

BROOKSIDE RESTORATION



The Brookside Restoration Project, Development Phase Community Engagement Report

Alice Pooley, for PROSPECTS Foundation, September 2025

This document gives an overview of the community engagement activities carried out as part of the development phase of the Brookside Restoration Project, which ran from April 2024 to September 2025 and was jointly funded by the National Lottery Climate Action Fund, Hyndburn Borough Council, and The Windfall Fund.



Public Engagement and Outreach Events

Over the 18-month development phase, the project team delivered 113 events. This total includes 48 volunteering days, 46 onsite public events, 15 events in off-site venues, and sessions delivered to 4 local primary Schools, plus engagement with a home schooling community.

The total number of active participants was over 1500. A further 4,000 people were engaged via Ecofest 2024 and 2025.

Launch Event:

The project team hosted a public launch event in August 2024, which was attended by over 60 people, including a representative from the National Lottery Climate Action Fund, the Hyndburn Borough Council portfolio holders, and Cllr Mike Booth, Mayor of Hyndburn.



The 'Thursday Gang' of Volunteers



The Brookside Thursday Gang, a group of regular volunteers who meet onsite every week, was developed by the project officer. This group regularly attracts 12 people, with a larger pool who attend around other commitments. Over the last 18 months, volunteers have carried out habitat improvements on site, participated in multiple citizen science events, and represented the project at community events. Several members of the Thursday gang have gone on to receive formal qualifications in environmental management, and all of the group are passionate advocates for the project within their communities. Four times a year, the Brookside Restoration Officer awarded a volunteer “Star of the Season” who was featured in the project newsletter.

The improvements made to Brookside have already garnered significant praise from site users. Below is an email received by the project officer following path clearance by the volunteers in Winter 2024:

To everyone that is involved,

After walking around this area on Sunday which as a family we haven't done for a long time due to the litter and how scruffy it had got I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the fantastic work you have done around the Brookside nature reserve area it looks absolutely fantastic and all your hard work is very much appreciated and we as a family will now enjoy many a walk around this area as the paths around the water course are so much improved and the whole area looks 100% cleaner and tidier.

*So thanks so much to everyone involved for helping this area be enjoyed to its full potential
Keep up the amazing work and your hard work doesn't go unnoticed*

Thank you

From a local Oswaldtwistle resident

School Engagement:

The Brookside development phase had a particular focus on working with young people. The Ribble Rivers Trust delivered the 'Rivers in the Classroom' programme with three local primary schools and a local home school group.



- **St Andrew's School:** visited in October 2024, including an in-school introduction session, two class visits to trout installation at Haworth Gallery, and two river table and 'river gifts' sessions in February 2025. Attended by 45 Year 5 pupils and six adults. A further two trout release sessions were held with St Andrew's School at Brookside.
- **West End School:** including an in-school introduction session, a visit to the trout installation at Haworth Gallery, river table and 'river gifts' sessions in February 2025, and a trout release at Brookside. Attended by 27 Year 5 pupils and five adults.
- **Intack School:** including two river table and 'river gifts' sessions in February 2025. Attended by two Year 5 classes.
- **Home School Group:** including a river table session in February 2025. Attended by 15 mixed age children and 13 adults.

Additionally, many children and their families independently visited the Haworth Gallery trout installation, demonstrating the interest created by the project.

The project officer also worked with teachers from local schools to codesign curriculum-linked activities that would address the schools specific needs and wants. The following sessions were delivered by the project officer:

- **Intack School:** onsite activity day for 2 x classes of preschool children to celebrate the end of the term in July 2025.

- **St Nicholas Primary:** full class sessions delivered in school as part of their annual science week in March 2025
 - Year 5 building wind turbines
 - Year 2 pollinators and their habitats
 - Year 4 designing Brookside Nature reserve
 - Whole school: assembly about the project and how to get involved
- **St Andrews Primary:**
 - Habitats and animals at Brookside, delivered in school to 2x whole classes of years 2 and 6 in October 2024.
 - Designing Brookside nature reserve delivered to a whole class in Oswaldtwistle Library as part of Great Big Green Week in June 2025.
- **West End Primary:**
 - Site tour for the heads of Science and Geography in July 2024
 - Tree seed collecting field trip for 1x full class of year 4 in October 2025

Physical Signage:

A community noticeboard was installed at the Stanhill entrance to the site, as this was perceived to be the most well-used and also had the most convenient vehicle access. It quickly became a place to advertise events, advise on contractor work onsite, and also a space for the community to share their own media. Each quarter, a visual “What’s On” flyer was created and affixed to the noticeboard.

Digital Offerings:

A dedicated project page was developed and hosted on the PROSPECTS Foundation website. This was regularly updated by the project officer and displayed a seasonal events calendar as well as links to partner websites.



A Virtual Reality tour of Brookside was created by LandScan UK, and offered to the public at Ecofest 2025 as a novel way to learn about the site. Attendees were able to experience “walking through” Brookside, guided by a voiceover, from the comfort of a chair in Accrington High Street. This experience was extraordinarily popular, with a queue out of the gazebo for the entire day, gaining positive feedback from attendees and increasing interest in both the project and the site.

There is significant potential to develop this offering in future as a way to engage with those who are not able to visit the site in person.

