Guided Walk Survey Findings Outline

Purpose and main finding

This outline brings together feedback from 29 adult survey responses and 13 children's responses. The walks contributed to the Water Restoration Fund milestone "Review impact of guided walks and links with health" for the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP). The work was led by ECP's Water Restoration Officer, who is employed by Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL).

This evaluation was undertaken to assess the value of guided walks as a community engagement activity, particularly their potential to support wellbeing, increase environmental awareness and encourage greater public involvement in the conservation of local water environments. The findings will help inform the future delivery of engagement activities within the Evenlode catchment.

Across the two surveys, participants reported positive experiences, stronger mood-related outcomes, and enjoyment of water, nature, walking, and shared activities. The walks were delivered through partnerships that combined environmental learning with outdoor, social, and creative experiences. The evaluation approach developed during the programme: adults completed a retrospective post-walk survey, while a child-friendly emoji scale was later introduced to provide a more robust measure of immediate change.

Overview

- The adult dataset contains 29 completed responses across three activities: 11 from a public guided walk along the Charlbury Gateway route, 11 from a wellbeing day at Combe Mill for clients of Bridewell Mental Health Charity, and 7 from the Blenheim Palace River Walk organised for Be Free Young Carers.
- The children's results contain 13 paired records measuring mood at the start and end of the Blenheim Palace River walk, and what each child enjoyed most.

Key outcomes

The findings highlight several encouraging outcomes:

- Positive experiences: 97% of adult respondents rated their overall experience as excellent.
- Wellbeing: 86% of adults agreed that the walk improved their mood and mental wellbeing.
- Connection with nature: 93% of adults agreed that the walk helped them feel more connected to nature.
- Environmental learning: 90% of adults agreed that they learned something new about the local water environment.

- Children's wellbeing: 92% of children reported feeling happy or very happy at the end of the Blenheim Palace activity, compared with 62% at the beginning.
- Future engagement: 86% of adults expressed an interest in participating in further outdoor walks.

Together, these findings suggest that guided walks, particularly when combined with practical and social activities, offer a valuable way to connect people with their local water environment while supporting wellbeing and encouraging future engagement.

Three Walks

1. **Charlbury Welcomes Walkers, Charlbury, 7 August 2025**



The CNL Water Restoration Officer worked with Charlbury Welcomes Walkers, CNL Voluntary Wardens, and members of the public to deliver a two-mile circular walk from Charlbury town across Mill Island. Participants discussed water-quality issues, tested the water, and shared observations about the local environment. 11 of the 19 participants completed the survey, giving a response rate of approximately 58%. Eight participants did not complete it.

2. **Bridewell Mental Health Charity, Combe Mill, 9 October 2025**

The CNL Water Restoration Officer invited Bridewell Mental Health Charity clients to spend a day beside the River Evenlode at Combe Mill, incorporating a short walk in the area. Participants discussed water-quality issues, tested the water, made oak gall ink, and used prepared ink to draw willow trees beside the river, as well a 1.5-mile circular walk around the local catchment, crossing a floodplain and passing through woodland, beside a pond, and through an arable field. The organisations intend to work together again to offer habitat-maintenance volunteering opportunities within the catchment. 11 clients and staff participated

and everyone completed a survey.



3. Be Free Young Carers, Blenheim Palace, 30 March 2026

CNL staff and Voluntary Wardens, and Be Free Young Carers' staff led children and adults from Hanborough train station along the Community Path, beside the Rivers Glyme and Evenlode, to Blenheim Palace. The outward walk was approximately 1.5 miles and included water-quality testing and discussion of water use and river issues. The group later returned by foot along the same route to the station in time for collection. The participating children were approximately 7 to 12 years old. Some young carers attended with parents, while others attended without a parent. Blenheim Palace provided free entry to the gardens, complimentary pizza, and access to the playground, maze, and butterfly house.

The partnership continued during the summer holidays, when CNL worked with Be Free Young Carers to facilitate a visit for young people aged 12 to 16 to Cotswold Lakes Trust for habitat creation, swimming, and paddleboarding. Positive wellbeing effects were observed, but no separate outcome data for that visit was supplied for this report.



