

Walka Water Works Consultation Outcomes

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- Company: AAP Consulting
- Version: 01



Online Survey

The survey was opened between 2 October 2024 to 31 October 2024.

A total of 548 respondents (contributors). I.e.: sample size $n=548$



Overall summary of survey outcomes



Desire for heritage and historical engagement

- Strong desire for **historical engagement**, especially related to the **pumphouse restoration** and educational or **heritage activities** (like the miniature railway and heritage events).
- Clear support for **historical interpretation** and preserving the site's past (e.g., museum, educational activities).

Strong demand for public amenities and comfort

- Respondents consistently asked for **basic amenities** like **picnic areas/**
- **Smaller scale food and beverage facilities** (cafés, kiosks, food trucks) were frequently cited.
- Emphasis on making the site comfortable and accessible without large-scale commercial development - this suggests a focus on **family-friendly** and **accessible public space**

Preference for recreation, not overdevelopment

- A significant portion of respondents is interested in **recreational activities**, such as **walking trails, bike tracks, play areas,** and **community events**.
- Large-scale **accommodation** is largely opposed. This indicates a preference for **active and passive recreation** over over-commercialized or built-up developments

Water features and access

- Moderate interest in **water-based activities** (e.g., pontoon, water activation, kayaking).
- While water features are not the top priority, they are still seen as an appealing aspect of the site, with a slight emphasis on integrating the **water** more into the site's overall offerings.

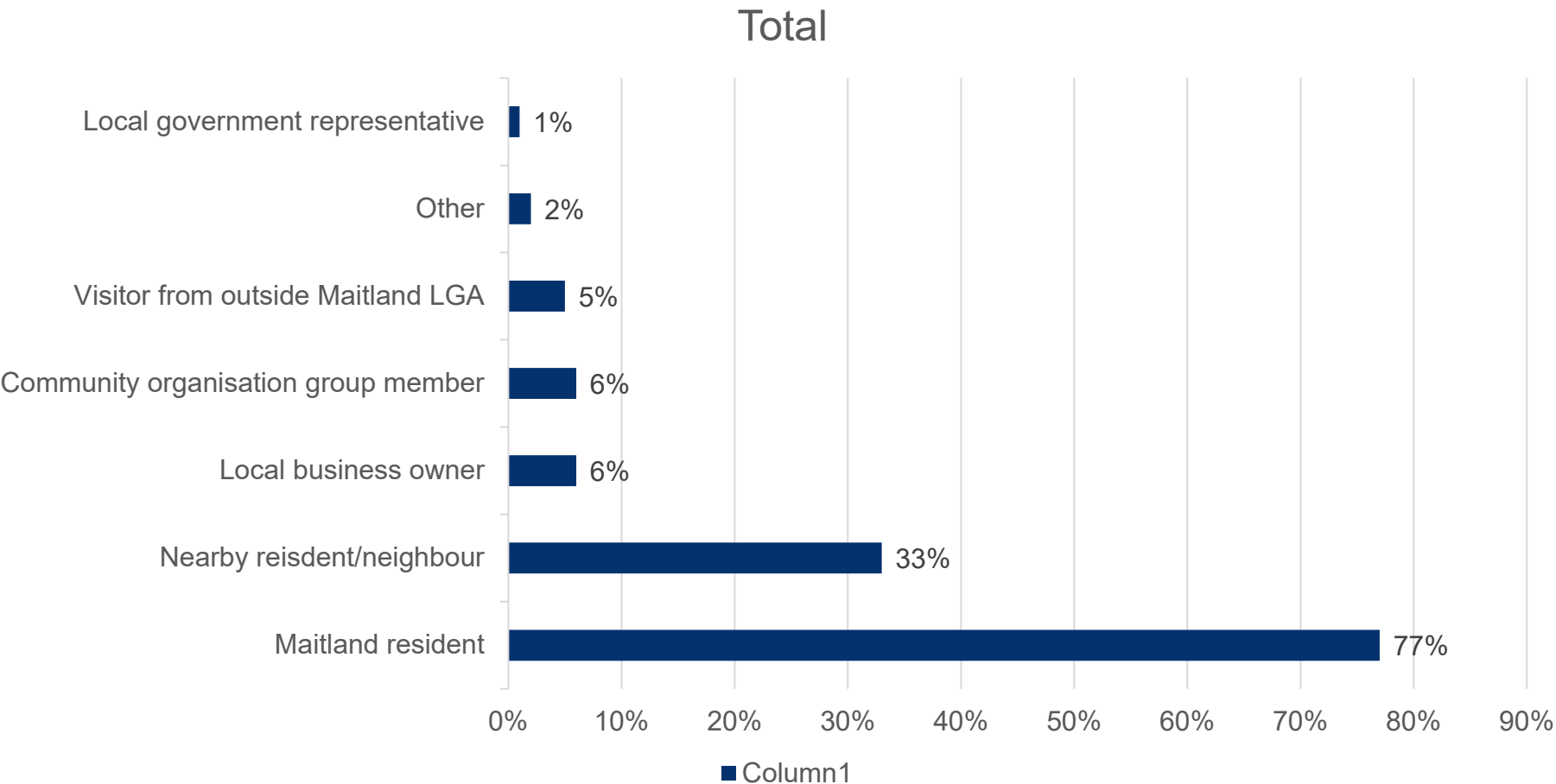
Event spaces and community focus

- The desire for **event spaces** and **community-oriented activities** is apparent across multiple responses. Many respondents support hosting **small events, community gatherings,** and **weddings**, but with an emphasis on **low-key, nature-integrated** settings. **Cultural and educational events** are also favoured.
- Large scale concerts or more regional events were not the focus, but family friendly events such as carols, cultural performances etc.

