats on Wirral's northern shore will give more access to nature for people, access we know is good for mental and physical health. The wading birds and wildfowl will still be there, though it will be further to walk from the promenade to see them. There will be many more flowers, insects and birds on the new habitats near the promenade, at their best in spring and summer when more people visit.

North Wirral foreshore is internationally important for wintering birds, with many thousands there every year. How would development of salt marsh and sand dune affect them? *A joint statement by the RSPB, BTO and CAWOS says:*



“The ongoing changes at Hoylake will be beneficial to birds, offering more protected high-tide roosting sites and alternative feeding areas for waders, as well as a new environment for ground feeding finches, wagtails, and pipits. In contrast, reinstating an artificial beach will be detrimental to birds.”

The wintering birds have limited areas to go to roost at high tide because of urban development round the Dee. Disturbance to roosting birds is one reason for recent declines in some of our wintering bird species, according to Natural England. We can help the roosting birds by keeping ourselves, our dogs and our horses from disturbing the birds at high tide in autumn and winter.

The previous agreement between Natural England and Wirral Borough Council on the beach management has finished. In 2019 Wirral Borough Council declared an Environmental and Climate Emergency, as have many other local and national bodies. In the last few years, new evidence on the effects of the weed-killer formerly used on the beach (glyphosate) has emerged. It has been shown to reduce invertebrate populations, including those in the beach sediments. These invertebrates are the food supply for the wintering birds. The guidance of the Government’s ecological advisor, Natural England, is now in favour of letting nature take its course (see [their guidance to Wirral Borough Council](#)). They do allow the possibility of creating a limited amenity beach, as at West Kirby, using mechanical means. There is certainly a need to sort the drainage from the promenade onto the beach, especially to find whose wrong connections are the source of the sewage-contaminated drainage. Draining roads, with all their dirt, onto a beach should not be acceptable in the 21st century!

Money is tight - is our money best used making the climate and environmental emergencies worse? Or could it be used to manage the natural sediments e.g. keeping easy access for RNLI.

Look ahead 50-100 years. Sea level will continue to rise. Dunes and saltmarsh would protect the sea wall. What would our grandchildren want us to do?

For all these reasons, we should allow nature to take its course on Hoylake shore. We are very lucky to have more coastal wildlife able to thrive in our peninsula. New coastal habitat is a rarity in the UK and we should celebrate it.

Our mission, as Cheshire Wildlife Trust, is to bring wildlife back. We want to see more and better-connected wild spaces and the pressures on the environment reduced, and we work to improve the resilience of nature and restore broken ecosystems. We also believe that people’s wellbeing and the economy relies on a healthy, natural environment. Coastal processes are changing the beach at Hoylake and increasing the diversity of wildlife found there. There needs



to be more understanding of the coastal change, habitat development and the value that this brings, and we are in favour of further studies to help achieve this. Hoylake beach is designated for nature conservation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. As such, any management of the beach requires the written agreement of Natural England.

Wirral Wildlife committee
Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Shoreline Management Plan - www.mycoastline.org.uk

Wirral Coastal Strategy - www.Wirral.gov.uk

Facebook group Hoylake Beach – the Evidence
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/353912892854904/>

Royal Haskoning report and much other data - see: <https://haveyoursay.Wirral.gov.uk/hoylake-beach-information>

Alan Jemmett's report:
http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/report_for_wbc_on_wind_blow_n_sand

Natural England Research Report NERR094 'Carbon Storage and Sequestration By Habitat: A Review of the Evidence' (second edition):
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5419124441481216>



Natural England Response

10th August 2022

Our ref: 1407221146NG

Your ref: Hoylake Beach Management Initial Consultation

Wirral Council PO Box 290 Brighton Street Wallasey CH27 9FQ

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Dear Wirral Council,

Thank you for your consultation on Hoylake beach management which was received by Natural England on 13th July 2022.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England have chosen to submit their representation in writing to ensure our position is clear. For clarity, Natural England refers each answer to the relevant question in the survey.

Question 1: People use Hoylake Beach for lots of reasons. Please choose which reasons are important to you.

- Exercise
- Walking
- Walking the dog
- A place to picnic
- A place to be close to nature
- Looking at nice views
- Looking at birds
- Family activities
- Playing on the beach
- Other (please say below)

Natural England understand that people use our natural environments for many different reasons. Natural England can appreciate the value of the beach for all the reasons listed in the survey, however as the beach is sensitive consideration must be taken to the conservation



objectives of the protected sites. I have provided a link to the conservation objectives of the site for your reference:

Special Protection Area (SPA) Conservation Objectives: [Marine site detail \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://naturalengland.org.uk/marine-site-detail).

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Conservation Objectives: [European Site Conservation Objectives for Dee Estuary SAC - UK0030131 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://naturalengland.org.uk/european-site-conservation-objectives-for-dee-estuary-sac-uk0030131)

Question 2: Please choose the most important things Hoylake Beach does for nature.

All statutory bodies have a legal duty to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs in undertaking their functions. Natural England's statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development function. This includes focussing on the conservation of protected sites, their habitats and species through the appropriate legal provisions. Hoylake beach is an important part of the statutory protected sites supporting intertidal sediments and developing saltmarsh and dune habitats and a range of species including internationally important non-breeding bird populations. Natural England understand the importance of this natural capital in providing ecosystem services including capturing windblown sand, providing natural flood defence and capturing carbon. Natural England also appreciates the value of the beach for people by providing a natural space for people to visit, hosting events and the importance of this local space to the local people.