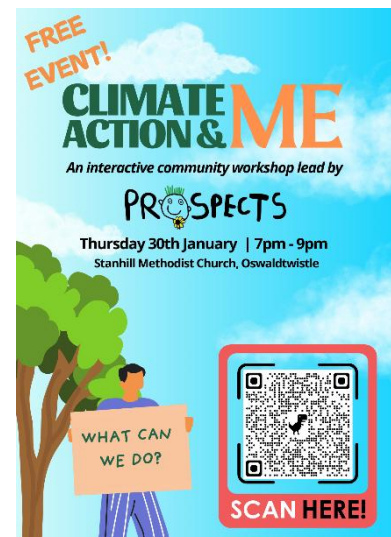
Co-production of the Project Vision

12 months into the project, the regular Brookside volunteers were invited to participate in a visioning workshop facilitated by the project officer. Each participant (6 volunteers and 6 members of the steering group) was invited to submit their ideas for a vision before voting to decide on a favourite. It is this vision which underpins the Brookside master plan.

A living model of nature recovery, community wellbeing, and a climate-resilient future.

“The vision-setting workshop held in April 2025 allowed for the Brookside volunteers to have a central role in shaping the future of the project. We all came up with ideas and our votes were weighted equally with those of the Brookside project staff. It also allowed for open and frank discussion for other new potential activities eg orienteering courses, woodland management, heritage and other trails etc.”

- Gordon S., volunteer participant



Climate Action Events

The project officer delivered two Climate Action events, where attendees could learn about climate action in a local context. The sessions comprised a presentation, interactive activities, and workshopping sessions where participants could suggest ideas of their own for local climate measures. Both events were attended by over 20 people and received very positive feedback. There is a significant scope to develop these offerings in future, with several community venues already offering to host events.

The Draft Master Plan and Roadshow

In June 2025 a visual draft masterplan for Brookside was created and displayed at a roadshow of community venues across Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen. The public was invited to give feedback on the proposals via a digital and paper format survey.

The draft master plan was displayed at the following locations:

- Ecofest 2025, Accrington Town Centre
- Stanhill Fete 2025, Stanhill Village
- Blackburn Central Library, Blackburn with Darwen
- Oswaldtwistle Library, Oswaldtwistle
- Brookside site, Oswaldtwistle, via semi-permanent display

The Project Newsletter:

The project officer created a quarterly Brookside newsletter, containing updates about the project, photographs, survey results, and details of future events. The newsletter generated significant engagement, with readership currently standing at 477. Printed copies were trialled, but were discontinued due to their significant cost and environmental impact.

Each quarter, the project officer would award ‘Star of the Season’ and ask the chosen volunteer about their experience with the project, and publicise this within the newsletter and on social media.

“I joined the Brookside Restoration project because this is a place I visited frequently with my children as they were growing up, and walking our pet dogs.

I needed something to inspire me after losing my husband and becoming a volunteer was just the boost I needed. Since joining the project, I have gained some knowledge in different areas of wildlife and the protection of the environment. The greatest thing is that I have made some great friends and met new people!”

- Maureen S., Volunteer

Direct Consultation with Marginalised Groups

The project team engaged directly with several community groups, including Lancashire Women, AAWAZ (an Islamic women’s empowerment organisation), the British Horse Society, White Ash Special School (a special educational needs provider), and the North Lancashire Training Group (provider of apprenticeships and DWP work-readiness courses).

These informal consultations focused on specific issues such as accessibility, inviting participants to share their lived experiences and advise how Brookside could best respond to their needs. Through this people-centric, “ask, don’t tell” approach, the project team were able to understand barriers to participation and ensure that the master plan is a suitable fit for the local community.

Landowner Engagement and Farm Advice

Ribble Rivers Trust engaged four neighbouring landowners to update on the project and gauge levels of interest in progressing climate focused activities on their land:

- Magnoll’s Farm
- Land adjacent to Kemp Delph
- Smithfield Stables
- Stanhill Farm

As a result of the engagement, some landowners expressed an interest in carrying out works including hedgerow and boundary repair and river restoration, subject to funding availability. In addition, all adjacent landowners were invited to the project launch and to events that discussed the emerging vision for the site.

Informal Public Engagement Findings

Informal conversations with site users and community groups provided a significant amount of learning. In many instances, members of the public would actively engage with volunteers and the project team whilst on-site and share their views. Below is a summary of the insights generated.

User Group:

Horse riders

Key Insights:

- Bridleways are not clearly marked, which can lead to riders being told off for being in the wrong place accidentally.
- Most riders would like a round route on site, and often use footpaths to achieve this
- Horses are often frightened of the motorway bridge, so some riders will not use the bridleway from Haslingden Old Road
- Horses can cause a lot of damage to surfaced paths, especially those with wooden edges
- Very hard paths, raised path edges, and tarmac can cause injury to horses
- Motorbikes on site are a major concern
- The preferred entrance is Stanhill Road

Cyclists

- Motorbikes on site are a major concern
- The East-West path along Lottice Brook is the primary route; others are not usable by many cyclists. Even the major paths are muddy and wet during bad weather
- Unsurfaced paths are not suitable for use
- Potholes at the Brookside Lane entrance to the site are dangerous

Walkers

- Dog poo and litter on site are major issues
- Some are afraid of antisocial behaviour on-site and do not feel safe walking alone
- Would like litter bins and dog poo bins inside the site, in addition to those at the gates
- Would like more benches
- Motorbikes are a major concern
- Worry about horses and motorbikes damaging the paths
- Worry about collisions with fast-moving traffic e.g. horses, bikes
- Several desire lines have formed where existing paths have degraded or grown over

