

Countryside Service

“Your Countryside Matters!”

***East Devon District Council
Countryside Service Roadshow 2004***

Community Consultation Report

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1. Introduction

“Your Countryside Matters!”

Throughout 2004, the East Devon District Council Countryside Service organised a series of Roadshows around the district. The venues of the Roadshows were selected to try to ensure even representation throughout the district, focussing on key population centres. The primary objective of the Roadshow was to raise awareness of the Countryside Service and its work in helping to conserve and enhance the natural environment of East Devon. The Roadshows provided an opportunity for local people to meet the Countryside Service team and to find out more about Local Nature Reserves, the Education Ranger Service, community grants, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within the district and recreational activities and events.

ROADSHOW DATES 2004

Axminster Street Market	8 July
Honiton Show	5 August
Southleigh Fayre	11 August
Sidbury Fair	15 September
Colyford Goose Fayre	25 September
Exmouth Magnolia Centre	9 October
Honiton Street Market	2 November

In addition to the above dates, static information displays were also mounted at the following local community venues:

Axminster Library
Seaton Library
Sidmouth Library,
Oakdown Holiday Park
Crealy Adventure Park
Seaton Tourist Information Centre
Sidmouth Tourist Information Centre
Honiton Sports Centre

A fundamental element within the Roadshows was a community consultation exercise, the purpose of which was to evaluate how much local people and visitors value the countryside in East Devon. Questionnaires were available at all the Roadshows and the static information display points and people were encouraged to express their views about the important issues facing the local countryside. 264 questionnaires were completed and the data collected and summarised in this report, which will help to inform service planning and delivery for the Countryside Service in future years.

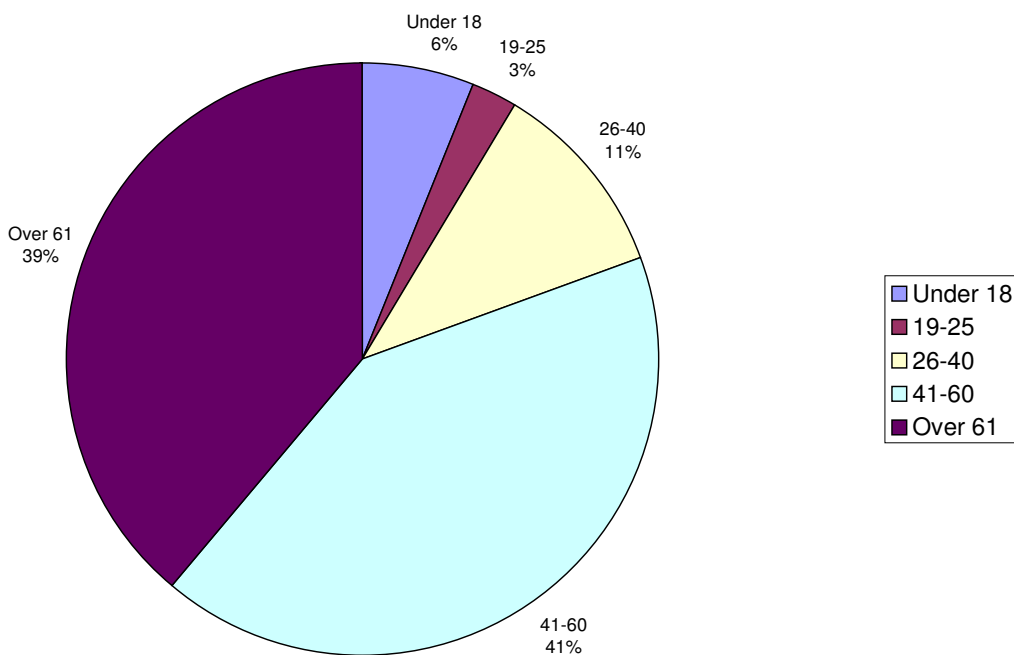
2. About You – a profile of the respondents

a) Of the 264 people who completed questionnaires, 80% lived in East Devon. The remaining 20% were visiting the district from elsewhere in the South West or from Berks, Hants, Kent, Oxon, Bucks, London, the Midlands, Northants, Worcs, Lancs and as far afield as Holland.

b) Of those respondents living in East Devon, 39% lived in a town or city, 38% within a village and 23% within a rural location.

c) The table and pie chart below illustrate the age range of the respondents, with only 20% below the age of 40. This reflects the district profile with a large percentage of people between the ages of 45 – 75.