ONLINE SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

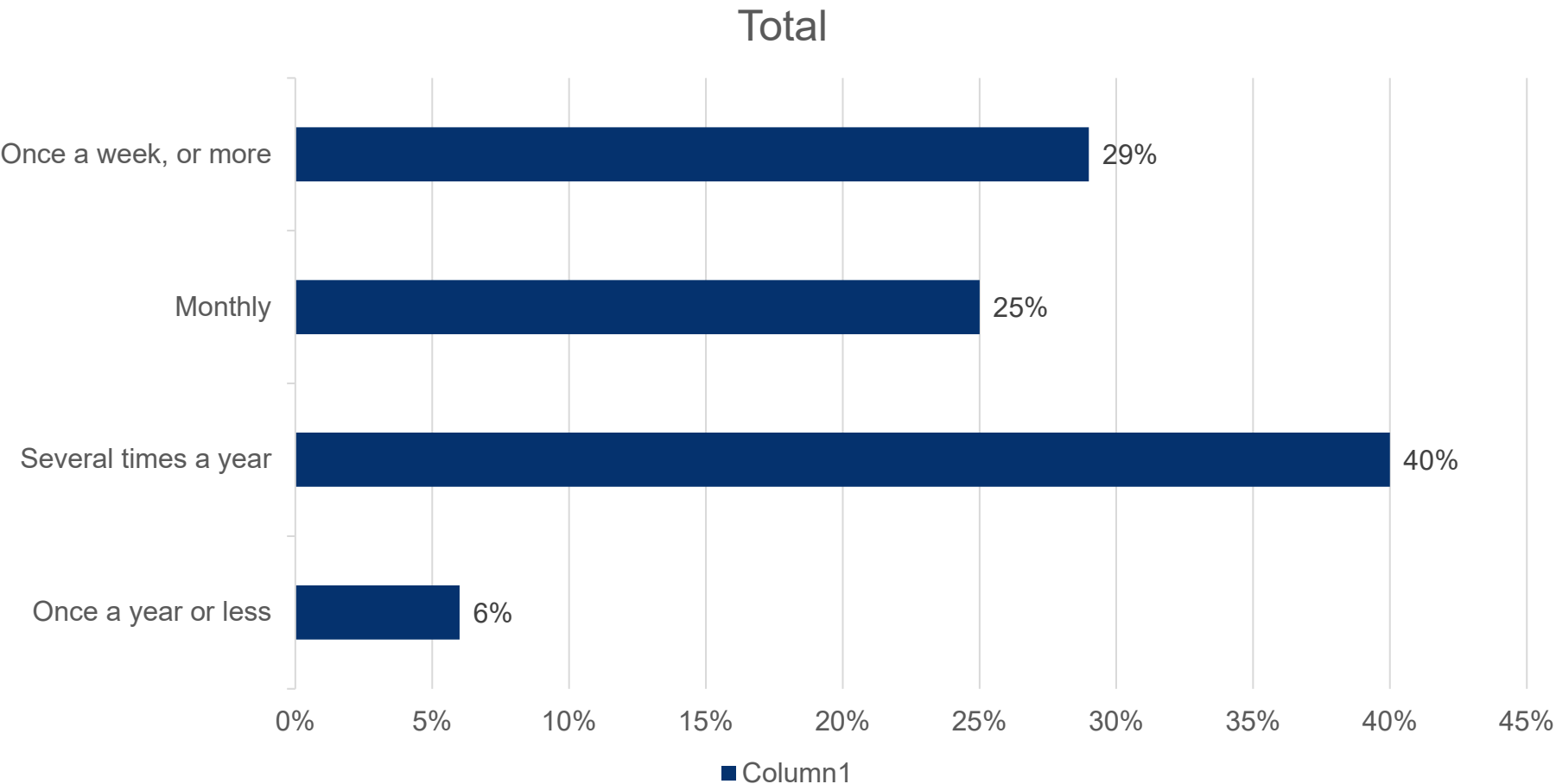


What is your connection to Walka Water Works?



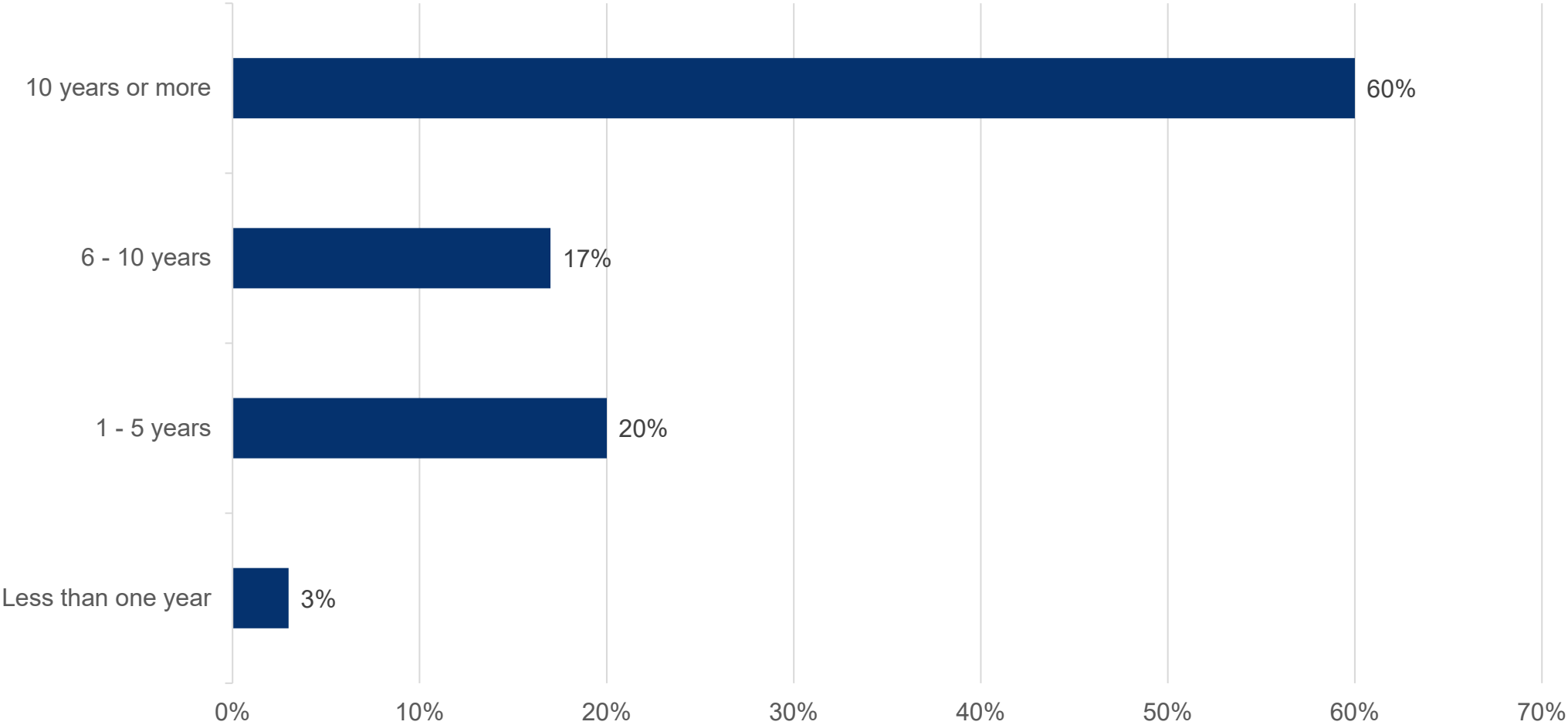
Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 591, multiple responses allowed