- Stepping out walking group regularly use the site (they start at the Black Dog Pub)
- Would like to see links to other routes and areas such as Foxhill Bank, Stanhill Heritage Trail, and the Lancashire Clog Route promoted

Other Leisure Users

- Brookside is popular with wildlife photographers, fishing enthusiasts, archaeologists, and ecology groups
- Worry about horses and motorbikes damaging the paths
- Worry about increased site traffic leading to an increase in antisocial behaviour
- Worry about collisions with fast-moving traffic e.g. horses, bikes
- Some would prefer the site 'left wild' and not improved
- Some users may be doing antisocial behaviour e.g. camping, cutting down trees, having fires, and littering
- Litter from fishing is a particular issue – bait, wire, tackle boxes, and chairs are regularly found near the lodges
- A significant number of people leave bread 'for the ducks', which is a form of pollution

Volunteers

- The majority are motivated by social connection, family connections to the local area, and a desire to conserve nature
- Attitudes towards the climate crisis are varied. Some are very engaged with climate action, whilst others do not see the link between volunteer activities and climate action
- Time commitments such as work and family are significant barriers to participation
- 'Drop in' style sessions with a regular meeting point help those who cannot commit to regular volunteering to take part
- Strong demand for evening and weekend sessions
- Many heard about the project from physical signage or by word of mouth. Many go on to advocate for the project within their families and communities.
- Some volunteers do not access digital resources such as QR codes. A small number do not use email.

Several groups are noticeably unrepresented at Brookside. These include elderly people, those with physical disabilities, and people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. Barriers to participation included the lack of wheelchair accessible paths, the lack of toilet facilities on site, not having suitable outdoor clothes or shoes, not knowing about the site or possible walking routes, and not feeling safe on site.

Data Collection:

The development phase involved a significant quantity of data collection by the project team. The learnings from community consultation during the development stage were fundamental to the creation of the master plan for Brookside. A summary of the data collected is given below:

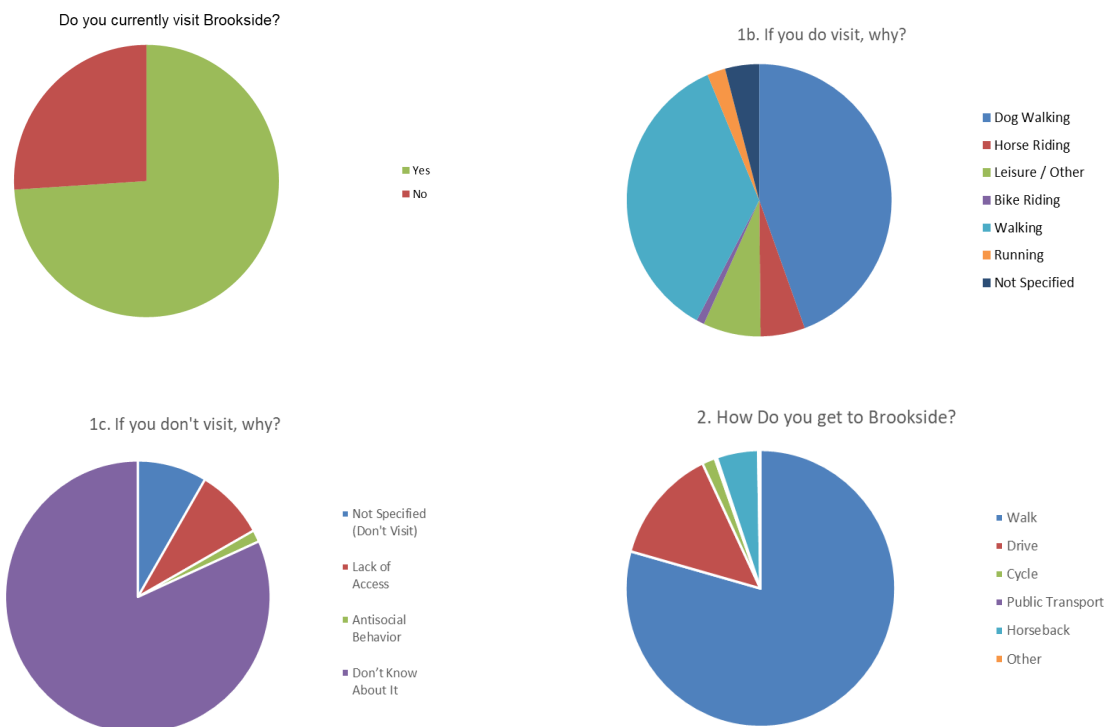
Public Consultation I (2023 – 2025)

Shared at Ecofest 2023 and 2024, plus on physical signage on Stanhill Road entrance to Brookside. Promoted digitally on partner websites and via the Brookside newsletter.