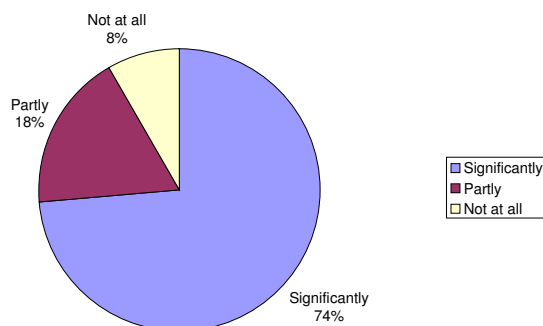
Age of respondents				
Under 18	19 – 25	26 – 40	41 – 60	Over 61
16	7	28	110	103



3. You and the Countryside – living in or visiting the area

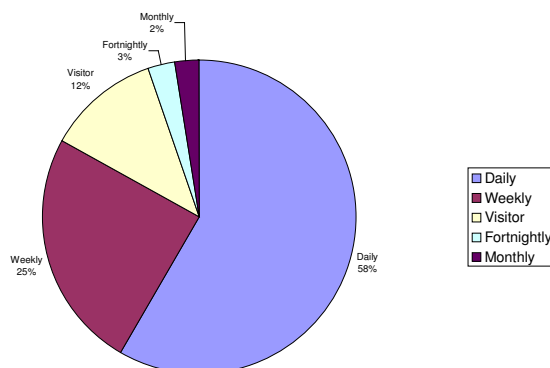
a) The table and pie chart below illustrate that 74% of respondents said that the countryside had significantly influenced their decision to either live in or visit the area.

Does the countryside influence your decision to live in/visit the area?		
Significantly	Partly	Not at all
194	48	22



b) The table and pie chart below illustrate that 58% of respondents visit the countryside on a daily basis.

How often do you visit the countryside?				
Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Visiting
141	60	7	6	28



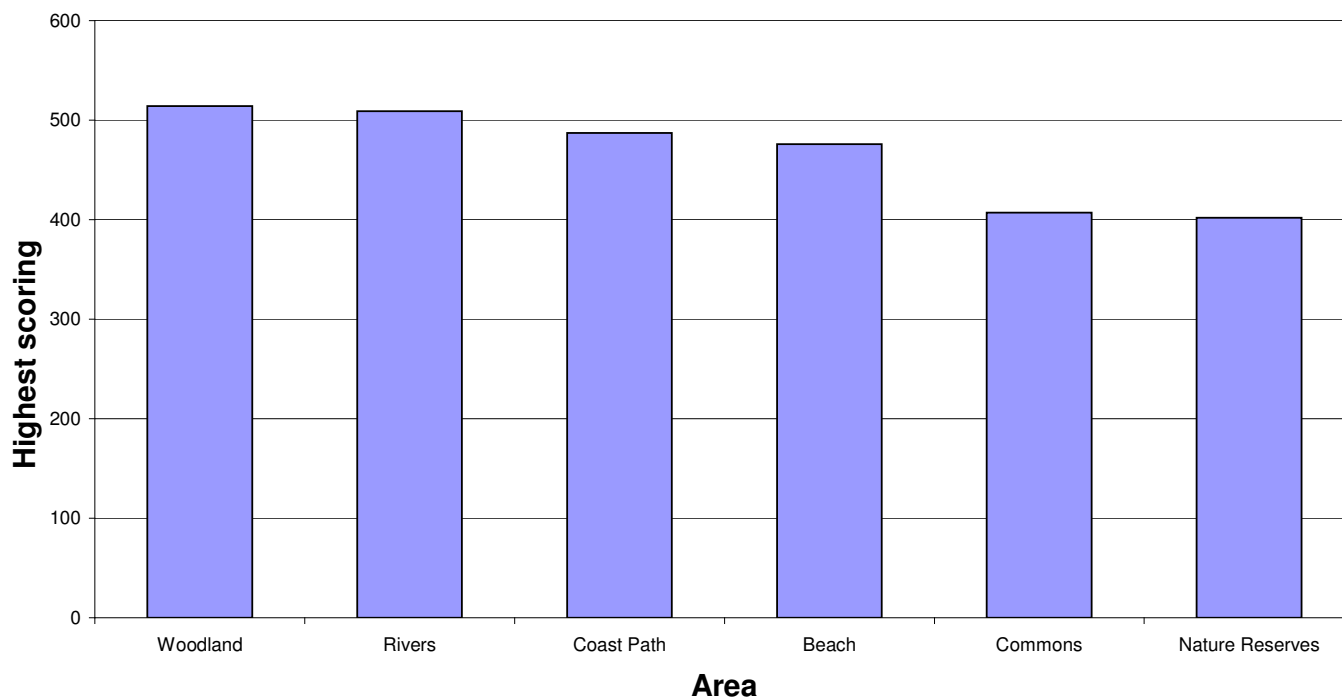
4. Your favourite areas – most popular areas for visiting