How often do you use the Walka Water Works site?



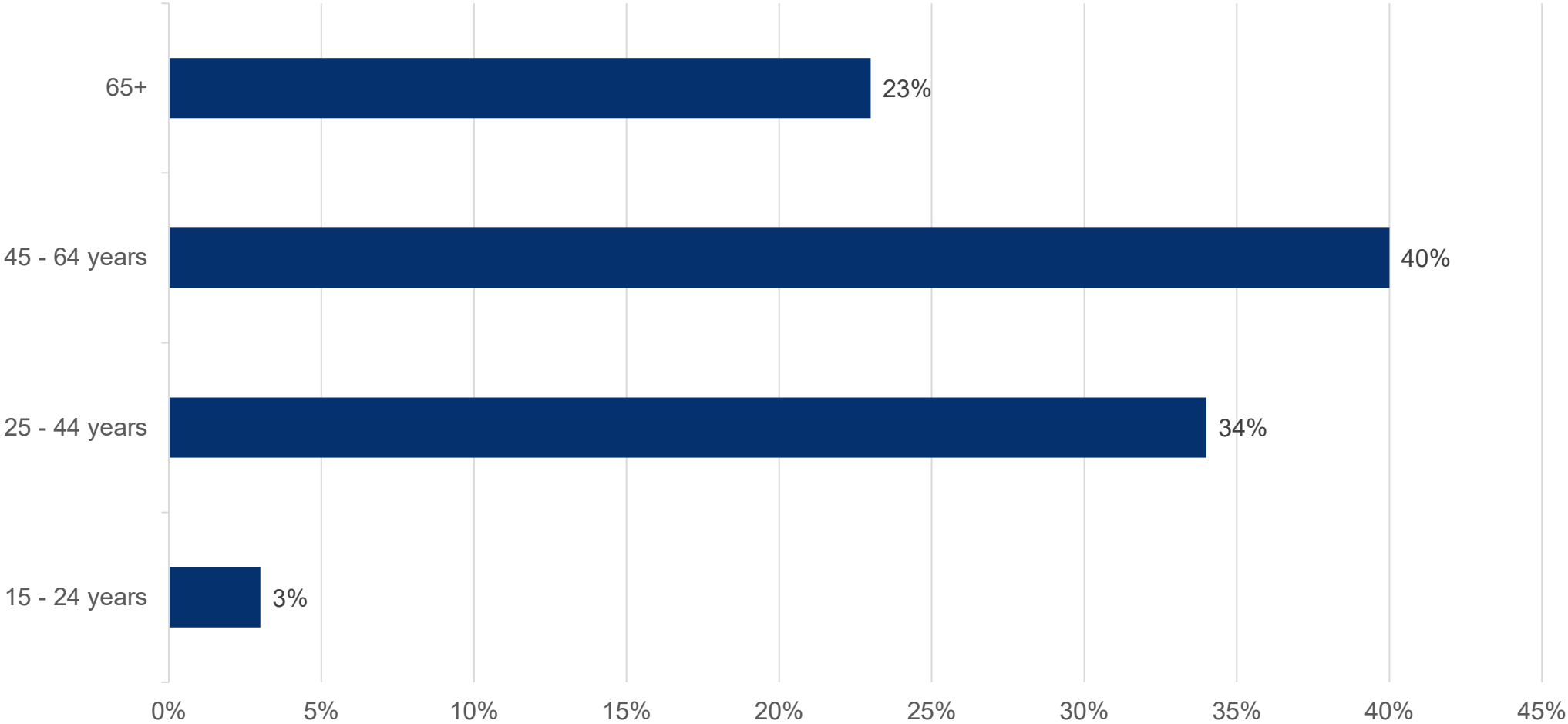
Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 590

How long have you lived there?