Aims:

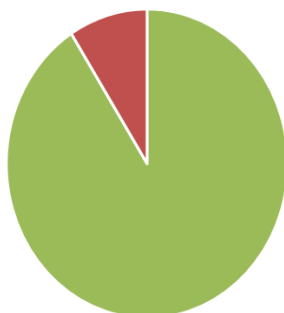
- Gauge the level of local support for the project
- Understand the community's needs and wants from the project
- Understand how people travel to Brookside
- Generate ideas for the draft master plan

Total number of responses: 448

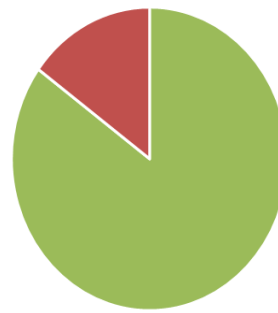


Category	Hits	Example Suggestions
Access and Facilities	93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved wheelchair and mobility access Additional seating and rest areas Better signage and maintained paths Public toilets and a visitor centre
Nature and Habitats	54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rewilding and native flora planting Bird and wildlife protection Tree planting Lottice Brook restoration
Community Activities	57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community events and celebrations Trails for walking, cycling and horse riding Volunteer opportunities and group activities
Education & Learning	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen science and outdoor learning Information boards about flora, fauna and site history Workshops and school engagement
Climate Resilience	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon-neutral or low-impact facilities Promoting sustainability through planting and green practices Environmental responsibility in development
Heritage and Place	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpretative signage on industrial or cultural history Use of local storytelling or art to reflect place identity

5. Would you visit Brookside more if it were improved?



6. Would you or your family be interested in taking part in future Brookside activities?



■ Yes
■ No

■ Yes
■ No

Public Consultation II (June – September 2025)

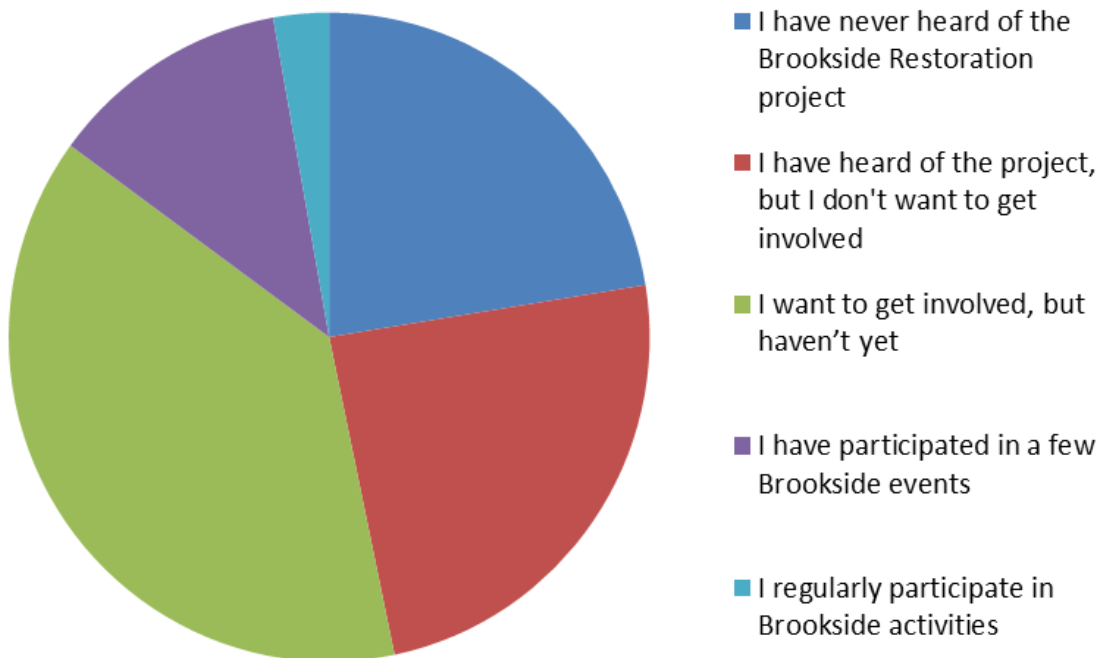
Shared at Ecofest 2025, Stanhill fete 2025, Stanhill Community Brew Day, and via displays in Blackburn Central and Oswaldtwistle Libraries alongside the six “draft masterplan visual” boards. Promoted on partner websites and via the Brookside newsletter.

Aims:

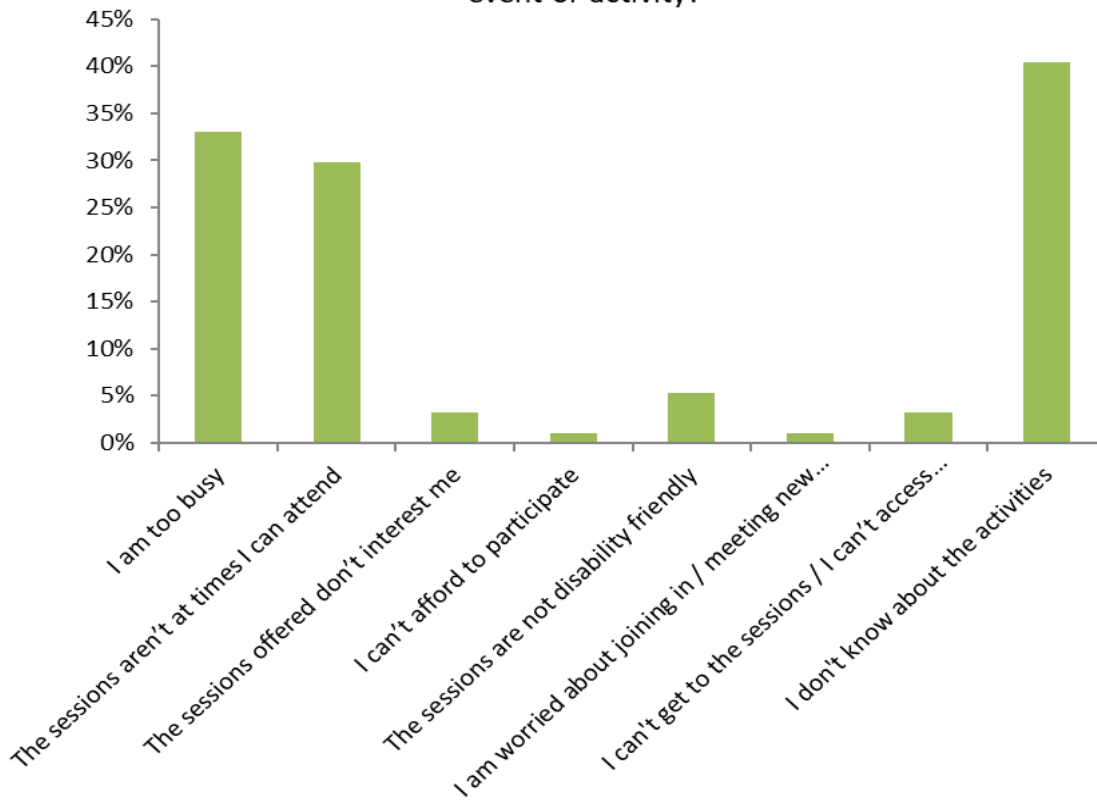
- Understand the barriers to participation in Brookside events
- Identify any perceived gaps in the draft master plan
- Understand the perceived relative importance of the six categories within the draft master plan
- Generate feedback on the project vision statement
- Understand the geographical reach of the project