Value of partnership working

The three activities demonstrate the value of working with established community organisations to engage different audiences, including members of the public, people accessing mental health support and young carers.

This collaborative approach creates opportunities to introduce river conservation and environmental learning to groups with different interests and needs. Combining guided walks with practical, creative and social activities also provides flexibility in how people can participate.

These partnerships offer a useful foundation for future engagement, including opportunities for repeat visits, volunteering and further involvement in catchment conservation.

Adult survey key findings

- Twenty-eight of 29 adults, or 97%, rated their overall experience as excellent, and the remaining respondent rated it as good.
- Twenty-four of 28 adults, or 86%, agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to take part in more outdoor walks in the future; the average rating was 4.50 out of 5.
- Twenty-four of 27 adults, or 89%, agreed or strongly agreed that the route was accessible and appropriate for their needs; the average rating was 4.67 out of 5.

Mood wellbeing and connection

- Twenty-four of 28 adults, or 86%, agreed or strongly agreed that the walk improved their mood and mental wellbeing; the average rating was 4.32 out of 5.
- Twenty-seven of 29 adults, or 93%, selected mood as an area positively affected by the walk.

- Twenty-six of 28 adults, or 93%, agreed or strongly agreed that the walk helped them feel more connected to nature; the average rating was 4.64 out of 5.
- Twenty-two of 29 adults, or 76%, selected their sense of community as an area positively affected by the walk.
- Responses about the previous week suggest that participants generally experienced positive aspects of wellbeing, including feeling relaxed, energetic and connected to other people. However, responses varied, and some participants also reported experiencing anxiety or stress. These findings provide useful context about participants' recent wellbeing but should not be interpreted as an effect of the walk itself.

Physical activity

- Twenty-two of 29 adults, or 76%, selected physical activity levels as an area positively affected by the walk.
- Twelve of 28 adults, or 43%, agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more physically active than usual, while 10 respondents selected the midpoint of the scale; the average rating was 3.39 out of 5.

Learning and water awareness

- Twenty-six of 29 adults, or 90%, agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something new about the local water environment; the average rating was 4.55 out of 5.
- Five of 29 adults, or 17%, said they knew a lot about local water quality or river health before the walk, and 21 of 29, or 72%, said they knew a lot after the walk.
- Seventeen adults, or 59%, moved to a higher self-reported knowledge category after the walk, 12 stayed in the same category, and none moved to a lower category.
- All 29 adults recalled information about river pollution, while 25 recalled information about river habitats and wildlife, 25 recalled ways to protect water quality at home, and 25 recalled citizen science and volunteering.
- Eighteen adults reported feeling motivated to learn more, 14 reported feeling concerned and wanting to act, 4 reported surprise about local water issues, and 1 reported a neutral reaction; respondents could select more than one reaction.

Intended next steps

- Twenty-three of 29 adults, or 79%, said they would consider sharing what they learned with someone else.
- Twenty-two adults, or 76%, would consider changing products they use, and 19, or 66%, would consider being more careful with water use at home.
- Fourteen adults, or 48%, would consider looking for more information online, 13, or 45%, would consider joining a citizen science group, and 12, or 41%, would consider joining a river clean-up.
- One adult selected that they did not plan to take action.

What adults enjoyed

The most frequently selected aspects were:

- Fresh air, chosen by 26 adults
- Beautiful scenery, chosen by 25
- Being in nature near trees or rivers, chosen by 23
- Physical exercise, chosen by 22
- Connecting with others, chosen by 22
- Learning something new, chosen by 20 adults
- Mindfulness, peace and quiet, wildlife, exploration, photography, and walking with friends or family also appeared repeatedly.

Thirteen adults provided comments about possible improvements. Most comments expressed satisfaction or requested more walks; specific suggestions included wider publicity, a longer walk, and more creative activities such as ink making.

Children's survey key findings

How do you feel at the start of the walk?



How do you feel at the end of the walk?



What did you enjoy most about the walk?

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Mood before and after the walk

• Six of 13 children, or 46%, showed an improvement on the emoji mood scale over the course of the walk, while 7, or 54%, showed no change and none showed a decline.