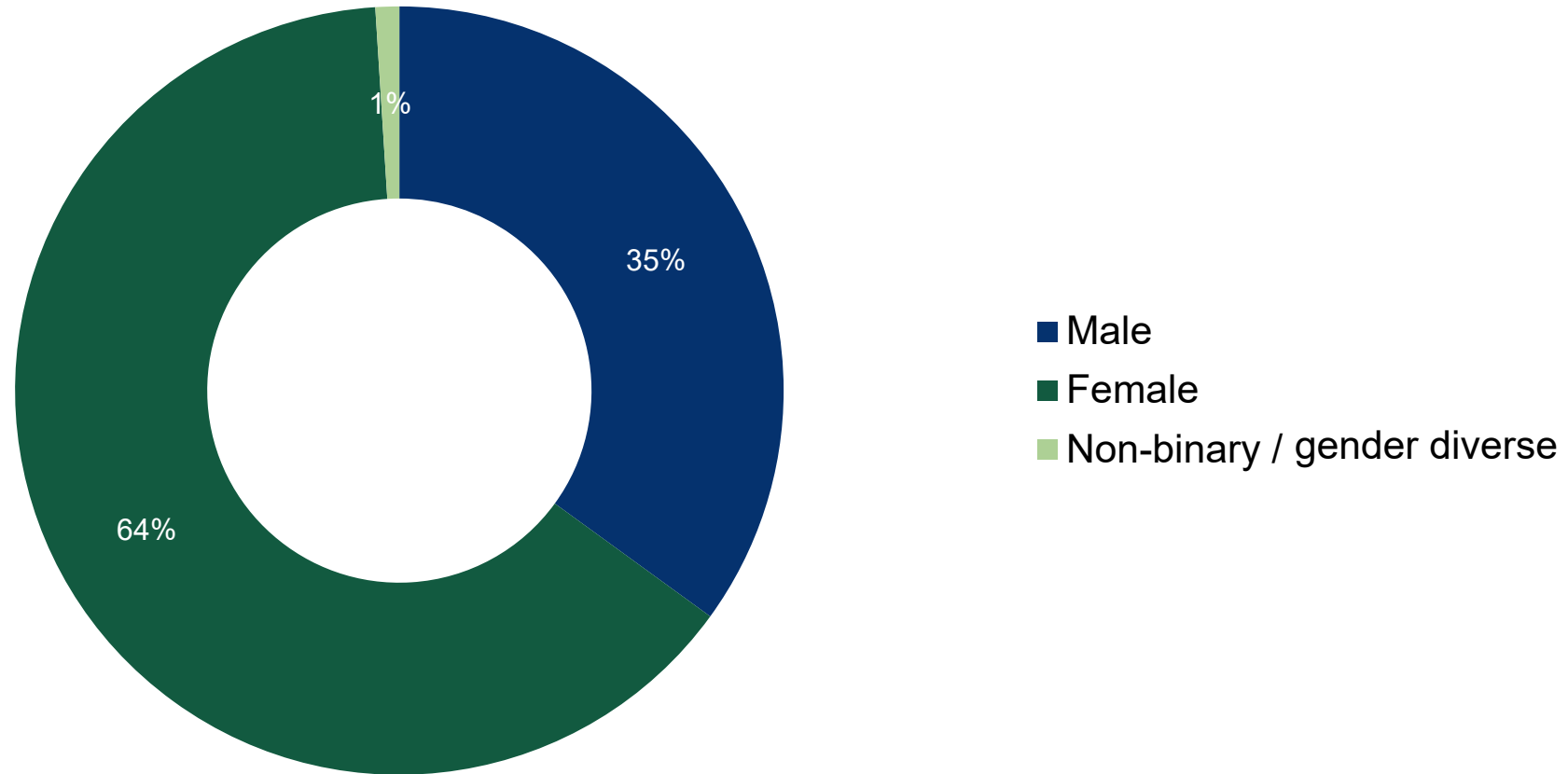
Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 591

What is your age group?



Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 591

What is your gender?