Total number of responses: 111

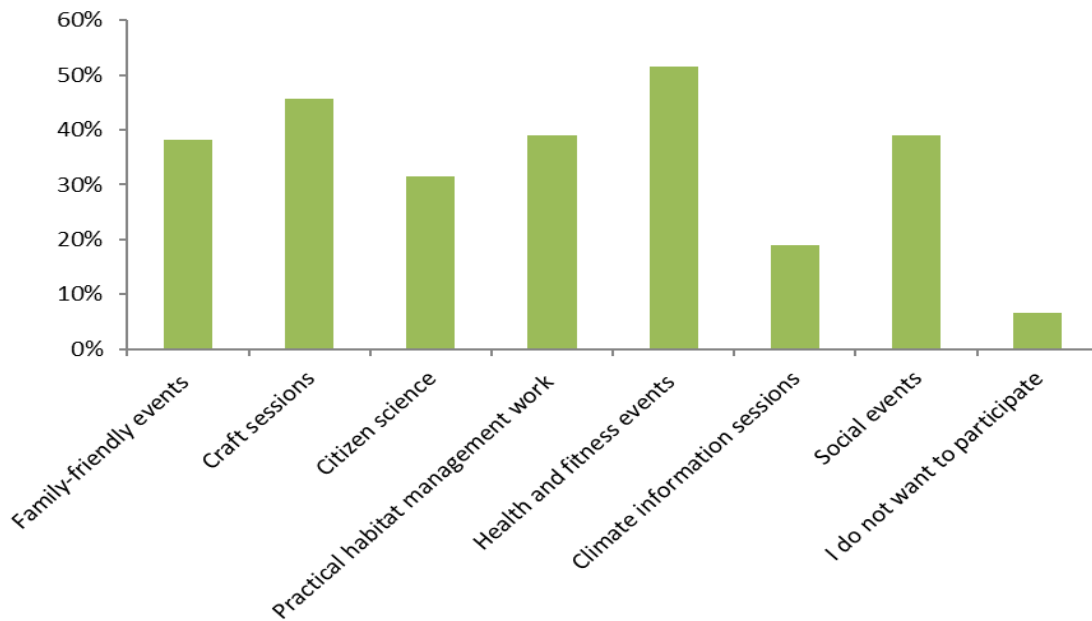
1. Please select the option that best describes you:



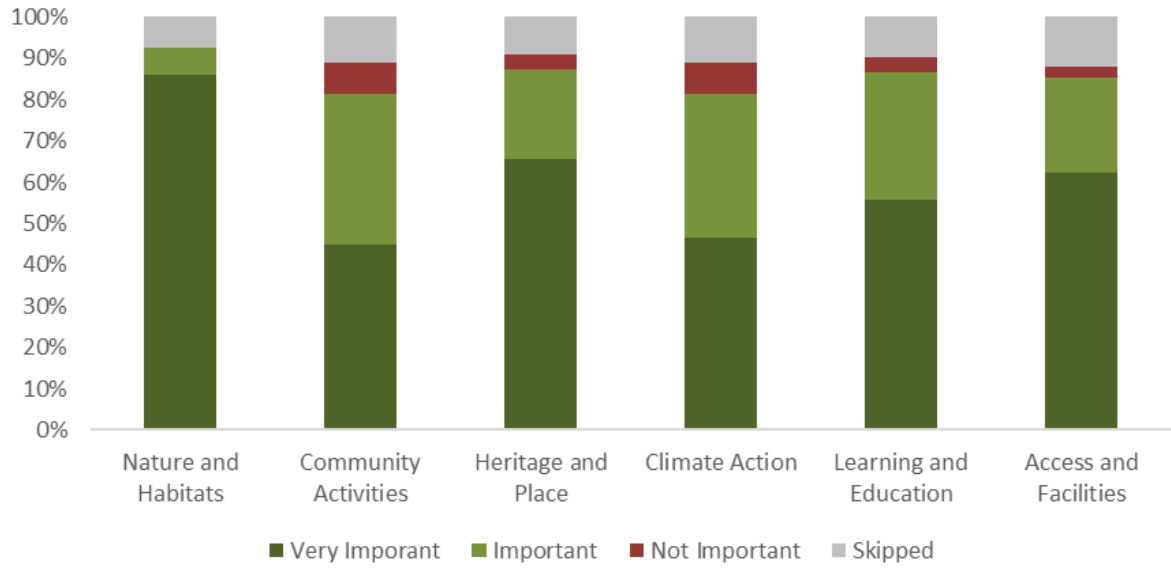
2. Has anything prevented you from participating in a Brookside event or activity?