Questions 3: Do you want saltmarsh at Hoylake Beach? 4: Do you want sand dunes at Hoylake Beach? & 5: How do you think Hoylake Beach should look?

Natural England supports allowing the beach to develop naturally and allowing natural processes to happen. The natural processes allow the establishment and expansion of saltmarsh or sand dune habitats and these are part of the protected site interest and provide valuable services. Any management of the beach should be consistent with the conservation objectives of the site and subject to the necessary regulatory tests and permissions.

Question 6: How do you feel about mud at Hoylake Beach?

Natural England supports allowing the beach to develop naturally and to allow natural processes to happen, this includes the presence of mud. Mud habitats provide valuable food resources for the important non-breeding bird populations. Observations indicate that there



has been an increase in sand supply resulting in the beach being less muddy and favouring the development of sand dune type habitats.

Question 7: How do you feel about getting around in a beach with plants and mud?

Natural England supports providing opportunities for everyone to access nature, including Hoylake beach. However, access and use of the beach needs to appropriately consider its conservation importance. Natural England would like to be involved in ideas and proposals for managing access.

Question 8: If the beach is not maintained, how do you feel about people's health?

Natural England mostly agree with option 2: "There are natural hazards at other beaches that the council does not manage. Hoylake should be the same."

Question 9: Visitors and the environment

Natural England mostly agree with option 2: "Visitors are important to me, and I think a natural beach would bring more visitors." The natural development of the beach with associated habitats provides a more diverse and interesting experience. The beach still supports a large area of open sand that can provide similar experiences to before the recovery of saltmarsh/sand dune type habitats. The natural beach will provide opportunities for new visitors to visit and observe how the beach is developing and the beach provides opportunities for education and eco-tourism.

Question 10: How much do you agree or disagree that we should do as much as we can to make Hoylake Beach maintained as it was up to 2019?

Natural England "Disagree a lot" with the statement that we should do as much as we can to make Hoylake Beach maintained as it was up to 2019. The habitats that are developing on the beach are an important part of the protected sites and clearance of these would be unlikely to be compatible with the conservation objectives of the sites through destruction of the habitat and alteration of the natural processes.

Question 11: How much do you agree or disagree that we should choose an area of the beach that is looked after for people to use? This area would have no plants and people could get to the beach from a managed path from the prom.



It may be possible to maintain an area of beach for amenity purposes, subject to being assessed fully and going through the necessary regulatory tests and processes. It is likely that specific surveys of proposed areas would need to provide a current assessment of plants present. However, Hoylake beach has a large area of open sand beyond the vegetation, it appears that this will increase in height and so be drier, especially if held by the frontline of vegetation – this could provide amenity opportunities. There may be opportunities to provide access to areas of open sand beyond the vegetation, for example by use of boardwalks.

Question 12: How much do you agree or disagree that we should choose an area of the beach to:

- Have plants.
- Only be partly looked after.
- Have a managed path for people to use to get to the beach from the prom?

Natural England partially agrees with all three options, subject to understanding the details and an assessment of these.

Question 13: How much do you agree or disagree that we should not look after the beach and just make sure there is a way for everyone to get to it from the prom? & 14: How much do you agree or disagree that we should support more plants to grow on the beach with no managed path from the prom?:

It is unclear what is meant by ‘not looking after the beach’. A positive decision to maintain the beach through minimal intervention eg allowing the beach to naturally develop could still be considered ‘looking after the beach’. Natural England therefore disagrees with this statement based on it’s ambiguity. In reference to whether we should support more plants to grow on the beach with no managed path from the prom, Natural England supports allowing the beach to develop naturally and to allow natural processes to happen. However, subject to assessments there may be scope for managed paths to allow access to the open beach beyond the vegetation, this may also limit human pressure on the developing habitats.

Question 15: How much do you agree or disagree that sand should be moved out of the beach, which will cost the council money and cause more pollution? 16: How much do you agree or disagree that we should manage the sand by taking it out of drains, roads and pavements so it doesn't cause damage? This would cost the council money and cause more pollution. 17: How much do you agree or disagree that we should manage the increase in sand a little, which would mean: • Spending less. • Causing less carbon dioxide to be in the air? & 18: Do you agree or disagree that we should try not to spend too much or cause too much pollution?



Natural England understands that the management of blown sand is an issue. Natural England considers that the beach vegetation provides important ecosystem benefits to Hoylake by capturing sand, acting as a natural flood defence and to capture carbon dioxide out of the air.

Natural England is unclear - what is meant by 'sand should be moved out of the beach' in Question 15? If this means excavating and removing sand from the beach Natural England disagrees – this would impact the protected site, very expensive and does not provide a sustainable solution. A better option, from Natural England's perspective, would be to allow the dune habitats to develop and trap the sand, this is likely to raise beach levels in front of the vegetation and allow the seaward movement of the dune habitats.

With regards to managing the drains to remove sand, Natural England understands the Council's need to manage drainage, the Council will need to consider any implications for the designated site eg with regard to sustainable water supply to the beach to maintain wetter elements of the habitat.

Natural England also suggests that Wirral Council investigates options to return windblown sand that has left the beach back to the beach. This may be acceptable subject to the necessary assessments and approvals.

Question 19: If you think that not looking after the beach would be bad for people's health, please say how here.

Natural England advises on the natural environment and the conservation importance of protected sites and their features. It is not our position to comment on health and wellbeing in this instance.

Many thanks again for engaging with Natural England early on this consultation.

If you have any queries relating to the content in this letter then please do not hesitate to contact me: Cheshire2.Lancashire@defra.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