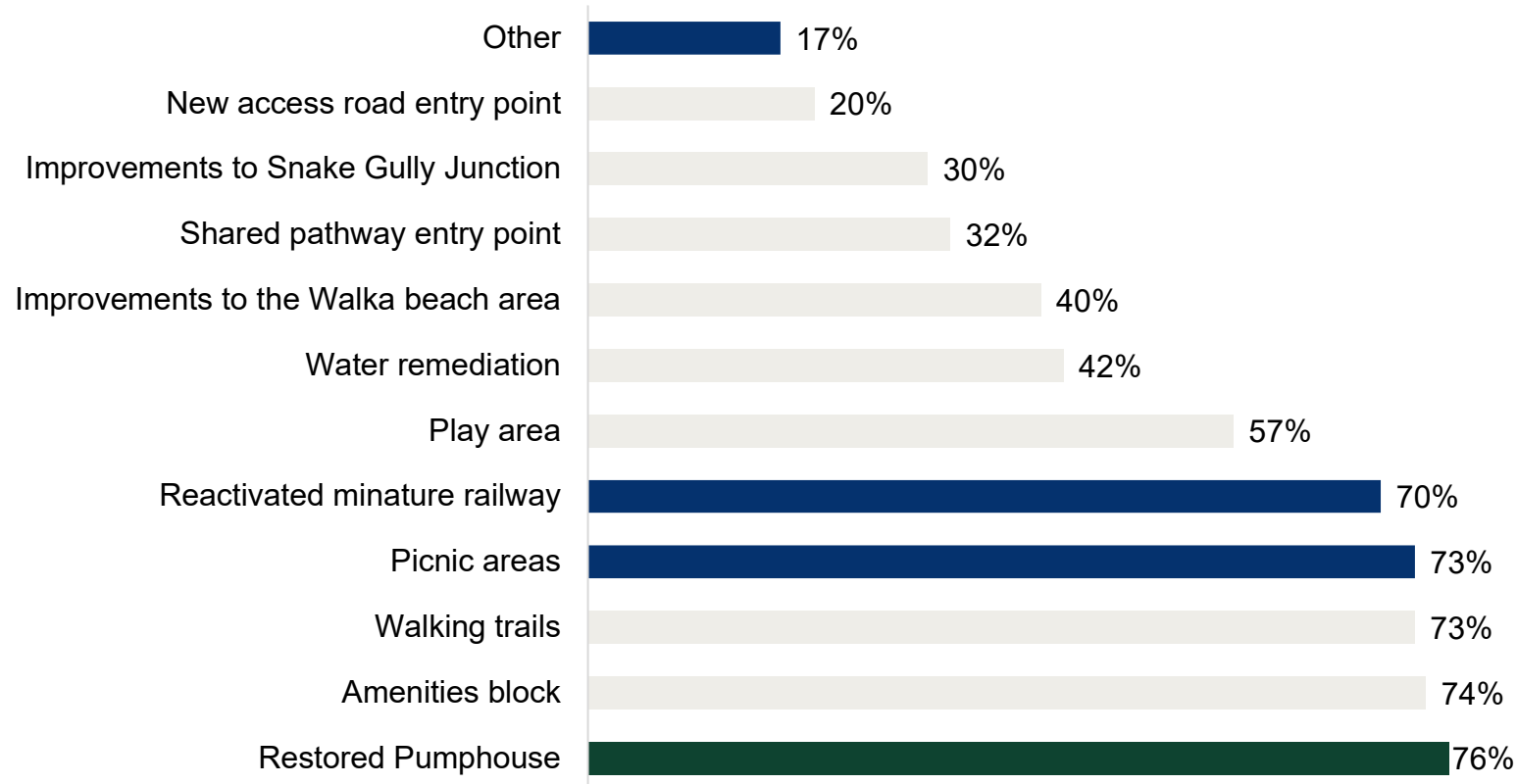


Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 100

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS



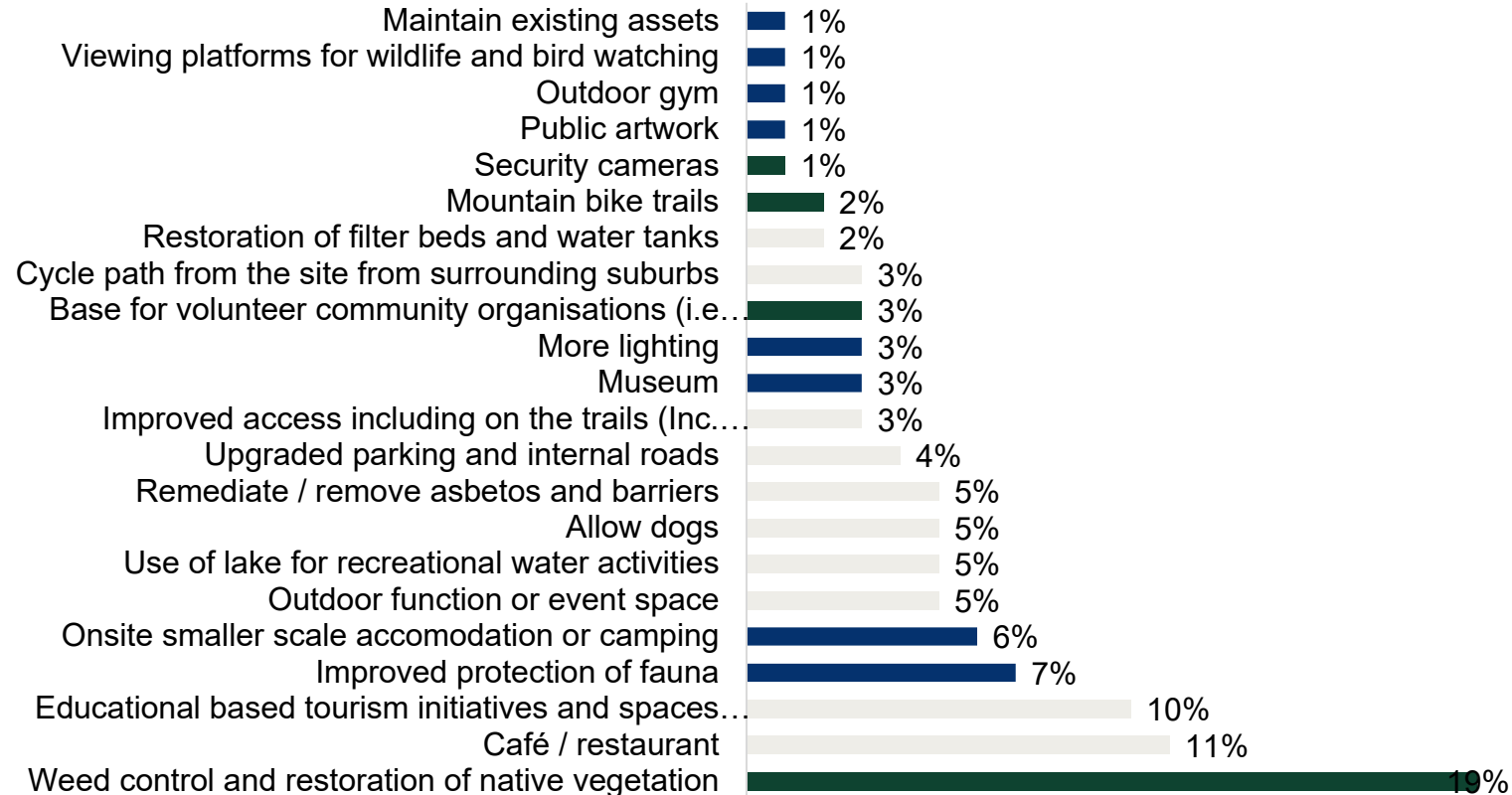
What improvements, if any, would you like to see?



Respondents prioritised restoring the pumphouse, adding amenities, and enhancing trails, with a focus on recreation and environmental improvements.

Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 582, multiple responses allowed. Predefined responses, with 'other' for open-ended responses.

Of those 17% that answered 'other' (or 99 total responses)