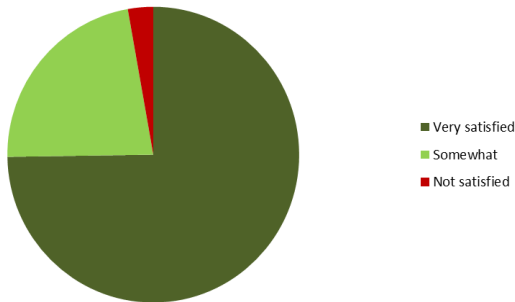
3. What kind of organised activities would you most like to participate in?



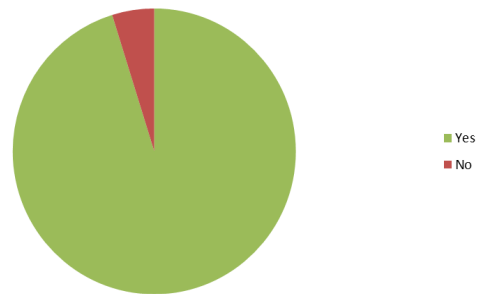
5. How important are the following to you?



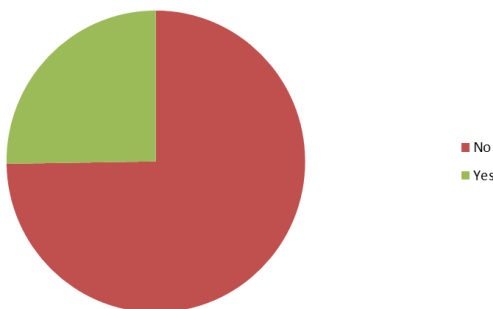
4. Some of our proposals can be seen in the draft visual masterplan above. How satisfied are you with these proposals for Brookside?



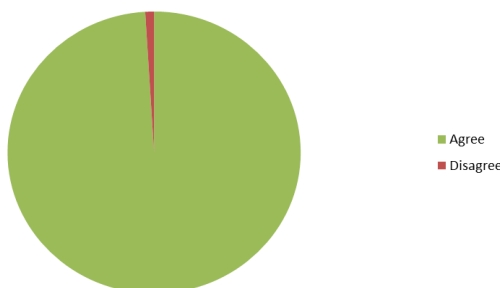
7. Please tell us if you like our project vision.



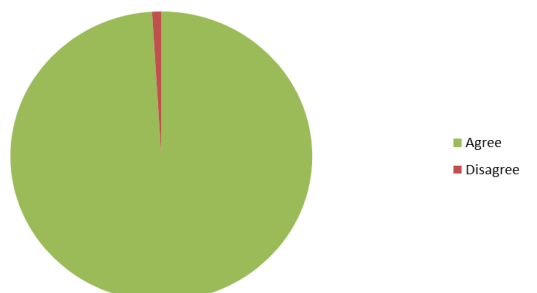
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add to these proposals?



8a. "People can enjoy a deeper connection with nature through improvements and activities at Brookside."



8b. "A deeper connection with nature can help change people's behaviours and increase environmental care."

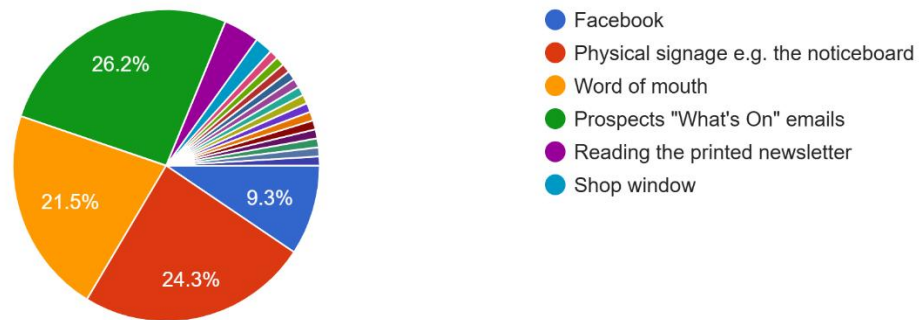


Sign In Form:

Volunteers and event attendees were asked to sign into Brookside events using a QR code. The sign-in form included the question “how did you hear about the Brookside restoration project?”. Only responses with a share greater than 2% are displayed on the key.

How did you hear about Brookside?