a) Respondents were asked to give each category a score of 1 – 3, with 3 indicating the highest level of enjoyment. The table and bar chart below illustrate that woodlands and rivers and estuaries received the highest scores and were the most popular areas.

Which areas do you most enjoy visiting?					
Woodland	Rivers and estuaries	Coast Path	Beach	Commons	Nature Reserves
514	509	487	476	407	402

Respondents were also asked to identify any other areas worthy of a visit – those commonly stated were footpaths and bridleways, villages and towns, National Trust properties and farmland.

Favourite areas for visiting

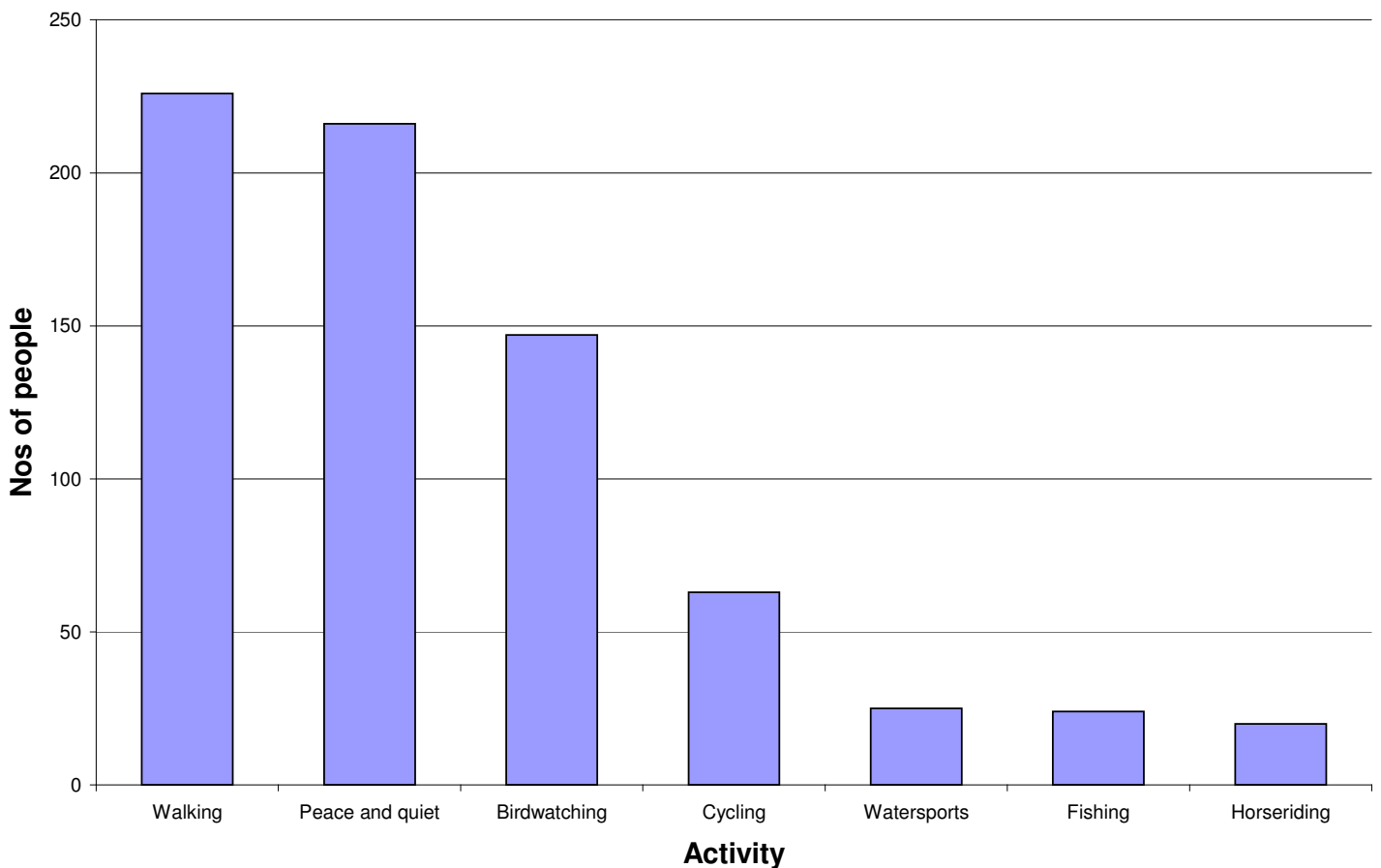