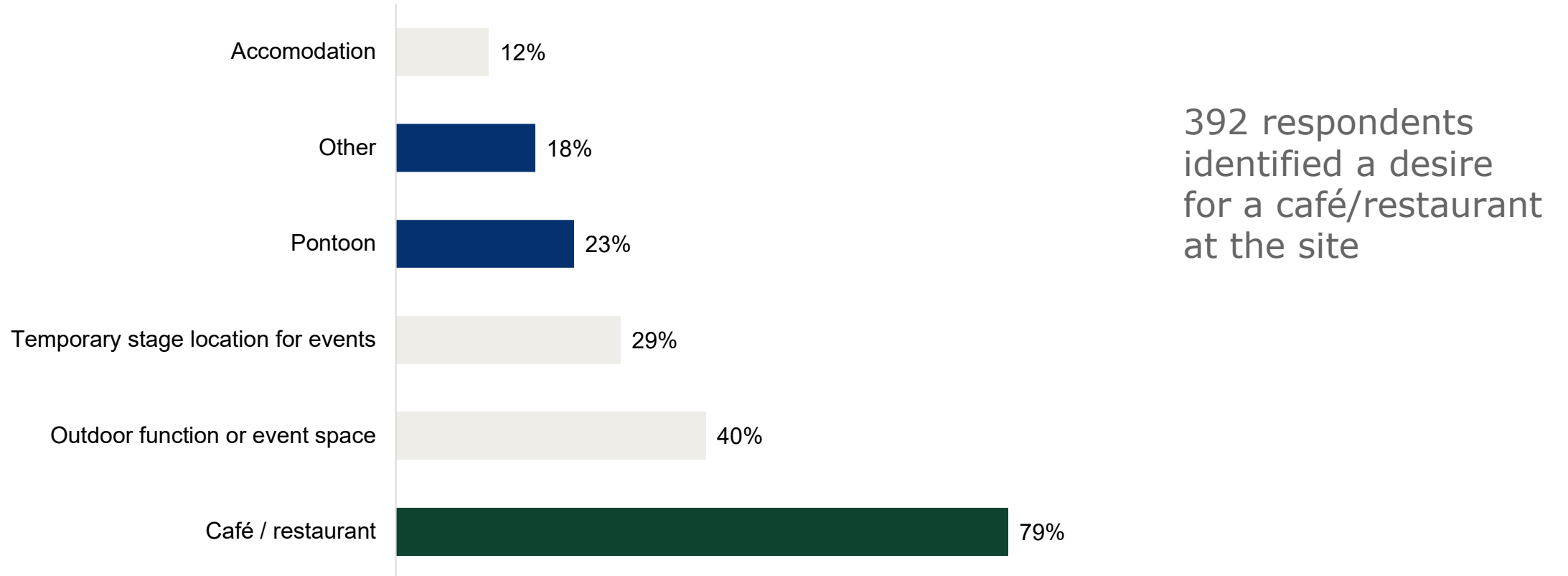


Additional suggestions included native vegetation restoration, educational initiatives, café/restaurant, improved fauna protection, and more recreational options.

Some of these responses could be linked to 'future enhancements' as opposed to relating to improvements to existing features.

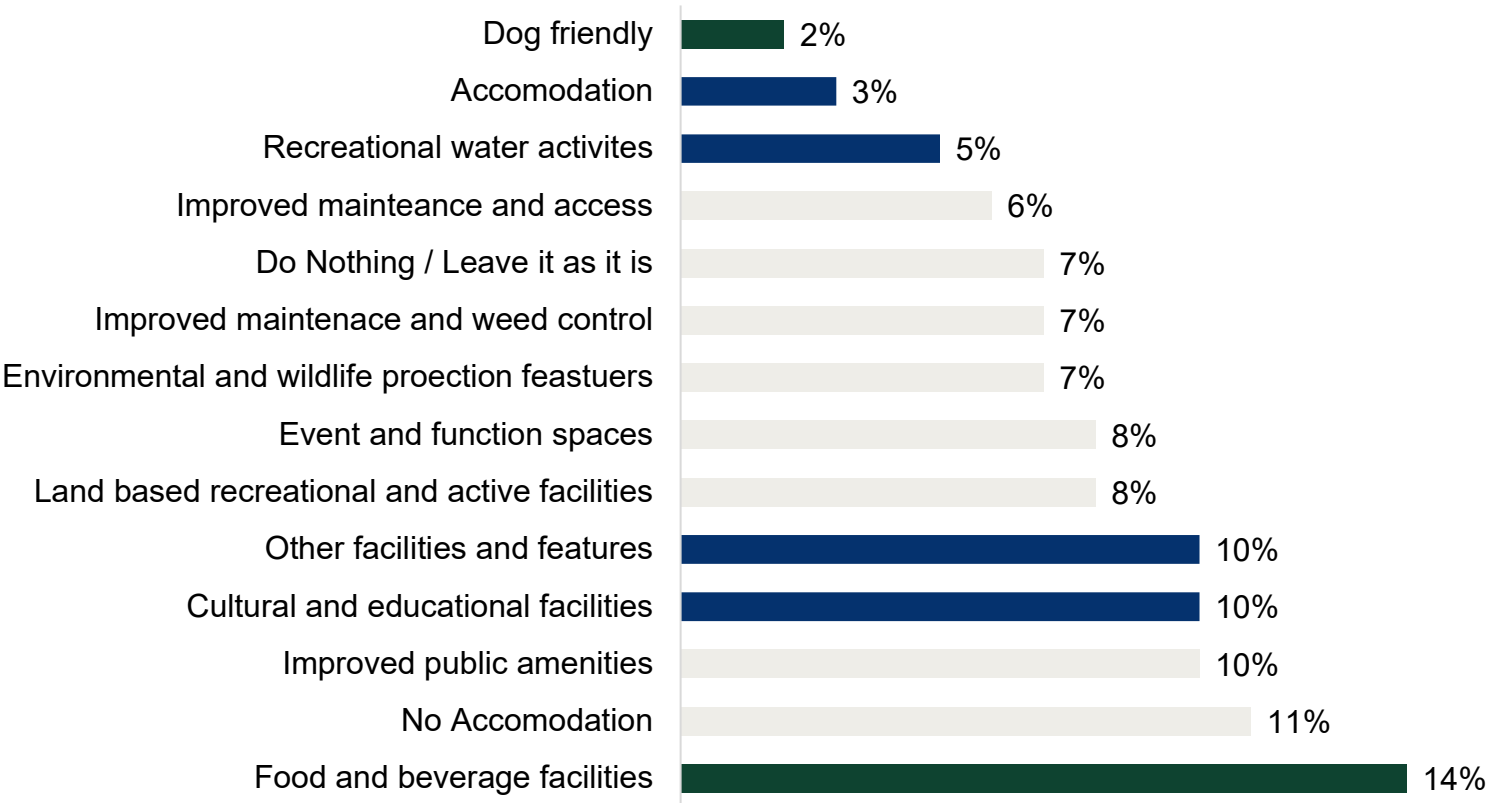
Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 116, multiple responses allowed (open - ended response to 'other').

What future facilities or features, if any, would you like to see?



Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 499, multiple responses allowed. Predefined responses, with 'other' for open-ended responses.