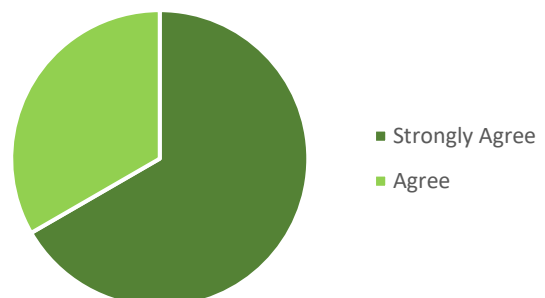
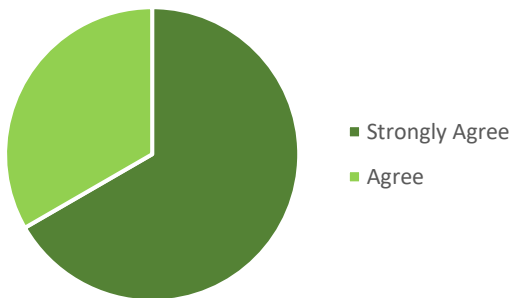
107 responses



Community Groups and Schools Session Feedback:

The session we attended helped us understand the importance of nature and the causes and impact of climate change

The session we attended helped us understand that all our contributions, however small, can have a positive impact on the environment and the fight against climate change.



100% of respondents **Strongly Agreed** that they would like to take part in future Brookside Restoration Project events.

Other comments from community groups and schools were extremely positive:

The session was aimed perfectly at the year 4 class. They were fully engaged from beginning to end and excited by the fact they could have a real impact in nature. It made them think carefully about the needs of animals and humans and how we can work together.

- Year 4 teacher, St Nicholas Primary

It was good to open the session to home school children. Our group enjoyed the day.

- Home Schooling parent

The session was very well presented and engaging. Our children learned lots about the environment and Brookside Nature Reserve. The children's contributions about how Brookside could be improved were very well received and the children had an opportunity to put their ideas down on paper.

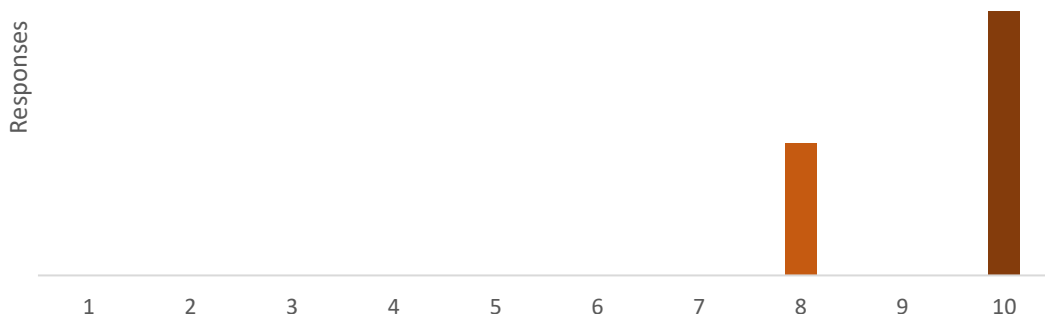
- Year 4 Teacher, St Andrews Primary

Alice Pooley gave a very informative & interesting talk/presentation of the work being done at the Brookside Restoration Project. The presentation boards were large & clear & easily understood. Alice's enthusiasm about her work is very infectious, she is very approachable & explains 'things' clearly. Who wouldn't want to get involved after listening to Alice !

- President of the Church and Oswaldtwistle Rotary Club

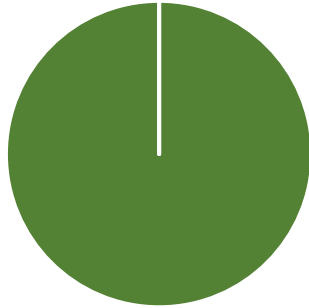
Climate Action Workshop I, January 2025:

1. How concerned do you feel about climate change on a scale of 1 to 10?
(1 being not concerned at all, 10 being constantly extremely concerned)

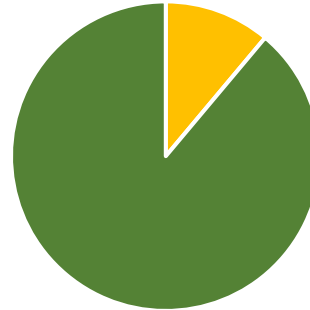


2. Do you feel as though you know more about climate change after attending tonight's workshop?

3. Do you feel more likely to take climate action / make any sustainable lifestyle changes after attending tonight's workshop?