b) Respondents were asked to tick the activities that they enjoyed in the countryside – respondents were encouraged to tick more than one activity. The table and bar chart below illustrate that the most popular countryside activities amongst respondents were walking and enjoying the peace and quiet.

Why do you visit the countryside?						
Walking	Peace and quiet	Wildlife/ birdwatching	Cycling	Sailing/ watersports	Fishing	Horse riding
226	216	147	63	25	24	20

Respondents were also asked to identify any other activities they enjoyed in the countryside – those commonly stated were visiting historic sites, photography, work and pursuing other sports e.g. shooting, golf and paragliding.

Favourite activities in the countryside



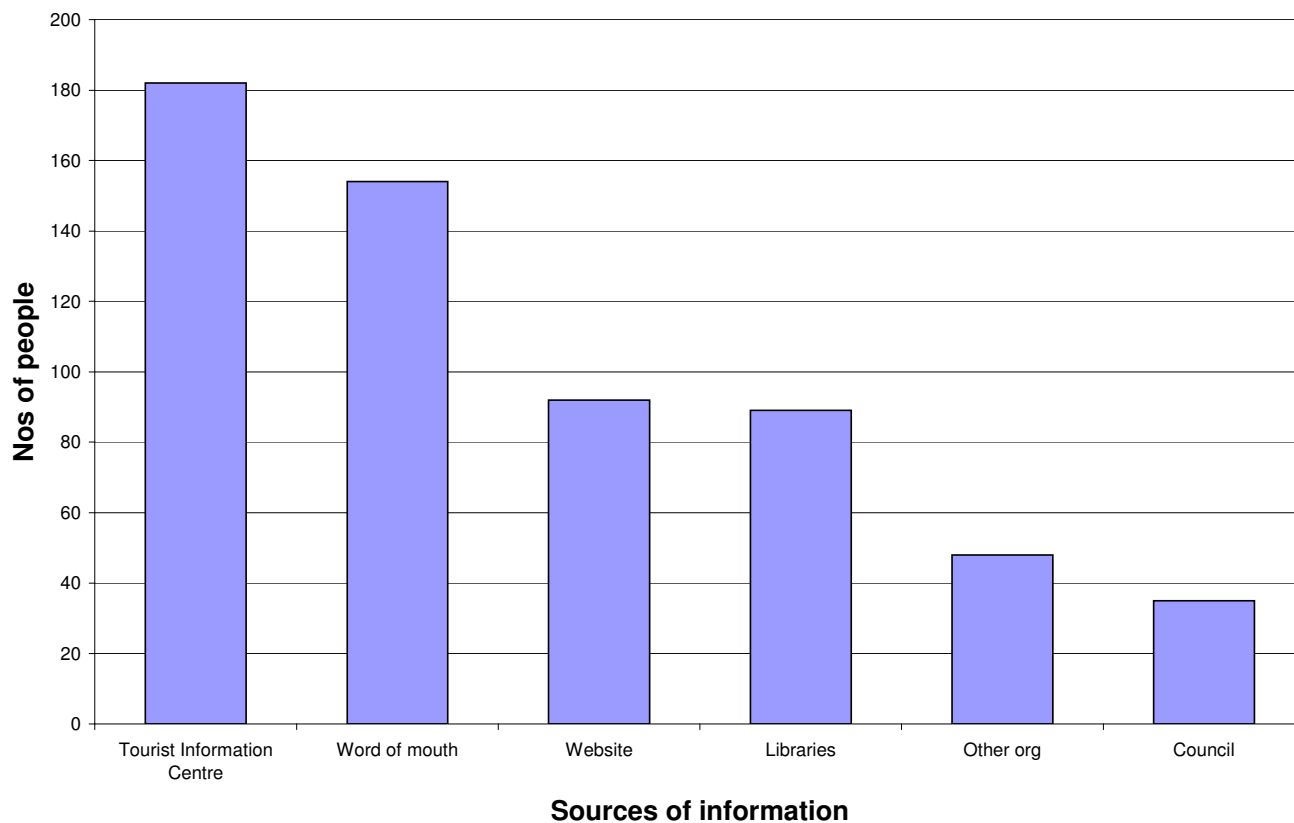
5. Information – finding out about the countryside