• Three children showed a two-point mood increase and three showed a one-point increase.

• At the start, 8 of 13 children, or 62%, selected a happy or very happy emoji. At the end, 12 of 13, or 92%, selected a happy or very happy emoji.

- Seven children, or 54%, selected the very happy emoji at the end of the walk, compared with 3 children, or 23%, at the start.

What children enjoyed

Twelve of 13 children provided a written answer about what they enjoyed most. Water-related features were prominent: children mentioned the river three times and boats twice. Other answers highlighted walking, flowers, silence, being with friends, the play area, bracelet making, food, and broad enjoyment expressed as "all of it" or "everything."

Because the written responses are brief and the sample is small, these comments indicate the range of valued experiences rather than a reliable ranking of preferences.

Development of the evaluation approach

The first stage of evaluation used the adult questionnaire only at the end of each walk. This was a deliberate decision to keep the first introduction welcoming and avoid making participation feel too intrusive or burdensome. Participants were therefore asked to reflect afterwards on whether the walk had improved their mood, activity, connection to nature, and other outcomes. This supported a lighter-touch engagement approach, while limiting the strength of evidence about change from a baseline.

The adult questionnaire also included questions about water-quality and river-health awareness. These were added to help assess whether guided walks could strengthen public understanding and support the case for awareness-raising activity alongside potential health benefits.

Advice gathered following the initial two walks indicated that a survey taken before and after an activity would provide more robust evidence of change than a post-walk reflection alone. A short, child-friendly emoji scale was therefore introduced for the Blenheim walk. The same mood question was asked before and after the activity, allowing immediate change to be calculated for each participating child. The emoji ratings remain self-reported, but the paired design is less dependent on participants retrospectively judging whether the walk changed their mood.

The adult and children's datasets represent different stages in the evaluation design and answer different questions. They should not be treated as a statistical comparison between adults and children.

Limits and possible improvements

These results describe the people who completed the surveys and should not automatically be generalised to every walk participant.

The adult survey was intentionally completed after the walk without a separate pre-walk wellbeing measure to reduce intensity during participants' first engagement. The findings document retrospective perceptions, but they do not directly measure change from a baseline or establish long-term or causal health effects.

The children's paired emoji measure strengthens the evidence of immediate mood change, but it remains self-reported and does not include longer-term follow-up.

The children's sample contains 13 responses from one walk. Its pre-walk and post-walk comparison is useful for that group, but the small sample means each response has a substantial effect on the percentages.

A very short, optional pre-walk measure could be introduced and repeated immediately afterwards. One or two mood or wellbeing items, linked anonymously using a simple participant code, could strengthen the evidence of change without making a first engagement feel overly intrusive.

A brief optional follow-up could also be conducted after several weeks to assess whether participants retained water-quality knowledge, changed their behaviour, joined another walk, or volunteered. This could help distinguish immediate reactions from awareness or action that continued beyond the event.

Conclusion

Although the sample size was relatively small, the findings from this evaluation provide strong support for the continued inclusion of guided public walks within the Evenlode Catchment Partnership's community engagement programme. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from adults and children demonstrates the potential for these activities to support wellbeing, strengthen connections with nature, encourage physical activity and provide enjoyable opportunities for social interaction.

Importantly, the walks also demonstrated their value as a means of increasing public awareness and understanding of local rivers, water quality and environmental issues. By combining outdoor experiences with practical learning and opportunities for discussion, guided walks can help people develop a greater connection to their local environment and encourage further involvement in water restoration and conservation activities. The partnerships established with local organisations also highlight the potential to reach a wider range of audiences and make environmental engagement more inclusive and accessible.

The recommendation arising from this report is therefore that guided public walks should continue to form an integral part of the Partnership's community engagement programme. Future activities should build on the successful collaborative approach, offering a variety of walks and interactive experiences that appeal to different audiences and encourage ongoing participation.

By providing positive experiences in and around local rivers, guided walks offer an opportunity to connect personal wellbeing with environmental awareness. This approach can help make river conservation more relevant and accessible to local communities, potentially encouraging longer-term interest in protecting and improving the catchment.