■ No ■ Somewhat ■ Yes, very much so



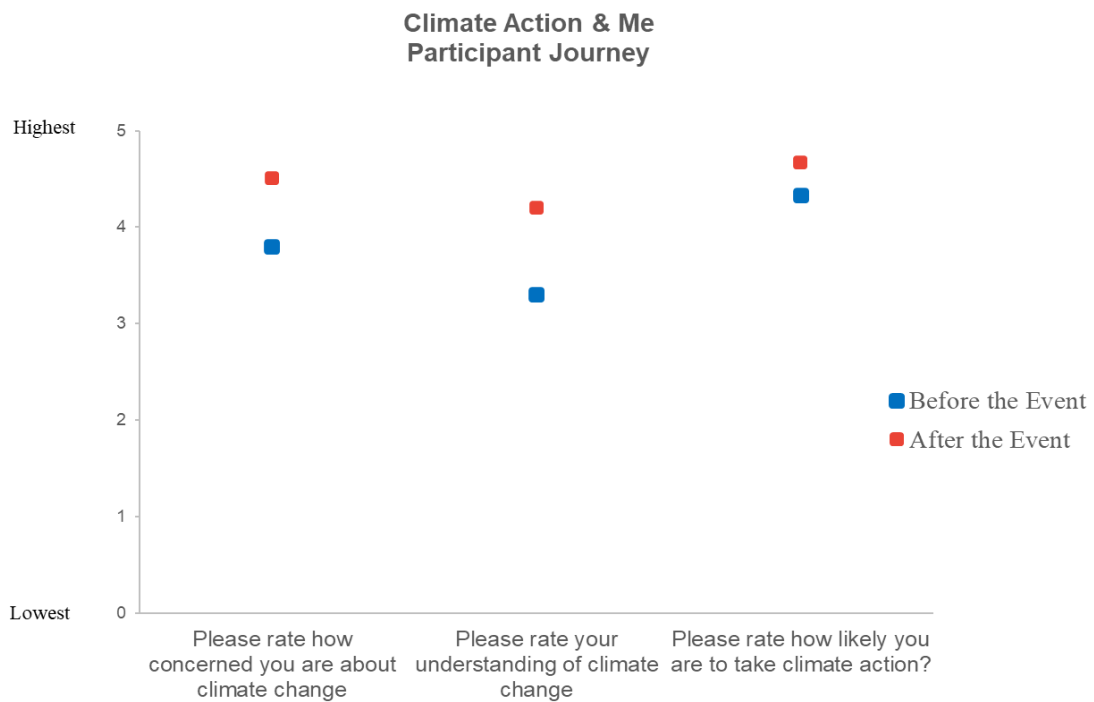
■ No ■ Somewhat ■ Yes, very much so

Other comments from the first climate action workshops were extremely positive:

- *A great session, conducted across the team with plenty of engagement with the audience and practical sessions to understand the content.*
- *It was well worth attending..*
- *The information provided was really useful and I'll be implementing as many as I can.*

Climate Action Workshop II, May 2025:

At the second Climate Action workshop, participants were asked to score themselves against three questions, before and after the event.



Discussion and Recommendations:

The community engagement process revealed an exceptionally high level of public enthusiasm for the Brookside Restoration Project, supported by over 1,500 active participants across 113 events and a further 4,000 reached through Ecofest. The majority of participants already value Brookside as a local green space, primarily for walking, but also for horse riding and outdoor leisure. Ninety per cent of respondents stated that they would use the site more frequently if it were improved, indicating a strong mandate for the project.

There is significant potential to increase the use of public transport to access Brookside. Signposting the bus routes from Blackburn and Accrington town centres will open up Brookside to a large number of people, whilst achieving climate action aims.

Across engagement activities, a consistent pattern emerged: residents placed the highest importance on nature, biodiversity, and the protection of local green spaces. Discussions around climate resilience and climate action invoked a range of responses, from those who engaged with the climate action workshops and showed a high degree of climate concern, to those who did not understand the link between nature and climate, or those who viewed climate action as 'political'. Framing climate action through tangible, nature-focused outcomes and co-benefits may be the most suitable approach for engaging the community.

Socioeconomic barriers to participation were also identified. A high level of deprivation in the area limits access to suitable outdoor clothing, while some families with disabled children lack Blue Badges or Radar Keys, preventing full participation in disability support infrastructure. Other barriers include a lack of digital confidence (e.g. using QR codes), low English comprehension for some residents, and concerns about personal safety, particularly among women, elderly visitors, and those worried about antisocial behaviour on site. Overall, consultation emphasised path condition, lack of signage, and motorbike misuse as key issues that prevent enjoyment of Brookside.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Communication and Engagement

- Continue to deliver free, inclusive events and taster sessions that explore nature, biodiversity, and climate
- Frame climate messaging through links with nature recovery, heritage, and wellbeing to widen the audience
- Clearly explain the link between volunteer session activities and climate at every session
- Promote small, low-cost lifestyle changes that are easy, fun, and achievable.
- Maintain a mix of digital and physical promotion, including noticeboards, libraries, and community venues, to reach non-digital audiences.
- Translate key communications into other languages and use simple, clear language throughout.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Develop a “kit library” to lend outdoor clothing and equipment during events.
- Improve accessible paths and entrances that can be used in casual footwear and by those without specialist mobility aids.
- Provide accessible parking for those without Blue Badges and promote awareness of Radar Key schemes.
- Deliver women-only and women-led sessions both onsite and in community venues.
- Offer drop-in sessions for people unable to pre-book due to health or learning needs, and provide introductory calls or site visits for new participants.

Safety and Site Management

- Regularly trim paths and maintain clear sightlines around the site
- Install directional signage and publicise recommended walking routes.
- Encourage the reporting of antisocial behaviour, supported by clear signage on permitted and non-permitted activities.
- Design gates and access points to prevent unauthorised motorbike entry while maintaining access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Multi-Use Access and Conflict Reduction

- Create a permissive bridleway using favoured entrances to minimise conflict between horses, walkers, and cyclists.
- Clearly mark horse-free routes and introduce passing places where appropriate.

Volunteer Development and Capacity Building

- Continue the Thursday Gang model and volunteer recognition schemes such as *Star of the Season*.
- Provide evening and weekend sessions for those unable to attend during weekdays.
- Support the development of community leaders who can independently deliver events.
- Promote the work of the volunteer gang through signage on site and in community venues

Off-Site and Virtual Access

- Co-develop off-site or virtual activities for groups unable to travel to Brookside.
- Expand the Virtual Reality tour model to provide accessible participation opportunities.