a) Respondents were asked to tick all of the places they would go to for information about the countryside. Tourist Information Centres and word of mouth were the most popular sources of information.

Where would you go for information about the countryside?					
Tourist Information Centres	Word of mouth	Website	Libraries	Other org	Council
182	154	92	89	48	35

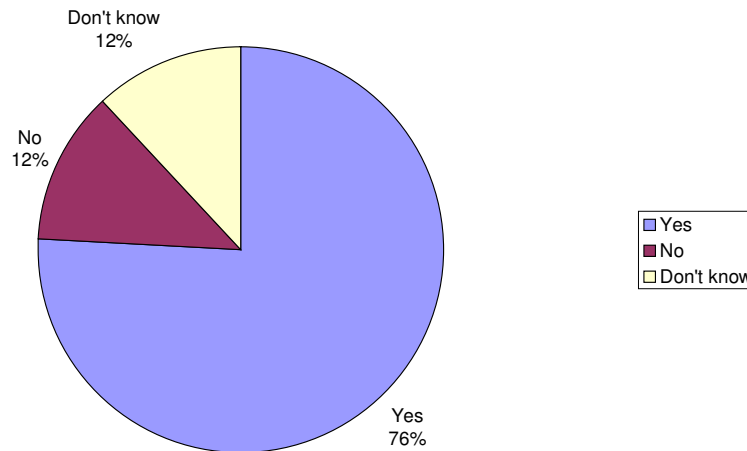
Respondents were also asked to identify other sources of information – those commonly stated were OS Maps and guidebooks, local interpretation boards and the media.

Where do you find information about the countryside?



b) The table and pie chart below illustrate that 76% of respondents consider that there is enough information available about the countryside.

Is there enough information available about the countryside?		
Yes	No	Don't know
196	31	31



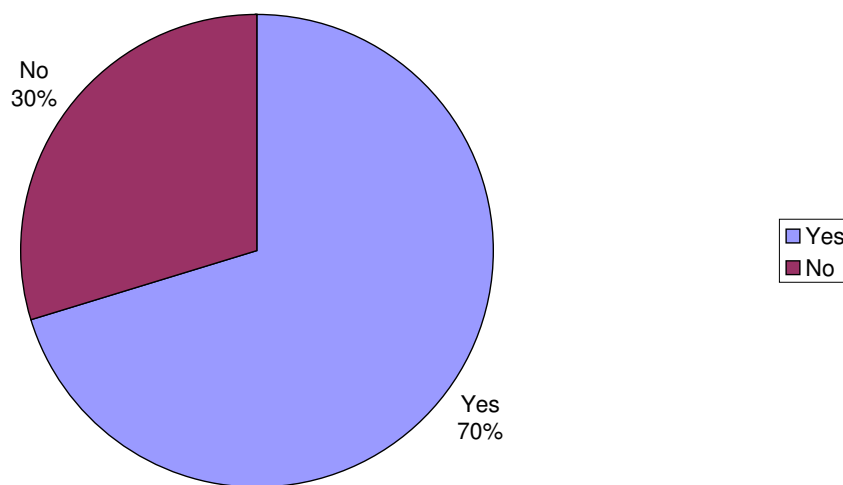
The 24% of respondents who didn't think there was enough information or were unsure suggested that the following information would be useful:

- More leaflets and maps about local footpaths/bridleways/cycleways
- Durable maps showing recreational/circular routes e.g. in car parks
- Web based maps/events
- Improved signage for footpaths
- Reprint of South West Coast Path Walk Packs
- More information in Post Offices, shops, pubs, town centre noticeboards, posters on buses
- Improved publicity in local press
- Better use of parish magazines
- More interpretation boards
- AONB Interpretation centres at Colyton (Eastern part of the AONB) and Woodbury (Western part of the AONB)
- Information about World Heritage Site at Exmouth
- Information about options available for SSI land e.g. tree planting, livestock
- Increased education and involvement of young people in the countryside

6. East Devon Countryside Service – awareness of service

a) Respondents were asked if they were aware of the existence of the Countryside Service. The table and pie chart below illustrate that 70% of respondents were aware of the service.

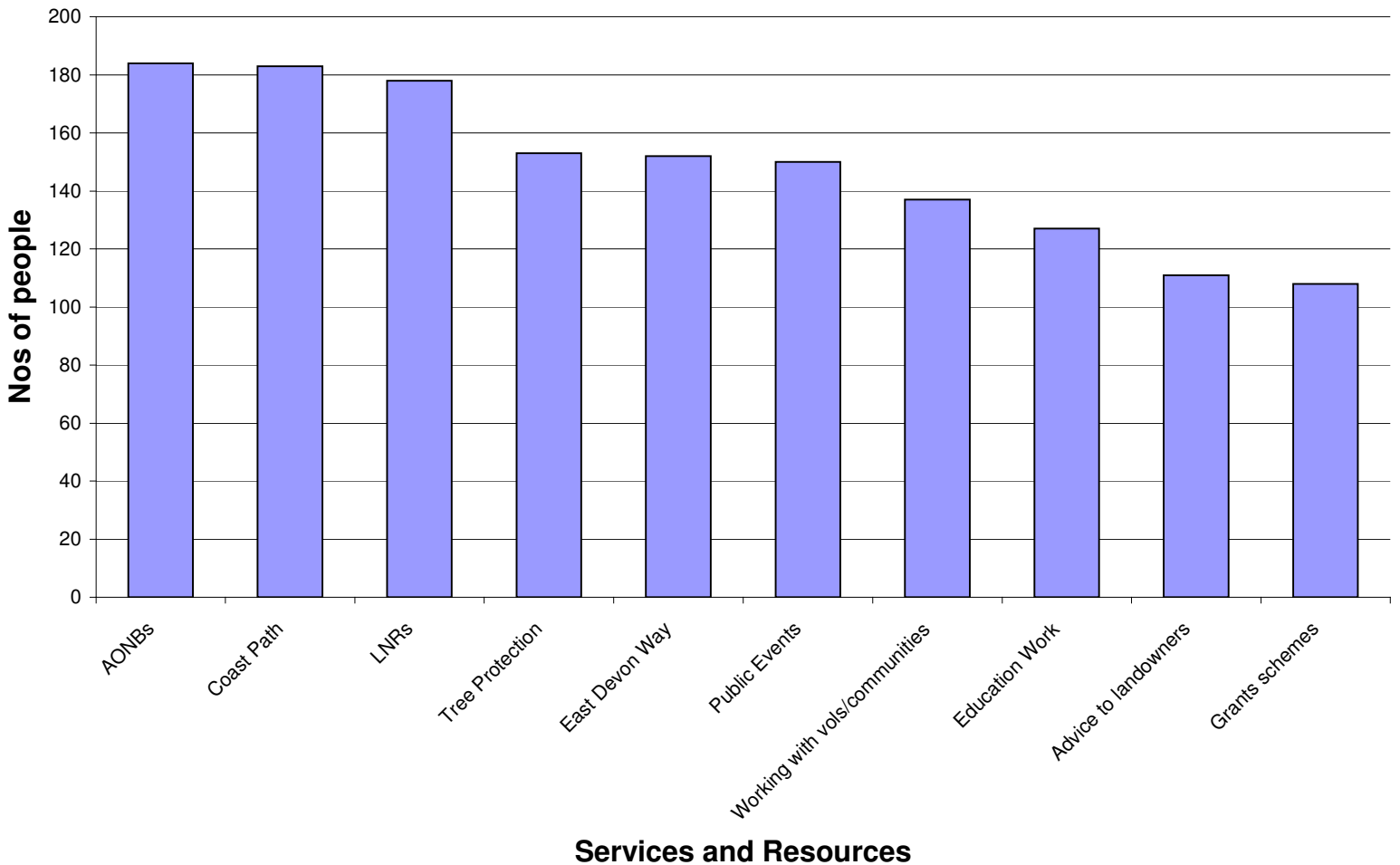
Are you aware of the Countryside Service?	
Yes	No
183	77