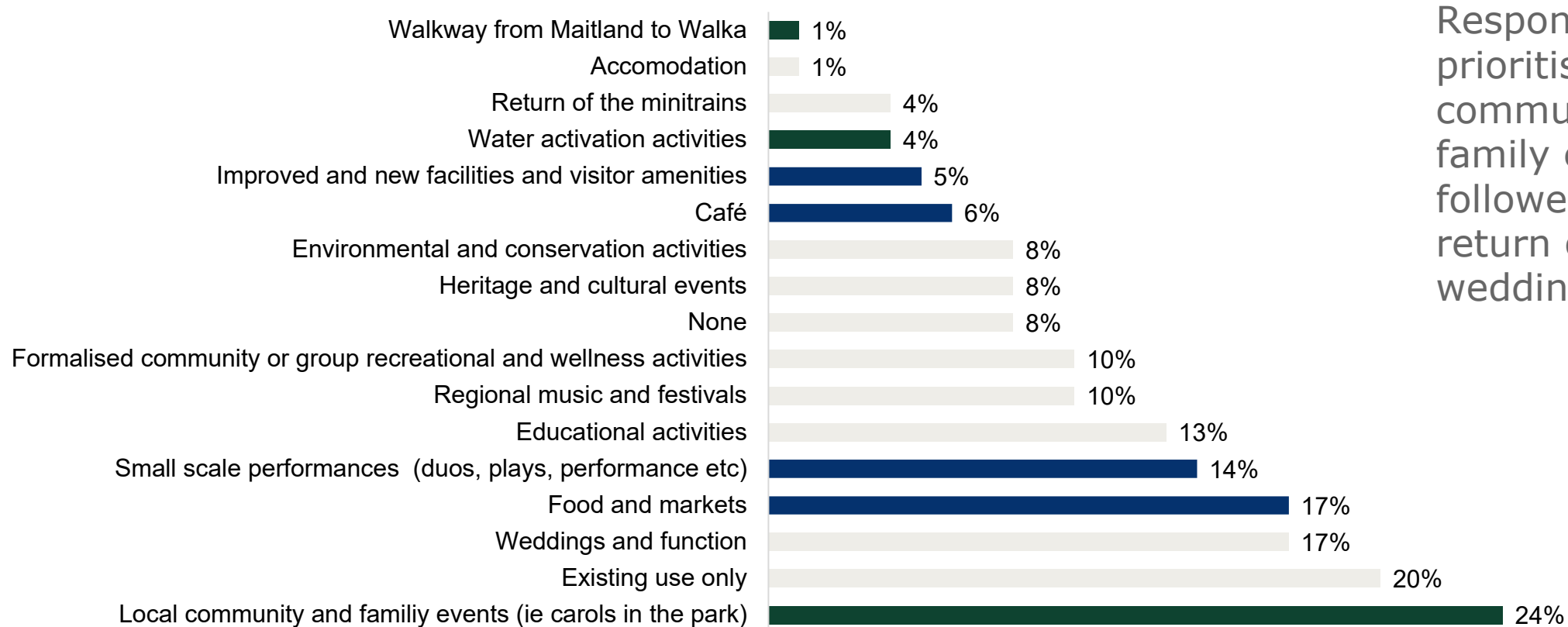
Of those 18% that answered 'other' (or 88 total responses)



Some respondents chose to answer this question with 'do nothing' or 'no accommodation' while others identified a range of differing facilities.

Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 499, multiple responses allowed. Open ended response to 'other'.

What activities or events, if any, would you like to see held at the site?



Respondents prioritised local community and family events, followed by the return of weddings/functions.

Base: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 410, multiple responses allowed. Open ended question.

Targeted interviews

11 registered, 9 complete *1 person registered twice, and other no response after multiple attempts to contact.

6 from Oakhampton heights, 3 from Oakhampton



What people value about living in the area:

- **Peace and Tranquillity:** A common theme is an appreciation for the **calm, quiet** environment provided by the area, with people enjoying the **absence of urban noise** and the ability to live in a peaceful setting.
- **Connection to Nature:** Residents value the proximity to **wildlife** and **natural spaces**, which adds a unique dimension to their daily lives, creating a **connection to nature** that many feel is increasingly rare in suburban areas.
- **Historical and Personal Ties:** The long-standing family connections to the land, and the memories and history tied to it, are highly significant for many interviewees. These personal connections foster a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the area.
- **Rural and Agricultural Lifestyle:** For some, especially those who live on larger properties or farms, the rural lifestyle is a major draw. This includes access to open land, space for agriculture or livestock, and a lifestyle that feels less encumbered by urban restrictions.



Thematic alignment

1. The need to preserve Walka Water Works, prioritise environmental conservation and the preservation of wildlife and biodiversity

"There is an enormous amount of bird life out there... this time of year, especially there is an enormous number of pelicans in the area."

"I would like to see it remain as a nature reserve"

"The lungs of Maitland.."

2. Majority against over-commercialisation of the area (e.g., caravan park or other large-scale developments)

"I'm not against change – I just think that the change needs to be appropriate and I can't see a caravan park or whatever being appropriate."

"I reckon a brewery would be amazing out there, but I really don't think it's the spot for it."

3. All value community engagement and desire better communication with the council

"I'd find out because I'd go for a walk and see that there was a refrigerator or something."

"We found out about this plan through the Maitland Mercury. We had no consultation whatsoever..."

Thematic alignment

4. Strong pride in the area's local identity and heritage

"It's the peace and quiet, you really value it... The kangaroos, the birds. The wind in the trees. It really is quite amazing. It's very relaxing. It's very special."

"Generations of family have lived here, we want that to stay"

5. Environmental concerns (wildlife preservation, invasive weeds and species, ecological balance, environmental conservation)

"When I was a child there were no kangaroos or lantana. Now we have 300 to 400 kangaroos on here"

"Weeds have taken over"

"I think if there is money to spend, please spend it on that (maintenance) and having it opened..."

Thematic differences

- 1.Preservation vs. Development:** There were mixed responses on whether Walka Water Works should remain **untouched** or evolve into a **selective, controlled development that maintains** its natural beauty. A facility used for education, conferencing, functions and events, exhibitions etc vs. do nothing and leave it as is.
- 2.Tourism:** The potential for **tourism-driven development** is contentious – with concern that bringing in **large-scale projects**, like **caravan parks** or **concert venues**, could detract from the area's **natural beauty and what the people value about living there**. Others suggest that smaller-scale improvements (like **updated facilities**), a café or community-focused events could enhance the visitor experience while maintaining the area's character.
- 3.Future Vision:** While many emphasise **preservation**, there's room for **compromise** around introducing **community-driven improvements**—especially those that **enhance local recreation** without overwhelming the natural or historical character of the site.
- 4.Safety and access:** Concerns around increased traffic, changes affecting access and pedestrian conflicts with vehicle movements were noted by some, but not all.