b) Respondents were asked to indicate which District Council countryside resources and services they were aware of. The table and bar chart below indicate a generally high level of awareness with respondents less aware of the Countryside Service's education work, advice to landowners and grants schemes.

Are you aware of the following resources and services?									
AONB	Coast Path	LNRs	Tree protection	East Devon Way	Public events	Working with vols	Education Work	Advice to landowners	Grants
184	183	178	153	152	150	137	127	111	108

Awareness of Countryside services and resources



c) Respondents were asked if they had any general comments they wished to make about the East Devon Countryside. Comments have been grouped around the following key themes- routes, promotion, development control and planning, transport and impact of farming.

Additional comments about the East Devon Countryside Service	
Comment	Nos of people
Routes	
Footpaths – need better signposting/information	9
Footpaths – need to be better maintained (including protection of coast path)	5
Footpaths – need more routes (including pushchair friendly)	5
Bridleways – need more routes/better information/better maintenance	5
Cycleways – need more off-road/safe routes	3
Promotion	
Need better promotion of resources and services(see 5b for detail)	25
Development control and planning	
Too much development spoiling countryside/planning controls too weak within AONB and across district	25
Fight building of new town (light/traffic pollution/pressure on services/flood risk)	5
Too restricted on development – should be more flexible	1
Transport	
Road congestion/noise pollution	4
Damage to roadside verges by lorries/farm vehicles	4
Improvements to bus services crucial for locals and visitors	1
Too many signs in lay-bys	1
Impact of farming	
Farmers destroy hedgerows and verges with machinery	3
Farming management is the most significant factor controlling the beauty of the area	9

Misc	
What a wonderful place!	17
More litter/dog bins needed	7
Erosion concerns at River Otter	1
Make more of valley structures to link inland e.g. Otter, Sid, Axe	1
Seaton Marshes LNR scarred by ugly wire fence	1
Remove caravans from coast path and screen with trees	1
Tree works should be made easier to prevent trees becoming dangerous	1
More environmental schemes are needed to help landowners care for the countryside – both financially and practically	1
Need for well publicised strategies on roads, lay-bys, litter, housing and transport in which each takes account of parallel influences	1
We hope that the high proportion of AONB dedicated land will help to preserve its traditional and very English character	1

7. Recommendations

In assessing the results of the questionnaire the Countryside Service has the following recommendations to implement and deliver for future activities:

- To more effectively target younger age groups and ethnic minorities within the district for future events programme to enable a greater understanding of the perception and needs of the local environment. This will be reflected in 2005 Countryside Roadshow programme with the Devon in Touch “outreach” programme.
- To focus on promoting our Local Nature Reserves and what they offer to a wider audience. Visitor audits are to be carried out on each LNR over a five year cycle. Also LNR “Open Days” are being planned for each LNR to encourage visitors from all over the district to find out more about their local wildlife.
- To actively promote the Countryside and AONB websites as the most effective mechanism for discovering and downloading information on all our activities rather than produce further generic leaflets. This will be our e-based “Countryside first stop shop” available to all residents and visitors.
- To co-ordinate our events based programme under one theme and divide into 2 seasonal programmes. The 2005 programme will be called “Celebrating East Devon’s landscape & wildlife – summer events” and “Celebrating East Devon’s landscape & wildlife – winter events”.
- To develop our volunteer network to enable greater participation in activities and events we hold annually. The Countryside Team will hold a Volunteers Networking Day to bring together all those who support our work and those who would like to be more involved.

These recommendations have been incorporated within the Team’s Service Plan over the next three years and so we will be able to monitor how effective we have been in delivering what the public have told us they would like to see.