Maitland Your Say Social Map

**28 contributors, 101
contributions**

*90 Oakhampton Heights
5% Oakhampton
4% Rutherford
1% Louth Park*





Environmental Preservation and Biodiversity Conservation

- **Provide nesting boxes** for bats, birds, and arboreal marsupials.
- **Remove invasive weeds** and restore native vegetation, especially around walking paths and trails.
- **Plant trees** to enhance wildlife habitat and reduce lawn maintenance.
- **Undertake fox trapping/eradication** to control invasive predators.
- **Restore wetlands** and reintroduce native fish species; remove exotic carp.
- **Enhance turtle breeding habitats** and install floating islands for turtle protection.
- **Remove lantana** and restore **Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest** to its natural state.
- **Revegetate riparian zones** to improve wetland functions and support bird species.
- **Improve water quality** in the lagoon to support local wildlife.

Community Engagement and Public Facilities

- **Improve picnic areas** with additional covered and uncovered tables and shelters.
- **Engage disability support providers** to enhance accessibility and foster inclusion.
- **Develop a community centre/museum** to interpret the site's history and provide space for local events.
- **Install interpretive signage** at key historical and ecological points across the site.
- **Create educational and interactive exhibits** about Walka's role in water treatment and its environmental impact.
- **Partner with local running groups** to revive the Walka Water Works Ultramarathon or host other outdoor events like "Last Man Standing".
- **Introduce a children's nature play playground** designed with natural materials and earth tones.
- **Revitalize the mini railway** for public enjoyment and to attract families and visitors.
- **Consider adding water play features** like fountains or a canoeing hub.
- **Introduce a "virtual reality experience"** to immerse visitors in the site's history and the working of the pumphouse.

Infrastructure Improvements and Safety

- **Install CCTV at site entry points** to deter illegal entry by motorbikes and unauthorized dog walkers.
- **Improve signage** at entrances and throughout the site to provide directions and event information.
- **Increase parking spaces** for safer access, especially for families with children.
- **Improve walking/cycle trails** with proper drainage to prevent erosion and ensure smooth access.
- **Separate walking and cycling paths** from car parking areas to ensure safety.
- **Add more potable water points/bubblers**, especially near popular areas like picnic grounds and parkrun finish lines.
- **Install proper toilet facilities** and improve amenities throughout the site.
- **Improve pedestrian access from Rutherford side** to connect with local neighbourhoods.
- **Designate an area for a dog park** separate from the main park to maintain wildlife protection zones.

4. Preserving Historical and Cultural Significance

- **Restore and preserve the pumphouse** as a historical feature or community facility.
- **Reinstall or interpret the former water filtration beds/tanks** and preserve remaining examples.
- **Interpret the workman's cottages** and other historic buildings for educational purposes.
- **Create a museum or exhibition space** showcasing the history of Walka, focusing on water treatment and the industrial era.
- **Install a permanent exhibition** about the role of clean water in Maitland's development and Australia's water treatment history.
- **Restore the wedding rotunda** or create a new courtyard for weddings and community gatherings.
- **Preserve the old silo** and turn it into a viewing platform or "**silos art**" installation.
- **Create a bird hide** at key points like Pelican Point for bird watchers, with educational signage.
- **Integrate thematic interpretations** of the former filter beds and the water treatment process into the landscape design.
- **Interpret the chief engineer's cottage** and its role in the history of the site.

Pop-Ups

Riverlights 12/10/24

Park Run 19/10/24



Pop-Ups

Demographics

Respondents at Park Run included local residents and regular park users, with a majority aged **25–44 years**. In contrast, respondents at Riverlights were more diverse, including families with young children and older residents aged **55+**.

Site Values

Participants consistently emphasised the value of Walka's **natural features**, including its **bushland**, **trees**, and **water bodies**, as essential to the park's appeal. The **pump house** and **railway tracks** were described as iconic and irreplaceable, with a strong desire to preserve and showcase these historical elements. Many attendees reflected fondly on past experiences at Walka, including **BBQs**, **picnics**, and weddings, which they wish to see restored.

Desired Improvements

There were frequent calls for upgrades to **toilets**, **picnic areas**, and **shaded seating**, as well as the addition of pram-friendly **trails** and **dog parks**. Clean, well-maintained infrastructure was a recurring theme. Participants requested **wider paths**, **separate walking and biking trails**, improved **accessibility** for families, older adults, and those with mobility challenges.

Pop-Ups

Desired Events and Activities

The community expressed strong support for **small-scale, community-oriented events** like seasonal markets, outdoor picnics, and family celebrations. Educational programs, such as **guided history tours** and **nature workshops**, were particularly popular among families. Participants at Park Run favoured **low-impact recreational activities**, such as yoga sessions, outdoor fitness classes, and bird-watching.

Concerns

The idea of introducing **accommodation facilities**, such as caravan parks or hotels, was met with strong opposition. Concerns included increased traffic, environmental damage, and potential anti-social behaviour.

Participants also expressed apprehension about **over-commercialisation**, including large-scale developments or events that could disrupt the park's peaceful and historical character. Many highlighted the need for **better maintenance**, particularly of water quality, litter management, and lighting for safety.

Triangulation of outcome



From the three engagement channels (survey, interviews, and online mapping), we observe that there is **strong alignment** on the following key areas:

- 1.Preservation and historical engagement:** Across all three channels, there is a shared desire to maintain and interpret the **heritage aspects** of the site, particularly the **pumphouse** and **miniature railway**.
 - 2.Recreational use:** All channels strongly favour the site being a **recreational space** that is accessible to all, with a focus on **family-friendly amenities and walking trails**. The return of small-scale events, such as weddings, birthday gatherings, etc, was stronger in the survey responses.
 - 3.Environmental conservation:** The community is united in its desire to protect the site's **natural environment**, particularly by removing **invasive species** and enhancing wildlife habitat.
 - 4.Opposition to over-commercialisation:** There is consistent opposition to **large-scale accommodation or more significant concert events**, with a preference for **small-scale developments** that complement the site's recreational and environmental values.
- There are differences that appear mainly around **water-based activities** and **specific event preferences**. However, even in these areas, respondents generally want to keep things **small-scale and family-oriented**.